



THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

20
23

INCREASING ACCESS TO VACCINES - COVID

THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

COMMUNITY PHARMACIES HAVE PROVIDED ALMOST A QUARTER

24%

OF ALL COVID VACCINATIONS IN ENGLAND. OVER A THIRD OF THESE WERE PROVIDED IN THE COUNTRY'S MOST DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES.



IN 2023, NEARLY HALF

1/2

OF ALL COVID VACCINES HAVE BEEN PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY PHARMACIES.

THERE IS THE POTENTIAL FOR COMMUNITY PHARMACY TO DO EVEN MORE, INCREASING ACCESS FOR PATIENTS WHILST SUPPORTING THE NHS BY CREATING MUCH NEEDED CAPACITY IN GENERAL PRACTICE AND HOSPITALS.



KEY CHANGES TO THE NATIONAL BOOKING SYSTEM, THE ASSURANCE PROCESS, AND THE SUPPLY CHAIN WOULD UNLOCK COMMUNITY PHARMACIES.

THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

The role community pharmacies play in the national COVID vaccination programme has been immense and continues to grow. We are now fast approaching the point where the majority of COVID vaccines are administered by pharmacies.

There are several advantages for both patients and the NHS in having community pharmacies lead the national vaccination programme. Crucially, community pharmacies provide greater access through their presence on high streets and retail parks with access to parking and longer opening hours. These pharmacies are also located in many of the most deprived communities. This access and reach **increases uptake in underserved groups.**

The growing pressures on the NHS mean that the ability to ensure the best possible uptake, without impacting other critical patient services, is vitally important. Using community pharmacy reduces the impact on other services, whilst also helping to reduce health inequalities.

Community pharmacy should be positioned by health systems as the primary provider of COVID vaccines. Small changes to how the programme is run will allow community pharmacy to take on this vitally important role.



“These pharmacies are also located in many of the most deprived communities. This access and reach increases uptake in underserved groups.”

THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

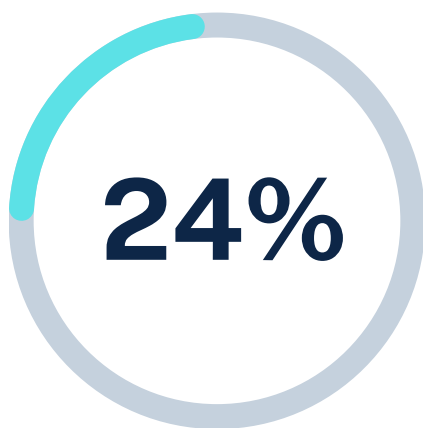
A developing role for community pharmacy

Since December 2020, nearly 150m COVID vaccines have been administered in England. The programme was originally designed to be delivered primarily in hospitals and mass vaccination centres, reflecting the need to administer a brand-new vaccine to the whole population, when supplies were erratic and needed to be closely controlled. Initially only a few community pharmacies were able to engage in the programme, where they were able to vaccinate very high numbers every week.

Over time pharmacies administered more and more vaccines as they were used to 'plug the gaps' in national provision. Community pharmacies became vital for meeting local needs, given their location in the heart of communities.

Healthcare suffers from an "inverse care law". Unfortunately, the communities with the greatest health needs often have fewer hospitals, GPs, and dentists. However, it has been shown that community pharmacies buck this trend, with more pharmacies located in deprived areas. [1] This means community pharmacy services target care to people who need it the most. In 2021, over a third of community pharmacy COVID vaccines were provided in the 20% most deprived communities. [2]

Until autumn 2023, the NHS controlled which pharmacies provided COVID vaccines. Pharmacies had to apply to provide vaccinations, and if the NHS determined that there was a local need or gap, they were commissioned to do so. Despite being restricted to gap filling.



of all COVID vaccines have been administered by community pharmacies, despite being restricted to gap filling.

[3], [4].

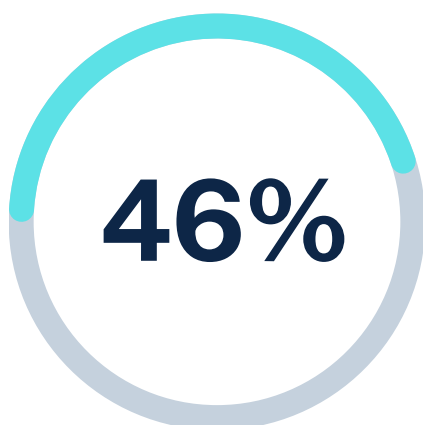
“...over a third of COVID vaccines were provided in the 20% most deprived communities.”

THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

The current situation

The proportion of COVID vaccines administered by community pharmacies is increasing. So far in 2023, 46% of all COVID vaccines have been administered by pharmacies. This share peaked at 52% in February. [4]

Setting	Number of COVID vaccines provided [3,4]
All settings	149,377,945
Community Pharmacy	35,169,939
Proportion provided by community pharmacies	24%
Community Pharmacies in 2023	2,057,687
Proportion provided by community pharmacies in 2023	46%



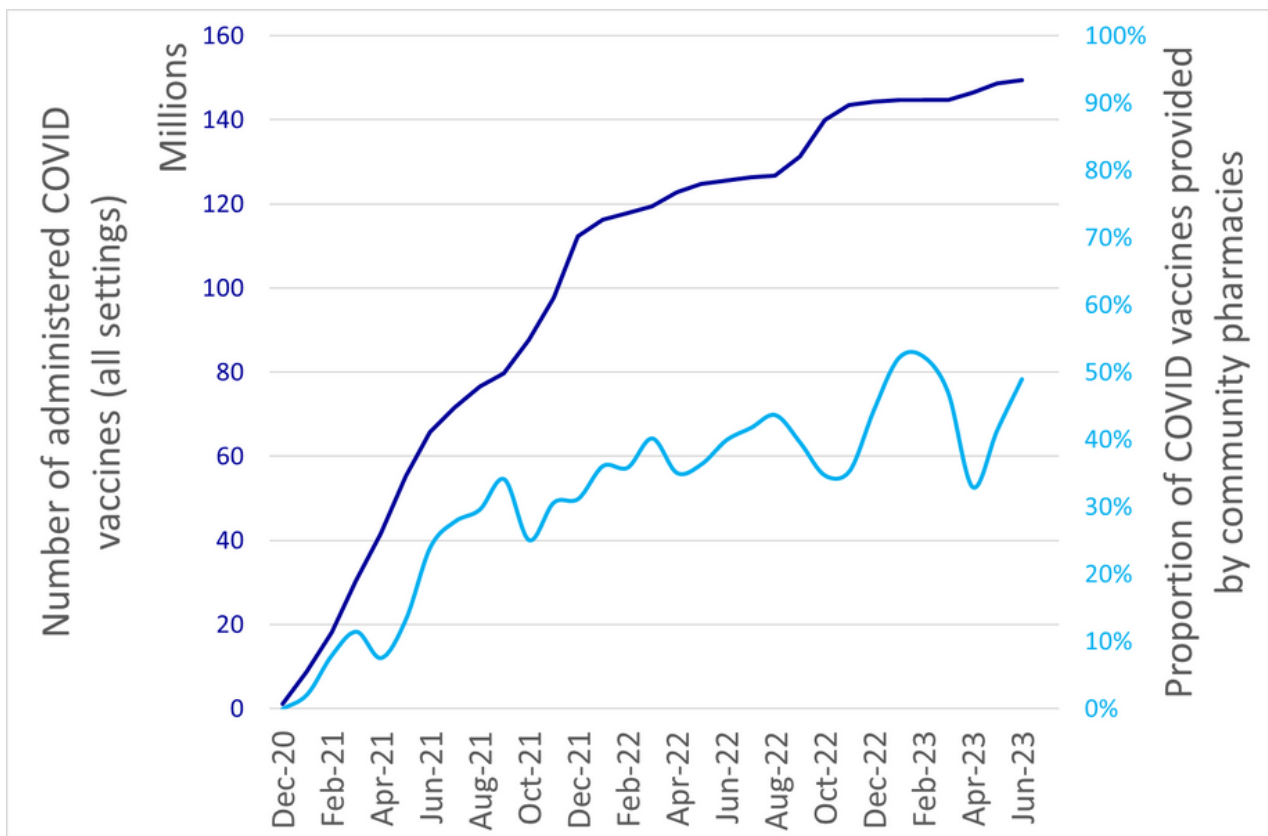
of all COVID vaccines have been administered by pharmacies in 2023.

THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

This autumn has seen a new approach by NHS England, with any pharmacy able to provide COVID vaccines. This is a very positive move. Unfortunately, the NHS have also made a significant reduction to the standard rate they will pay for COVID vaccinations to be administered, making the programme almost impossible to deliver without loss to the pharmacy.

A lack of funding, combined with unnecessary NHS bureaucracy, has created barriers to providers wishing to engage with the programme in 2023.

