

April 2022

PSNC Briefing 013/22: Summary of the results of PSNC's 2022 Pharmacy Pressures Survey

Background

England's community pharmacies have played a vital role in the Government's COVID-19 pandemic response, including staying open throughout to provide critical face-to-face healthcare services and advice to patients and the public. This has brought with it significant additional pressure, which is being worsened by rising operating costs, and by a workforce crisis enveloping the sector.

The Pharmacy Pressures Survey

In order to hear directly from a wide range of pharmacy teams and businesses about the impact that the ongoing pressures are having on them and on patient care, PSNC launched two surveys in mid-January 2022, together known as The Pharmacy Pressures Survey. The first survey was for completion by pharmacy business owners and head office representatives and the second was completed by pharmacy team members. This is the first time PSNC has asked individual pharmacy team members about the effect that current pressures are having on them and their patients.

More than 400 (418) contractors and Head Office representatives between them representing more than 5,000 pharmacy premises completed the first survey, and more than 1,000 pharmacy team members (1,132) completed the second. The pharmacy team members who responded were a mix of pharmacists and wider team members (including managers, technicians, dispensers and counter assistants) and they were asked to answer the survey for the pharmacy that they spend most of their time working in. This paper provides a summary of the survey results.

Impact on patient care

92% of pharmacy teams and pharmacy owners reported that patients were being negatively affected by the pressures on their pharmacy.

The detrimental impacts of the current pressures are wide ranging. 90% of business owner/head office respondents said the time that could be spent with patients was affected, 87% said prescriptions now take longer to dispense, and 81% said the promptness with which their pharmacies could respond to patient queries by phone or email was affected.

More than two thirds of pharmacy teams members (67%) said pharmacies they work in had been forced to reduce the services they offer to patients, and **62% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives said they were concerned about the ability of their pharmacies to help patients.**

Supply chain and medicines delivery issues

According to pharmacy team members, **67% of pharmacies are having to deal with medicine supply issues every day**, 21% multiple times per week and 9% weekly.

Pharmacy teams spend many hours trying to resolve these supply issues so that patients are not affected by them. The average spent by respondents' teams was 5.3 hours per week. Almost all pharmacies experience extra workload and stress due to supply issues, and patients are frustrated and inconvenienced by the supply issues: **75% of pharmacies reported experiencing aggression from patients due to medicine supply issues.**

Staff shortages

The community pharmacy sector is also in the midst of a workforce crisis: **91% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives and 82% of pharmacy team members said their pharmacies were experiencing staff shortages**, with 23% of owners/head office representatives reporting that their pharmacy had been required to close temporarily because of these.

According to estimates from pharmacy business owners/head office representatives, the total cumulative number of hours of unexpected closures by all affected pharmacies in one month was **7,598, equivalent to 844.2 days of closures (assuming 9 hours per typical business day)**. The average number of hours per affected pharmacy was 13.3. The increasing shortage of pharmacy staff has added more pressure on already overstretched pharmacy teams, with **78% of those surveyed reporting that they had been required to work extra hours due to staff shortages**.

Increasing workload

Alongside rising operating costs, community pharmacy teams have also seen their workload greatly increase since the beginning of the pandemic; a trend that is unlikely to ease as the Government looks to make better use of community pharmacy to help with the country's pandemic recovery, and patients continue to rely on their local pharmacies more than ever before.

Around **74% of the pharmacy team members said their pharmacy had seen a significant increase in requests from members of the public for healthcare advice**, with **82% reporting that their pharmacy had also seen a notable increase in patient phone calls**.

Pharmacy team wellbeing

82% of pharmacy team members said that their work is having a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Just 8% said work was having a positive impact on their mental health.

Concerningly, 49% of pharmacy teams cited patient abuse as one of the main reasons why they are not coping at work. **Some 90% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives said that they were concerned about the wellbeing of their pharmacy team(s)**.

