



Medicines Supply Report



Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2025

The ongoing impact of medicines supply issues
on pharmacies and patients in England

Medicines supply issues continue to increase, with little sign of improvement.

The Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2025 has highlighted persistent challenges faced by pharmacies in England, with medicine supply issues continuing to put significant strain on both pharmacy teams and owners, and their patients. Medicines supply issues can compromise the care patients receive, leading to frustration for all involved. Since the Pressures Survey began in 2022, it has shown the scale of the challenges and three years later, the data shows things are not getting better.



This report is based on the views of the owners (or head office representatives) of over 4,300 pharmacy premises in England and of 1,600 pharmacy team members.

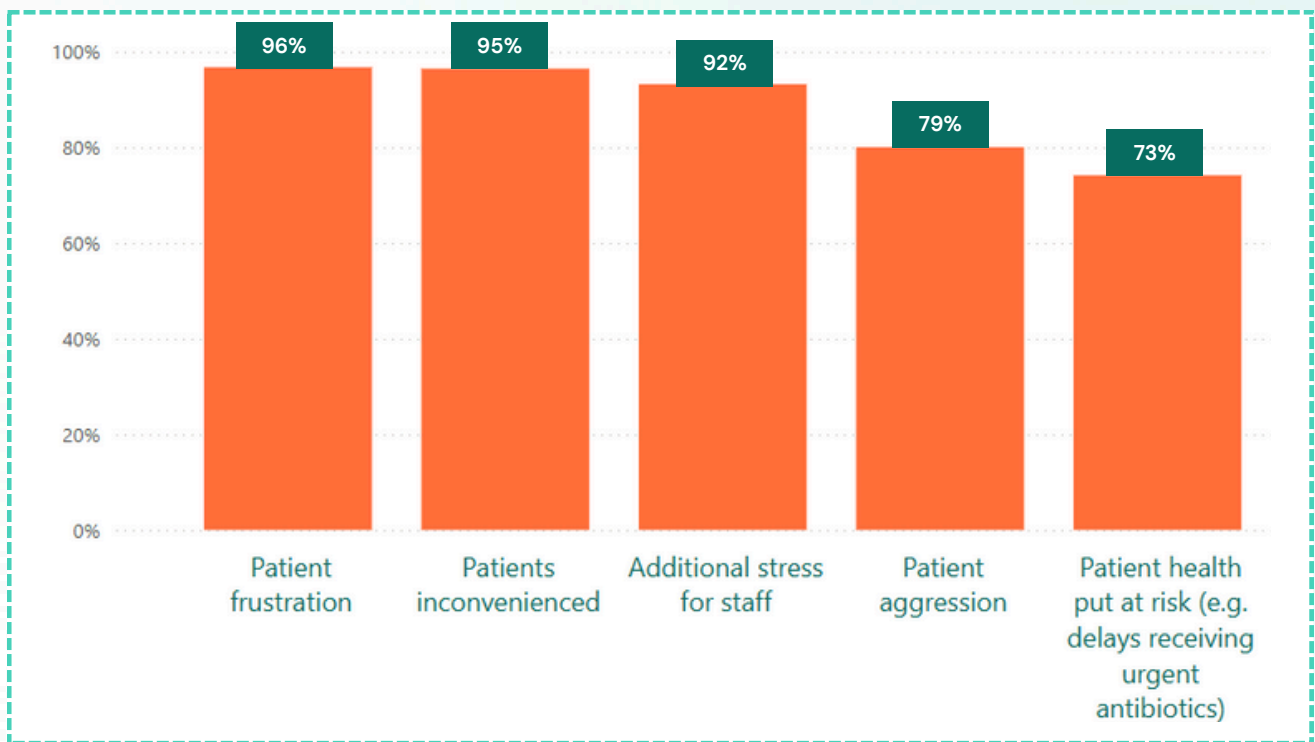
Key Findings

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Medicine supply issues continue to compromise patient care and increase pressure on pharmacy teams

- **95%** of pharmacy team members indicated that patients are still being inconvenienced by ongoing shortages.
- **86%** of pharmacy owners said shortages are leading patients to visit multiple pharmacies in search of their medicines.
- **73%** of pharmacy team members reported that medicines supply issues are putting patient health at risk.
- **96%** of pharmacy team members said patient frustration is a common consequence of supply issues, with 79% reporting incidents of patient aggression when medicines are unavailable or delayed.
- Over **90%** of pharmacy staff reported increased workload and stress as a result of supply problems.

