



Pharmacy First

May 2025

healthwatch
County Durham

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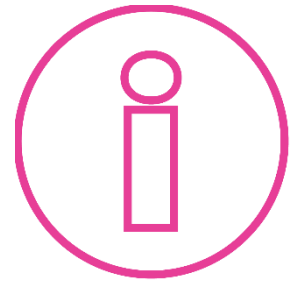
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About us

Healthwatch County Durham is an independent organisation whose aim is to help people get the best out of their local health and social care services, whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow. Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience. As a statutory watchdog, our role is to ensure that local decision-makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care so that those who buy (commissioners) and provide our services (NHS Trusts, local authorities, GPs, the voluntary sector, and independent providers) can benefit from what people tell us. The Healthwatch network currently consists of 153 Healthwatch organisations, covering each of the local authority areas in England. It also has a national body called Healthwatch England based in London. For more information about us please click on this link: [Healthwatch County Durham](#) or scan the QR Code:



Introduction

In January 2024 the NHS launched the new Pharmacy First service, introduced to enable patients in England to get prescription-only treatment for seven common conditions at their local pharmacy, without the need to see a GP.

The Pharmacy First service can treat: Earache, impetigo, infected insect bites, shingles, sinusitis, sore throat and urinary tract infections.

Healthwatch County Durham wanted to find out how much the public knew about the service and how it was being used. We worked with Public Health at Durham County Council to co-produce a survey to ask people's experience of local pharmacies and the Pharmacy First service.

Summary

Healthwatch County Durham wanted to hear about people's experiences of local pharmacies, and to contribute to the Health and Wellbeing Board's review looking at whether there are adequate pharmacy services to meet the needs of the local population, including the new Pharmacy First service launched in 2024.

We wanted to know if people in County Durham knew how to access treatment for some common conditions directly from their pharmacy. We shared our survey on our website, via social media, with partner organisations, community groups and engagement events throughout County Durham.

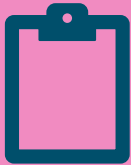
- We received 83 completed surveys.
- 78% of people surveyed had heard of the Pharmacy First service.
- 55% of participants had used the Pharmacy First service for a wide variety of conditions.
- 63% of people rated the service as very good to excellent.
- 90% of people reported they could easily access pharmacies by car, taxi or on foot



We received
83 surveys

Method

To find out about service users experience of local pharmacies and the Pharmacy First service we:



Worked alongside Public Health at Durham County Council to develop a user friendly survey.



Sent out links to the survey to our local community pharmacy network, local advice services and community groups, and Durham County Council Public Health contacts and network.



Engaged with members of the public at information events and offered surveys in a range of formats including online links, QR codes, and paper format.

Findings

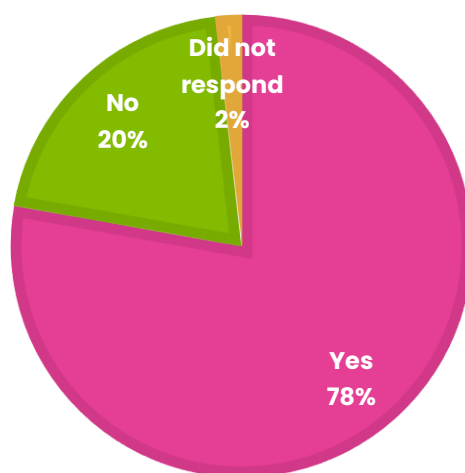
Healthwatch County Durham discovered that out of those who took part in the survey, **78% had heard of the Pharmacy First service**, and over half of those had used the service for common ailments and illnesses. This included 29% of people regarding sore throats, 22% regarding urinary tract infections and 13% for earache. We had 83 surveys undertaken including 76 fully completed and 7 partially completed surveys.

Over 80% of those surveyed were happy to talk to the pharmacist about common conditions and discuss symptoms and treatments for a wide range of illnesses; including 85% would be happy to talk about a sore throat, 84% earache, 81% infected insect bites, 71% impetigo, and 68% would be happy to discuss shingles.