Rising costs

Community pharmacy contractors' operating costs continue to rise, as confirmed in the survey. **97% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives reported that the costs for their pharmacies were higher than this time last year**. Most (96%) blamed rising staff wages and an increase in the price of utilities (65%) and transport (60%).

As a result of increasing cost pressures, **61% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives said they were concerned about their ability to keep their pharmacies open**. This could very negatively impact patient access to healthcare in the future.

What can be done to alleviate the pressure facing pharmacies?

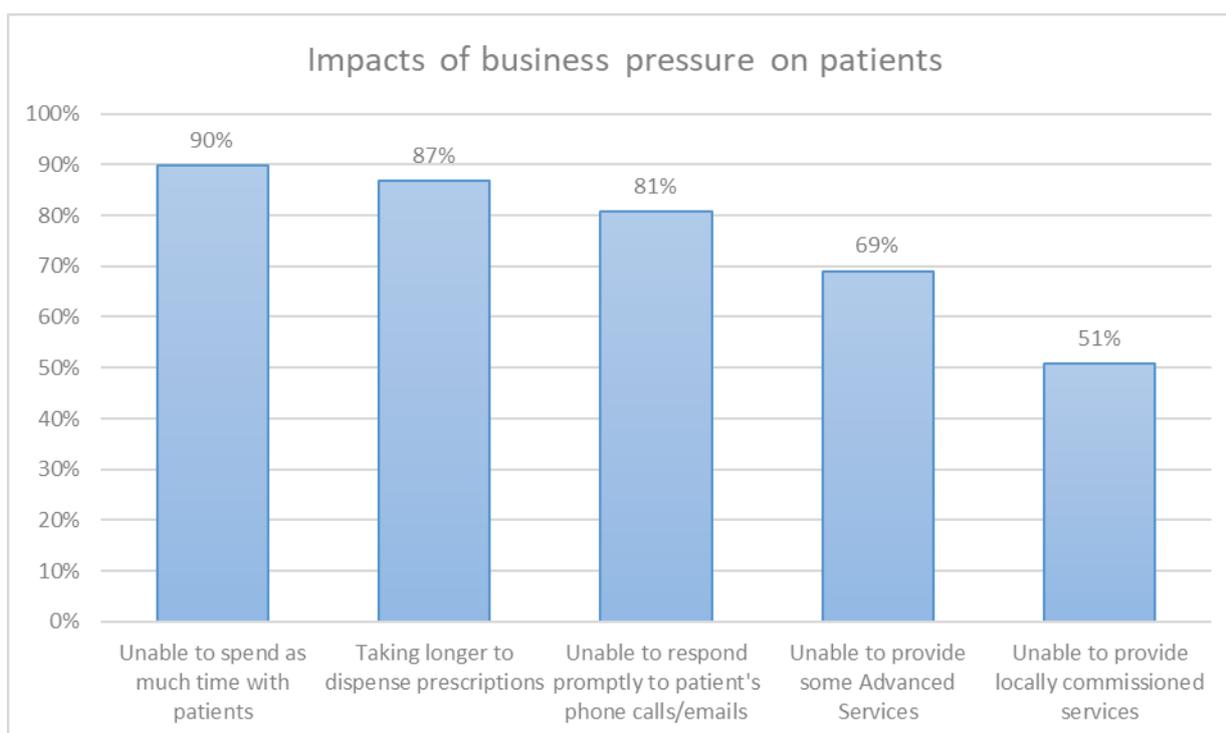
PSNC is very concerned about the ongoing pressures facing pharmacy businesses and the pharmacists and teams who work within them, and about the impact that this is now having on patients and local communities. To better support the sector and ensure pharmacies businesses are economically sustainable, an uplift is needed to the core funding for the sector. PSNC is seeking this, along with a new fully funded pharmacy minor ailments walk-in service, in the ongoing negotiations on Year 4 of the five-year Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF).

For more information about this summary briefing, please contact commsteam@psnc.org.uk. Further data from the Pharmacy Pressures Survey is included below.