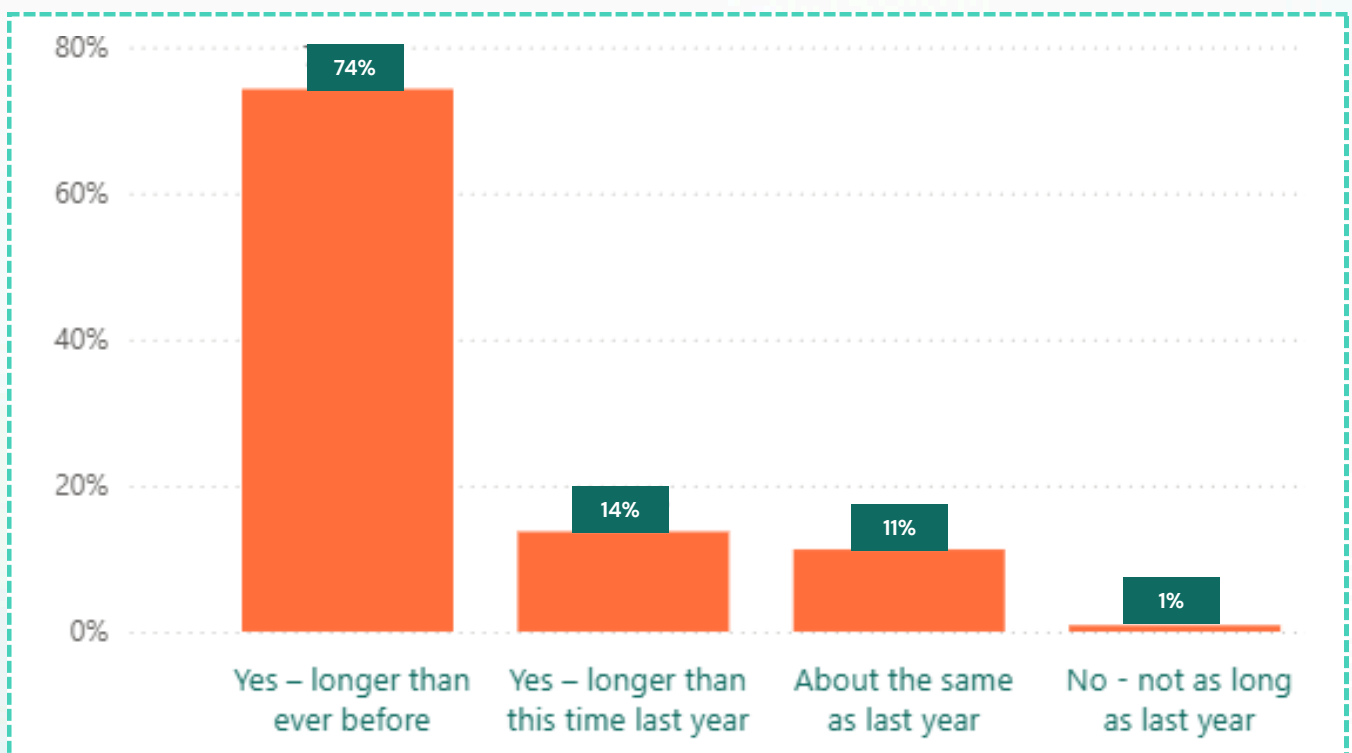
Which of the following have occurred as a consequence of medicines supply issues?



