



Lambeth Pulse

Pharmacy Services

healthwatch
Lambeth

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	2
Key Findings	2
Pharmacy First	2
Privacy	2
Conclusions.....	3
Methodology	4
Participant Profile	4
Survey Findings	5
Pharmacy Usage.....	5
Access to Services	7
Experience at the Pharmacy/Chemist.....	9
Conclusion	13
Appendix I: Survey Questions.....	14

Executive Summary

Introduction

In March of 2024, Healthwatch Lambeth launched the Lambeth Pulse: a monthly survey exploring the views of the community on a variety of topics across health and social care.

As of 31 January 2024, Pharmacy First enables members of the public to access treatment for seven common conditions at the pharmacy, without the need for a GP appointment or prescription.¹ The scheme was launched as part of the NHS's plan to improve access to primary care and to ease pressure on GP services.

As pharmacies take on a bigger role in primary care, it's crucial to learn more about people's usage and perceptions of pharmacy services. In this context, Experiences of pharmacy services was chosen as the first topic for the monthly Lambeth Pulse survey.

Key Findings

Our survey found that respondents already access pharmacy services regularly, with three fifths (60%) of respondents going to the pharmacy at least once a month. Nearly all respondents used pharmacies to buy medicine and collect prescriptions. Many also used pharmacies to get treatment and advice on medical conditions, but more specialised services, such as blood pressure checks, were largely unused and unknown.

Pharmacy First

Our survey found that just under three quarters of respondents (71.43%) were already receiving treatment for common conditions at the pharmacy, and that 79% of participants would feel comfortable receiving such treatment at the pharmacy.

Most participants were happy to access health services at both the pharmacy and the GP, but people generally preferred the GP for more specialised services. Furthermore, while most (73%) people felt positively about pharmacists' knowledge and expertise, several participants commented that the quality of service varied greatly between pharmacists.

Only one participant mentioned [Pharmacy First](#) by name. However, they were confused about whether it was active or not: *"Before you could get treatment for common conditions at the pharmacy but not anymore. Everywhere I go they tell me it has stopped."*

This may be due to confusion over a similarly named service which previously existed in Lambeth, now called Pharmacy First Plus.

Privacy

Overall, respondents reported positive experiences at the pharmacy. However, privacy at the pharmacy was viewed negatively. 37% of respondents rated privacy at the pharmacy as either "Poor" or "Very poor", while another third (31%) of responses rated it as "Neither good nor bad". Two respondents commented on the lack of confidentiality when giving out personal details (e.g.

¹ The seven conditions are: Earaches, Impetigo, Infected insect bites, Shingles, Sinusitis, Sore throat, and Uncomplicated urinary tract infections.

name or DOB) when collecting a prescription, while another wished there was a private consultation room for discussing health issues with the pharmacist.

Conclusions

While most respondents felt positively about receiving primary care at the pharmacy, there are a few points of concern:

- **Awareness** – many people are unaware of what their pharmacy can provide. While not all pharmacies offer the same services, raising awareness of the services they **can** provide may ensure people can easily access the care that they need.
- **Confidence** – despite positive attitudes towards pharmacies, many people still view GPs as their first point of care, especially for more specialised services. While raising awareness is crucial, people must also feel confident about the **quality** of treatment they will receive at the pharmacy.
- **Privacy** – people are concerned by the lack of privacy at the pharmacy. As the services offered become more specialised, privacy is likely to become a deciding factor when choosing where to access treatment.

Methodology

The findings and analysis in this report are based on a quantitative survey. The survey was distributed online via our network of partners and social media platforms and at in-person outreach events across the borough. There was no target population, as we wanted to hear the views of all members of the community.

Participant Profile

28 participants took part; 89% (25) lived in Lambeth, while 11% (3) did not. Of those that chose to answer demographic questions:

