

Hosting a pharmacy visit for your local MPs

This document provides guidance to help LPCs organise successful visits to community pharmacies for local Members of Parliament.

Why organise a visit?

Community pharmacy has built a profile among local and national politicians in recent years, and we must continue to build relationships with MPs to ensure they understand the value of pharmacies and the potential of the sector and, to encourage them to be our advocates in Parliament.

The 2019 General Election resulted in a Conservative majority and there are lots of new MPs in Parliament to engage with and promote pharmacy to. The NHS was a key battleground in the election and all MPs will want to be seen to be supporting local services in their constituencies. Conservative MPs might be particularly keen to demonstrate what all parts of the NHS are doing to help local people, while opposition MPs might seek to present themselves as guardians of the health service.

New MPs can be invited to an introductory visit to one of their local pharmacies, while returning MPs can be reminded of the value of pharmacy and to show their support for the sector, but all MPs will want to hear about how their local pharmacies are helping their constituents. They will also need to hear about the five-year Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) and all the new services due to be introduced, as well as the many challenges ahead for contractors. Ultimately, we need the support of MPs to help campaign for an expanded role for pharmacy and future investment into the sector, and pharmacy visits are an excellent way of engaging with local politicians and building this kind of support.

Organising a visit: step by step guide

Identify your candidates

It is important first to identify the right MPs to engage with, which parties they belong to, and if any of them serve as a Minister or front bench spokesperson. There may be some record of what they have championed or spoken about in Parliament, depending on how long they have been elected. This could include community pharmacy. You may be able to find information through web searches, or through the MP's own website. Look out for links to pharmacy or healthcare in their background or their parliamentary career to date, as this might provide a talking point or a hook for a visit. If you already have a relationship with the MP then you will of course know all of this, and you may be able to pick up some of your previous conversations with them. Make sure you invite MPs to visit a pharmacy within their constituency. PSNC has mapped all MPs in England to their local LPC areas to help you easily find your MPs: [\[link\]](#)

Choose the pharmacy for the visit

The pharmacy you choose needs to demonstrate community pharmacy's best assets. Whether this is because of its accessibility or because of the quality and range of services provided, choose a local pharmacy that shows the best of community pharmacy. It should also, of course, be within the constituency of the MP.

Make the right approach

LPCs might have existing relationships with returning MPs and may be aware of their contact details, however generally MPs are best reached via their parliamentary email addresses. Visits should be billed as an opportunity for MPs to see first-hand the work their local pharmacy teams do, as well as to better understand the challenges they face. Many MPs will be keen to show their constituents that they are supporting local health services, often through their website or on social media, so it would be useful to emphasise the chance to have a photograph taken, feature in a press release, and show support for a highly valued team of health professionals on the high street. A template email invitation is included as Appendix 1.

As well as showcasing community pharmacy, a visit will provide an opportunity to discuss pharmacy policy and the current challenges facing the sector. Be aware that the visit may be short, due to diary pressures. This means you need to be clear about what you want them to understand and how you would like them to support you. Be ready for the question: “How do you want me to help?”. MPs can table questions in Parliament, write privately to Ministers or make contact with CCGs and others responsible for planning and delivering local care. MPs can also support the work of the All-Party Pharmacy Group in Parliament – make sure you ask them to do so. By emailing appg@lexcomm.co.uk they can contact the group’s administrators, but PSNC can also help you with any of these follow-up actions.

Publicise the visit

A pharmacy visit is an ideal opportunity to generate local press coverage, and cement awareness of pharmacy’s central role within the community. You can:

- Contact your local newspapers in advance of the visit, and make them aware of the date and time of the visit – they may want to send along a photographer.
- Take photographs of the visit for you to use on social media, for a press release and to share with the MP and their team.
- Social media is important to a lot of MPs, so make sure that a photograph of the visit is shared on Twitter and Facebook, LinkedIn and any other available channels. Encourage the MP and their office to share photos as well.
- Prepare a press release in advance, to release the day after the visit. The release should be eye catching, without being sensational. Use it to fly the flag for the work of community pharmacists: give an overview of the purpose of the visit and detail the individuals present. A template press release is included as Appendix 2.
- Make sure you include a quote from the pharmacy owner, the MP, and any other relevant attendees (e.g. commissioner representative). You can approach all of these people in advance of the visit about adding a quote to the release, or you can ask the MP for a quote on the day itself.
- Remember to keep an eye out for any coverage!