2 Pharmacies are spending more time than ever sourcing medicines in the face of daily supply chain challenges

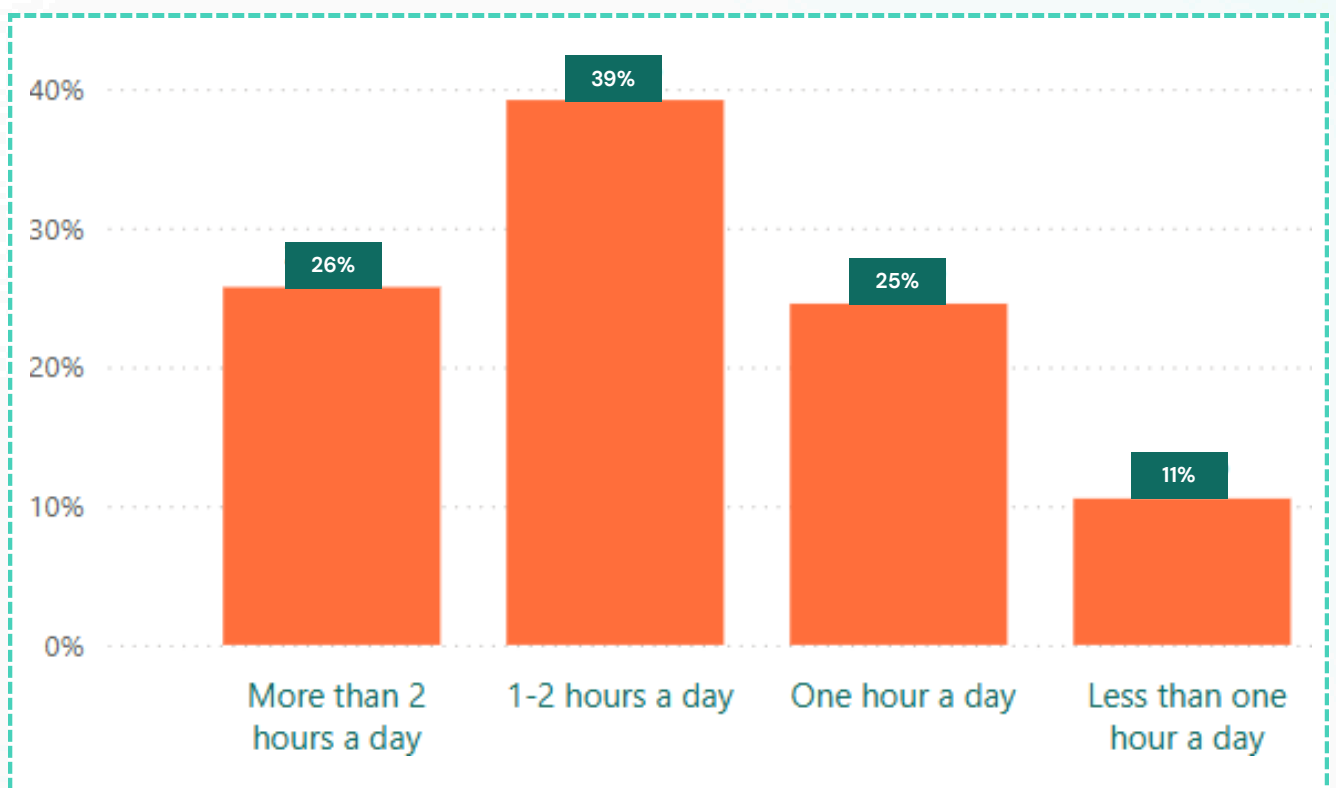
- More than **80%** of pharmacy owners have reported that their business experienced an increase in medicines supply chain/ wholesaler issues in comparison to the previous year.

Is your business having to spend longer to procure medicines than this times (January/February 2024) last year?



- More than **80%** of pharmacy teams have indicated that out of stock items from wholesalers occur every day.
- Over a quarter (**26%**) pharmacy teams have reported that medicines supply chain issues are affecting their pharmacy daily, and 61% of pharmacy teams have indicated it is happening multiple times a day.
- Nearly three quarters (**74%**) of pharmacy owners have reported that their business is having to spend longer to procure medicines than ever before.
- About 4 in 10 (**39%**) members of pharmacy staff are spending 1-2 hours daily sourcing alternative medicines.

Can you estimate how many hours the pharmacy team spends trying to obtain stock/alternatives?



- Over a quarter of teams (**26%**) spend more than 2 hours on this task.
- Almost half (**49%**) of pharmacy owners have indicated that patient services are being negatively affected by pressures on their business and the vast majority (94%) have said the inability to source and supply medicines to patients is a root cause behind this.