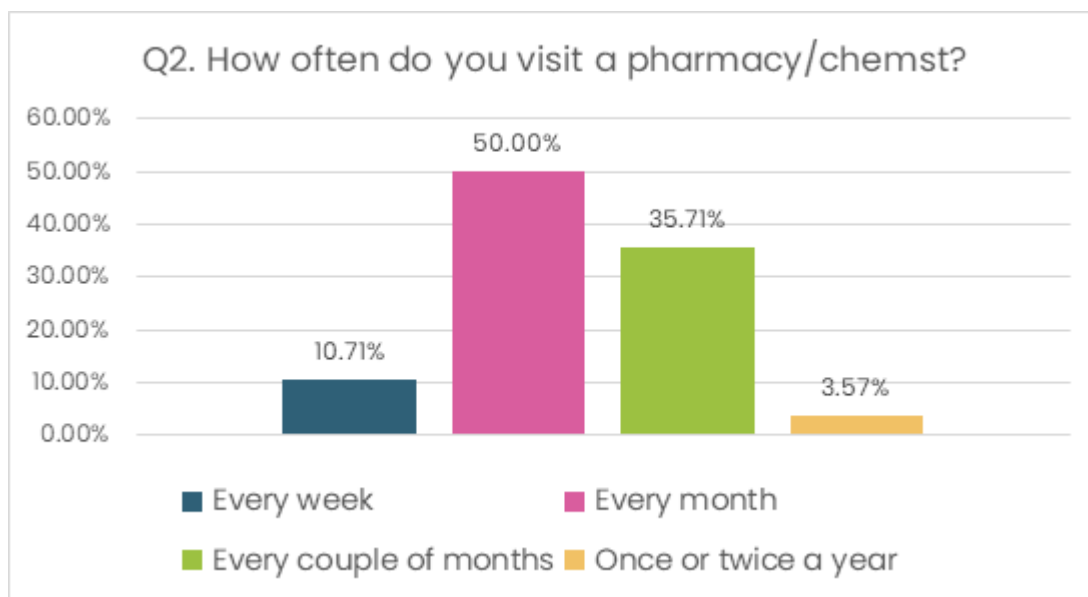
- **More than two thirds of participants were aged 50 and above.** 42.85% (9) were over 65 and 28.57% (6) were aged 50-64. 19.04% (4) of participants were aged 25-49 and only 9.52% (2) were aged 18-24.
- **More than two thirds (67% | 14) of respondents were women.** 24% (5) were men, and 9% (2) were non-binary. 90% (19) of respondents answered that their gender identity was the same as their sex recorded at birth. 10% (2) preferred not to say.
- **70% (14) of respondents identified as White British.** Two identified as Black African and the following categories had one respondent each: Black Caribbean, Indian, and White Other. One respondent chose to self-describe as Native American/Arab/Asian/English.
- **59% (13) of respondents had a long-term condition and 27% (6) of respondents had a disability.**
- Only **one** participant said they were a **carer**.

Table 1: Participants' profile

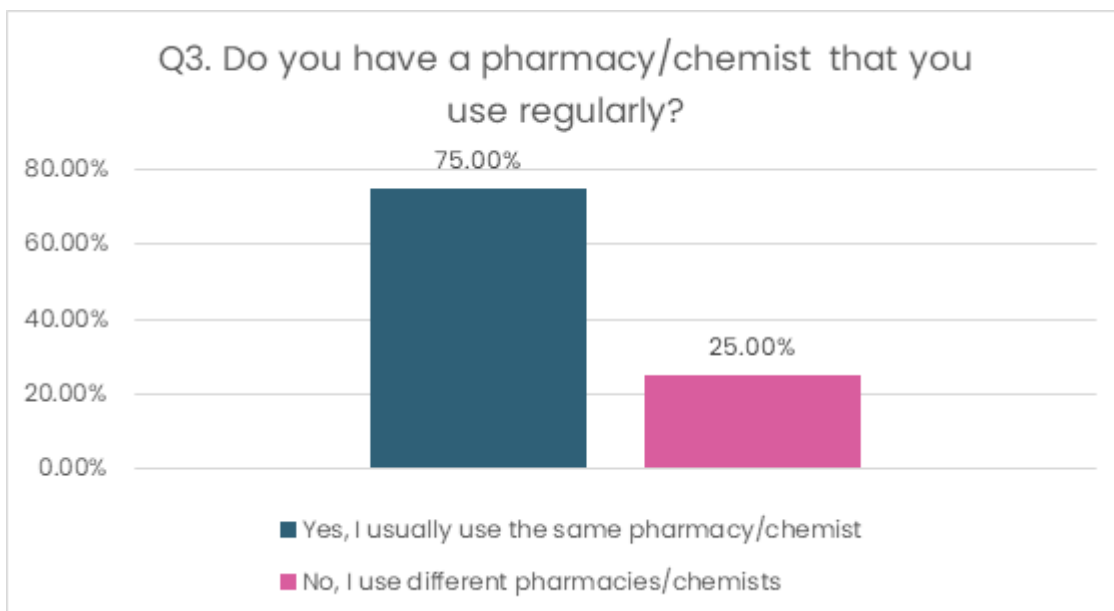
Characteristics		Number of participants
Age range	65-79	9
	50-64	6
	25-49	4
	18-24	2
Gender	Woman	14
	Man	5
	Non-binary	2
Gender identity same as sex recorded at birth	Yes	19
	Prefer not to say	2
Ethnicity	White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	14
	Black/Black British: African	2
	Black/Black British: Caribbean	1
	Asian/Asian British: Indian	1
	White: Any other White background	1
	Native American/Arab/Asian/English	1
Long-term condition		13
Disability		6
Carer		1

