# Community pharmacy sector warns of mounting pressures ahead of CPCF negotiations



Pharmacy owners across England face a critical deadline to contribute their insights ahead of the next Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) negotiations. Community Pharmacy England (CPE) has called on pharmacy owners to complete its survey by 8 September, providing a vital opportunity for the sector to influence contractual reform, prioritise funding allocations, and propose regulatory changes to alleviate ongoing operational challenges. This consultation aims to ensure that upcoming CPCF adjustments reflect the real, frontline pressures confronting community pharmacies today.

According to the announcement, the survey seeks detailed feedback on service commissioning priorities and the feasibility of components within the NHS’s 10-Year Health Plan. This initiative emerges amid mounting financial strain within the sector. Data from CPE’s Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2025 underscores the difficult environment: of more than 800 pharmacy owners surveyed, nearly half (45%) admitted resorting to personal savings to sustain their businesses, and a mere 9% considered the business threats manageable even after the latest funding package was awarded. Janet Morrison, CPE’s chief executive, remarked on the sector’s predicament, stating that these concerns are "very much at the front of our minds" in preparation for the negotiations.

The financial landscape for community pharmacies in 2025/26 includes a £3.073 billion funding deal, supplemented by an additional £215 million that contractors can earn through enhanced services like Pharmacy First, blood pressure monitoring, and contraception provision. Notably, the medicines margin has been increased to £900 million, and the single activity fee (SAF) was raised by 19 pence, effective April 2025. Despite these financial commitments, pharmacies continue to face formidable challenges.

Among the most pressing is the persistent issue of medicine supply shortages, which has worsened according to a CPE 2025 annual pressures survey. Nearly three-quarters of pharmacy owners reported spending "longer than ever before" procuring medicines, with no signs of improvement since the previous year’s poll. The survey highlighted that 95% of pharmacy teams observed that patients remain inconvenienced by medicine shortages, with 73% warning that these shortages jeopardise patient health. Moreover, 79% of respondents detailed instances of patient frustration culminating in aggression when essential medicines were delayed or unavailable. This has resulted in patients frequently visiting multiple pharmacies in pursuit of their prescriptions, adding further strain on pharmacy operations.

The time burden is substantial; many pharmacy staff spend between one to two hours daily sourcing medicines, with over a quarter dedicating even longer. Nearly half of pharmacy owners connected these supply issues directly to a negative impact on patient services. Morrison described this ongoing situation as "a distressing new normal," emphasising the need for greater flexibility during shortages and a fairer financial framework to support medicines supply.

Equally concerning are the growing staffing shortages that compound operational difficulties. CPE’s 2024 pressures survey revealed that 62% of pharmacy team members reported an impaired ability to deliver services due to understaffing. Staffing deficits affect both pharmacists and support staff, with roughly seven in ten pharmacy owners citing shortages in non-pharmacist roles and over half acknowledging pharmacist vacancies. Recruitment challenges are profound, with many pharmacy owners struggling to find permanent staff capable of managing workload and pressure.

The repercussions of staffing shortfalls are stark: increased workload pressures, longer patient waiting times, and frequent temporary pharmacy closures. Data from the NHS Business Services Authority found that locum shortages contributed to 65% of these closures between 2021 and 2024. Workforce wellbeing is also severely impacted—well over three-quarters of pharmacy team members report negative effects on mental health, with many describing themselves as barely coping, exacerbated by patient abuse and operational stress.

Janet Morrison highlighted the critical link between workforce conditions and patient care quality, warning that an overburdened and understaffed pharmacy workforce cannot sustain high-quality service delivery. She urged improvements in funding, workforce training, and regulatory support, noting that recruitment into GP surgeries through schemes like the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) has further strained community pharmacies by drawing pharmacists away from the sector.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society, together with Pharmacist Support, has recognised these wellbeing challenges, launching surveys and support campaigns to address workforce mental health and resilience. Danielle Hunt, chief executive of Pharmacist Support, noted a significant rise in demand for peer support services, underscoring the urgent need for sector-wide attention to staff wellbeing.

Community pharmacists themselves reflect elevated stress levels, with evidence from an exclusive profession-wide survey indicating greater work-related stress compared to general practice peers. The strain manifests in sleep deprivation, compassion fatigue, and strained personal relationships, confirming the heavy toll the current pressures exert on community pharmacy professionals.