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Our survey shows that as medicine supply issues remain a daily reality across the country, the risk to patient health has become a distressing new normal. Delays in receiving medicines not only disrupt patients' treatment but can also cause unnecessary stress and potential harm to their health.

The ongoing time and effort required to manage shortages also adds pressure on pharmacy teams, who are already working at full stretch. Our survey results suggest a system stuck that is stuck at breaking point.

Janet Morrison
Chief Executive of Community Pharmacy England

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These findings are worrying and reflect what patients tell us about the distress and frustration that medicine shortages cause.

Our previous research found a quarter of people had been affected by medicine shortages, and sadly, the situation hasn't improved much.

International supply issues will take time to fix, but the NHS can take immediate steps to reduce the impact on patients who cannot get hold of their medication.

Providing clear guidance to the public on what steps to take if their medication is unavailable is crucial. The government should also consider other actions, such as giving pharmacists greater flexibility to substitute medication, provided it is safe to do so, and the patient agrees. If steps like this are implemented quickly, they could help reduce the impact of medicine shortages on patients.

Louise Ansari
Chief Executive of Healthwatch England

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Medicine supply challenges persist three years on: A Comparison of 2025 and 2022 survey data

When the Pressures Survey was launched in 2022, the intention was to capture the ongoing challenges faced by pharmacies across the UK. Now, in 2025, the latest findings show that little progress has been made in addressing medicine supply problems from the perspective of pharmacies and their patients.

Key comparisons with 2022 findings include:



Worsening availability: In 2022, 67% of pharmacy team staff said they experienced daily supply issues. In 2025, this has risen to 87%, with pharmacy teams now reporting they face supply problems at least daily, often multiple times a day. Additionally, in 2025, 81% of staff report that out-of-stock items from wholesalers occur daily, highlighting the persistent and worsening reality of medicine shortages in pharmacies.



Patient safety remains at risk:

In 2022, just over half (51%) of pharmacy teams said patients were negatively affected by supply chain issues on a daily basis. In 2025, this concern has grown significantly, with 73% reporting risks to patient health caused by delays in accessing medicines.



Patient aggression continues: Reports of aggression from patients due to medicine shortages remain high, rising slightly from 75% in 2022 to 79% in 2025. This reflects ongoing strain on patient experience and the public-facing teams dealing with the consequences.



Increasing time spent sourcing alternatives: In 2022, pharmacy teams spent an average of 5.3 hours per week managing supply issues. In 2025, this has intensified, with 39% of teams spending 1–2 hours every day and over a quarter (26%) spending more than two hours daily.



Mounting pressures on pharmacies:

Supply chain problems continue to have a major impact on pharmacies. In 2022, 83% of pharmacy owners reported a significant increase in supply chain and medicines delivery issues. By 2025, this remains in a similar position, with 81% of pharmacy owners reporting the same. In 2025, 94% of pharmacy owners said the inability to source and supply medicines to patients is the main reason behind the pressures on their business and the negative impact on patient services.

Comparison of Key Findings – 2022 vs 2025

Key challenges	2022 findings	2025 findings
Daily medicine supply issues	67% of pharmacy staff reported daily disruptions	87%, with pharmacy teams facing supply problems at least daily, often multiple times a day.
Time spent sourcing alternatives	Average of 5.3 hours/week spent by pharmacy teams resolving supply issues	39% of pharmacy teams spend 1–2 hours/day and 26% spend more than 2 hours per day
Impact on patient health	51% said patients were negatively affected daily	73% say supply issues are putting patient health at risk
Patient aggression	75% of team members experienced patient aggression due to supply issues	79% report aggression from patients linked to supply issues
Patient frustration	97% of pharmacy staff said that supply chain issues had led to frustration from patients	96% Pharmacy staff have indicated patient frustration because of medicines supply issues
Impact on pharmacy businesses	83% of pharmacy owners reported a significant increase in supply chain issues	81% of pharmacy owners reporting the same in 2025 and 74% pharmacy owners say they're spending longer than ever sourcing medicines
Effect on patient services	92% of pharmacy owners reported that patient services were being negatively affected by the pressures on their business in general.	94% of pharmacy owners have indicated that pharmacy services are being negatively affected due to sourcing issues



Our survey findings provide yet more evidence that medicine supply problems haven't disappeared – it will take sustained action to resolve this crisis and ensure patients can access the medicines they need, when and where they need them.

Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Community Pharmacy England

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Every day we're facing immense challenges with medicine shortages. It's not just a matter of running out of stock – patients are frustrated, and we're caught in the middle. We spend hours calling suppliers and contacting GPs, trying to find alternatives. The constant uncertainty is affecting both our staff and patients. Each year, it only seems to get worse. We're doing the best we can, but the pressure is overwhelming. We hope things improve soon, as the stress is taking its toll on everyone.

— ” —
**Fin McCaul, Independent Community Pharmacy owner,
based in Greater Manchester**



What patients and pharmacy professionals told us.

Pharmacy owners and staff members provided examples of how their patients have been impacted by the medicine supply issues.

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Creon capsule shortages have been devastating. Patients can't access life-saving meds. We deal with their anger and feel helpless.

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A 10-year-old couldn't get their regular epilepsy medicine in liquid form and was forced to switch to tablets, which are not the right dosage. The GP made the change just to prescribe something.

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Some HRT patients are so disturbed by not getting their usual medication, they end up going to over 10 to 15 pharmacies.

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One elderly patient prescribed trimethoprim 200mg (not available) waited six days for the GP to change the dose. By then, the patient had been admitted to hospital.

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Two patients were admitted to hospital due to mental health medication not being available or because of prescription delays.

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If we aren't able to supply medicines, some patients just give up and stop taking them. Some of these are long-term treatments, so their health will deteriorate over time.

Patient view:



I have a long-standing repeat prescription for five meds – blood pressure, cholesterol, thyroid, pain, and heart. One or other is often unavailable, about once every three months. I can fudge through without some of my meds, and sometimes have to do without for 3–10 days, but the pain, heart, and thyroid meds are more problematic. I'm wheelchair dependent and in chronic pain. I had thyroid cancer and had the thyroid removed, so I need the thyroid meds to keep functioning. I have idiopathic ectopics [a condition involving irregular heartbeats]¹ and need heart meds to put the brake on these.

The obvious nuisance is repeat trips to the pharmacy, repeat queuing, getting cold and wet in the winter. More significantly, there's the anxiety, as there's often no certainty that returning on the day suggested will yield the meds. Then there's the re-assertion of symptoms that the meds control. Pain and spasms prevent me sleeping. Lumpy heartbeats make it hard to focus on work. Lack of thyroid meds sees me winding down, tired, and cold. I work, so all this messing about, and feeling under-par, is not good. The elderly are having a tough time, standing in the queue, and I've seen people give up and collapse on the pavement.

Female Patient, Yorkshire, England



The context

Medicines supply chains are long and complex, and both the manufacture and supply of medicines are rigorously regulated. While some supply issues can be localised, medicine shortages are often a national (and sometimes global) problem that can affect both the availability and pricing of medicines. Medicine shortages have been a growing issue following years of turbulence across supply chains, with impacts linked to Brexit, COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and wider economic instability.²

Pharmacy teams spend a lot of time trying to source prescription medicines as cost-effectively as possible, saving the NHS millions every year. However, the growing number of medicine supply problems is making this task increasingly difficult. In the last 12 months between May 2024 and April 2025, Community Pharmacy England received nearly 1,500 reports of medicine shortages with pharmacy owners reporting difficulties obtaining 60 unique products, on average, each month.

Ongoing shortages and supply disruptions continue to affect the availability of medicines used in a range of clinical and therapeutic areas. These include medicines used for the treatment of ADHD, diabetes and epilepsy.

In the 12 months between May 2024 and April 2025, the Government has issued Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) for medicines including:

- Creon (Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy)
- Estradot (HRT)
- Quetiapine (used to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder)
- Methylphenidate (ADHD)
- Cefalexin and clarithromycin (antibiotics)
- Isosorbide mononitrate (used for angina)
- Ramipril (cardiovascular disease)

In previous years we have also seen shortages affecting HRT and adrenaline pens.