Survey Findings

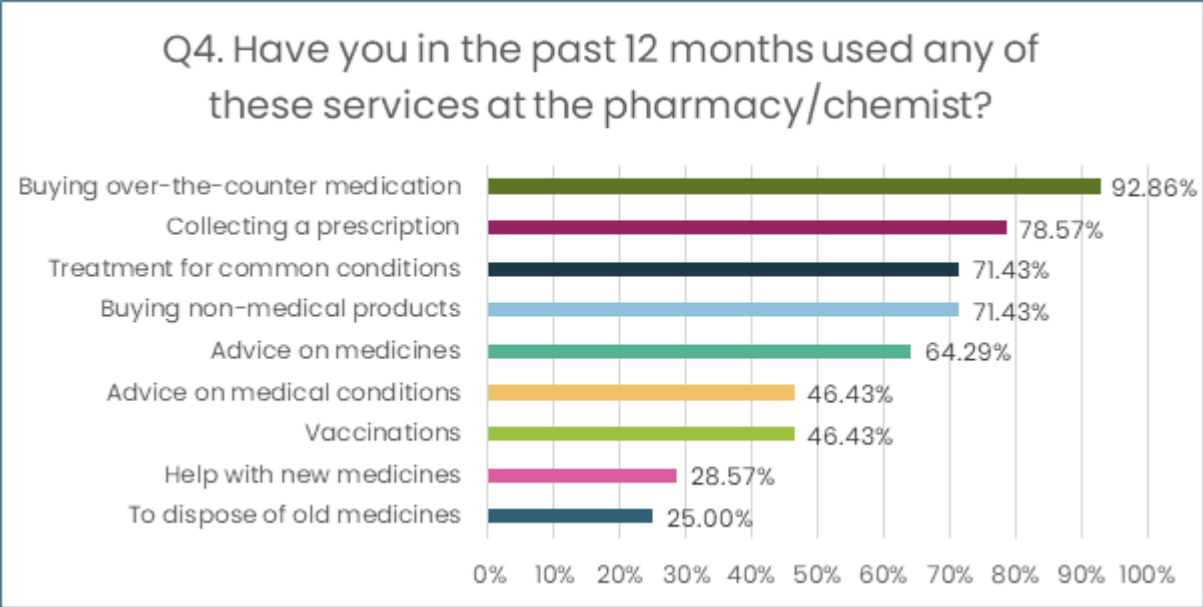
Pharmacy Usage



All respondents had used a pharmacy/chemist in the past 12 months. Half of respondents (50%) visited a pharmacy/chemist every month and over a third (35.71%) visited every couple of months. A tenth (10.71%) visited every week, while only one participant visited once or twice a year.



Three quarters (75%) of respondents usually used the same pharmacy/chemist, while one quarter (25%) used different pharmacies.



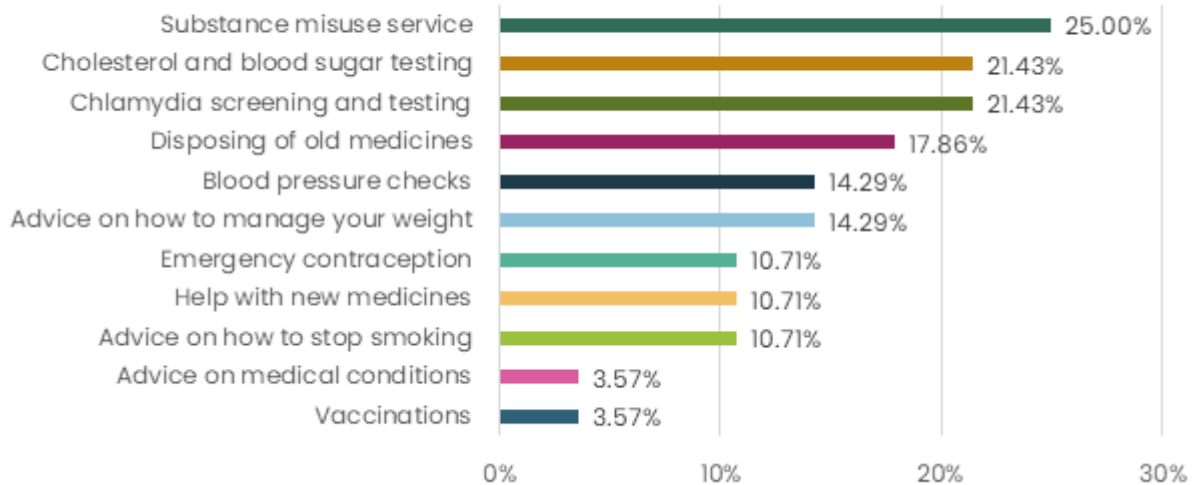
Participants were asked if they had used any of sixteen services offered by some pharmacies in England. The list was compiled by looking at previous reports and at the [NHS's page on Pharmacy Services](#). These include principal pharmacy services (e.g. buying toiletries/OTC medication, or collecting a prescription), treatment and advice, and specialised services (e.g. blood pressure checks or chlamydia testing).

