

Pharmaceutical needs assessment stakeholder consultation

Healthwatch Birmingham and Solihull welcomes the opportunity to respond to Birmingham and Solihull Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) Stakeholder Consultation. Our key role is to make sure that patients, the public, service users, and carers, are at the heart of service improvement in health and social care. In line with our role, we have focused our comments on:

- Feedback provided by Birmingham and Solihull residents regarding their experiences of Pharmacy provision
- Ensuring that the statements provided in the assessment are representative of the views the public hold regarding such services

We are pleased to see that in the local context, the PNA details our report [Impact report: Think Pharmacy First: Improving community pharmacy services in Birmingham and Solihull](#) and the improvements that have been undertaken to services locally as a result of this work across the area by Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board.

Utilising patient experience data

Whilst we welcome the amount of thought that has gone into ensuring that community pharmacy provisions are meeting the needs of the specific communities across Birmingham and Solihull, we would also like to highlight the importance of including more patient experience data in this process. Throughout this assessment and provision document there are several statistics which may be better understood by triangulating them with patient experience data to demonstrate how services are meeting these needs. As such we have included some key areas to consider based on the feedback we have heard from the people of Birmingham and Solihull.



Public feedback

The feedback that we have collected from Birmingham and Solihull residents highlights a generally positive view of community pharmacy services, with around 80% of the feedback we heard in the last year being positive. This indicates that the needs of the people of Birmingham and Solihull are largely being met.

"The pharmacy here is fantastic. I can't praise them enough."

"They're very good. They get my medication ready and sorted for me. They're very helpful. They know what they're doing. Very perceptive."

"Very good. It was a fast turnover after taking my prescription into them. They provide helpful advice too."

People told us how much they valued advice and information from pharmacy services

"Really good. The main person there is really friendly and gives good advice. They tell you where to go for support and advice out of hours when the GP isn't open."

"Good people, good service. Excellent selection of medication and they give me good advice if I am worried."

"Fantastic pharmacy. I told them I was struggling with eye drops and so they gave me a different brand with easier squeeze bottle. They were very helpful."

"No problems so far. Excellent selection of medication. They give excellent advice and the staff are kind and friendly."

We also heard how useful additional pharmacy services such as Pharmacy First were

"It's good. Not too long a wait for medication. I have also used pharmacy first for my 3 year old son and they were able to prescribe something for him. In that instance they were great. A really helpful service."



"They're sound. They have been given more power now so you can go to them for things and get help that you would have had to go to the GP for."

"The pharmacy here is very good. They get prescriptions ready quickly. They gave me good advice and ear drops when my son had an ear infection under pharmacy first. That saved me a hospital trip."

People shared their positive experiences of using pharmacies to access vaccinations

"Helpful pharmacy, quick at sorting prescriptions. Gave me my covid and flu vaccines straight away when I needed them."

"I only went in for nail polish and they offered me both flu and covid vaccines. They are excellent. It isn't just me that thinks they're great."

"Very helpful staff. Whenever I travel abroad I get my travel vaccinations from them."

Despite the positive feedback, we have identified several key areas of concern.

People told us about long waiting times for medications, both for prescriptions to be processed, and on the day when picking up medications

"This service is awful. My medication is never available on time and I have missed a week of medication because of their mix ups. I was told it was due to supply issues but other pharmacies had it."

"The staff here are rude and I have issues getting prescriptions sorted. I leave it with them but they are still not ready a week later. There are also long queues along with this wait for prescriptions to come through."

"Very busy, I have to wait ages all the time to get my medication."

"They are awful. My prescriptions are sent there but they never seem to be ready. I have waited an hour at times for my medication."



"It takes too long. They'll say they will have it ready by a certain time and you go in and it's not ready and then tell you to come back again and it's still not ready. They are so slow. An absolute nuisance."

We have heard about low levels of stock and medication shortages being a concern

"Not so good. They never have the stock in and give alternatives. Why give something else if your prescribed that medicine."