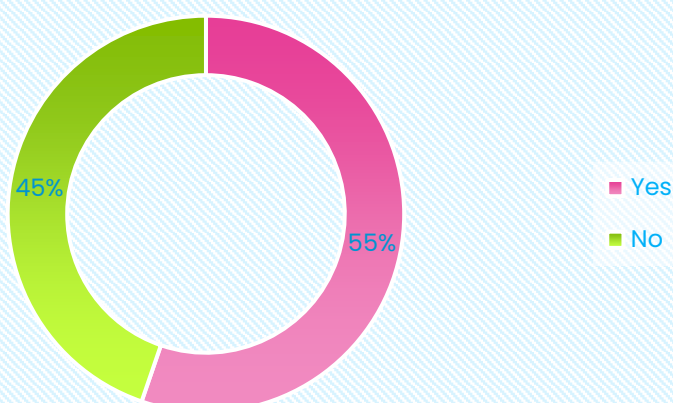
78% of respondents said they had heard of the Pharmacy First service.

PARTICIPANTS WHO HAD HEARD OF THE PHARMACY FIRST SERVICE

■ Yes ■ No ■ Did not respond

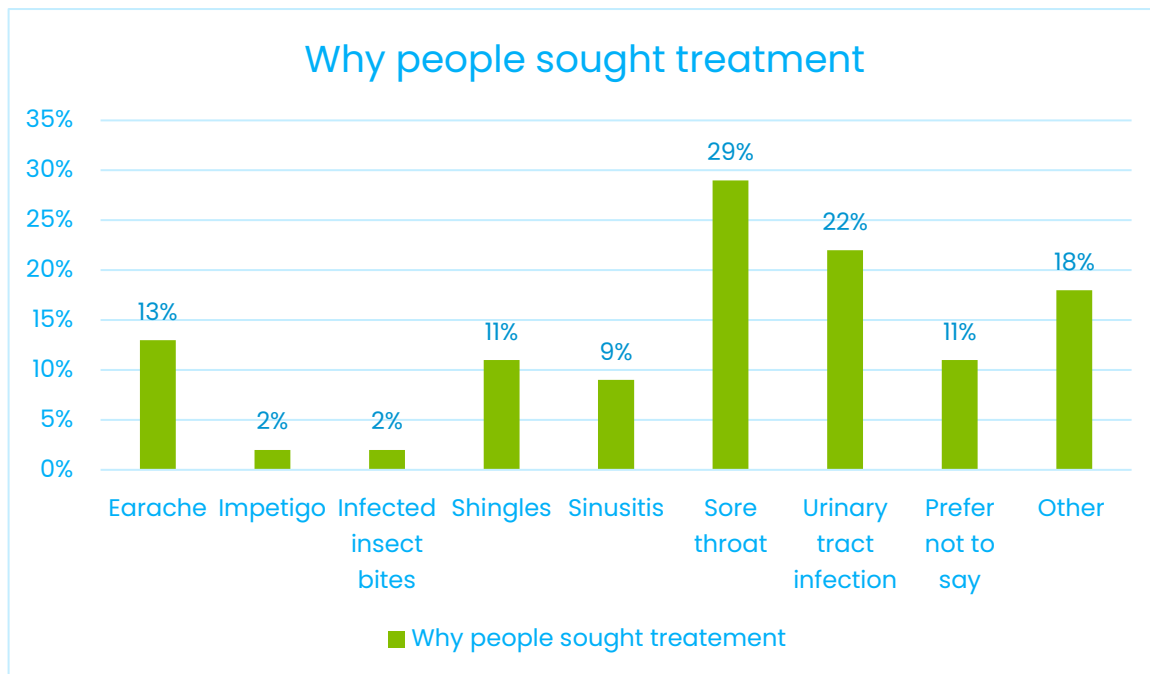


Participants who have used the Pharmacy First service



Of those participants who had heard of Pharmacy First, over half (55%) had used the service.

People used the Pharmacy First service for a variety of conditions:



Other conditions included:

- Blood pressure
- Other skin conditions

Comments made included:

- Two people commented that they were referred back to the GP due to their age.
- One noted that the pharmacy only deal with female UTIs and was referred to the GP.
- One was advised it was shingles but was referred back to the GP.



70%

of people reported
that they had used
the pharmacy for
common ailments
and illnesses
before the launch
of the Pharmacy
First service in
January 2024.






