

# Briefing 018/24: What pharmacy owners told us in September 2024

As part of Community Pharmacy England's commitment to working more closely with pharmacy owners – listening to them better, as well as engaging more regularly via events and other channels – we sought input from the sector ahead of the [September 2024 Committee Meeting](#).

Between 9th and 26th August, the latest Committee opinion poll was conducted to gather views from all pharmacy owners on a series of topical issues. The questions asked how pharmacy owners were feeling about the Pharmacy First service, the effects of the GP collective action on their pharmacies, and the intensity of the various financial and operating pressures facing the sector.

Thanks to all those who took the time to complete the survey. This briefing summarises what you said.

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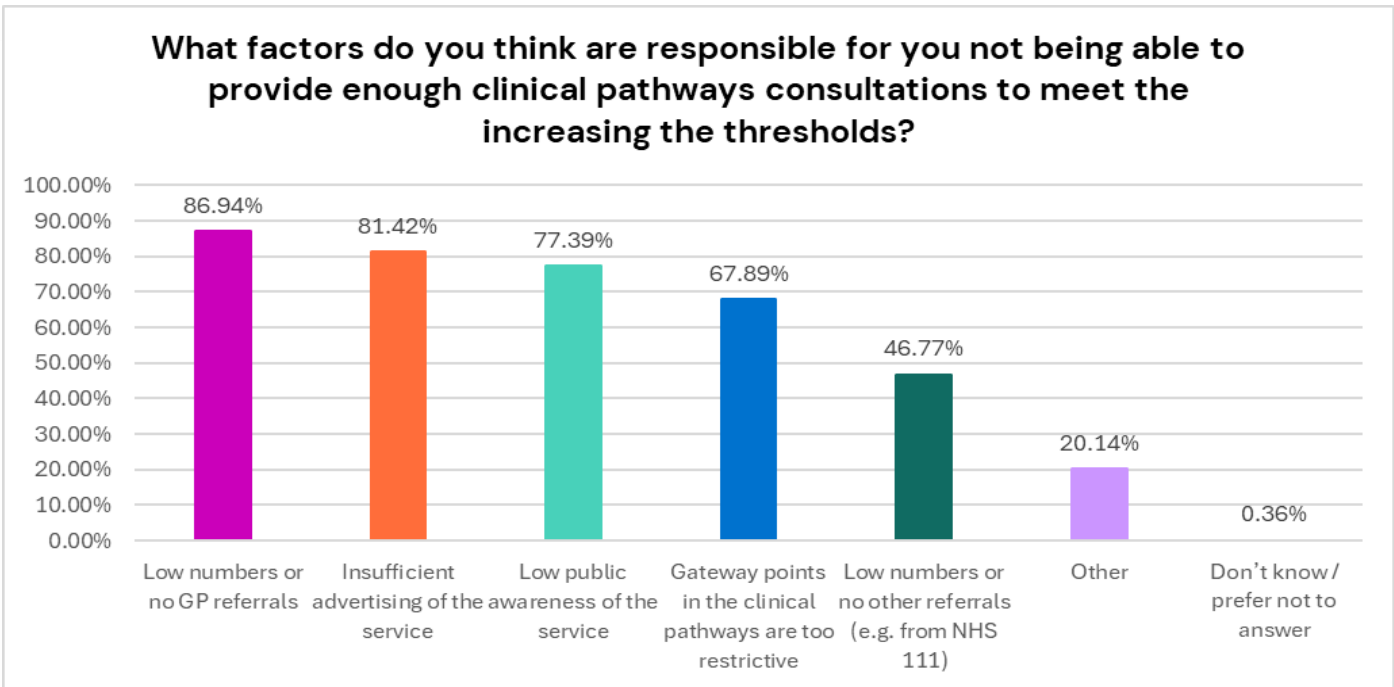
## Opinion Poll Results

Participants representing 4,589 pharmacy premises in England engaged with the September Committee survey, giving a snapshot of thoughts from across a range of different pharmacy businesses across the country.

### Pharmacy First service

The Committee asked about Pharmacy First, and worryingly, more than 60% of the community pharmacies represented reported that they are 'not at all confident' about meeting the Pharmacy First thresholds in September and October, while less than a third are 'slightly confident'.

Looking at the possible causes for not being able to reach the increasing thresholds, respondents largely pointed to low numbers of GP referrals as well as insufficient advertising and therefore low public awareness of Pharmacy First. However, two-thirds also felt that they were being overly restricted by the current gateway points in the clinical pathways.