PSNC Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2022: Results

Impact of pharmacy pressures on patients

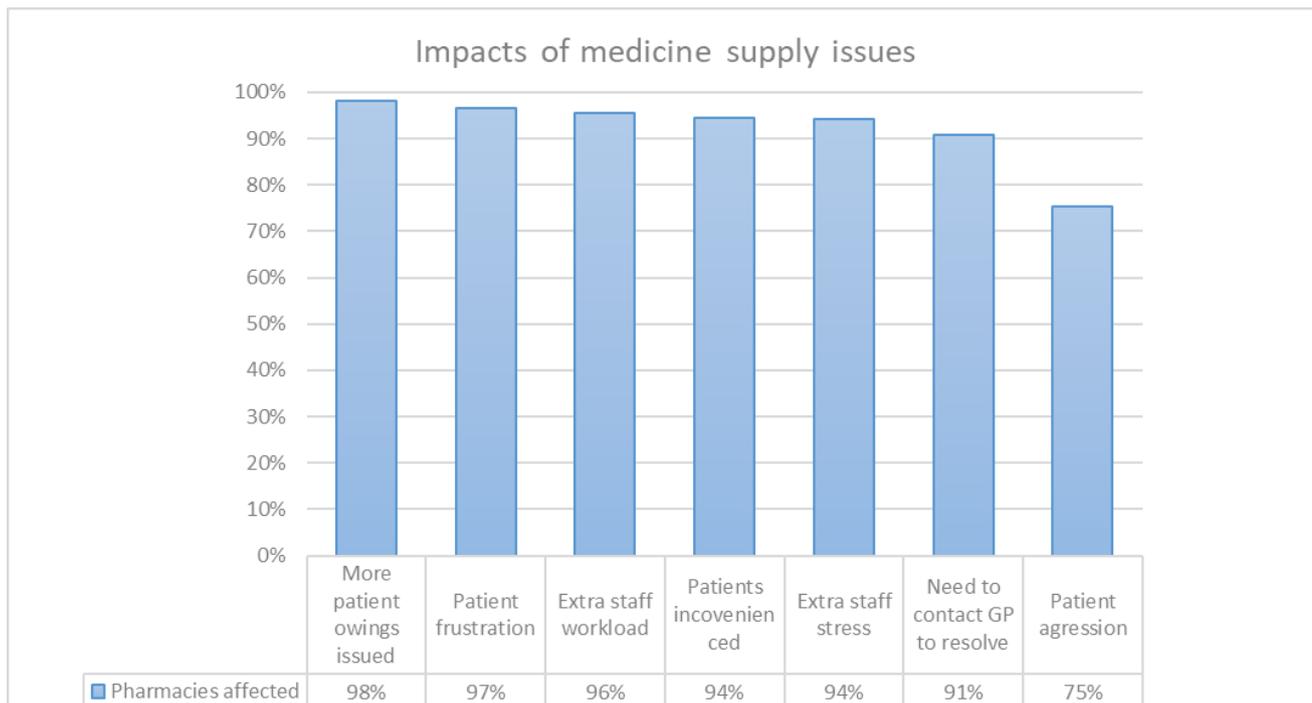
- 92% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives reported that patient services were being negatively affected by the pressures on their business. This finding – 92% – was exactly the same across the pharmacy team members surveyed.
- The detrimental impacts of the current pressures are wide ranging. 90% of business owner/head office respondents said the time that could be spent with patients was affected, 87% said prescriptions take longer to dispense, and 81% said the promptness with which their pharmacies could respond to patient queries by phone or email was affected.



- Advanced Service provision was affected at 69% of businesses, and 51% said they were unable to provide locally commissioned services because of the current pressure levels.
- 62% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives said they were concerned about the ability of their pharmacies to help patients.
- 22% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives said that their business had no capacity to take on new services in both the short and long-term. This will negatively impact on the range of services that patients and the public can expect to receive from pharmacies in the future.