Prior to the launch of the Pharmacy First service people sought treatment from the pharmacy for a wide range of ailments and illnesses:

| What people sought treatment for: | Percentage of respondents |
|--|---------------------------|
| Ear care – earache, ear infection, ear wax | 41% |
| Allergies – bites and stings, hay fever, skin reaction | 35% |
| Cold and flu – cough, congestion, sore throat, fever/temperature | 33% |
| Aches and pains – back pain, headache, period pain, teething | 24% |
| Eye care – bacterial conjunctivitis, styes | 22% |
| Gastrointestinal care– diarrhoea, constipation, indigestion, haemorrhoids | 19% |
| Vaginal thrush | 17% |
| Head lice | 9% |
| Skin care – athlete's foot, contact dermatitis/atopic eczema, nappy rash, warts and verrucae | 7% |
| Other | 7% |
| Mouth care – cold sores, oral thrush, ulcers | 6% |
| Prefer not to say | 2% |



63% of people rated the Pharmacy First service as very good or excellent.

How would you rate the Pharmacy First Service?

| | | |
|---|-----------|-----|
|  | Excellent | 40% |
|  | Very Good | 23% |
|  | Good | 12% |
|  | Fair | 8% |
|  | Poor | 17% |

"It was quicker than going to the GP. I was given privacy to discuss my symptoms."

"Professional and polite, reassured and help with my anxieties. "


"It was fast, and late at night so there when needed rather than having to wait until the doctor could see me."

"Clear, precise information, good advice all in private."

What was good about the service/treatment you received?

"Seen there and then"


"I was able to be seen there and then and commence treatment immediately as opposed to waiting for a GP appointment. The treatment details were then sent the same day to my GP and appeared in my medical record. I get tonsillitis severely and a couple of days starting penicillin can be the difference between a really severe bout and a not so severe bout."




"Quicker than going to the GP"

"It was quicker than going to the GP. I was given privacy to discuss my symptoms etc, and had I not been advised otherwise, I would have paid for my prescription. I am 60 and as I am working, I had expected to pay. The treatment was effective, I was given appropriate advice and would use the service again."

"Very quick efficient service"

 "Very quick efficient service – provided with antibiotics for urinary tract infection. Really struggle to get doctors appointments for myself and the children so this is a much-needed service for minor ailments – I have taken my children for ear infections too and their treatment could begin immediately."



"Cheaper medication"

"Pharmacy was good and advised an alternative cheaper medication that did the same thing at a third of the price."

Things people felt could be improved

Overall people were happy with the service they received from pharmacies, however some felt the following were needed:

- Better confidential areas
- Lift age restrictions
- Male UTI to be included
- Further training
- More flexible opening times



"The consultation took a long time and there was a lot to follow on the computer, it took the pharmacist away from other work a lot"



"Communication needs to be improved"

"My UTI problem was long-standing. The GP practice refused to see me and sent me to the pharmacy who also refused to help as my problem was long-standing. [The Pharmacist] sent me back to the GP. Communication issues need to be improved"

Anon



"The offer of a private room to discuss concerns. It was ok in this instance but would not be in certain circumstances."



