t 0203 1220 820
e info@psnc.org.uk
w psnc.org.uk

Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s

PSNC's response

October 2019

This document sets out PSNC's answers to the online consultation for the Government's prevention green paper.

PSNC is a not-for-profit organisation which promotes and supports the interests of NHS community pharmacies in England. We are recognised by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as the body that represents NHS pharmacy contractors. We work closely with Local Pharmaceutical Committees to support their role as the local NHS representative organisations.

Our goal is to develop the NHS community pharmacy service – enabling community pharmacies to offer an increased range of high quality and fully funded services that meet the needs of, and provide value for, patients and the NHS.

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From life span to health span

Which health and social care policies should be reviewed to improve the health of: people living in poorer communities, or excluded groups? How can we design and implement health and social care policies that do this?

There are more than 11,500 community pharmacies in England providing highly accessible healthcare, particularly in areas of high deprivation. In contrast to many other healthcare settings, the country's pharmacy network bucks the inverse care law: there is a greater density of community pharmacies in the most deprived areas, per head of the population. Overall, 89% of the population is estimated to have access to a community pharmacy within a 20-minute walk, and in the most deprived areas, this rises to 99% of people. Community pharmacies have a positive track record in health improvement. They are frequently the first port of call for patients when they are unwell and often visited by people even when they are in good health. Community pharmacy teams generally see patients more regularly than any other health care provider, so they are well placed to offer public health advice and support. Indeed, they have been undertaking this role formally and informally for years, offering a range of services including flu vaccinations and advice on health and wellbeing topics such as smoking cessation or weight loss. There is therefore considerable scope to upscale the range of nationally commissioned community pharmacy services, for instance to allow pharmacies to test and treat more conditions (such as STIs), to offer a range of vaccinations, and to give advice on lifestyle topics such as smoking cessation, all of which would improve access to healthcare for some of our most deprived communities, contributing to the reduction of health inequalities.

Intelligent health checks

Do you have any ideas for how the NHS Health Checks programme could be improved?

Local commissioning of NHS Health Checks through pharmacies is patchy. Health Checks could help tackle health inequalities, and as there are more pharmacies in areas of deprivation, it follows that a nationally commissioned service, making the checks available from all community pharmacies, could help address these gaps. The NHS Health Check could also be extended to allow pharmacy teams to provide further testing if needed, and to help people interpret results and take actions to improve health. For example, following the Health Check, community pharmacists could check blood pressure, and offer advice on diet, smoking cessation, and physical activity on an ongoing basis to help individuals to maximise positive behaviour change. In some cases, where a Health Check leads to further investigations and a diagnosis, in collaboration with the GP, of a condition such as hypertension or diabetes, pharmacies could take on some of the routine management of those patients, helping them to build the knowledge, skills and confidence to manage their own health. In particular, some patients with long-term conditions would benefit from regular support to help them get the best outcomes from their medicines and better manage their conditions. A pilot of such a service took place in community pharmacies in West Yorkshire. Eligible patients had one-to-one discussions with a pharmacist to identify personalised health goals, optimise their use of medicines, and explore actions. Patients

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showed an improvement over 12 months in key clinical and process metrics, such as patient activation, adherence, blood pressure and quality of life.

Eating a healthy diet

How can we do more to support mothers to breastfeed? How can we design and implement health and social care policies that do this?

The more than 11,500 community pharmacies in England provide highly accessible healthcare, particularly in areas of high deprivation. An estimated 90% of people visit a pharmacy at least once per year, and there are estimated to be 1.6 million visits to pharmacies every day. This unique contact with local communities means pharmacies are ideally placed to provide opportunistic health advice to families and mothers, including those of very young children. As part of the core national community pharmacy services, pharmacy teams can offer opportunistic one-to-one advice on healthy lifestyle topics to certain patient groups and around 90% of pharmacies have now achieved Healthy Living Pharmacy status. Community pharmacies have a positive track record in supporting public health campaigns and providing brief health interventions and would be well placed to offer further support to new mothers through the provision of such health advice, interventions, information materials, or by signposting them to other local services including through social prescribing.

How can we better support families with children aged 0 to 5 years to eat well?

As above, given their location at the heart of communities and the many visits that pharmacies have every day, they are ideally placed to provide health advice to parents, schools and other local community groups involving young people.

This could particularly be achieved through the further development of the Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) concept. Around 90% of pharmacies are now accredited as a Healthy Living Pharmacy. This means that they are local hubs to promote health, wellbeing and self-care and they provide services to prevent ill-health. Each HLP has at least one qualified health champion and the pharmacies work to maximise the benefits of both the regular and the opportunistic contacts that they have with local communities. HLPs also undertake outreach events in their local communities and they help to improve the public's health.

Evaluation of the HLP scheme has shown that:

- 98% of people would recommend HLPs to their friends and family;
- 21% of people surveyed wouldn't have sought another option if they hadn't been able to access the pharmacy service; and
- 60% of people surveyed would have chosen to visit a GP if they hadn't been able to access the pharmacy service, meaning demand on those services could have increased.