Supply chain and medicines delivery issues

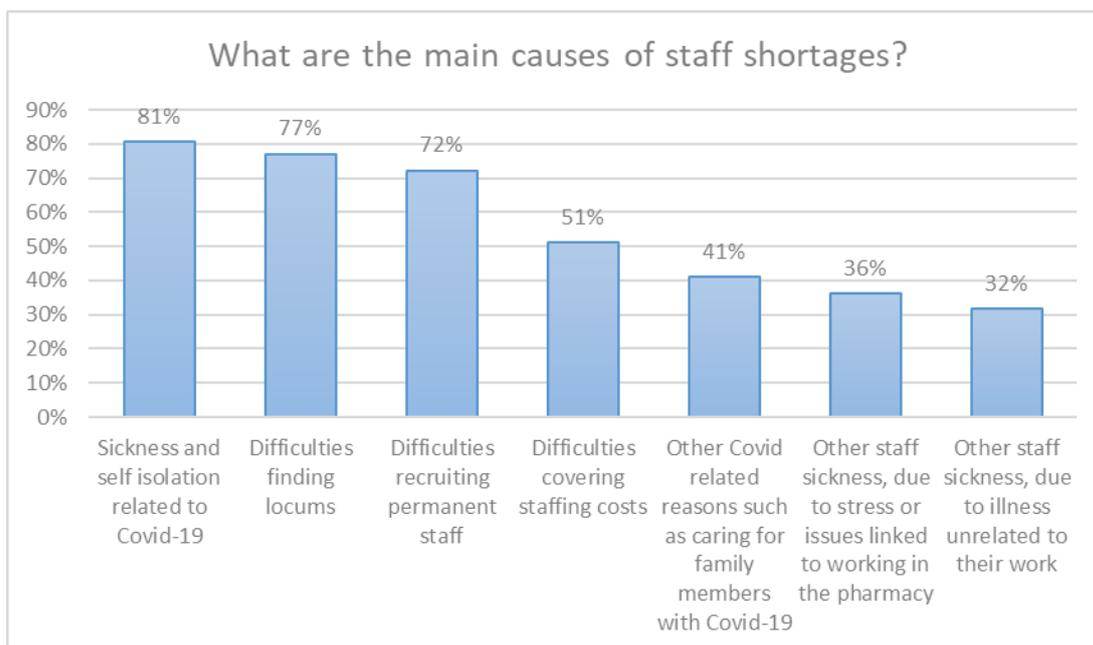
- According to pharmacy team members, 67% of pharmacies are having to deal with medicine supply issues every day, 21% multiple times per week and 9% weekly. No team members said that they were never experiencing issues.
- Pharmacy teams spend many hours trying to resolve these supply issues. The average spent by respondents' teams was 5.3 hours per week.
- Medicines supply issues have serious implications for pharmacy teams and patients. Almost all pharmacies experience extra workload and stress due to supply issues, and patients are frustrated and inconvenienced by the supply issues.