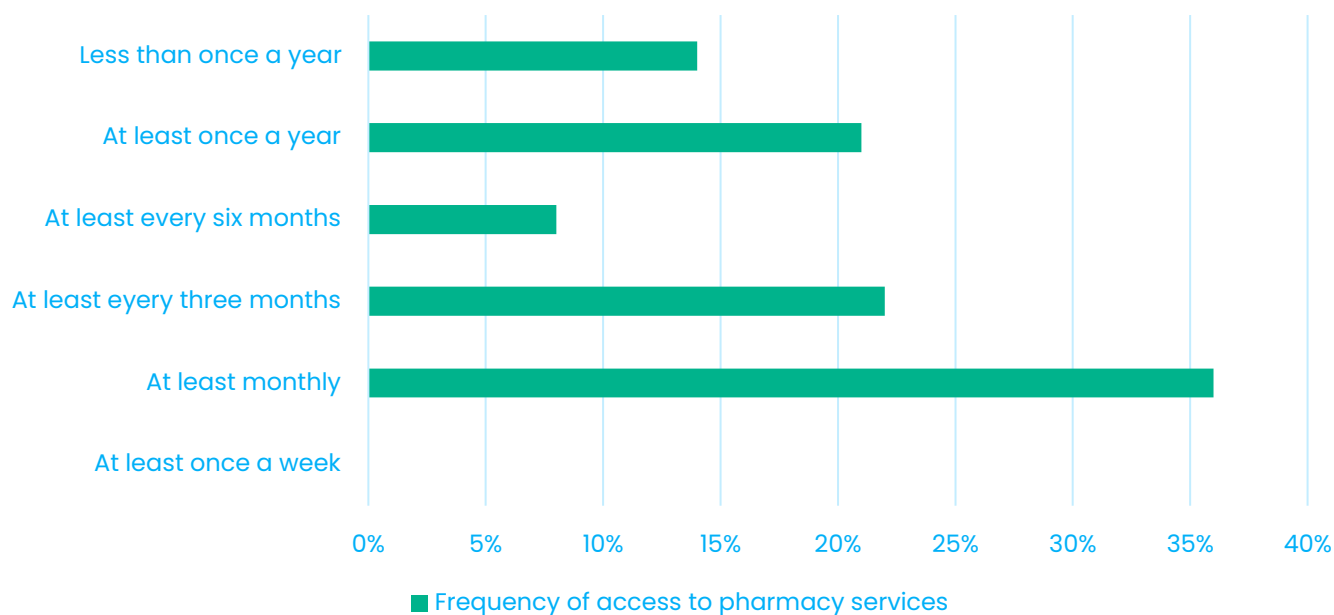
"Further training required"

"I feel the pharmacist required further training on my condition. It was later found to be shingles; however, the pharmacist had encouraged me to buy antihistamines as she felt it was allergy related."

Anon

36% of people reported that they accessed pharmacy services at least monthly. With nearly half (43%) accessing the same pharmacy service and a further 36% usually accessing the same pharmacy services.

