NHS
HEALTH CHECKS

Your health challenge

- Attendance, uptake and prescribing rates for NHS Health Checks are all lower than the Government anticipated when the scheme was launched in 2009.
- Since 2013, only 45.6% of eligible individuals have received a health check.
- There is considerable variability in the rate of uptake between provider organisations.

How can community pharmacies help?

Community pharmacies are an ideal partner for local commissioners to increase the uptake of NHS Health Checks in their area and to help raise awareness of the NHS Health Check service.

Community pharmacy teams have always played a role in promoting, maintaining and improving the health of the communities they serve but pharmacy teams are increasingly taking on a larger role in public health as described by the Local Government Association.

Pharmacies, who are located at the heart of communities, with trusted healthcare professionals on site, reflect the social and ethnic backgrounds of their residents.

Patients and the public trust their pharmacy teams and build a special relationship with them due to frequent contact, so that people are able to be honest with them about their lifestyle choices, for example, the number of cigarettes they smoke.

A survey of over 2,100 adults also showed that 78% are comfortable receiving health checks from their local community pharmacy.

What the experts say

“One of the great benefits of the pharmacy is that the opening hours are more flexible. People can have the health checks done in the evenings and at weekends. When we send out the invitation letters we give people the choice. It is about giving people greater access.”

Frances Fuller, Lewisham’s Cardiovascular Prevention Programme Manager

What the patients say

“I think the service is a brilliant idea and we’re lucky to have it.”

Patient

“It was the closest place and very convenient as the cholesterol test could be done on site with results available straight away.”

Patient

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Potential benefits of a community pharmacy NHS Health Check service

1. Highly accessible for patients
Community pharmacies are highly accessible locations; research has shown that 89.2% of the overall population and 99.8% of people from the most deprived areas live within just a 20 minute walk of a community pharmacy.\(^6\) This is consistently higher when compared with the population living within a 20 minute walk of a GP practice.\(^7\) Many community pharmacies are also open for extended hours in the evenings and weekends, again ensuring accessibility for patients.

2. No appointment needed
Patients do not need to make an appointment for an NHS Health Check in a community pharmacy. Patients can just present, at a time which is convenient for them, and have an NHS Health Check, again making it a convenient option.

3. Opportunistic NHS Health Checks
NHS Health Checks can be offered to patients opportunistically in a community pharmacy setting. Community pharmacies are the ideal place to do this, due to the high footfall, an estimated 95% of people visit a pharmacy at least once a year.\(^8\)

4. Additional public health services
Many community pharmacies offer public health services that are complementary to the NHS Health Check service, for example, stop smoking, alcohol intervention and brief advice and weight management. Following an NHS Health Check, patients can be advised of relevant services for their health needs.

5. Reduces workload for overstretched GP practices
GP practices are struggling to cope with their workload, so a community pharmacy NHS Health Check service helps lessen this by reducing the number of patients visiting their GP practice for the service.

Case study: London Borough of Lewisham

The London Borough of Lewisham started using community pharmacies from the start of the roll out of the NHS Health Check programme as they saw that there was merit in broadening access beyond GP practices.\(^5\)

A quarter of all NHS Health Checks in Lewisham are now taking place in community pharmacies.\(^5\)

As well as the standard NHS Health Check, four community pharmacies in Lewisham are commissioned to offer spirometry testing to current or recent smokers as part of the service.\(^9\)

Pharmacy teams have access to a secure, web-based recording system to check the patient’s eligibility and use this platform to send the results of the NHS Health Check to their GP.

Referrals can also be made to the Lewisham Lifestyle Hub, which is a local programme that links patients to different services available in their area such as physical activity, taster lessons, healthy walks and weight management programmes. Overall, 40% of referrals to the Lewisham Lifestyle Hub come from community pharmacy-based Health Checks.\(^5\)

An evaluation of the community pharmacy service showed that 80% of respondents agreed that a pharmacy was a good place for an NHS Health Check. Many felt that the pharmacy was more convenient than their GP practice.\(^8\)

Another recent evaluation of the community pharmacy service has shown that it is a better setting for engaging hard-to-reach groups. Pharmacies see a higher proportion of black African and black Caribbean residents and people from deprived communities – and because of this it identifies a greater proportion of people at risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.\(^5\)

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9. Medway School of Pharmacy, Evaluation of NHS Health Checks provided by community pharmacists with addition of spirometry, Exec summary (April 2014)

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