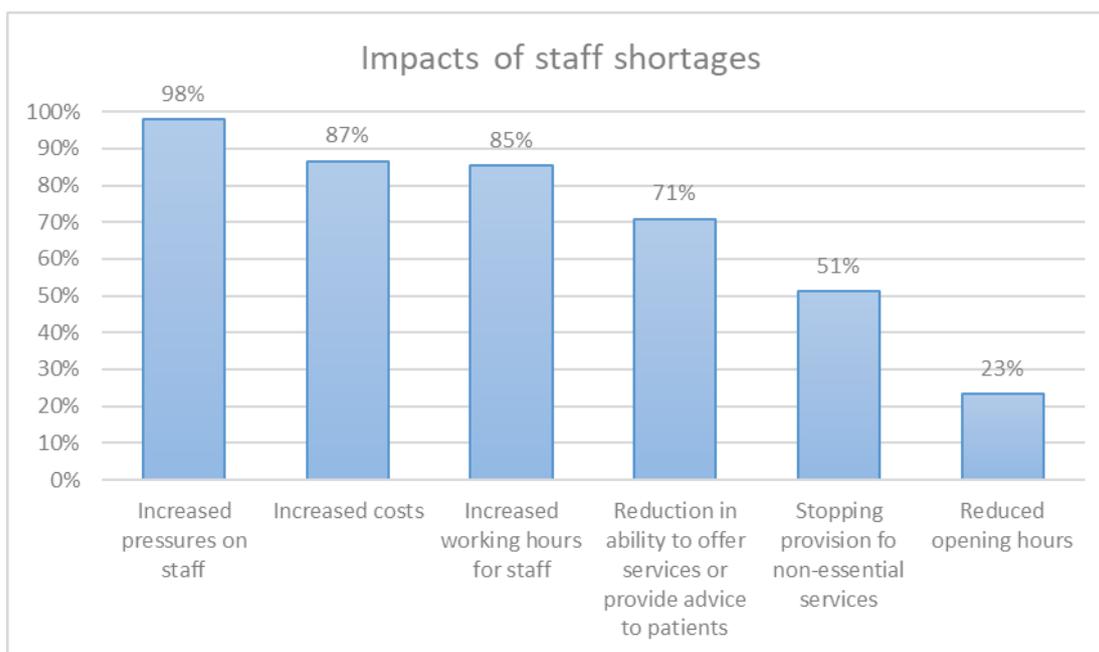
- 75% of pharmacies reported experiencing aggression from patients due to medicine supply issues and 51% of pharmacy team members said that patients are negatively affected by supply chain issues on a daily basis.
- These findings were echoed in the survey of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives, 83% of whom said their business had experienced a significant increase in supply chain/medicines delivery issues.

Staff shortages

- 91% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives reported that their pharmacies was experiencing staff shortages.
- Covid-19 related sickness and self-isolation were the most significant driver of staff shortages, with 81% of business owner/head office respondents citing this reason.



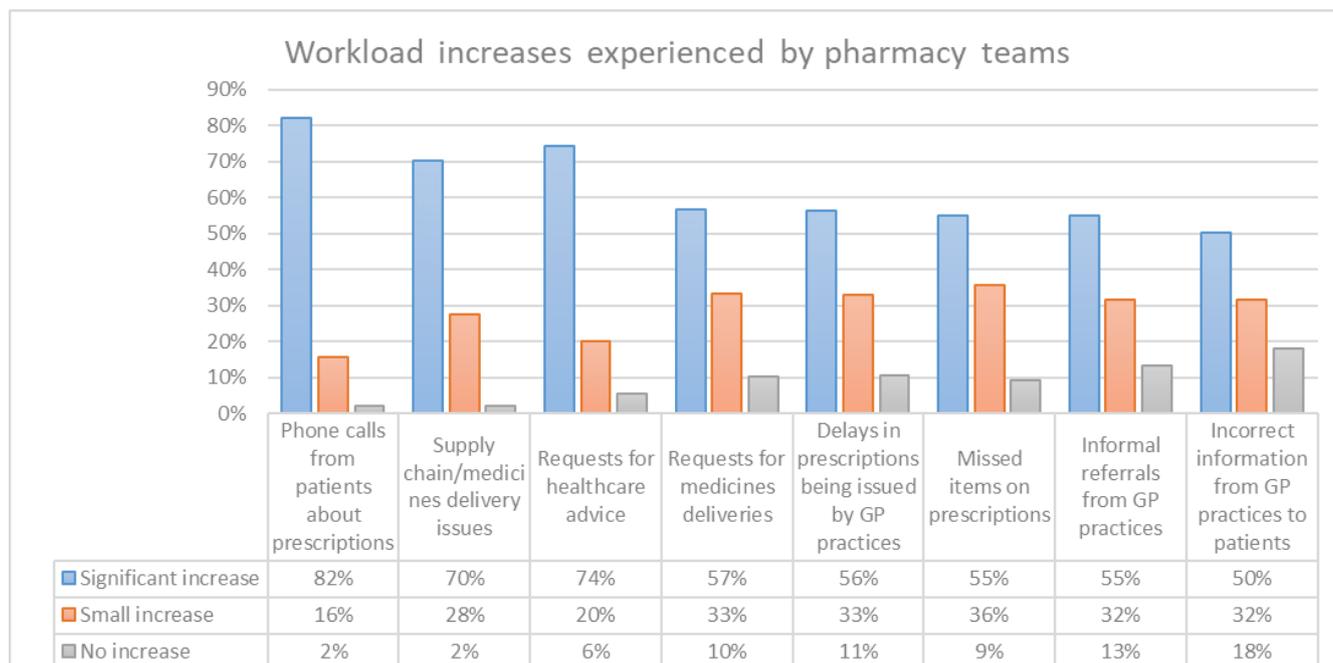
- Most pharmacy business owners and representatives also cited difficulties recruiting staff or finding locums as major causes of staff shortages. And 51% of respondents said that difficulties covering the costs of staffing were leading to shortages in their pharmacies.
- The impact of staff shortages are far-reaching. 98% of business owner/head office respondents said that staff shortages had resulted in increased pressure on staff, and 85% said they resulted in increased working hours for staff.
- 87% of respondents said that business costs increased because of staff shortages. 71% said their businesses have had to reduce services or advice they offer to patients, and 51% have had to stop provision of non-essential services. 23% said they have had to reduce opening hours in their business.