Price concessions

When community pharmacies cannot source a product at or below the published reimbursement price as set out in the Drug Tariff, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) can introduce a price concession. This is a temporary adjustment to the reimbursement price of a medicine and is introduced at the request of Community Pharmacy England based on reports received from pharmacy teams. A price concession can be requested for any medicine listed in the Drug Tariff. For any medicine granted a price concession, pharmacies are automatically reimbursed at the new prices for that month.



Between May 2024 and April 2025, Community Pharmacy England received over a million reports from pharmacy teams of medicines purchased above Drug Tariff prices. Over the same period, the Department granted 1,524 price concessions, an average of 127 per month.

Medicines granted price concessions are not necessarily affected by shortages. However, we do see price fluctuations of medicines affected by shortages or supply disruptions, due to increased demand for the limited stock available.

The causes of ongoing supply issues and future uncertainty

The causes of these ongoing supply issues can range from product discontinuations to wider global supply chain problems. We also believe that low UK medicine prices have made the market less attractive for manufacturers, further weakening supply chain resilience.

According to a recent House of Commons research briefing on medicines shortages, causes and consequences of medicines shortages are explained as follows:

“Supply chains for medicines are long and complex, and shortages can be caused by multiple factors. These include manufacturing or distribution problems and increased demand for medicines. Commentators have also drawn attention to the effects of wider geopolitical factors, including the conflict in Ukraine, the covid-19 pandemic and Brexit.”³

As the Health Secretary recently acknowledged⁴, US tariffs are likely to have an impact on UK medicine supply. Medicines imported at higher cost, coupled with rising prices in Europe, could have a knock-on effect on the UK market. Factors like these create uncertainty and risk of drug price inflation, likely having an impact on the wider NHS. Experts have warned that while the expected impact may initially be felt in secondary care and for high-cost medicines such as cancer treatments, the hope is that primary care doesn't feel the strain in the future.



Recommendations

Community Pharmacy England is calling for:

- Continued progress to investigate and improve medicine supply chain resilience, from manufacturing through to community pharmacy supply to patients.
- Implementation of measures to give pharmacists more flexibility in making strength, quantity and formulation changes where there are supply issues, for the benefit of patients.
- Progress on work to look at ensuring fair access to margin, for instance looking at branded generics.⁵



Notes and References

¹ **Source:** British Heart Foundation, What are ectopic beats? Can they damage your heart? Available at: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/heart-matters-magazine/medical/ask-the-experts/ectopic-beats>

² **Source:** [Medicine Shortages: 'Why do medicine shortages occur?' - Community Pharmacy England](#)

³ **Source:** Medicines Shortages, House of Commons Library Research Briefing, April 2025. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9997/CBP-9997.pdf>

⁴ **Source:** [Trump tariffs could hit UK medicine supply, Wes Streeting warns](#), The Guardian, April 2025; [Trump tariffs could threaten UK medicine supply, Wes Streeting warns](#), The Independent, April 2025.

⁵ **Retained margin:** The reimbursement rates that community pharmacies receive from the NHS for prescription medicines are set out in the Drug Tariff. Pharmacies buy their medicines from wholesalers and manufacturers at the best price they can. For some medicines, any difference between that price and the Drug Tariff can be retained as profit, known as retained margin. The amount of funding the NHS pays the community pharmacy sector through this margin is capped for each year. Source: House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee Report, Pharmacy: Third Report of Session 2023–24, May 2024. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmhealth/140/report.html>



Background Information on the Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2025

Community Pharmacy England represents all c.10,000 community pharmacies in England. This report has been produced based on the results of Community Pharmacy England's 2025 Pharmacy Pressures Survey, which was carried out between early January 2025 and early March 2025. The survey consisted of two parts, an online questionnaire specifically for pharmacy owners (or head office representatives) and another separate questionnaire for pharmacy team members. Over 800 pharmacy owners – between them representing more than 4,300 pharmacy premises in England – and over 1,600 pharmacy team members (mostly pharmacists, but also some technicians, dispensers and assistants) took part in their respective surveys.

Further Information and Media

For any further information visit our [Pressures Survey webpage](#)

For media queries, including interview or recording requests, please contact: comms.team@cpe.org.uk

Further information on medicine supply issues, including on price concession trends can be found here: [Supply chain and shortages](#)

For general background information on community pharmacy see: [Learn more about community pharmacy – Community Pharmacy England](#)



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