Nearly all respondents (92.86%) reported using the pharmacy to buy over-the-counter medication. Four fifths (78.57%) had used pharmacies to collect a prescription and nearly three quarters (71.43%) to buy non-medical products. Just over a quarter had used pharmacies to get help with new medicines (28.57%) and to dispose of old medicines (25%).

Regarding treatment and advice, nearly three quarters (71.43%) had used pharmacies to get treatment for common conditions, nearly two thirds (64.29%) to get advice on medicines, and just under half (46.43%) get advice on medical conditions and to get vaccinations.

None of the respondents had used pharmacies for more specialised services: blood pressure checks, emergency contraception, cholesterol and blood sugar testing, chlamydia screening and testing, advice on how to stop smoking, advice on how to manage your weight, or for the substance misuse service.

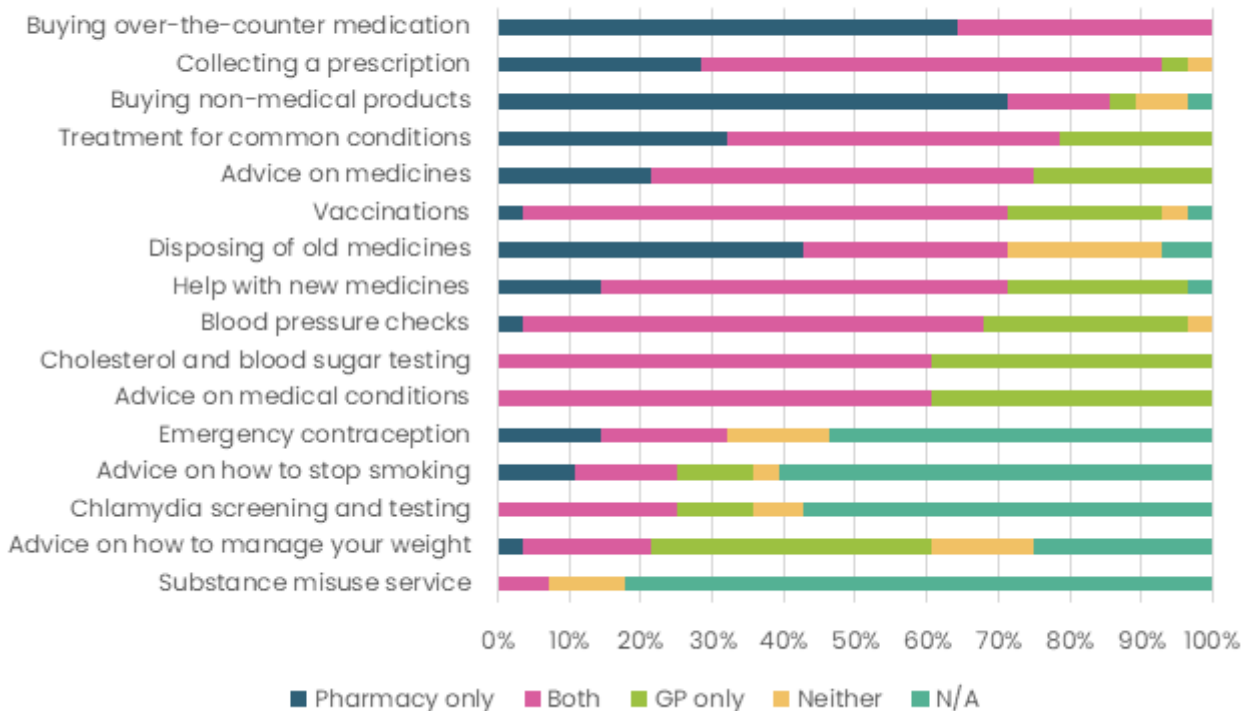
Q4. "I did not know pharmacies offered this service"



Eleven of the fifteen services received at least one response saying: "I did not know pharmacies offered this service". The least known service was the substance misuse service, not known by a quarter (25%) of respondents, followed by cholesterol and blood sugar testing and chlamydia screening and testing, not known by one fifth (21.43%) of respondents. However, some more general services, such as advice and support using and disposing medicines, were also partially unknown.