"Horrendously busy, horrendously bad. They never have the medication and say they will order it and it never turns up."

"I work full time and I struggle to get to the pharmacy early in the day. I rely on them managing their service well and knowing that some people must come after work. For the last 2 months I have gone to collect my prescription and I have been met with either none of my medication being available, the pharmacist has gone home and you'll have to come back, or them telling me I can have some now and some if I come back in the morning. It's really not on!"

"Not good at all. Sometimes the medicines are out of stock, you check back the next week and the medication is still not there. Communication is no good either."

"My son missed 2 weeks of school because he's not allowed to go in without his medication and they didn't have it. This pharmacy is awful. The staff are rude and always make excuses for the issues."

A person undergoing cancer treatment highlighted how difficult it was for them to access the medications they needed due to a lack of availability of some medications.

"As part of my cancer treatment I take a lot of medication and I sometimes have to travel to different pharmacies to get the medication. Sometime I have to travel to pharmacies that are quite far away which is very difficult and inconvenient because I do not drive."



People shared with us how poor organisation in general affected their experience

"They keep giving me the wrong medication because they have another patient with the same name."

"I went to pick up my husbands medication and they didn't give me all of it so I had to go back they then said they had dispensed it but they hadn't and had to re do it. I think they had given it to someone lese. When I left I found they had still forgot to give me something else."

"Cannot get through via phone - they cut you off. No email to contact by. I have quite a journey to get to them and often have to go multiple times to pick up drugs. This costs me transport. If I can't get thru via phone to check if my drugs are ready - I am left with no drugs. If drugs are not in stock - they don't tell me this. This week I've been once and picked up drug. They wouldn't check if my other prescription had come thru electronically, It had been sent from the Drs the day before. And now I will have to make another journey to see, when it may be ready - as they are not answering phone, despite phoning numerous times. I have no drugs - and my symptoms are affecting me. I cannot take over counter alternatives."

"They sent medication to the wrong person and gave me an inhaler that was the wrong strength that made me worse. They are more interested in playing on the phone than helping someone. They're dangerous. They are going to end up hurting someone."

"They don't work well at the moment. the last time I went to pick up my prescription they said it had already been picked up. The staff are not permanent so they don't know what they're doing. I had to get my GP to resend another prescription."

We have continued to hear concerns around the communication of individual services and the attitude of their staff members, which we also highlighted in our report "[Access and barriers to NHS Community Pharmacies in Birmingham](#)"



“Very poor. Never have the medication and they never tell you until you turn up and it’s missing. Gone down the pan.”

“Well, they have changed the medication without telling us so we have to go back and ask them why they have changed it or given us something else.”

“Very rude pharmacist at this surgery. Usual hatch window was broken and I had the audacity to step over the door threshold. To be told to wait outside. I had been standing therefore 5 mins and been ignored.”

“Very rude and unhelpful staff. Always in a hurry and don’t listen to patients.”

“The attitude of the staff is appalling! They treat everybody like cattle and if you have an attitude with them they don’t serve you. They are very slow! I once went to the centre and waited over 90 minutes for the pharmacist to finish his lunch break. Stealing a wage I think.”

“I just don’t understand this pharmacy. One person is so rude and another who stands behind the till looks like they are so fed up and huffs and puffs about being there. It’s a late night pharmacy so sometimes it’s my only option and I actually get anxiety about walking in there as the atmosphere is so vile. After all the reviews saying the same thing- why don’t they try and change? People are usually ill when they use this shop so why not just be a bit kinder?”

It is important to understand that negative experiences such as the ones highlighted above will cause people to avoid specific services in their local area. We have heard about these issues in all six localities of Birmingham and Solihull. This could mean provision for some people is significantly worse than when looking at services statistically. This is why we feel a greater use of patient feedback is needed when assessing pharmaceutical needs across Birmingham and Solihull.



Discussion points

Healthwatch Birmingham and Solihull are pleased to see the summary of responses from the patient and public engagement and equality impact assessment, with respondents showing general satisfaction.