Frequency of access to pharmacy services

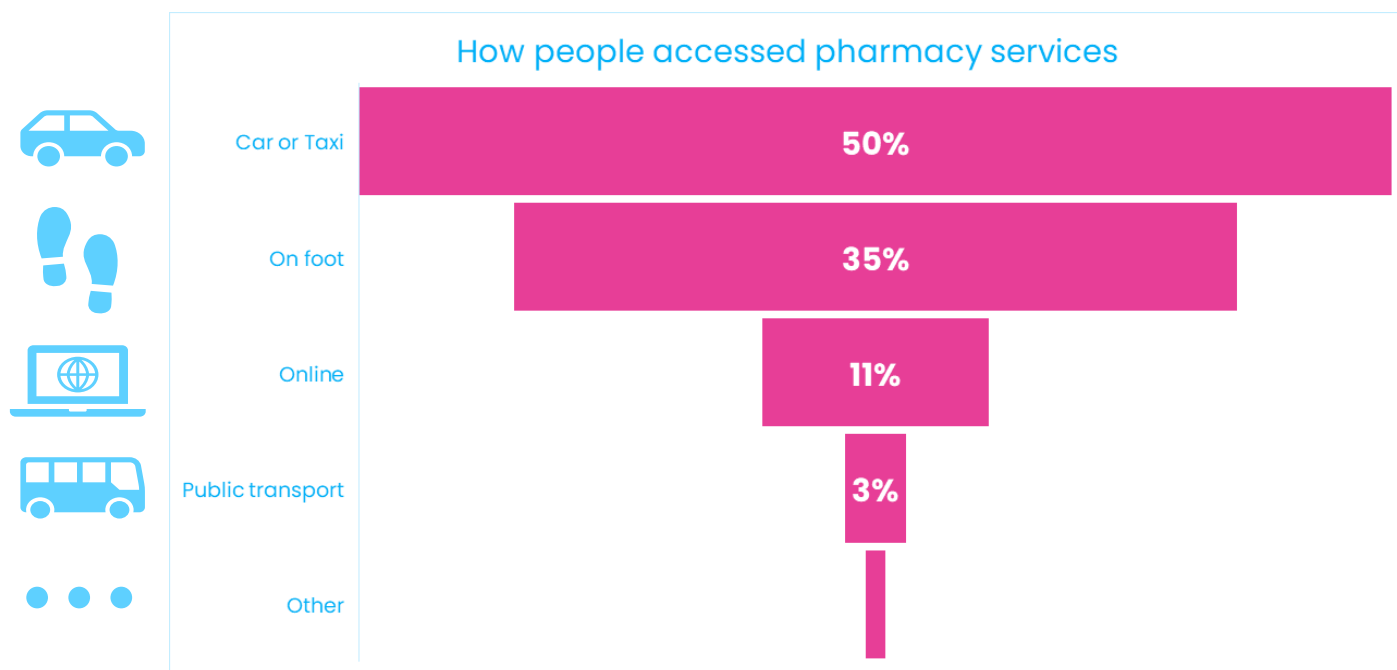


90% of people reported they could easily access pharmacy services with only 4% stating that they could not easily access services.

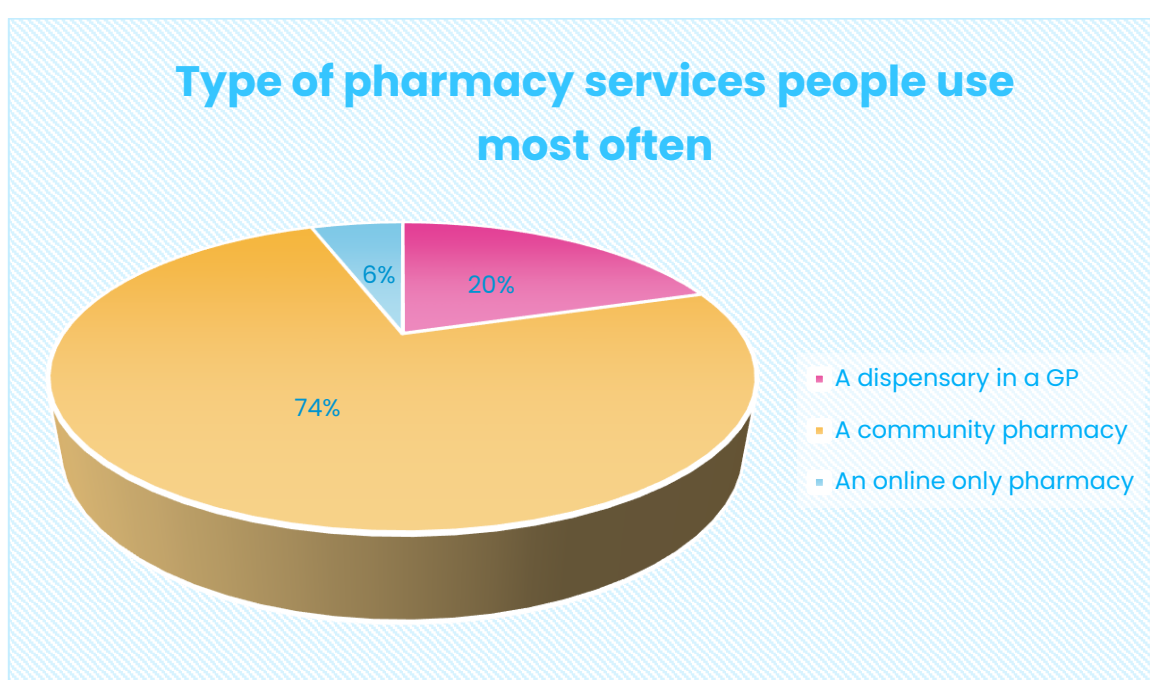


How people accessed local pharmacy services

People predominantly accessed local pharmacies by car or taxi, or on foot, with 11% accessing their local pharmacy services online and 3% reported accessing pharmacies via public transport.



Over 80% of people who completed the survey specified they used a community-based pharmacy such as those available on the high street or supermarket, with only 6% of people stating that they used an 'online only' pharmacy service.



What do County Durham pharmacies do well?

People reported that they accessed a range of services from pharmacies, such as face to face discussions, vaccine jabs, home delivery of medications and text messaging services, and extended opening hours.

People described that they generally had a positive experience at the pharmacy and thought they did a wide range of things well...



Treats customers with care and respect.



