Community Pharmacy England

July 2026

Pressures Survey 2026: Guide for Interviewees

Note to interviewees

This guide provides key messages, background information and supporting statistics to help you prepare for media interviews. It is intended as a reference document, and you do not need to draw on everything included below in every interview.

For interviews, it is sufficient to be familiar with the **key messages / media lines** and a small number of key statistics. In particular one or two examples relating to:

- Pharmacy finances
- Medicines supply
- The impact on patients

The remaining information is included as supporting background and can be referred to if needed. You will also be able to draw from your personal knowledge and experience in your own pharmacy – what pressures are you and the team feeling and what impact is this having?

You can also refer to the press release on this topic, and our general interview top tips.

Media Lines / Messaging

What are the key messages from the Pressures Survey 2026 results

- **Community pharmacies are a vital NHS front door under severe strain:**
    - Pharmacies provide walk-in care, medicines and advice without an appointment, but they are under huge pressures. **75%** are losing money and only **14%** are profitable.
- **Pressures on pharmacies are being driven by a wide range of factors including:**
    - **Rising workload** – as prescription volumes and demand for healthcare advice continue to rise. Medicines supply issues also add to workload pressures.
    - **A financial squeeze** – there is a £2 billion funding gap between the economic costs of the services that pharmacies provide and what they are paid to do so.

    - **Rising costs and inflation** – staff, utilities, business rates and all other costs are rising for pharmacies.
- **Services are being scaled back:**
    - **30%** of pharmacies have reduced their opening hours, while some pharmacies have had to stop providing services such as vaccinations and Pharmacy First.
- **Patient access is already worsening:**
    - **76%** report impacts on patient care, including longer waits, delays in accessing medicines, and reduced responsiveness.
- **Medicines supply and pricing remain problems:**
    - Almost all **(99%**) pharmacies say NHS payments do not cover their medicine costs.
    - Additionally, medicine shortages are widespread, with **86%** spending longer sourcing medicines and **88%** of patients are visiting multiple pharmacies to get medicines.
- **Workforce pressures are also limiting patient care:**
    - Rising staffing costs affect **95%** of pharmacies. Many owners are going without a salary, and nearly **40%** of staff cannot spend enough time with patients.
- **Urgent action is needed to support NHS priorities:**
    - Without sustainable funding, pharmacies cannot deliver the Government's ambition to shift care into the community and relieve pressure on GPs and hospitals.

Situation overview

Community pharmacy is under sustained and increasing pressure across finances, workforce and medicines supply. The 2026 survey provides a clear, up-to-date picture of the scale of the challenge facing the sector and its ability to support patients and the wider NHS.

Survey context

The Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2026 reflects responses from 2,936 pharmacy owners and over 900 team members across England (Feb to Apr 2026), providing a robust snapshot of current pressures. Key data from the survey is included in the Annex.

What needs to change?

If community pharmacy is to play the expanded role expected of it in NHS plans, action is needed now to stabilise the sector and create the conditions for growth.

Sustainable core funding

- Funding must reflect the real cost of delivering NHS services and address the current funding gap.

Full reimbursement for medicines

- Pharmacies should not be subsidising NHS care. Reimbursement must cover actual purchasing costs.

Long-term certainty

- A long-term sustainable solution is needed so pharmacies can plan, invest in staff, and expand services.

Workforce investment

- Support for recruitment, retention and training is essential to maintain safe, effective care.

Support with business costs

- Targeted relief on business rates and property costs will help protect access, particularly in high-cost areas.

Stronger role in community-based care

- Pharmacies must be fully integrated into NHS primary care and neighbourhood health models.

Action on medicines supply

- National action is needed to improve supply chain resilience and reduce shortages.

Why this matters?

Community pharmacy is central to current NHS and Government priorities, particularly the shift towards prevention, neighbourhood health services, and care closer to home.

- Pharmacies are often the **first and most accessible point of care**, with no appointment needed
- They play a key role in **reducing pressure on GPs, urgent care and hospitals**
- They support **prevention, early intervention and long-term condition management**

With the right support, pharmacies can do more to:

- Improve access to care in local communities.
- Deliver services such as Pharmacy First and vaccinations at scale.
- Help tackle health inequalities.

Without action:

- More pharmacies will reduce services or close.
- Patient access will worsen.
- Pressure on the rest of the NHS will increase.

Background and Statistics

Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2026

The Community Pharmacy England Pharmacy Pressures Survey is a recurring annual survey of pharmacy owners and pharmacy staff in England designed to monitor the operational, financial and workforce pressures facing the sector. Fieldwork was conducted between mid-February and mid-April 2026. 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.

Pharmacy owners representing 2,936 pharmacies and over 900 pharmacy team members (mostly pharmacists, but also some technicians, dispensers and assistants) took part in their respective surveys. Therefore, providing a comprehensive snapshot of current financial, operational and workforce challenges across the sector. The survey results highlight the scale of the pressures facing community pharmacy and the impact on patients and services.

Key results from the Survey

Pressures on pharmacies

Financial pressures:

- 75% of pharmacies are losing money; only 14% are profitable.
- 99.7% report rising costs; 95% cite staffing costs.
- 99% say medicine reimbursement does not cover costs.
- Around a £2 billion funding gap remains across the sector.

Cashflow challenges:

- 11% could not pay medicine wholesalers on time.
- 10% have taken on additional financing.
- Many owners are using personal savings to keep pharmacies afloat.

Medicine supply issues:

- 86% are spending longer sourcing medicines.
- 30% report the worst delays they have experienced.
- 88% say patients are visiting multiple pharmacies due to shortages.

Workforce strain:

- 95% affected by rising staffing costs.
- 60% of owners took no salary; a quarter of business owners or directors (24.5%) have not taken any salary or income from the business.
- Nearly 40% of staff cannot provide the level of patient support they would like.

Impact on patients

These pressures are directly affecting patient access to care and the quality of support pharmacies can provide every day.

Longer waits and reduced responsiveness:

- 72% of patients report longer waits for advice.
- 83% of pharmacies cannot respond promptly to patient queries.

Difficulty accessing medicines:

- Ongoing shortages mean patients often need to go from pharmacy to pharmacy.
- Delays are risking interruptions to treatment, particularly for long-term conditions.

Reduced services:

- 57% of independent pharmacies have stopped local services
- 29% of pharmacy owners suggested that in 2026 they will have to begin charging for services that were previously offered to patients for free.

Reduced opening hours:

- 30% of pharmacies had already reduced opening hours during 2025.
- 21% of pharmacies are expected to have to reduce opening hours in 2026.
- This particularly affects more vulnerable and underserved communities.

Knock-on impact on the NHS:

- When pharmacies cannot meet demand, patients turn to GPs and A&E.
- This adds pressure across primary care and urgent care services.

FAQ

What about the recent funding settlement?

The Government introduced a new funding settlement for community pharmacy in April 2025, including an £800 million uplift, and a further 10.3% (£340m) in 2026/27 funding uplift. This was a welcome step and recognition of the pressures facing the sector. However, it falls well short of what is needed to stabilise pharmacy services.

Funding still does not match demand or costs

- After a decade of real-terms cuts, the settlement leaves a significant gap. Independent analysis shows a remaining **£2 billion annual shortfall**.
- Pharmacies are still being asked to deliver more for the NHS, including supporting the shift to community-based care, without funding that reflects the true cost of doing so.
- The recent settlements provided short-term relief, but have not resolved the underlying financial pressures. Without further action, pharmacies will continue to scale back services or close, limiting patient access and undermining NHS ambitions.

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