

Local Government Association briefing, House of Commons Debate on Community Pharmacies

Wednesday 2 November 2016



Key messages

- Councils want every local area to have a strong community pharmacy network, particularly those in deprived areas with the greatest health needs, or rural communities with the furthest distance to travel. It is important that the Government ensures this is delivered through the Pharmacy Access Scheme.
- The closure of community pharmacies could leave many isolated and vulnerable residents, particularly in deprived and rural areas, struggling to access pharmacies for their potentially life-saving medicines.
- Local pharmacies should be expanded within their communities, providing important public health services such as health checks, smoking cessation, sexual health, screening and immunisations, in addition to dispensing and selling medicines.
- Additional investment in community pharmacy could be strategically and financially beneficial to local government by improving primary and secondary prevention of disease and access to services.

Further information

Community pharmacies are not only a valuable health asset, but also an important social asset because often they are the only healthcare facility located in an area. Community pharmacy and local government share a common purpose in a number of areas:

- **Public health** – pharmacists and their teams already have a track record in delivering public health services, such as promoting and supporting good sexual health and reducing substance misuse within communities
- **Support for independent living** – by helping people to understand the correct use and management of medicines as well as provide healthy lifestyle advice and support for self-care, pharmacists and their teams can help contribute to better health, reduce admissions to hospital and help people remain independent for longer
- **Making every contact count** – by using their position at the heart of communities, pharmacies can use every interaction as an opportunity for a health-promoting intervention, as signposters, facilitators and providers of a wide range of public health and other health and wellbeing services
- **A community pharmacy is one of the core businesses** that can make a difference between a viable high street and one that is failing commercially – thereby sustaining communities, providing investment, employment and

Briefing

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training, and building social capital.

Councils want every local area to have a strong community pharmacy network, particularly those in deprived areas with the greatest health needs, or rural communities with the furthest distance to travel. It is important that government ensures this is delivered through the Pharmacy Access Scheme.

Older and frail people rely on their local chemist not just as a place to get medicines, but as somewhere they can go to for informal health advice and information. If this lifeline was removed, it would mean more people having to potentially travel longer distances to GP surgeries and adding to existing pressures.

For some people, the local pharmacy is their only contact with a health professional, providing access to invaluable health advice and enabling older people to live more independently.

Pharmacies also have an important place in our local economy. They are vital to ensuring diverse and vibrant high streets, which can otherwise be dominated by betting shops, fast food outlets and payday lenders. Losing our pharmacies could leave gaps in high streets that may never be filled. Vacancy rates have doubled in recent years, with the amount of money shoppers are spending halved and local pharmacies must remain at the heart of communities.

We would like to see pharmacies playing a bigger role in providing public health services, alongside their important existing roles of supplying medicines. This could include services such as health checks, smoking cessation, sexual health, screening and immunisations, in addition to dispensing and selling medicines. Additional investment in community pharmacies could improve the prevention of disease and help take the strain off the NHS and social care.

It is important that pharmacies modernise, with new ways of ordering prescriptions and collecting medicines, including online ordering and delivery to the patient's home.

There are significant opportunities for councils to commission public health services from community pharmacies as a key element of their health improvement strategies; based on their priorities agreed in the joint health and wellbeing strategy.

Additional investment in community pharmacy could be strategically and financially beneficial to local government by improving primary and secondary prevention of disease and access to services. For example, some councils have chosen to commission NHS Health Checks, stop smoking programmes, vaccinations and screening from pharmacies in their area.

In addition to the delivery of public health services, community pharmacy teams are engaging in opportunistic interventions such as the provision of healthy lifestyle advice, opportunistic blood pressure or cholesterol testing, preventing people from becoming ill. They also help to maintain the health of people who are already ill. Local authorities can play a role by specifically recognising the opportunity for such interventions in discussions with pharmacy representatives and supporting their use.

Case Study: Community Pharmacy Green Light Project

Giving back to the community Green Light is an employee-owned co-operative, operating a small chain of pharmacies in seven branches across London, with its flagship based at Euston. The chain places a strong emphasis on creating

resilient communities with a focus on health, wellbeing and creation of social capital.

Green Light pharmacies are deliberately situated in areas of socio-economic deprivation and multi-cultural communities and the staff profile reflects this diversity. By doing this, the co-operative aims to reduce language and cultural barriers that sometimes prevent people from seeking care and support from other local health care providers. Green Light sees creating local employment as a way of contributing to the health of the community. It takes on people who might not be considered employable, for example young people with a history of gang membership, most with no history of tertiary education in their family. For instance, one staff member, whose parents were patients at the pharmacy and convinced by staff of her potential, was supported through GCSEs, A levels, her degree and post-graduate qualifications. She is now a pharmacist with hugely changed life prospects and able to 'give back' to her community. Local knowledge can be useful to pharmacy staff.

One small example is that a member of staff at the Euston branch who is a trained health champion can tell people when the local market reduces fruit and vegetables to half price, as part of her role in promoting healthy eating. As part of its commitment to supporting long-term sustainable employment in the area, the co-operative has worked with a local charity to design a year-long course that will bring together standard apprenticeships with regulated pharmacy training, thus enabling young people to get on the ladder to a career.

The pharmacies are clinically-focused and do not sell perfumes or cosmetics. The branch at Euston, while providing typical commissioned and commercial pharmaceutical services from ground-level premises, has transformed its basement into a local health education and meeting centre. This is a joint venture with the School of Pharmacy at University College London (UCL) designed to provide innovative, patient-facing real world teaching to their undergraduates. Pharmacy staff write material and lead the teaching with support from UCL, with which a community-centred vision of undergraduate pharmacy education has been co-created.

Key Statistics

- There were 11,674 community pharmacies in England by March 2015
- 1.6 million people visit a pharmacy each day, 1.2 million of those for health related reasons (433 million in 1 year)
- 79 per cent of people have visited a pharmacy at least once in the last 12 months, 37 per cent visit at least once a month
- over 75 per cent of adults use the same pharmacy all the time
- pharmacies in England dispensed nearly one billion (978.3 million) prescription items in 2014/15 - nearly 2.7 million items per day
- 95 per cent of people are able to get to a pharmacy within a 20 minute walk and access is greatest in the most deprived areas
- there are over 2,000 Healthy Living Pharmacies across the country with 3,500 qualified health champions on site
- over 9,000 pharmacies in England supported Smoke Free January in 2015

- nearly 10,000 pharmacies supported Stoptober 2015
- over 90 per cent of pharmacies now have a private consultation room and many have already taken on a wider public health role, for example running weekly clinics to help people lose weight, stop smoking or to monitor blood pressure or cholesterol
- pharmacies are increasingly seen as a referral mechanism to GPs for patients with possible early symptoms of cancer