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With additional commissioning, for instance of weight management or dietary and physical activity advice services or signposting to further resources such as apps or local social prescribing options, these pharmacies could do much more to support families with young children to eat well.

Support for individuals to achieve and maintain a healthier weight

How else can we help people reach and stay at a healthier weight?

As above, given their location at the heart of communities and the many visits that pharmacies have every day, they are ideally placed to provide health advice to people, including about their weight. As part of the core national community pharmacy services, pharmacy teams can offer opportunistic one-to-one advice on healthy lifestyle topics to certain patient groups who present prescriptions for dispensing. Where patients are on regular medicines, this presents a regular opportunity for the pharmacy team to engage with them to support them with long-term goals such as weight management.

As described above, an extension of the Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) scheme to include additional commissioning, for instance of weight management or dietary and physical activity advice services, or signposting to further resources such as apps or local social prescribing options, pharmacies could do much more to support people to reach and maintain a healthy weight. National roll out of an extended NHS Health Check service through pharmacies, to include the provision of lifestyle support from pharmacies following the checks, could also help more individuals to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Taking care of our mental health

There are many factors affecting people's mental health. How can we support the things that are good for mental health and prevent the things that are bad for mental health, in addition to the mental health actions in the green paper?

Raising awareness and upskilling all NHS staff to be better equipped to have conversations with patients about their mental health could help ensure that whenever patients come into contact with the health service, they receive some level of support for their mental health, which could be beneficial. The more than 11,500 community pharmacies in England and the regular contact they have with patients present a unique opportunity for this – where patients are on repeat medicines, the pharmacy team has a regular chance to engage with them and to provide opportunistic one-to-one support on topics such as mental health.

Community pharmacists can also provide expert advice to help patients use their medicines appropriately and to manage any side-effects, and this could be particularly beneficial for patients with mental health conditions. One specific service development we would like is the extension of the New Medicine Service (the NMS is designed to improve patients' understanding of a newly prescribed medicine for a long-term condition and

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help them to get the most from the medicine) so that patients who have been newly prescribed an antidepressant could benefit from the support of a community pharmacist.

Community pharmacies could also play a role in signposting patients to local specialist services and support groups, including through any social prescribing programmes. A community pharmacy service in Hampshire which provided physical monitoring of young people on medication for ADHD was found to release 40% of the local adolescent mental health service, providing more input to those with greater needs.

Sleep

We recognise that sleep deprivation (not getting enough sleep) is bad for your health in several ways. What would help people get 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night?

The more than 11,500 community pharmacies in England provide highly accessible healthcare, particularly in areas of high deprivation. An estimated 84% of people visit a pharmacy at least once per year, and there are estimated to be 1.6 million visits to pharmacies every day. This unique contact with local communities means pharmacies are ideally placed to provide opportunistic health advice on many healthcare topics. As part of the core national community pharmacy services, pharmacy teams can offer opportunistic one-to-one advice on healthy lifestyle topics to certain patient groups who present prescriptions for dispensing. Community pharmacies have a positive track record in supporting public health campaigns and providing brief health interventions, and would be well placed to offer further support to people on sleep, including through the provision of health advice, interventions, information materials, or by signposting them to other local support services including through social prescribing.

Prevention in the NHS

Have you got examples or ideas for services or advice that could be delivered by community pharmacies to promote health?

Community pharmacies have a positive track record in health improvement and in many cases they see patients, and people who are apparently well, more than any other healthcare provider. Pharmacies are developing into neighbourhood health and wellbeing centres, becoming the 'go-to' destination for support, advice and resources on staying well, and their location at the heart of local communities, particularly in deprived areas, makes them uniquely well placed to contribute to the prevention agenda.

There is considerable scope to improve public health and to contribute to prevention efforts by upscaling the range and reach of community pharmacy services. Nationally commissioned community pharmacy services (or template service specifications to support consistent, widespread local commissioning) to support this could include:

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- Further development of the Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) concept (around 90% of pharmacies are now accredited as an HLP);
- The NHS Health Check, along with additions that would allow pharmacies to provide greater follow-up testing and support for patients;
- Routine management of some patients with long-term conditions helping them to build the knowledge, skills and confidence to do more to manage their own health;
- COPD case finding;
- A wider range of vaccinations, including catch-up provision for cohorts of patients where vaccination levels are below targets;
- A smoking cessation service to increase reach to target the remaining, harder to access smokers;
- An EHC and first contraception service through community pharmacy; and
- A nationally commissioned 'full' sexual health service, including a range of screening and treatment, e.g. chlamydia.

Musculoskeletal conditions

What would you like to see include in a call for evidence on musculoskeletal (MSK) health?

The more than 11,500 community pharmacies in England provide highly accessible healthcare, particularly in areas of high deprivation. Their unique contact with local communities means they are ideally placed to provide opportunistic health advice on many healthcare topics.