The 2023 programme is still largely designed to be delivered through mass vaccinations centres, even though now most have now closed. As the role of community pharmacy increases there is a need to change key parts of the programme.



“A lack of funding, combined with unnecessary NHS bureaucracy, has created barriers to providers wishing to engage with the programme in 2023.”

THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

Maximising the opportunity of community pharmacies

All vaccination programmes are planned many months before the first patient arrives onsite. Critical decisions are needed up a year in advance. As well as improving the decision-making process that underpins the programme there are also many practical changes that can be made to make the programme simpler for patients and pharmacies. For instance, a pre-filled syringe, rather than the current vials, would massively simplify vaccination.

NHS England can make other changes that would improve patient access and reduce the costs of delivery including:

National Booking System (NBS) – At present the main route for patients to access pharmacy COVID vaccinations is through the NBS. The NBS needs to be integrated with existing pharmacy IT solutions. This would mean that patients could access COVID through the NBS or via pharmacy managed pathways, and internal company systems (such as calendars) would be automatically updated. This would also allow appointments to be reviewed and updated from existing pharmacy systems.

Vaccine supply – Current vaccine supply is managed by the NHS. Whilst there have been continual improvements in the process, vaccine supply remains uncertain and cumbersome. The supply of COVID vaccines needs to be moved to existing logistical routes, allowing pharmacies to order COVID vaccines and manage levels of stock holding in the same way as all other medicines supplied for the NHS.



Assurance processes – Community pharmacies already deliver many different NHS services, including administering other vaccinations. The design of the COVID vaccine programme means many more checks are required, often managed by local NHS teams. The detailed requirements of these checks can be very different, depending on the pharmacy's location, creating a 'post-code lottery of bureaucracy'. The lack of standardisation and additional bureaucracy doesn't help the NHS, pharmacies, or patients.

Funding – In August 2023, without warning, NHS England announced they would reduce the standard vaccination fee for COVID vaccines. The reason offered was that the vaccines can be administered at the same time as flu vaccines. However, we know that patients do not always want to receive both vaccines at the same time. Given that co-administration is not always possible it is important there is sufficient resource to provide the necessary high-quality care for patients. The high levels of inflation mean that it costs more than ever to vaccinate patients, not less.

THE GROWING ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

Increasing uptake across England

The NHS is under pressure, with all parts of the system struggling with workload. Investing in community pharmacy vaccination will create much needed capacity, particularly in general practice. GP practices provided nearly 28 million appointments in July 2023 yet waiting times remain a key source of dissatisfaction for patients. [5] The NHS “Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care” aims to tackle this. [6] Supporting millions of patients to access their COVID vaccine from community pharmacy can only help with this.

Changes such as those suggested, can unlock the true potential of community pharmacy to magnify the success of the COVID vaccination programme. By empowering community pharmacy, the NHS can take advantage of the access offered by the over 10,500 pharmacies in England. More pharmacies vaccinating also means that uptake will increase in deprived communities - directly tackling health inequalities.

References

- [1] Todd et al. The positive pharmacy care law: an area-level analysis of the relationship between community pharmacy distribution, urbanity and social deprivation in England, *BMJ Open*, 2014, 4:e005764. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-005764
- [2] The CCA, *The Impact of Pharmacy Closures on Health Inequalities*, 2022
- [3] NHS England, *Vaccinations: COVID-19 Data* (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-19-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccinations-archive/>), Data published up to September 2022
- [4] NHS England, *Freedom of Information Request to NHS England (Data after September 2022)*, 2023
- [5] Nuffield Trust, *Public satisfaction with the NHS and social care in 2022: Results from the British Social Attitudes survey*, 2022
- [6] NHS England, *Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care*, 2023



WHO WE ARE

Established in 1898, the CCA is the trade association for large pharmacy operators in England, Scotland and Wales. The CCA membership includes ASDA, Boots, LloydsPharmacy, Morrisons, Rowlands Pharmacy, Superdrug, Tesco, and Well, who between them own and operate around 5,500 pharmacies, which represents nearly half the market. CCA members deliver a broad range of healthcare and wellbeing services, from a variety of locations and settings, as well as dispensing 500 million NHS prescription items every year. The CCA represents the interests of its members and brings together their unique skills, knowledge, and scale for the benefit of community pharmacy, the NHS, patients and the public.



OFFICE@THECCA.ORG.UK



[@CCAPHARMACY](https://twitter.com/CCAPHARMACY)



THECCA.ORG.UK



**COMPANY CHEMISTS'
ASSOCIATION**