- In addition to this, respondents were asked about temporary closures over the previous month and over a one-month period 11% of the sampled pharmacies had unexpected closures due to staff shortages.
- The total cumulative number of hours of unexpected closures by all affected pharmacies in one month was 7,598, equivalent to 844.2 days of closures (assuming 9 hours per typical business day). The average number of hours per affected pharmacy was 13.3.
- These findings were echoed in the survey of pharmacy team members, 82% of whom said that the pharmacy was experiencing staff shortages, and 35% of whom said that staff shortages were resulting in unplanned closures of the pharmacy.
- In line with the conclusions of business owners, 97% of pharmacy team members also said that staff shortages were increasing pressure on pharmacy teams.

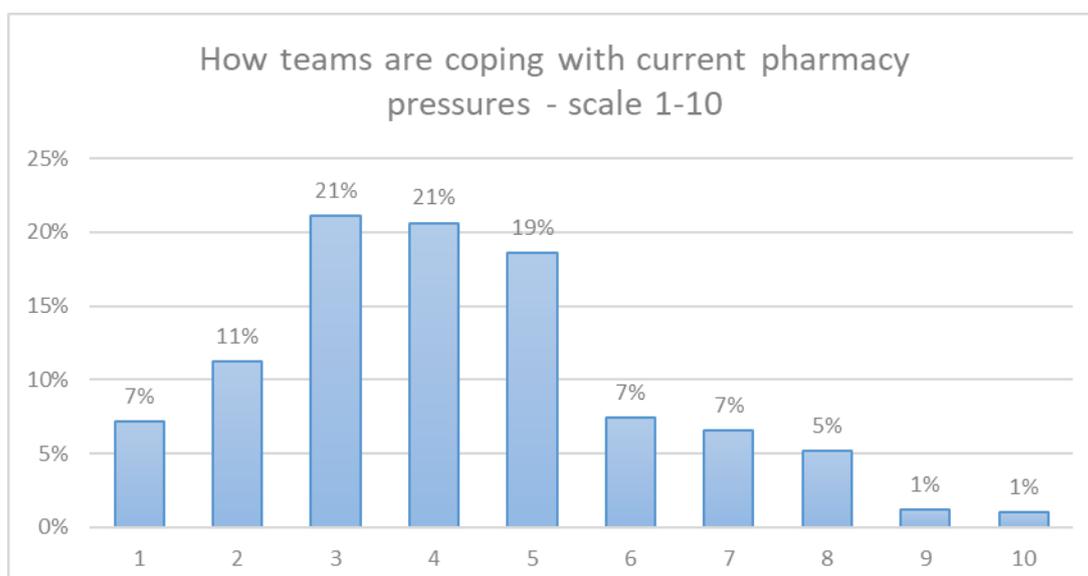
Increased pharmacy workload

- Pharmacy teams report significant pressures in a wide range of areas, including extra requests from patients for advice and for medicine deliveries, increases in supply chain and delivery issues, delays by GPs and items missed from prescriptions (see chart on next page).
- There have also been significant increases in patients displaced from GPs to pharmacies, and incorrect information being provided by GP practices to patients. 83% of pharmacy team members cited workload as the main problem for pharmacy teams, with 56% citing lack of staff due to unavailability.
- The findings were echoed in the survey of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives, 90% of whom reported that their business was seeing a significant increase in patient phone calls about prescriptions, and 86% of whom reported increases in requests for healthcare advice.



Wellbeing of pharmacy teams

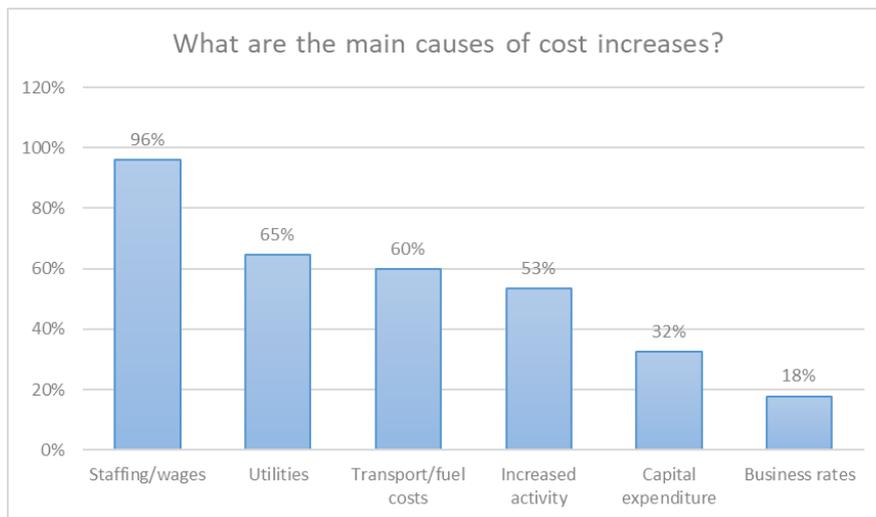
- 82% of pharmacy team members reported that their work is having a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Just 8% said work was having a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing, with 10% saying work had no impact.