It is good to see that the proximity of pharmacy provisions across the localities has been examined in the PNA, and that consideration into new housing developments has been taken. We would ask that continuous reviews of geographical coverage will take place for the life of the PNA to monitor how a growing population impacts provision demands.

Although we recognise the PNA considers pharmacy services to be well placed, we are concerned that the most deprived individuals living in more rural areas would still find accessing a suitable pharmacy service to be difficult. Residents of Meriden and Hampton in Arden are residing comparatively further away from pharmacy services, increasing the reliance on either personal or public transport. We note that more rural areas, particularly in Solihull, are likely to have an older population, reducing the likelihood of access to services during ill health or poor weather.

As highlighted in the feedback we have shared, and from further feedback we have gathered, we have learnt that proximity to a pharmacy does not universally guarantee that members of the public choose to access their most local service. We have received feedback suggesting that factors such as long waiting times, poor customer service, stock issues, and incorrect medications being dispensed are likely to result in people attending a different service.

We feel that the praise given to convenient delivery services highlights a need for the PNA to thoroughly document which service provisions offer home delivery. This will enable a clearer picture of how accessible pharmacy provisions are for individuals in certain areas. This would also enable improved consistency within delivery services as we have identified a lack of consistency in delivery schedules, and that deliveries are often late.



Throughout the PNA information is shared about the provision of specific pharmacy services, such as the Specialist Palliative Care Drugs (SPCD) service. However we have heard from people in Birmingham and Solihull that it can often be hard for them to access accurate up to date information easily about which pharmacies provide these services. We would urge the Health and Wellbeing board to consider how information like this gathered for the PNA can also be shared in an easy to understand way for people living in Birmingham and Solihull.

The PNA clearly documents patient groups with specific needs across the Birmingham and Solihull. Despite this, the needle exchange services across Solihull are predominantly centered in the North, disregarding areas of deprivation in other parts of locality that could benefit from such a provision. There is a notable disparity found in the needle exchange service with only six pharmacies operating this provision compared to 84 in Birmingham, which is proportionally larger than the population gap when comparing the two localities. We feel this suggests additional factors beyond just the difference in population size alone. We would therefore welcome an expansion in the availability of the needle exchange service to strengthen harm reduction outcomes.

Moving further services to community pharmacies

We note that as part of this consultation process stakeholders are being asked what further services could be provided in the community pharmacy setting in future. Whilst we are pleased to see an aspiration for more services to be delivered locally to people, we would also take the opportunity to raise concerns around public confidence shift towards pharmacies as wider care venues. As noted in our report [Access and barriers to NHS Community Pharmacies in Birmingham](#), many people were not confident in accessing services that were traditionally offered elsewhere through their local pharmacy. As such, we feel that further work should be undertaken to improve confidence in community pharmacy prior to the introduction of any new services to ensure that people feel comfortable when accessing the care they require.



Initiating a follow up when receiving ongoing support

This plan for the provision of services across Birmingham and Solihull also includes information regarding the Discharge Medicines Service process. Within this process, it is explained that pharmacists can initiate a follow-up with patients to provide them with further information regarding their medication. We wonder if there is a mechanism within this process for patients to follow up with their pharmacist if they have any concerns or questions that they would like to raise. If so the details of this process should be made clear to the public, including who they should contact and whether this is conducted through an appointment system or by waiting in the main queue to speak to a pharmacist.

With pharmacies intended to undertake more long-term ongoing care for patients, we would also like to better understand how and when this care can be transferred between services. This includes situations where patients may have ongoing issues with their local pharmacy, or they have moved out of area. As such it is also important for people to understand where the records of this ongoing care are stored so that they can be properly transferred to a new venue if this is required. It should also be made clear who they should contact in the event that they need to move this care to a new service, or if they wish share concerns or make a complaint about a service they have received.

Thank you for sharing the draft pharmaceutical needs assessment with us for comment, and we look forward to seeing the final version once stakeholder comments have been considered.

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