Follow up

After the event do thank those involved in the visit, particularly the MP and their point of contact with you. There may be an opportunity to provide them with a further briefing, or to put them in touch with PSNC on specific points that arose during the visit.

Report back to local pharmacy contractors

Make sure you tell your contractors about the visit and any outcomes; it may inspire them to get involved in lobbying parliamentarians in the future. You can also let PSNC know by emailing [Zoe Long, Director of Communications and Public Affairs](mailto:Zoe.Long@psnc.org.uk) and [Jessica Ferguson, Public Affairs Officer](mailto:Jessica.Ferguson@psnc.org.uk).

The visit: tone, content and key messages

The purpose of a pharmacy visit is to create a positive impression of community pharmacy, demonstrating pharmacy's assets and potential, in terms of supporting both the health of local communities and other local health and care providers. You may like to focus a visit on a particular service, so that the MP can see how the pharmacy team is helping local people and get an idea of how they could build on that to do more.

Community pharmacy's core message is: **community pharmacy is extremely valuable; please support it.** We should frame this in the context of congestion in A&E departments and busy GP surgeries, pointing out that it is more important than ever that we use the valuable network of community pharmacies to keep people healthy and out of hospitals.

You will also want to discuss the recently agreed five-year Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework to explain where the sector is currently at and what lies ahead. You could talk about the benefits the new services will bring but could also highlight how challenging it will be for many pharmacies, given the financial pressures on the sector and capacity issues as dispensing volumes continue to rise and workload intensifies.

Many LPCs will want to raise concerns about workload and funding within an MP visit and this is appropriate, but more detailed and serious concerns could also be raised in writing or at a meeting. But also keep in mind the need to give MPs the impression that pharmacy is a sector that is helping patients and the NHS. For example, you may like to highlight concerns by talking to MPs about how hard the pharmacy team is working, showing them any impact that the flat funding is having, explaining the risks if pharmacy services are lost, and telling them about the need to give the team the capacity to do more to help local communities and reduce pressure on other local health services. It is important to keep visits positive and grounded in local constituencies, as MPs will be focused on engaging with their constituents and learning about the pharmacy services available to them.

- **The five-year settlement for community pharmacies**

In July 2019, PSNC, NHS England & NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) agreed to a five-year deal for community pharmacies, guaranteeing funding levels until 2023/24 and setting out how pharmacies will adapt to provide new services to help people stay healthy and prevent illness; to support and provide urgent care services; to support patients leaving hospital; and to help patients avoid unnecessary visits to GPs and hospitals.

- **The Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS)**

In three months, the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS) saw more than 100,000 patients have appointments with expert pharmacists instead of other healthcare providers, relieving pressure on GPs and A&E departments. The service enables NHS 111 health advisers to refer patients with minor illnesses to their local pharmacy for assessment and treatment. Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

"I want to see pharmacists ready and able to do much more to help people stay healthy and prevent pressure on hospitals. This 'pharmacy first' approach makes life easier for patients with minor illnesses assessed close to home, saving them unnecessary trips to A&E or the GP, and helping people get the care and advice they need quicker."

A key question might be: how can the Government support community pharmacies? You could use the following points to discuss this:

- **Commit to the further development of pharmacy services**

The commissioning more national public health services through community pharmacies is something we would like to see; stop smoking services and provision of Emergency Hormonal Contraception to be

available nationally among all community pharmacies in England could help improve choice and access for patients. The national commissioning of the NHS Health Check service from pharmacies could help to address the current patchy local commissioning, and the service could include greater follow-up support for people who have agreed lifestyle changes following their check.

- **Recognise that community pharmacies are hugely valuable**

In 2016, PSNC commissioned PwC to analyse the value (net benefits) to the NHS, public sector, patients and wider society of 12 specific services provided by community pharmacies in England in 2015. Key findings were:

- 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.
- Community pharmacies deliver substantially more in benefits than they receive in compensation, providing excellent value to the Department of Health and Social Care.

Services analysed included supervised consumption, emergency hormonal contraception provision, minor ailments and delivering prescriptions. The full PwC report can be downloaded from: psnc.org.uk/valueofpharmacy

- **Support community pharmacy contractors**

Community pharmacy contractors are facing ongoing financial pressures as costs continue to rise. Some pharmacies are having to stop offering services (or charge) for which they are not paid, such as delivery of medications to patients' homes. The sector needs more investment to ensure it can continue to provide all services to local patients.

- **Make greater use of community pharmacies to help improve uptake rates of vaccinations**

We would like to see a wider range of vaccinations made available in pharmacies, following the success of the flu vaccination programme, which patients have liked.