- Pharmacy team member respondents were also asked to rate how their teams were coping with the current pharmacy pressures on a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 is not coping at all and 10 is coping perfectly fine. The average score from respondents for how well pharmacy teams are coping was 4.2. 79% of respondents scored their team as 5 or below. Only 1% of respondents said their teams were coping perfectly fine.



- Concerningly, 49% of pharmacy teams cited patient abuse as one of the main reasons why they are not coping at work, and 75% of pharmacy team members said that medicine supply issues had caused patient aggression.
- Some 90% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives said that they were concerned about the wellbeing of their pharmacy team(s).

Increasing business costs

- 97% of pharmacy companies reported that costs are higher than this time last year. 80% reported that they were significantly higher.
- Almost all pharmacy businesses (96%) cited increases in wages as a main driver of cost increases. Other major causes were rising utility costs (65%), and fuel/transport costs (60%). Increases in activity (e.g. dispensing more prescriptions, increased demand from patients) were also cited as a driver of cost increases by over half of respondents (53%).



- 87% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives said that they were concerned about the finances of their business, with 61% concerned about their ability to keep their pharmacies open.

Concerns for the future

- The sampled pharmacy companies were asked to rate how concerned they were about a range of issues, on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is not concerned and 10 is extremely concerned. The responses paint a very worrying picture, reflecting the extreme levels of duress and stress that pharmacy teams and business are experiencing.