Access to Services

Q5. Would you feel comfortable accessing the following services at the pharmacy, the GP, or both?



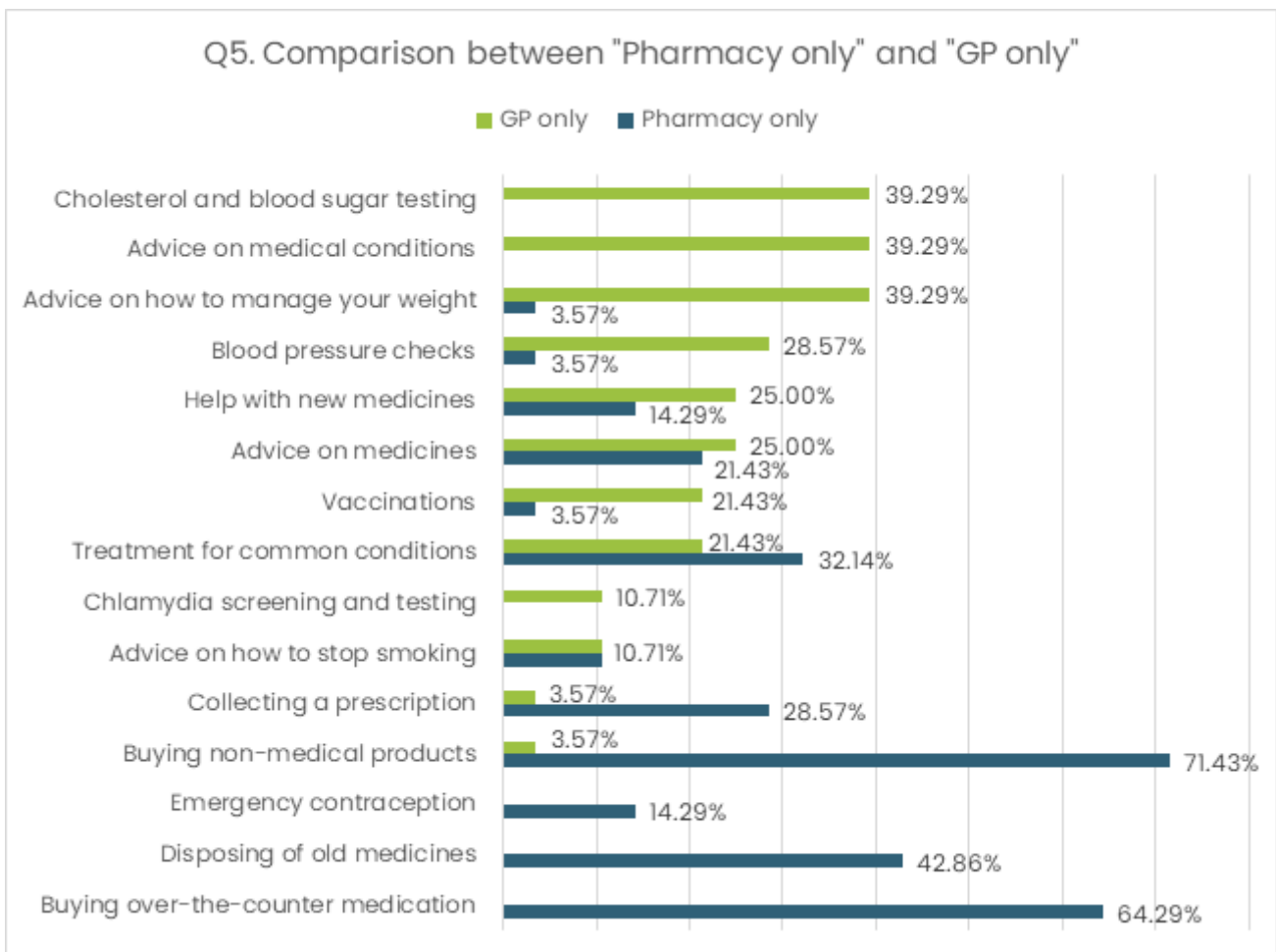
Participants were asked if they would rather access the sixteen services at the Pharmacy, the GP or both.

Most respondents were happy to access eight of the sixteen services at both the GP and the pharmacy. These were vaccinations (67.86%), collecting a prescription (64.29%), blood pressure checks (64.29%), cholesterol and blood sugar testing at (60.71%), advice on medical conditions (60.71%), help with new medicines at (57.14%), advice on medicines (53.57%), and treatment for common conditions (46.43%).