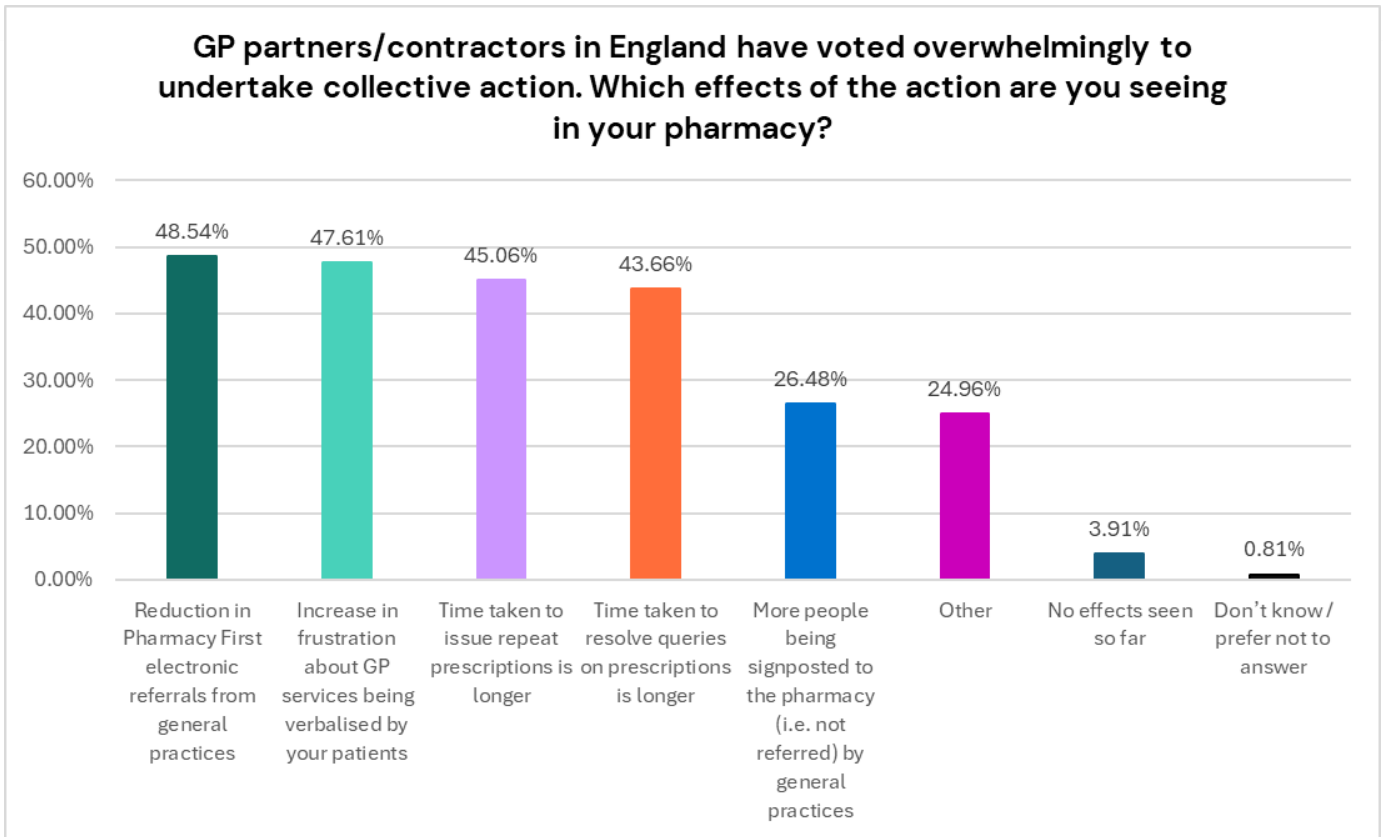


Asked what they would do if they failed to meet the monthly thresholds, a majority of respondents indicated that they would first seek greater engagement from local GP practices to try to increase referrals to the service. Just 8% said that would carry on providing the service without trying to secure any increase in referrals.

### Effects of GP collective action

An early assessment of the impact of GP collective action was the focus of the second part of the poll, with pharmacy owners being asked to identify what changes they had seen.

The findings indicate that a range of impacts are already being felt by a significant number of pharmacies across the sector. Almost half of community pharmacies report they have seen a reduction in Pharmacy First referrals and an increase in patients voicing frustration with GP services. Delays in issuing repeat prescriptions and resolving queries on prescriptions were also reported by more than four in ten pharmacies. A quarter of pharmacies report a rise in informal referrals from general practices.



Community Pharmacy England is concerned that pharmacies could be overwhelmed with displaced and unfunded patients at a time when capacity in the sector is already so stretched. We will continue to monitor the impact of the GP collective action through regular conversations with LPCs and Regional Representatives.