- ✓ Great customer service
- ✓ Polite, helpful staff
- ✓ Knowledgeable and supportive staff
- ✓ Privacy and confidence
- ✓ Awareness of individual needs

- "Makes me feel safe to disclose and show my ailments such as broken skin on feet."
- "They are aware of regular individual needs and have good knowledge of products."
- "Convenient opening hours."
- "Quick service. Reliable information and diagnosis."
- "Tell you about prescription doctor prescribes."
- "Always willing to speak to patients."
- "Privacy is always offered through the use of a little room. Very polite sales staff."
- "Personalised, patient centred approach which I love!"
- "Everything! It is open long hours; it is fast and completely reliable."

Is there any way your pharmacy service could be improved?



"Prescriptions can take a long time to arrive. Items are not always stocked"

"Telephone service would help very much. I have walked in many times to be informed I need to go to my GP."



"There seems to be lots of medication unavailable."



"I feel the pharmacist needs further training on the Pharmacy First service and conditions it sees to."



"The pharmacy used to be good for making up prescriptions from the GP and getting them delivered quickly. Now, there are always delays and we usually have to visit to get the prescriptions and then wait, sometimes in long queues."



"..bigger, maybe a more private talking space. Make it easier with more embarrassing issues. More abuse training, physical and emotional."



Conclusion

Overall people were happy with the Pharmacy First service with 40% rating it as excellent and a further 35% as good or very good.

People liked the convenience and locality of the service, and that pharmacies often had extended opening times so they could access the service at a time that suited them without the need to make an appointment.

Service users accessed pharmacies to treat a range of common illnesses including sore throat and earache with over half of those surveyed having already used the Pharmacy First service.

Most recipients were happy to discuss a range of issues with Pharmacists and felt the service was quicker and more easily accessible than GP.

They felt that on the whole, staff were polite and professional and that the advice and information given was clear and accurate.

Most accessed pharmacy services through their local community pharmacy with online only services only used by a same number of recipients.

People reported issues getting through on the phone and long queues to collect prescription medication, as well as issues with supplies and getting specific branded medications.

However the consensus overall towards pharmacies and the Pharmacy First services was positive and people were happy with the standard of service they received.



80% of people surveyed would be happy talking to a local pharmacist about a variety of conditions.

Recommendations and next steps

- Larger privacy areas with better soundproofing
- Better access to medications and prescriptions
- Shorter waiting times for medications and queues within the pharmacy
- Better communication between the pharmacies and GPs
- On-going training for staff on Pharmacy First conditions and treatments

Responses

Relatively low number of responses received makes it difficult to attach any statistical significance to the responses, particularly the very low numbers of negative comments.

Some of the negativity is due to a lack of knowledge of how community pharmacy works, which is fair enough for members of the public.

Queues, long time to answer phones, lack of medication, etc is all due to funding constraints and inability to employ more staff or open for longer and have meds sitting on the shelf for long periods of time.