Most participants preferred to access three services exclusively at the pharmacy: buying non-medical products (71.43%), buying over-the counter medication (64.29%) and disposing of old medicines (42.86%). For advice on weight management, the majority of respondents (39.29%) preferred the GP.

Four services received primarily N/A responses: the substance misuse service (82.14%), advice on how to stop smoking (60.71%), chlamydia screening and testing (57.14%) and emergency contraception (53.57%).

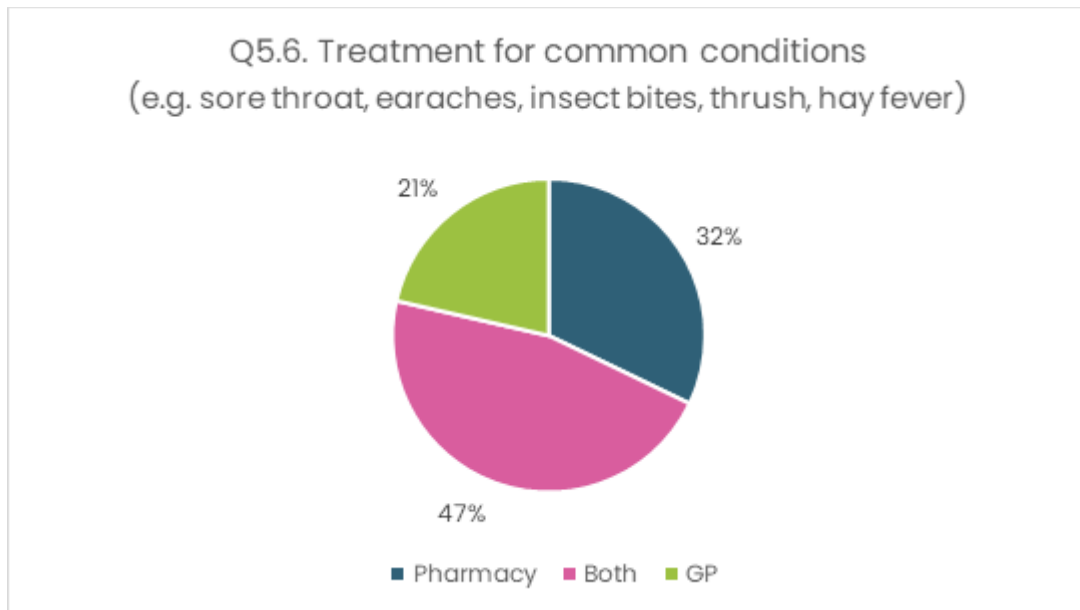
Pharmacies vs. GPs



Services that got more “Pharmacy only” responses mainly revolved around buying, using, and disposing medicines. On the other hand, specialised services got more “GP only” responses, such as advice on medical conditions and specific procedures, e.g. cholesterol and blood sugar testing, blood pressure checks, and vaccinations.

This may be a matter of trust, as one respondent expressed:
“I would not trust the expertise of pharmacists to provide advice or do medical procedures like a vaccination.”