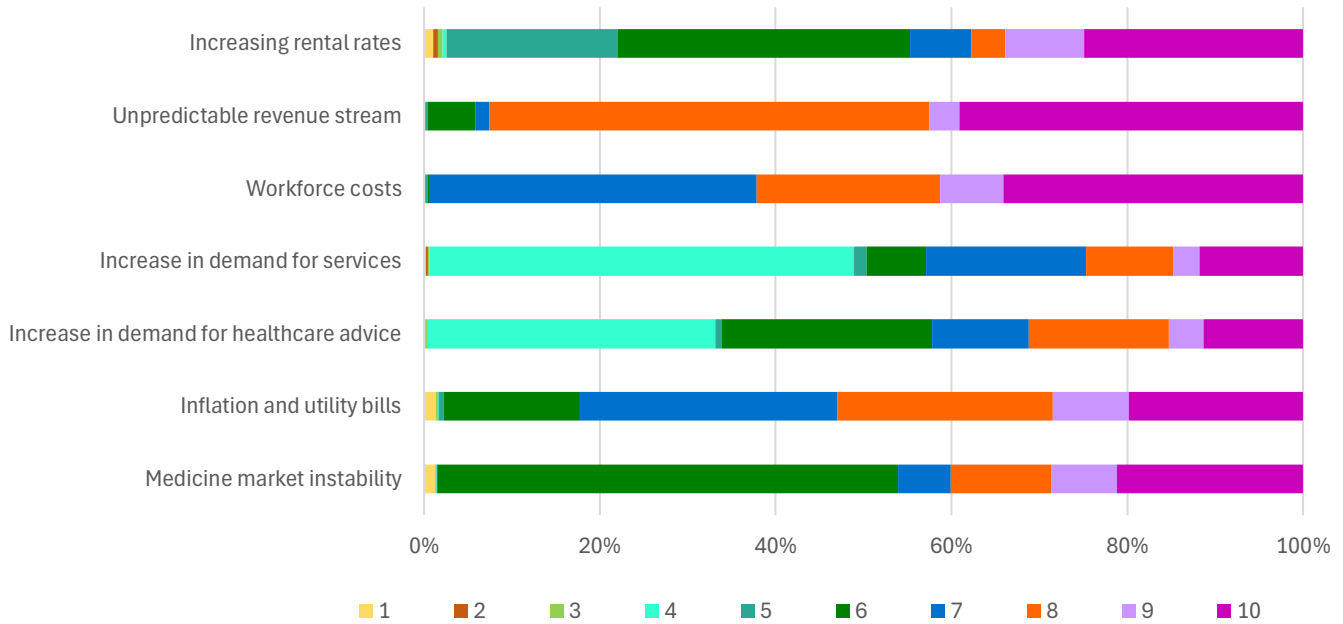
**Pressures Tracker**

For tracking purposes, we repeated the question on pharmacy pressures from previous surveys. Participants were again asked to rank pressures from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest pressure.

In this poll, respondents say that their unpredictable revenue stream is the most intense pressure. Pressures remain high across all indicators.



## Financial and Operational Pressures – September 2024



### Using the data

The full polling results were considered by all Community Pharmacy England Committee Members at the September Committee Meeting, feeding into plenary discussions about negotiations as well as discussions about Pharmacy First and ongoing influencing work. Members looked at what the results mean for current and future priorities, as well as drawing on this valuable information, augmented with feedback from the Regional Representatives, throughout the meeting.

The findings will inform ongoing work, including to press for funding uplifts and other improvements for the sector through our influencing programme. We are continuing to reference poll findings in media and political lobbying work, and poll results along with regular feedback from LPCs and Regional Representatives are used on an ongoing basis to inform work and strategy.

Polling data will also shortly be available to LPCs through [a webpage in the members area](#).



## Next Steps

These polling results show that there has been little change in the situation since the Committee last met: a sector in crisis, and a critical healthcare asset at risk. Community Pharmacy England is working hard to fully brief Ministers on this picture and to stress the urgent need for investment and support. This has included making submissions – both individually and collectively with other professions – to the Darzi Review and Spending Review; continuing our economic work; meeting with Minister Kinnock; and wide engagement with MPs across the new Parliament.

Central to ongoing discussions about Pharmacy First is how much time and effort pharmacy teams have put into the service, which we desperately need NHS England to match through more effective advertising and encouraging use of the electronic referrals process.

Looking ahead, we have always believed that all elements of the Pharmacy First service should be accessible by anyone walking into a pharmacy, rather than needing a referral from elsewhere. The proposal for Pharmacy First to become a fully walk-in service was included in our service development priorities for the new Government, which we are currently using in our influencing and public affairs programme. Plans are underway for further media and other activity around this topic in the coming months.

Regular engagement with pharmacy owners via polling will continue to serve as an important tool for temperature-checking and consultation on key issues going forwards. We will continue to keep polling short so as not to burden pharmacy owners further, while still providing an opportunity to feed directly into the Committee discussions for those that want to do so.

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If you have any queries or require more information, please contact: [comms.team@cpe.org.uk](mailto:comms.team@cpe.org.uk)