Community pharmacies have a positive track record in supporting public health campaigns and providing brief health interventions, and would be well placed to offer further support to people on musculoskeletal health, including through the provision of health advice, interventions, information materials, or by signposting them to other local support services including through social prescribing.

Community pharmacies can also offer patients advice on their prescribed medicines, some of which can have an impact on musculoskeletal health – such as by increasing the risk of falls and therefore fractures. In one pharmacy Falls Prevention Service, which was designed to identify people at increased risk of falls, in Doncaster:

- 95% of patients reviewed in pharmacies were found to be taking one or more 'high-risk' medicines, 32% were experiencing fall inducing side effects, 22% had fallen in the past year, 23% had balance/gait problems and 17% were afraid of falling;
- 10% of patients were referred to the specialist falls clinic; and
- Over 50% of patients who had suffered a previous fragility fracture were not being prescribed medicines that help prevent bone loss.

Using community pharmacies to identify people at risk of falls and to offer further support and advice if needed could have a positive impact on the musculoskeletal health of populations.

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Prevention in wider policies

What government policies (outside of health and social care) do you think have the biggest impact on people's mental and physical health?

In some areas, pharmacies report that some patients are not able to afford to pay the prescription charge, or have to choose which medicines they should pay for. Not taking any prescribed medicines can have a detrimental impact on health, both physical and mental, and we would like to see the prescription charge removed to ensure that all patients have fair and free access to the medicines that they need.

Value for money

How can we make better use of existing assets – across both the public and private sectors – to promote the prevention agenda?

NHS community pharmacies straddle the ground between public and private sector – although they are owned by private businesses, for the average pharmacy more than 80% of their income comes from the NHS. Like GP practices, pharmacies are an integral part of the NHS primary healthcare system.

The more than 11,500 community pharmacies in England provide highly accessible healthcare, particularly in areas of high deprivation. Their unique contact with local communities means they are ideally placed to contribute to the prevention agenda, and they have a positive track record in supporting public health campaigns.

Community pharmacy services offer value for money: an evaluation by PwC found that community pharmacies contributed a net value of £3 billion to the NHS, public sector, patients and wider society in England in 2015 through just 12 services. Pharmacies made more than 150 million interventions through the services in 2015 and there was a benefit of more than £250,000 per pharmacy or £54.61 for every resident of England. There is significant scope to upscale community pharmacy services, as described throughout this response, to make better use of community pharmacies and in doing so improve the health and wellbeing of the public and contribute to the prevention agenda.

Local action

What more can we do to help local authorities and NHS bodies work well together?

Community pharmacy has sometimes been overlooked by local healthcare organisations, and currently many locally commissioned pharmacy health services are at risk of decommissioning due to budget constraints. A particular challenge is services related to prevention, where funding for services such as pharmacy smoking

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cessation advice comes from Local Authorities' public health budgets, but financial benefits from the services will be picked up by the NHS (through reduced respiratory and other associated illness) i.e. in a different budget. This can make it difficult to make a successful business case for services. To improve the commissioning and provision of such services across the country, we would like to see more pharmacy services nationally commissioned and the development of a nationally agreed set of template service specifications so that Local Authorities could make use of these safe in the knowledge that centrally they are viewed as good value.

Community pharmacies have much to offer, and the 1.6 million visits to pharmacies daily – including by people who are apparently well – as well as the frequent contact with patients taking regular medicines, can give pharmacies a unique insight into the health of the local population. In future we would like to see all local care planning structures making better use of this network to help them to bridge any gaps between NHS, public health and social care services.

Sexual and reproductive health

What are the top 3 things you'd like to see covered in a future strategy on sexual and reproductive health?

- A nationally commissioned community pharmacy service providing emergency contraceptive advice and access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC).
- A nationally commissioned community pharmacy service allowing pharmacies to screen and treat for a range of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) e.g. chlamydia.
- A nationally commissioned community pharmacy service providing general contraceptive advice and allowing pharmacists to supply and then monitor patients on oral contraception.

Next steps

What other areas (in addition to those set out in this green paper) would you like future government policy on prevention to cover?

We hope this response gives a flavour of how better use could be made of the more than 11,500 community pharmacies in England to support the Government's ambitions on prevention. These pharmacies are already providing highly accessible healthcare, particularly in areas of high deprivation, and they have a positive track record in health improvement.

As a trusted core part of the primary care team there is considerable scope to upscale the role of community pharmacies, in particular through the national commissioning of a wider range of services. We very much welcome the direction that the recently announced five-year deal for community pharmacies will take the sector in, and with further investment would like to do even more, for instance to allow pharmacies to test and treat more conditions (such as STIs), to offer a range of vaccinations, and to give advice on lifestyle topics

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such as smoking cessation, all of which would improve access to healthcare for some of our most deprived communities, supporting the Government's prevention agenda.

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