Treatment for Common Conditions

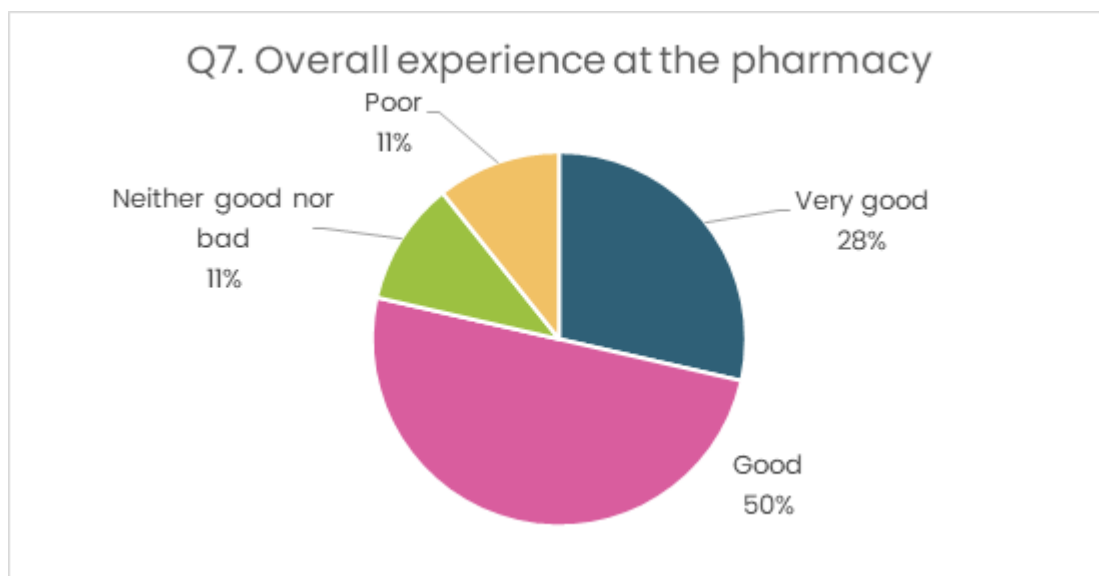


Nearly half (47%) of participants were happy to receive treatment for common conditions at both the pharmacy and the GP. Furthermore, a third (32%) would prefer to receive treatment at the pharmacy, compared to a fifth (21%) at the GP.

Regarding Pharmacy First, one participant was confused about whether it was active or not.

“Before you could get treatment for common conditions at the pharmacy but not anymore. Everywhere I go they tell me it has stopped.”

Experience at the Pharmacy/Chemist



Overall, nearly four fifths (78%) of respondents rated their overall experience at the pharmacy positively (either “Good” or “Very good”). Only 11% rated their experience as Neither good nor bad, and another 11% as poor.

One participant said their experience had varied between pharmacies: *“My high street pharmacy is brilliant. Sadly, the pharmacy at King’s Hospital is poor.”*



To get more nuance, participants were asked to rate their experiences at the pharmacy from “Very good” to “Very poor” across eight categories. In seven out of eight categories, most responses were positive (either “Good” or “Very good”). The only category with mainly negative responses was privacy.

Privacy

37% of respondents rated privacy at the pharmacy as either “Poor” or “Very poor”, while another third (31%) of responses rated it as “Neither good nor bad”.

We also received several comments regarding a lack of privacy at the pharmacy. Two respondents were concerned by their confidentiality being breached when confirming their personal details at the counter:

“They breach confidentiality at the counter every time they ask me to confirm personal details before giving me my prescription. There seems to be no way to prevent this, but it is a data breach.”

“They [should] stop breaching patient confidentiality by screaming out a person’s address and date of birth in order to identify a patient waiting for a prescription. They should accept people writing down their personal details to collect a prescription, especially these days where identity fraud is at an epidemic level.”

Another respondent suggested having *“a private room for discussing health issues with the pharmacist”*.

Treatment from Pharmacists

Overall, pharmacists were rated positively. Three quarters (75%) of respondents felt they had received polite and respectful treatment at the pharmacy, while over two thirds (69%) felt they had been listened to and had their questions answered. Just under three quarters (73%) of respondents were satisfied with pharmacists' knowledge and expertise and two thirds (65%) felt positively about the advice and information provided.

However, we received several comments regarding mixed to poor treatment from pharmacists. *“Staff attitude can be improved. They behave like they are the only ones that work. Yes, they are busy but isn't everyone. I wouldn't be there unless I needed their services. I have better things to do than deal with their bad attitude, especially when you've only walked in the door and said hello.”*

“Poor treatment from pharmacists. I feel rushed and treated as if they were running out of time.”

We also received a concerning account about being given the wrong prescription.

“I'm a regular user of my pharmacy and like it. However, there was one time when I was given the wrong medication entirely. Luckily the pills were a different shape than my normal ones because I don't always read the packet as it's such a common thing for me. I took them back and they were apologetic, but it did worry me how and why that happened. Mistakes happen but feedback on why it happened might have helped.”

Some comments suggested there was great variability between pharmacists.

“Service is enormously variable depending on the individual pharmacist seen. Some, one in particular, is very good. Others, not so good -better staff training should help.”

“I have found most pharmacists/chemists helpful and knowledgeable - one in particular was outstandingly good. One of his neighbouring chemists was outstandingly bad, giving damaging advice. I mentioned this to a GP at the GP Surgery where I am registered, without identifying the chemist or location of the pharmacy. However, the bad chemist does seem to have been replaced.”

Facilities and Opening Hours

Most respondents (72%) were satisfied with the opening hours at the pharmacy. However, one participant commented that *“it would be great if they could open on Sundays.”*

Another respondent commented on the lack of accessible facilities.

“I am unsatisfied with the facilities at pharmacies as a disabled and obese person. Chairs are often inadequate and painful. I would like to see better facilities.”

We also had a comment about the lack of accessibility of digital apps for older users.

“The Boots prescription app is totally unnecessary and is elderly unfriendly”.

Other Comments

One respondent complained about mark-ups on over-the-counter medication.