As pharmacy owners approach the upcoming CPCF discussions, their input via the CPE survey represents a crucial chance to articulate the sector’s needs and advocate for meaningful reforms. With financial pressures, medicine shortages, and workforce challenges converging, concerted action is essential to sustain community pharmacy’s vital role in patient care and health system resilience.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1–3 – [[1]](https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/community/last-chance-for-pharmacy-owners-to-inform-cpcf-negotiations-via-survey/), [[2]](https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/community/last-chance-for-pharmacy-owners-to-inform-cpcf-negotiations-via-survey/)
* Paragraph 4–6 – [[3]](https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/news/pharmacies-spending-longer-than-ever-managing-medicines-supply-issues/)
* Paragraph 7–11 – [[4]](https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/news/community-pharmacies-sound-alarm-over-staffing-shortages/)
* Paragraph 12–13 – [[5]](https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/in-practice/community-pharmacists-report-higher-stress-levels-than-those-in-general-practice/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/community/last-chance-for-pharmacy-owners-to-inform-cpcf-negotiations-via-survey/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/community/last-chance-for-pharmacy-owners-to-inform-cpcf-negotiations-via-survey/> - Pharmacy owners have until the end of Monday 8 September to inform upcoming Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) negotiations via Community Pharmacy England’s (CPE’s) survey. The survey is gathering opinions on the current outlook for pharmacy businesses and the ongoing pressures they face. It asks pharmacy owners to share ideas for contractual reform, prioritisation for funding allocations, and potential regulatory changes to ease operational challenges. CPE wants to know which services should be commissioned or developed next and the deliverability of elements of the 10-Year Health Plan. This is pharmacy owners’ opportunity to ‘influence negotiations and ensure changes to the CPCF reflect frontline realities and ambitions’, said CPE in a statement on its website. This is particularly important considering the financial pressures that pharmacies are facing. The CPE Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2025 revealed pharmacy owners’ ongoing struggle to keep their businesses afloat in the wake of medicine supply issues, inflation, rising operational costs, and increasing staff wages. Of the over 800 pharmacy owners polled, 45% reported dipping into their personal savings to support their business and even after the funding settlement, only 9% said the threats to their business were manageable. In a statement recently published on CPE’s website, its chief executive Janet Morrison said: ‘All of this is very much at the front of our minds as we prepare for the next round of CPCF negotiations.’ The CPCF for 2025/26 saw a £3.073bn deal agreed for the sector, with a further £215m available for contractors to earn through Pharmacy First, blood pressure and contraception services. The medicines margin for 2025/26 was also increased to £900m and the single activity fee (SAF) was increased by 19p, effective from April 2025. The survey closes as 11.59pm on Monday 8 September and can be completed here.
3. <https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/news/pharmacies-spending-longer-than-ever-managing-medicines-supply-issues/> - Almost three-quarters (74%) of pharmacy owners in England have said their business is spending ‘longer than ever before’ to procure medicines amid worsening supply issues, a survey has revealed. Community Pharmacy England’s 2025 annual pressures survey has added weight to ongoing concerns over medicines supply challenges and the impact this is having on both the profession and patients. The survey of more than 4,300 pharmacies in England and more than 1,600 pharmacy team members suggests there has been ‘no improvement’ in supply issues since the poll was first launched in 2022. Key findings show the majority (95%) of pharmacy teams report that patients are still being inconvenienced by ongoing medicines shortages and almost three-quarters (73%) said this was putting patients’ health at risk. A further 96% suggested that patient frustration was a ‘common consequence’ of supply issues, with 79% reporting incidents of patient aggression when medicines were unavailable or delayed. And some 86% of pharmacy owners reported that shortages were forcing patients to visit multiple pharmacies in search of their medicines. CPE warned the issue of medicines shortages had become a ‘distressing new normal’ for the sector and said pharmacists needed more flexibility during shortages and a ‘fairer financial arrangement’ for the medicines they supply. According to the survey results, every day, pharmacy teams are spending hours trying to source medicines for patients. Around four in 10 (39%) of pharmacy staff now spend one to two hours each day doing this, with over a quarter (26%) spending even longer than two hours, CPE found. Concerningly, almost half (49%) of pharmacy owners said patient services were being ‘negatively affected by pressures on their business’ and an overwhelming 94% said this was directly linked to medicine supply problems as a root cause. CPE chief executive Janet Morrison said: ‘Our survey shows that as medicine supply issues remain a daily reality across the country, the risk to patient health has become a distressing new normal.'
