

A Call to Action

Community Pharmacy Resilience: Save our NHS and protect our communities.

Community pharmacies across the country have gone above and beyond in recent years to protect our NHS and communities. Pharmacies have faced extraordinary challenges with the global pandemic, [unprecedented medicine supply issues](#), inflation and cost increases, falling real-terms funding, and workforce shortages all set against increased workload from both prescription growth and as patients have been diverted from other parts of the health service.

Yet despite these existential pressures – which have led to the **closure of over 1,000 pharmacies and left many more at risk of closure** – community pharmacy teams have remained steadfast in their commitment to providing care in their community. With the introduction of the new national [Pharmacy First](#) service this year, pharmacies are now going even further to support people and to reduce the burden on General Practice.

Key Facts about Community Pharmacy

- **Pharmacies were the only part of the healthcare system that remained open for their patients on a walk-in basis throughout the whole of the COVID-19 pandemic.** The network of 10,500+ pharmacies, including Distance-Selling Pharmacies, provides the infrastructure and expertise to provide care and advice across the nation. Millions of patients, their carers, and the wider public, rely on community pharmacies every day. Pharmacies are pillars of the community, as well as vital and accessible healthcare centres. With over 24 million people on at least one repeat prescription, **pharmacies dispense more than 1.1 billion prescriptions every year.**
- **Community pharmacies can help relieve pressure elsewhere in the health and social care system.** Pharmacy's role in providing clinical services has been expanded this year with the launch of **Pharmacy First**, which empowers people to go to their pharmacy rather than wait for a GP appointment to receive advice and appropriate treatment for seven of the most common conditions. NHS predictions suggest that this and other pharmacy services – such as Blood Pressure Checks and access to Contraception – **could free up as many as 10 million GP appointments annually.** Community pharmacy also offer a range of other clinical and public health services – including providing winter flu vaccinations – and commissioning further services in community pharmacies could do even more to improve access to primary care.
- **Community pharmacies are well positioned to help deliver the Government's health and care priorities.** The Government's aspiration to create a 'Neighbourhood Health Service' and wider primary care objectives should seek to utilise the existing network of community pharmacies, which are at the heart of high streets across the country. Some

85% of the population in England live within one mile's walking distance of their local pharmacy. In serving some of the nation's most deprived communities, **pharmacies already play a huge role in supporting the health of the nation**, including reducing health inequalities which is rightly identified as key to the [NHS Long Term Plan](#).

- **Community pharmacies are facing critical financial pressures.** As privately owned businesses providing NHS services, pharmacies are run by skilled businesspeople who combine an entrepreneurial approach with clinical skills and a real desire to improve health outcomes. **The average pharmacy relies on NHS funding for around 90% of its income.** But that core NHS funding **has decreased in real terms by 30% since 2016**, while costs have spiralled and activity has grown year on year both in terms of prescribing and services delivered. **The number of pharmacies open in England is now the lowest since the 2008/09 NHS year, despite the annual number of prescriptions growing by over 40% since then and the high levels of growth in clinical services commissioned by the NHS.** This is completely uneconomic and unsustainable – many pharmacies have closed as a consequence, and the squeeze has left most pharmacy businesses teetering on the edge of collapse. While pharmacy is ambitious for the future, further services must be commissioned in the context of fair, sustainable funding.
- **Pharmacy closures, consolidations and other market changes demonstrate the unsustainability of the sector.** Exits from the community pharmacy market have come alongside large numbers of closures across the sector, demonstrating that pharmacies are increasingly unviable. **The funding crisis is affecting businesses of all shapes and sizes and more than 1,200 pharmacies have closed since 2016.** The second largest operator in England, Lloyds Pharmacy, exited the market completely in 2023, and our recent analysis of the publicly available accounts of the twenty largest remaining companies operating pharmacies showed clear red flags. Of all the predominantly NHS pharmacy-focused companies, only three were not loss making before tax (with year ends typically in 2023, i.e. before some of the most recent cost pressures). **This all echoes our 2024 Pharmacy Pressures Survey in which the vast majority of businesses reported that they were no longer profitable or only just profitable.**
- **Community pharmacy is ambitious and has the skills to provide additional clinical services.** Following the introduction of Pharmacy First in January 2024, community pharmacies are doing more than ever before to help patients and local communities. But there remains much untapped clinical potential in the sector – if it has the right investment and support – as identified by Nuffield Trust and The King's Fund in their [Vision for Community Pharmacy](#). Examples of services that pharmacies could provide include having a greater role in smoking cessation, supporting weight management, and supporting women's health. The new Government should seek to utilise this untapped potential in community pharmacy to its full extent.



Conclusions and Actions Needed

Community pharmacies are well placed – both in terms of the professional skills of their teams, and their location at the heart of local communities – to help deliver on Government ambitions for the health service. The challenge is that, after years of stepping into the breach to protect the NHS and our communities during extraordinary times despite a serious funding squeeze, our pharmacies are beyond breaking point.

We need to build back in renewed resilience in this vital part of our health service so that pharmacies can continue their role on the frontline to save the NHS and protect our communities' long-term health.

As the [Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry](#) recently concluded:

“The undoubted potential for pharmacy to improve access to health care, crucially including immunisations, and reduce pressure on general practice and other areas of the health system can only be realised with the right support and the right investment of public funding”.

To do so we need from Government and the NHS:

- A sustainable funding model for community pharmacy
- A full review of the medicines supply market and short-term relief measures
- Investment in community pharmacy's clinical future
- A plan to safeguard the pharmacy workforce

Community Pharmacy England's four-point plan

1

A sustainable funding model for community pharmacies: Pharmacy finances are currently unsustainable, resulting in intolerable pressures and a degradation in services for the public, including temporary closures of pharmacies. To protect patient access to medicines and wider pharmacy services, pharmacy funding needs to be reset at an economically sustainable level, with ongoing increases to reflect cost rises.

2

A full review of the medicines supply market, and short-term relief measures: We must protect access to medicines and address issues such as under-funding and price concessions. Alongside the review, we should take forward immediate measures such as allowing pharmacists to make minor adjustments to prescriptions, to help alleviate some of the issues that patients are facing and reduce the burden on GPs and pharmacy.

3

Investment in community pharmacy's clinical future: Building on the new Pharmacy First service, community pharmacies have much more to offer to support the nation's health and wellbeing. We would particularly like to see them empowered to offer more vaccinations, and wider support for women's health and people with long-term conditions.

4

A plan to safeguard the pharmacy workforce: Like other health and care settings, community pharmacy is in the midst of significant workforce issues. To ensure the public can continue to rely on critical community pharmacy services, Government should work with the NHS on a pharmacy-specific workforce recruitment, retention and return plan.

“As long as waits for healthcare continue and the health and wellbeing of the nation suffers, we need to protect our vital community pharmacies. A thriving community pharmacy network has so much to offer patients and the public, providing safe access to medicines alongside a range of preventative, public health and clinical services, as well as supporting wider primary care and the NHS. We want to work with Government and NHS to action this four-point plan, unlocking the potential of community pharmacies now and for the future.”

Janet Morrison
Community Pharmacy England Chief Executive

Contact comms.team@cpe.org.uk for further information related to any of the points raised.