

CCA response to HSC Committee inquiry into prevention

Community pharmacies play a crucial role in preventative healthcare, through services and the delivery of advice and support to enable patients to identify concerning symptoms.

This is particularly important among disadvantaged groups, who tend to suffer greater levels of preventable harm.

Whilst access to healthcare tends to be more limited where there is greater need, the reverse is true for community pharmacy where access is higher in areas of greater deprivation. Combined with their convenient locations (highstreets, supermarkets and at transport hubs) and long opening hours, pharmacies are ideally placed to improve population health.

However, the current impact of community pharmacy is at risk due to a shortfall in funding leading to closures skewed to the most deprived communities.ⁱ The committee should carefully consider how the existing pharmacy network can be best protected and better utilised.

Whilst there are many opportunities to expand the role of community pharmacy in prevention, this paper focuses on three key areas.

1. Vaccinations

Community pharmacies are central to the national NHS flu vaccination programme, having provided just under 5m NHS flu vaccinations this financial year.ⁱⁱ

There are opportunities to build on this. The sector showcased its ability to scale-up during the covid pandemic, delivering 22m covid vaccinations in the year between January 2021 and 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ

The CCA estimates that the sector could provide a further 10m vaccinations each year. This would bring England in line with other comparable countries, including the USA and Canada (where CP delivers approximately 60% of vaccinations in primary care) and could include an uptick in routine flu jabs, and new programmes such as meningitis, pneumonia and shingles.

This would:

- shift work from general practice, which is struggling to meet patient demand,
- support uptake and prevent disease, particularly among deprived communities.

2. Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

Community pharmacies play a crucial role in the delivery of contraception. The recent commissioning of the NHS contraception service, allowing pharmacies to manage the provision of oral contraception, is welcome, but should be expanded. Commissioning all non-invasive contraception from community pharmacy, would release significant numbers of appointments and increase access at a time when women increasingly report difficulties accessing vital contraceptive services.^{iv}

This must include the provision of emergency hormonal contraception (EHC), for which community pharmacy is one of the main routes of access.

Unfortunately, there is significant variation in free-at-the-point of access EHC, which is available in around half of community pharmacies. Where it is available some localities

impose age limits above which women have to pay, whilst other areas specify eligibility by postcode/address.

This is in the context of significant (and growing) unmet need.

- 45% of pregnancies and one third of births in England are unplanned or associated with feelings of ambivalence.^v
- In 2021 the highest number of abortions were conducted in England and Wales, since the 1967 Abortion Act was introduced and
- Rates of abortion in the most deprived areas are more than double those in the least deprived areas.^{vi}

Community pharmacies have long opening hours on evenings and weekends when other services are closed. This is particularly important for time-sensitive medication, such as EHC. **National commissioning is the first step in improving access, whilst also transferring at least 20,000 GP appointments each year to community pharmacy.**

3. Cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention

Hypertension case finding

CVD is the biggest area where the NHS can save lives and hypertension is the biggest risk factor for CVD. People in the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to die from CVD than those in the least deprived areas.

Community pharmacies currently deliver a hypertension case-finding service.

Last year community pharmacies delivered nearly 600,000 blood pressure checks. Given that CVD is one of the leading causes of premature death, there is an urgent need to scale-up significantly. With investment, **the CCA estimates that pharmacies could screen up to 5m people a year and support the management and initiation of treatment in appropriate people. This platform could also be expanded to include diabetes and cholesterol.** We recommend the committee gives expansion of the service urgent consideration.

Smoking cessation

We also recommend the committee considers community pharmacy's role in smoking cessation. Whilst many colleagues are trained to deliver smoking cessation support, there is no nationally commissioned patient-led service.

Whilst we recognise the complexities of local commissioning, given that annually across England smoking accounts for approximately 75,000 deaths^{vii} and costs the NHS £2.6bn, the existing network of 11,000 community pharmacies could and should be better used.

ⁱ CCA, [40%+ of Pharmacy closures in last 7 years have occurred in the 20% most deprived parts of England](#), October 2022

ⁱⁱ PSNC, [Flu Vaccination – Statistics](#), 2023

ⁱⁱⁱ PSNC, [Over 22 million COVID vaccines delivered by community pharmacy](#), January 2022

^{iv} APPG SRH, [Strengthening access to contraception](#), December 2020

^v PHE, [Health matters: reproductive health and pregnancy planning](#), June 2018

^{vi} OHID, [Abortion statistics, England and Wales: 2021](#), Figure 14, December 2022

^{vii} NHS Digital, [Statistics on Smoking, England 2020](#), December 2020