



# Pharmacy Advice Audit 2024: A Summary

This briefing summarises the results of a Pharmacy Advice Audit conducted by Community Pharmacy England in June 2024. More than a third of pharmacies in England participated in the audit, the findings of which clearly demonstrate that patients and the public are increasingly relying on community pharmacies to access the healthcare advice and support they need.



“Community pharmacy teams do an incredible job helping over a million people a week with a whole variety of health concerns and questions. Patients get vital and timely access to a healthcare professional, and it helps to reduce the burden on other parts of the NHS. This walk-in healthcare advice has never been more important as the public struggles to access many parts of the health service: and it’s no surprise that our data shows that more and more people are relying on it.”

Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Community Pharmacy England

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## Introduction

Community pharmacy is the front door of the NHS and helps to **deliver healthcare in local communities closer to home**. Pharmacies not only provide services commissioned and paid for by the NHS, but they also provide free at the point of access, professional healthcare advice to any person who seeks it. The Pharmacy Advice Audit identifies the number of **unfunded, professional consultations** being carried out in community pharmacies.

**More than a third (3,916) of community pharmacies in England** took part in the 2024 Pharmacy Advice Audit, providing key information on the number, type, duration and outcome of consultations that occur daily in community pharmacy.

Data was provided for **61,837 patient consultations** which are not part of an NHS-funded service, such as Pharmacy First. Participating pharmacies recorded information on all their patient consultations that fell outside of NHS services over the course of one day.

The data gathered has been extrapolated across the network of community pharmacies in England to determine the work being undertaken by the sector as a whole.

## Key Findings

**Consultations:** On average, a community pharmacy consults with 22 patients per day. Across England, this means that **each week more than 1.3 million people** are presenting to their pharmacies – that’s **69 million per year**.

**Referral Routes:** Whilst a consistently high percentage (81%) of people are self-referring, pharmacies are helping **more than 4.3 million people a year** who can’t access other parts of the NHS. There are also almost **150,000 informal referrals a week** (more than 2 per pharmacy per day) from GP surgeries and NHS 111.



**Duration:** The average patient consultation takes 6 minutes, meaning **more than 2 hours a day** is spent providing these clinical consultations.

**Outcomes:** Community pharmacies **successfully conclude 85% of the consultations** with advice alone or advice

with the sale of a medicine. In the other 15% of cases the patient needs to be seen by another healthcare professional due to the severity or complexity of the condition, of which **around 52,000 a week need to be seen urgently**, providing an insight into the level of acuity of patients visiting pharmacies.

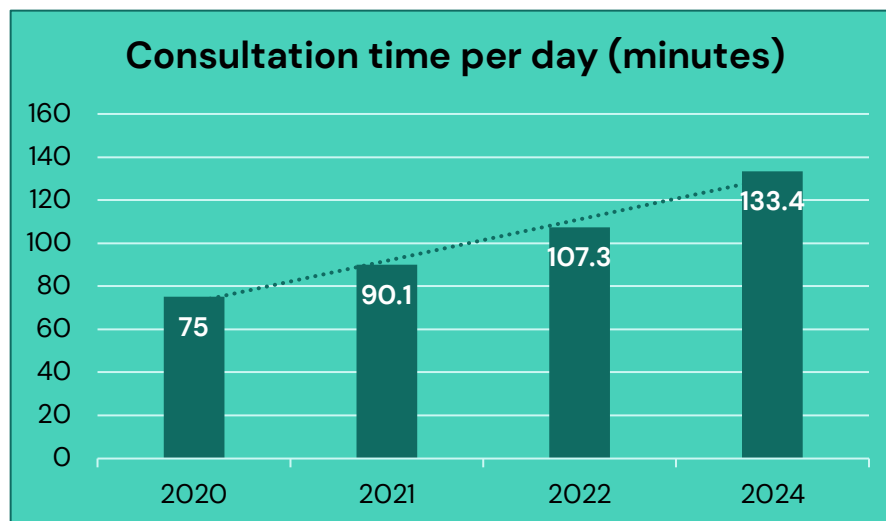
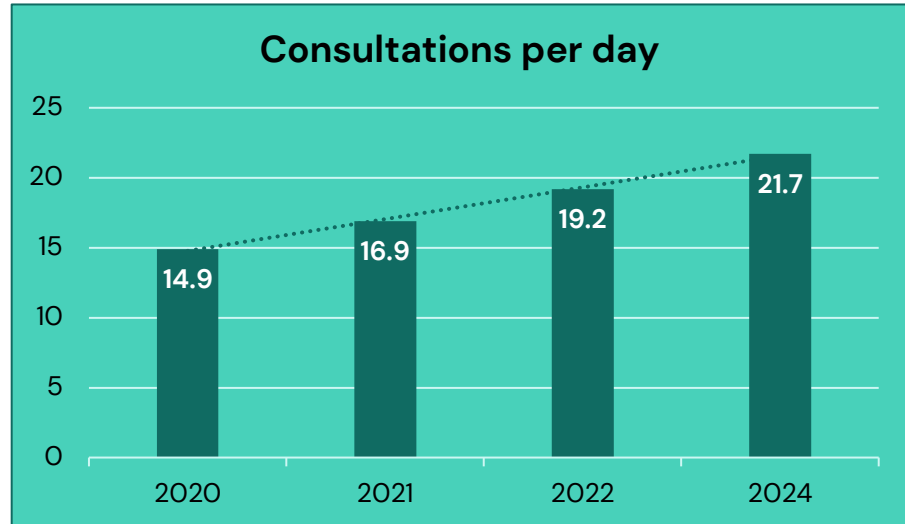