“Mark up on over-the-counter high strength vitamins by 1757%. I had previously bought it for £7 at the same pharmacy, but when getting a repeat purchase, the price had increased to £130. I got them for just over £7 from a different pharmacy. Either they have been ripped off or they are trying to rip off their customers. Either way, it’s not good for all.”

Another participant suggested implementing pill packet recycling at all pharmacies.

Finally, one respondent commented on poor communication between GPs and pharmacies.

“My pharmacy says it is difficult to speak with my surgery [Norwood Surgery].”

Conclusion

Overall, our findings show that most respondents feel positively about receiving primary care at the pharmacy. Experiences at the pharmacy are largely positive, and people are already using pharmacies for more than buying and collecting medicines.

However, many respondents are **not fully aware** of the many services pharmacies can offer. Furthermore, some respondents have reservations about accessing medical advice and tests, such as blood-pressure and cholesterol checks, at the pharmacy over the GP. This may be partly due to **a lack of confidence** in the quality of care offered by the pharmacy. **Privacy** may also be a key barrier to access, as many respondents are not satisfied with the level of privacy at the pharmacy.

Tackling **awareness, confidence**, and **privacy** is crucial to ensuring the success of Pharmacy First, and to improving access to primary care for all.

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

1. **Do you live in Lambeth?**
 1. Yes
 2. No
2. **How often do you visit a pharmacy/chemist?**
 1. Every week
 2. Every month
 3. Every couple of months
 4. Once or twice a year
 5. Never
3. **Do you have a pharmacy/chemist that you use regularly?**
 1. Yes
 2. No, I use different pharmacies/chemists
 3. I have not used a pharmacy/chemist in the past 12 months.
4. **Have you in the past 12 months used any of these services at the pharmacy/chemist?** (Each is answered with “Yes”, “No”, or “I did not know pharmacies could offer this service”.)
 1. Collecting a prescription
 2. Buying over-the-counter medication
 3. Buying non-medical products (e.g. toiletries)
 4. Advice on medical conditions
 5. Advice on medicines
 6. Treatment for common conditions (e.g. sore throat, earaches, insect bites, thrush, hay fever)
 7. Vaccinations (e.g. NHS flu jab, COVID jab, travel jabs)
 8. Blood pressure checks
 9. Emergency contraception
 10. Cholesterol and blood sugar testing
 11. Chlamydia screening and testing
 12. Help with new medicines
 13. Disposing of old medicines
 14. Advice on how to stop smoking
 15. Advice on how to manage your weight
 16. Substance misuse service (e.g. needle and syringe exchange schemes)
5. **Would you feel comfortable accessing the following services at the pharmacy, the GP practice, or both?** (Each is answered with “GP”, “Pharmacy”, “Both”, “Neither”, or “N/A”.)
 1. Collecting a prescription
 2. Buying over-the-counter medication
 3. Buying non-medical products (e.g. toiletries)
 4. Advice on medical conditions
 5. Advice on medicines
 6. Treatment for common conditions (e.g. sore throat, earaches, insect bites, thrush, hay fever)
 7. Vaccinations (e.g. NHS flu jab, COVID jab, travel jabs)
 8. Blood pressure checks
 9. Emergency contraception
 10. Cholesterol and blood sugar testing
 11. Chlamydia screening and testing

12. Help with new medicines
 13. Disposing of old medicines
 14. Advice on how to stop smoking
 15. Advice on how to manage your weight
 16. Substance misuse service (e.g. needle and syringe exchange schemes)
6. **Thinking about your visits to the pharmacy/chemist, how would you rate your experience on the following?** (Each is answered with “Very good”, “Good”, “Neither good nor bad”, “Poor”, “Very poor”, or “N/A”.)
1. Opening hours
 2. Waiting times
 3. Privacy, e.g. you were seen in a private consultation room
 4. Availability of medication
 5. Pharmacists’ knowledge and expertise
 6. Advice and information provided, e.g. on a current or long-term medical condition
 7. Polite and respectful treatment
 8. Being listened to and having your questions answered
7. **Taking everything into account - the staff, the shop, and the service provided - how would you rate the pharmacy you normally use?**
1. Very good
 2. Good
 3. Neither good nor bad
 4. Poor
 5. Very poor
 6. N/A
8. **Finally, if you have any comments about how the services from your pharmacy could be improved, please write them in here:**



healthwatch Lambeth

Healthwatch Lambeth
Tripod, LB of Lambeth, PO Box 80771
London
SW2 9QQ

www.healthwatchlambeth.org.uk
t: 020 7274 8522
e: info@healthwatchlambeth.org.uk
📱 @HWLambeth
📘 [Facebook.com/HWLambeth](https://www.facebook.com/HWLambeth)