

February 2023

PSNC Briefing 004/23: Feedback from PSNC December Webinars

Late in 2022, PSNC wanted to talk to contractors about their current situation and the steps they might be willing to take in future, should emergency funding relief not be forthcoming. Two engagement events at which contractors could hear from and talk to PSNC Chief Executive Janet Morrison and Negotiating Team Members were held in December 2022.

Overview of the feedback from the engagement events

During the events we heard about the devastating situation that many pharmacy owners now find themselves in. The results of the polls run at the events were also deeply troubling:

- 42% said they would not be able to keep their pharmacy business going beyond a year.
- 88% of those present said their business was losing money, including those who said they would not be able to keep their business going beyond a year.
- 60% said their patients were already being impacted by the current pressures.
- 80% said they were considering or had stopped free services.
- 84% said they had stopped or were considering stopping certain Advanced Services.

We shared these findings with the Minister in a meeting later in December at which we made clear to him that Government is now at a fork in the road – if they continue to do nothing but degrade pharmacy funding then they will be presiding over more pharmacy closures and the potential collapse of the sector; but if they invest in the sector then pharmacy still stands ready to better support patients and other parts of the health service.

Our work since last year's engagement events

Since the December engagement events, we have been continuing to discuss urgent matters such as price concessions reform and regulatory easements which could bring some immediate relief to contractors. But we have also done a huge amount of work urging Government and the NHS to intervene and protect pharmacies.

This has included:

- working with the other pharmacy organisations and large multiples to coordinate letters to the Secretary of State and Prime Minister;
- the launch of a #saveourpharmacies campaign;
- detailed policy briefings to Government officials on our Pharmacy First proposals;
- Parliamentary work including coordinating a letter from nearly 40 MPs to Ministers;
- briefing the Labour health policy team; and
- continuing to press for workable improvements to the price concessions system as well as regulatory measures that would provide practical relief for contractors.

You can see a summary of this work on this presentation: [PSNC influencing and campaigning work \(February 2023\)](#)

We have also responded to the specific feedback that we received at the engagement events as set out on the following pages.

Responses to individual feedback from contractors

1. Contractors said: PSNC must make Government aware of the extreme pressures we are facing

Since December, we have joined forces with the other national pharmacy bodies and largest pharmacy operators to write to both the Health Secretary and the Prime Minister. Both letters warned that the community pharmacy network is on the verge of collapse and called for urgent investment in the sector to prevent widespread closures. We secured media coverage of the letter to the Health Secretary in the [Telegraph](#) and the [Times](#), and coverage of the letter to the Prime Minister in the Daily Mail.

PSNC has also written to the Chancellor, met with Minister Neil O'Brien, and been actively briefing MPs and Peers across Parliament on this. We have been helping MPs to write to Ministers as well as challenging the responses that they have received from Government. We have facilitated a letter to the Health Secretary from MPs and Peers calling for urgent action to protect patient services. And we have written to the Department and NHS with our latest financial analysis.

We have also now launched a [Pressures Survey](#) to gather more evidence from the sector. And we have been supporting the Daily Mail's campaign to save pharmacies as well as seeking additional media coverage, some of which is detailed below.

2. Contractors said: PSNC must lobby for a Pharmacy First service for England

We have been continuing to highlight the value of a Pharmacy First Service to the Pharmacy Minister, Neil O'Brien, building on the fully costed plan for such a service that we presented to Government and the NHS in March 2022. Letters to Ministers and the Prime Minister have referenced this also. The introduction of Pharmacy First is also a key part of our [Four Point Plan](#) for the future sustainability of community pharmacy which we have been using to regularly brief MPs.

PSNC Members took part in the Prime Minister's recent NHS Recovery Forum at Number 10 Downing Street, at which they again highlighted the support that pharmacy needs and the value of a Pharmacy First approach. We have also been building support for the service among General Practice representatives and more widely. Support for such a service is building, and we are continuing to press Government and the NHS to start formal negotiations on this with us.

3. Contractors said: We need help to take pressure off our businesses

We have been actively discussing a series of measures with DHSC and NHS England to try to help support capacity pressures, such as a relaxation of opening hours requirements. The latest Government response to our initial proposals were considered at the PSNC Meeting at which they were rejected as being totally inadequate. The Committee has written to the NHS and DHSC restating the critical situation and urging them to take more decisive action to help and protect contractors. The Committee will also hold a further, urgent meeting, this month to consider other options and next steps.