**Alternatives:** If the patient had not been able to access their local pharmacy, they would have **visited their GP surgery on 55% of occasions**. So, without these pharmacies, **more than 115 additional appointments per GP surgery** would be required weekly to provide the care for these communities. This means that the community pharmacy network saves **38 million GP appointments a year**.

## Change Over Time

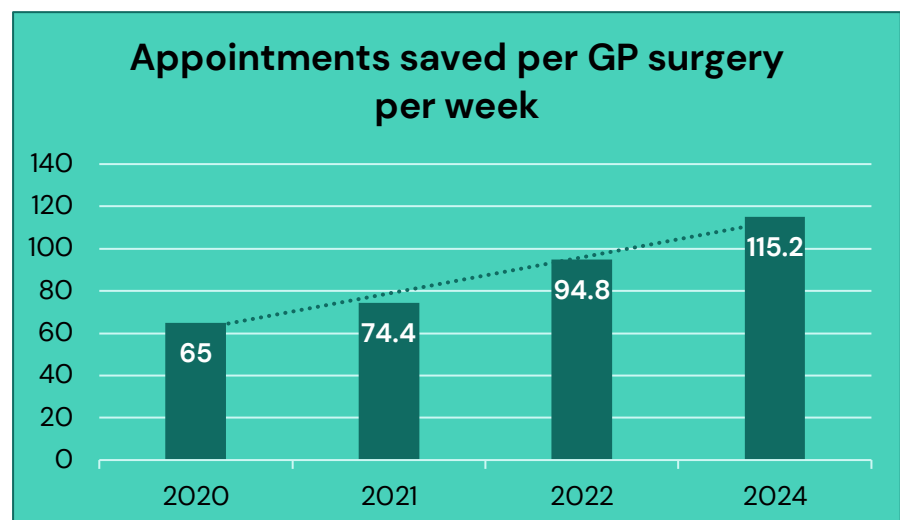
Similar Pharmacy Advice Audits were conducted in 2020, 2021 and 2022, providing a timeline of how the **demands on community pharmacies have been increasing.**

This year's data revealed community pharmacies are now providing, on average, 21.7 unfunded consultations a day, which is **nearly 50% more** than four years ago (at the height of COVID-19).



Plus, such consultations are taking longer, with pharmacy teams now spending more than 2 hours (133.4 minutes) a day on providing these clinical consultations – that's **a 78% increase on 2020.**


Access to pharmacies has also prevented 115.2 GP appointments per surgery every week. Since 2020, community pharmacy has saved general practice a further **47% increase** in patients using their services.





## Conclusions

### Pharmacies are valuable healthcare assets

 With more than 1.3 million people a week now having their healthcare needs addressed by community pharmacies – and 70% asking for advice on clinical symptoms – **the general public is relying on pharmacies more than ever before.**

Whilst 85% can be helped there and then, of those referred on, pharmacies identify around 2.7 million people a year needing urgent help. Not only are patients benefitting from being able to **access support from a healthcare professional at a time and place that's convenient for them**, but pharmacists are also **helping detect issues that could be more serious.**




The calculations also indicate that community pharmacy is saving the NHS 38 million GP appointments a year, **reducing the burden on the already strained GP system.**

### Pharmacies are under increasing pressure

However, with nearly 50% more consultations provided in pharmacies now than in 2020 – and over 2 hours a day spent providing them – **a significant amount of pharmacies' capacity is being taken up by unfunded work.**



 Additionally, despite NHS referral routes being in place, GP surgeries and NHS 111 are still informally referring patients to community pharmacies. The NHS Pharmacy First service is being bypassed in nearly 150,000 cases per week, effectively **removing more than £115 million worth of funding from the pharmacy network.**

### Things need to change

Community pharmacy plays an **invaluable role in healthcare provision** and should be **appropriately recognised and remunerated** by Government and the NHS. To realise pharmacy's potential, Community Pharmacy England is calling for:



- 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; and
- A plan to safeguard the pharmacy workforce.

For more information, please contact: [comms.team@cpe.org.uk](mailto:comms.team@cpe.org.uk)