The patient questionnaire for the NHS Flu Vaccination Service in community pharmacies in 2016/17 found that: 98% of patients were very satisfied with the service; 99% would be willing to have a flu vaccination at a pharmacy again; and 15% said they might not have had a flu vaccination if the service had not been available in the pharmacy.

Remember – top tips for the visit are to:

- Keep the visit broadly positive if you can
- Ask the MP to publicly back their local pharmacies
- Take a photo
- Base the conversation around clear key messages
- Stay away from technical terms and too much policy detail
- Take time to prepare
- Don't be too party-political
- Steer conversations away from complaints, which can be best addressed in other forums

Resources

You may find the following resources useful to help explain the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) to MPs:

- [Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework 2019/20 – 2023/24: A Summary for External Stakeholders](#)
This briefing explains the five-year Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework. It is intended for external stakeholders – such as MPs and charities – and is written so that those outside of the sector can better understand the recent deal.
- [Community Pharmacy Infographic: 2019/20 – 2023/24](#)
This infographic is a visual aid to demonstrate the new services introduced as part of the contract over the next five years.

More information

Remember that MPs who demonstrate a particular interest in pharmacy should be encouraged to join the [All-Party Pharmacy Group](#). Please also pass any useful intelligence about any visits hosted with MPs to PSNC.

If you have queries on this PSNC briefing or have any questions about a visit, please contact [Zoe Long, Director of Communications and Public Affairs](#) and [Jessica Ferguson, Public Affairs Officer](#).

Appendix 1: Draft letter to invite an MP to visit a community pharmacy

GUIDANCE:

- You will need to replace all yellow highlights with local detail
- Use the name of the constituency, not the LPC area
- Estimate the number of pharmacies, if necessary
- Include local detail where possible, but keep the email short
- Email the MP using their parliamentary address (ending @parliament.uk)
- Cc. The MP's diary manager/other point of contact the visit was arranged with

Dear [MP],

[Name of] LPC represents all NHS community pharmacies in your constituency and we would like to invite you to visit one of them at your earliest opportunity. The visit will allow you to see first-hand of the work local NHS pharmacy teams are doing for your constituents, as well as to better understand the plans for future services and some of the changes they will be going through.

We thought you might like to visit [xx pharmacy] at [address]. The pharmacy is providing a range of services which are highly valued by those who use it in [constituency], in particular [insert services, eg CPCS, smoking cessation].

[Possible sentence for returning MPs: We have very much appreciated your support for community pharmacy in the past, and we think this would be a valuable opportunity to update you on the latest developments and how pharmacies in [constituency] are changing.

It is an exciting time for pharmacy and there are many new services due to be introduced over the next five years which will provide great benefit to local patients. With increasing pressure on GP surgeries and overcrowding in A&E, it is more important than ever that we support the job that community pharmacies do to help keep people healthy and out of hospitals.

Please let me know if we can arrange a short visit at your convenience, otherwise we would be more than happy to brief you on local pharmacy matters.

Yours sincerely,

[X]

Appendix 2: Draft press release following an MP pharmacy visit

[MP] TRIES LOCAL PHARMACY OUT FOR SIZE

[PHOTO]

[Name of MP] the [party] MP for [constituency] visited [name of pharmacy] in [location] to learn more about how the pharmacy is helping local residents stay healthy.

During the visit [name of MP] heard about how pharmacies are helping people with certain minor illnesses and promoting healthy living in the local community.

Local pharmacist [name] explained how a range of new services are coming soon to community pharmacies. A new contract for pharmacies will see them doing more to help the NHS provide healthcare closer to home. From providing safe access to medicines and supporting high quality care to improving public health and detection, your local pharmacy is a key part of the primary care team OR [insert other activity as appropriate eg had a flu vaccine].

PLEASE AMEND ALL QUOTES – EXAMPLE QUOTES ARE FOR ILLUSTRATION ONLY

[Name of pharmacist] said: “Community pharmacies do more than dispense medicines – many can treat minor illnesses, provide healthy lifestyle advice, and guidance on how to take newly prescribed medicines.”

Request quote from local MP’s team – **do not use a quote unless permission granted**. Some will prefer a draft quote for them to sign off. If so, suggested wording follows:

[Name of candidate] said: “It was fantastic to visit [name of pharmacy] today to see the kind of support residents can access through their local pharmacy. Community pharmacies play a vital role in promoting health and wellbeing, and I encourage people in [constituency] to make the most of their local pharmacies.”

[ENDS]