4. <https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/news/community-pharmacies-sound-alarm-over-staffing-shortages/> - Almost two-thirds (62%) of pharmacy team members have reported a reduced ability to offer services or advice to patients because of staffing shortages, a survey by Community Pharmacy England (CPE) has revealed. Nearly all (95%) of pharmacy team members surveyed said that staff shortages had led to increased pressure on remaining staff, while 61% said that remaining staff had to increase their working hours and 86% said staff shortages had led to increased waiting times for patients. The findings, based on CPE's 2024 pressures survey, represent the views of over 6,100 pharmacy premises in England and 2,000 pharmacy team members, as surveyed in March - April 2024. Seven in 10 (71%) pharmacy owners said they were currently short of non-pharmacist staff members, while six in 10 (58%) said they were short of pharmacists. And 69% of pharmacy owners said they were experiencing a shortage of permanent team members. Some 76% of pharmacy owners said they struggled to recruit permanent staff, while 71% said they experienced challenges in covering staffing or locum costs. One pharmacy owner responding to the survey said they were unable to fill vacancies because despite lots of interviews, they were 'yet to find a colleague who would be able to manage the workload or pressure involved' in the job. And another commented: 'The increased pressures are not sustainable long term and will cause staff illness and absence, which will increase the pressure on staff. Each action of the community pharmacy has to be properly funded to allow the service to grow to cover the workload that is being transferred from other NHS service providers.' Nearly half of pharmacy owners (45%) said they were extremely concerned about team wellbeing - ranking as the third highest concern after finances (73%) and medicine supply issues (69%). More than three quarters (77%) of pharmacy team members said their work was negatively impacting their mental health and wellbeing, and one in three said they were either 'barely coping' or 'not coping at all'. Nearly all (92%) said workload was making it hard to cope at work, 85% cited problems sourcing medicines, 56% mentioned patient abuse and 40% cited lack of available staff. Staff shortages causing temporary closures More than one in 10 (14%) of pharmacy owners reported that their pharmacy had needed to close temporarily due to workforce shortages - totalling 711 pharmacy premises across the country between February and March 2024. And NHS Business Services Authority data from October 2021 to July 2024 revealed that being unable to find a locum was the biggest reason for temporary closures (65% of closures), followed by short notice staff sickness (14%). ‘A workforce that is falling over does not support quality patient care’ Janet Morrison, CPE chief executive, said the negotiator was 'deeply concerned about staff wellbeing and the negative impact that the current pressures are having on both the mental health of the community pharmacy workforce and on patient care'. 'Community pharmacy teams are working non-stop to protect their patients and local communities, but a workforce that is falling over does not support the delivery of quality patient care,' she said. 'If pharmacy staff are overworked, understaffed, harassed and facing significant stress, it negatively affects their ability to meet patient needs. 'If we want to make full use of the clinical skills of community pharmacists and their teams, we must address these workforce shortages, as well as the critical funding constraints and capacity issues, in the sector.' Government and NHS asked to consider funding, training and ARRS CPE has called for community pharmacy funding to be increased to support recruitment and retention of pharmacy staff. And it said that fully implementing plans to expand the training and development of the workforce 'will significantly aid recruitment and retention in the sector'. CPE also asked the NHS to consider the impact of the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) on community pharmacy. The negotiator said the scheme had 'led to the recruitment of over 5,000 pharmacists, primarily from community pharmacy, into GP surgeries and PCNs', resulting in 'shortages, temporary closures and rising costs'. A Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) spokesperson responded that the new government had 'inherited a broken NHS'. 'We are committed to supporting community pharmacists who have a vital role to play in our plans to move the focus of care out of hospitals and into the community,' they added. And they said they were looking at concluding the national funding and contractual framework arrangements for 2024/25 'as a matter of urgency'. Support available through Pharmacist Support And it highlighted support available through wellbeing charity Pharmacist Support’s ACTNow wellbeing campaign, which encourages pharmacy owners to: Allow time for wellbeing; Consider the needs of others; and Take action. Also commenting on the survey findings, Danielle Hunt, chief executive of Pharmacist Support, said that calls to its peer support service, Listening Friends, had risen by 74% in the last year alone. 'With staff wellbeing ranking as one of the top concerns for pharmacy owners, it is clear that immediate action is needed to support the health and sustainability of our pharmacy workforce,' she added. RPS surveying staff on wellbeing Last week, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS), in partnership with Pharmacist Support and in collaboration with the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK, launched its annual workforce wellbeing survey. It has been distributed by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) and will be open until Tuesday 12 November.
5. <https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/in-practice/community-pharmacists-report-higher-stress-levels-than-those-in-general-practice/> - Community pharmacists report significantly higher work-related stress levels than those working in general practice, a snapshot survey has revealed. An exclusive poll by The Pharmacist suggests the stresses of the job have resulted in a lack of sleep and put a strain on pharmacists’ personal relationships in both settings – but it appears notably worse among those in the community. The survey held in April was completed by almost 160 members of the profession, including 84 working in community pharmacies and 74 in general practice. Three-quarters (75%) of community pharmacy respondents said workplace stress had resulted in a lack of sleep, while 47% of those working in general practice reported the same issue. A further 75% of those in the community also said they were experiencing ‘compassion fatigue’ and more than a third (34%) of general practice pharmacists said the same. When it comes to personal relationships or friendships, almost seven in 10 (69%) of community pharmacists said their job-related stress was having an impact. This was compared to around a third (34%) of general practice pharmacists who reported an impact on their relationships. More than half of