4. Some contractors also called for more militant action by the sector

Following calls from some contractors that community pharmacies should take strike action to convey the pressures on the sector, we sought legal advice.

The advice was clear that though strike action can be effective for employees this is not an option for businesses as employers and, in addition, the protections afforded to trade unions organising collective action such as strikes are not given to organisations representing businesses such as PSNC.

The result is that any collective action, for example, to withhold NHS or other pharmacy services, by contractors or PSNC, would fall foul of competition legislation, be a breach of contract/contractual services and more, even if limited in scope and duration. With this too comes potentially significant adverse financial and reputational consequences.

PSNC is continuing to carefully consider other courses of action available to contractors and the Committee will be holding an urgent meeting very soon to consider next steps and what other relief measures might be available for pharmacies.

5. Contractors said: The national pharmacy organisations should be working together

PSNC has always believed that the messages to Government and the NHS need to be aligned and that community pharmacy needs to present a united front. As part of our usual joint working arrangements, in January, PSNC hosted a meeting with the other national pharmacy bodies to consider what a joint, public-facing campaign would look like. From the outputs of the meeting we developed a plan for a [joint #SaveOurPharmacies campaign](#) which will include coordinated efforts to target the Government, patients, the public and the national press.

Shared resources to enable effective Parliamentary lobbying and mobilise public support for pharmacies will be available in the next few weeks. A patient petition is also being produced and PSNC campaign events are being planned for throughout March.

6. Contractors said: We want to help campaign for the sector

A full set of promotional resources for the #SaveOurPharmacies campaign will be shared soon. In the meantime, we have produced a [range of influencing resources](#) for contractors to send to their local MPs, including a new Pharmacy Pressures Summary Briefing. We have likewise produced updated guidance for contractors on how to write to your MP and for hosting a pharmacy visit with your local MP. This will all be updated once we have the results of the 2023 Pressures Survey. Contractors and LPCs have also been helping by encouraging their local MPs to sign the joint letter to the Health Secretary, Steve Barclay.

7. Contractors said: Our patients need to understand the pressure we are under

Since our December engagement events, PSNC’s Communications Team has been working hard to obtain national media coverage of a multitude of issues confronting pharmacies currently. Please see the table below for some of this recent press coverage. The #SaveOurPharmacies campaign will also significantly ramp up this messaging to the public.

Publication	Title/brief description	Mention
The Telegraph	Pharmacies system in danger of collapse, Steve Barclay warned	PSNC press release quoted
The Times	Pharmacies say they’ll collapse without funding	PSNC press release quoted
Daily Mail	Pharmacists 'to treat more illnesses' as the government considers handing them greater powers to ease the pressure on waiting times for GPs and A&E	PSNC Director of NHS Services quoted
ITV News	Staff feel unsafe at work': Pharmacists suffer rise in abuse amid medicine supply shortages	PSNC data used
The Sun	PHARMACY THREAT Thousands of pharmacies could be forced to close amid drug pricing row with Government	PSNC spokesperson
iNews	Patients with chronic illnesses have struggled to access antibiotics across 'many areas' of UK	PSNC Drug Tariff and Reimbursement Manager quoted
Daily Mail	Chemists pay for guards to prevent brutal attacks with three-quarters of them reporting regular physical or verbal abuse	PSNC CEO quoted
iNews	Lloyds Pharmacy closures: Decision to shut 237 Sainsbury’s branches lays bare 'dire' state of UK pharmacies	PSNC CEO quoted
Daily Mail (This is Money)	Lloyds Pharmacy to shut 237 branches as the sector faces 'more extreme pressures than ever before'	PSNC CEO quoted
Bloomberg	Sainsbury to Lose Drug Counters as LloydsPharmacy Exits	PSNC data referenced

Express	<u>Pharmacies closing for good as costs spiral and funding shortages hit industry</u>	PSNC CEO quoted
Express	<u>Pharmacies could become a real one stop shop for minor ailments (op-ed piece)</u>	PSNC CEO quoted
Daily Mail	<u>Harness the power of pharmacies so chemists can treat minor illnesses in bid to tackle patient backlogs, MPs say</u>	PSNC Director of NHS Services quoted
Daily Mail	<u>'Without your help, Rishi, many chemists will close for ever': For months, we have campaigned for a better deal for community pharmacies. Now, a powerful group including Boots and Lloyds has written to the Prime Minister pleading for urgent action</u>	PSNC CEO quoted

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information, please contact commsteam@psnc.org.uk.