Negative comments about consultation rooms noted

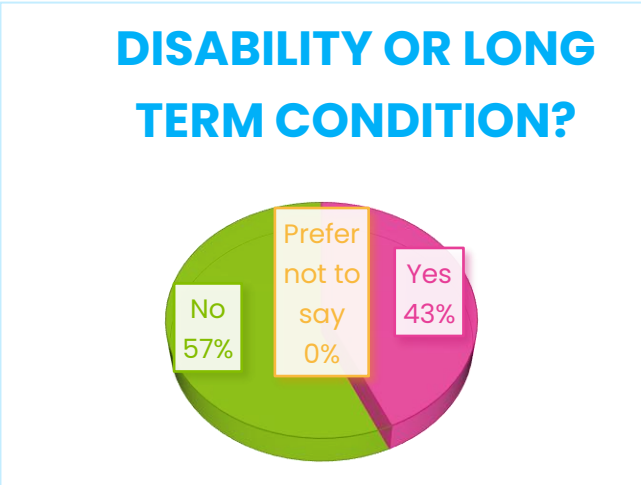
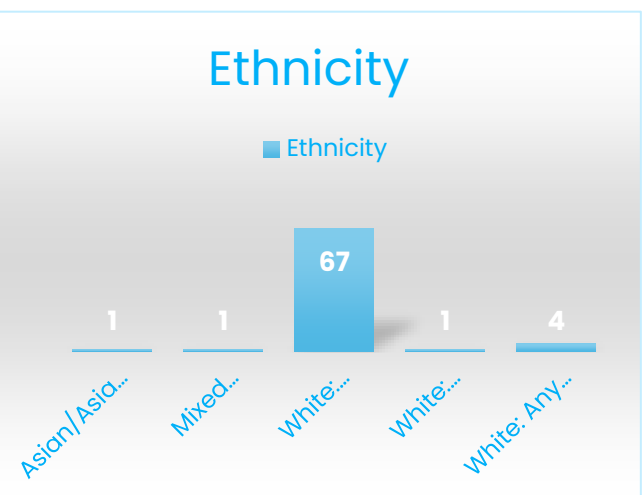
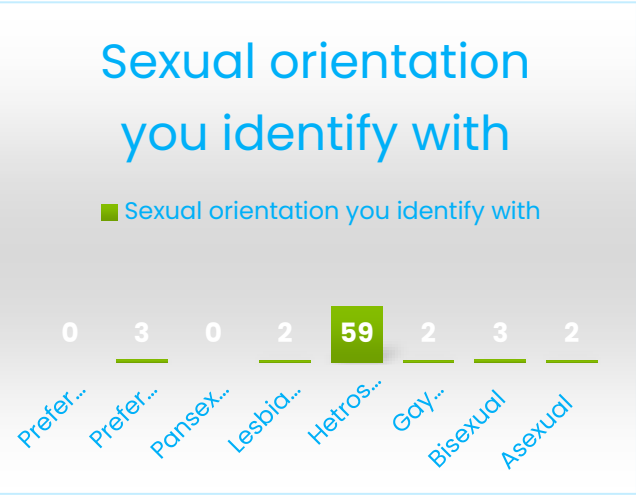
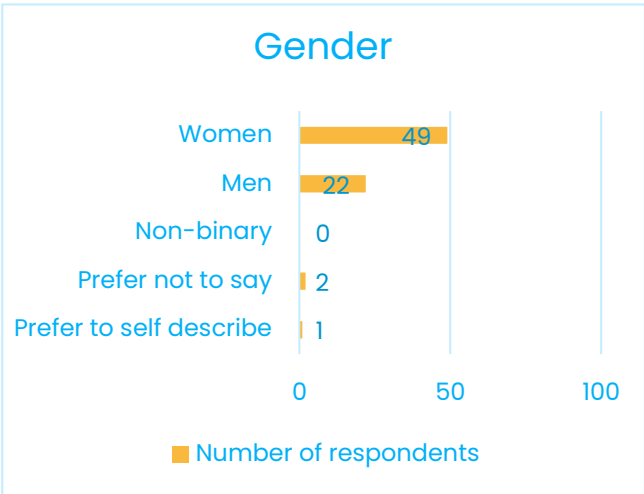
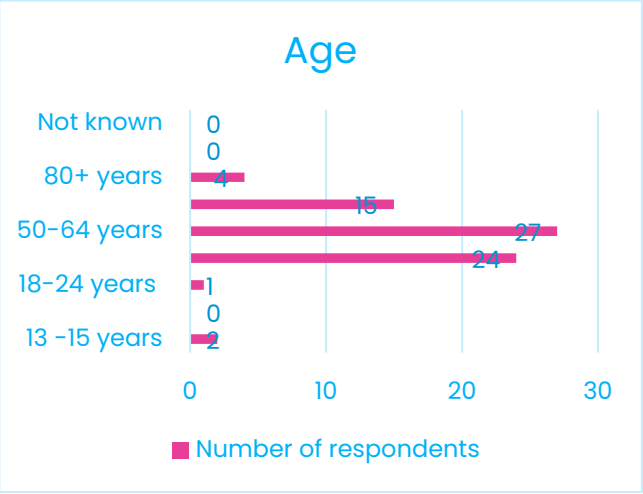
Great to see that the overwhelming feeling towards pharmacy is positive.

Greg Burke, Chief Officer, Community Pharmacy Durham and Sunderland

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey and took the time to talk to us about their experiences at engagement events. Thank you to Claire Jones from Public Health for their collaboration with developing and distributing the Pharmacy First survey, and all those co-partners who helped share the survey with the wider public within County Durham.

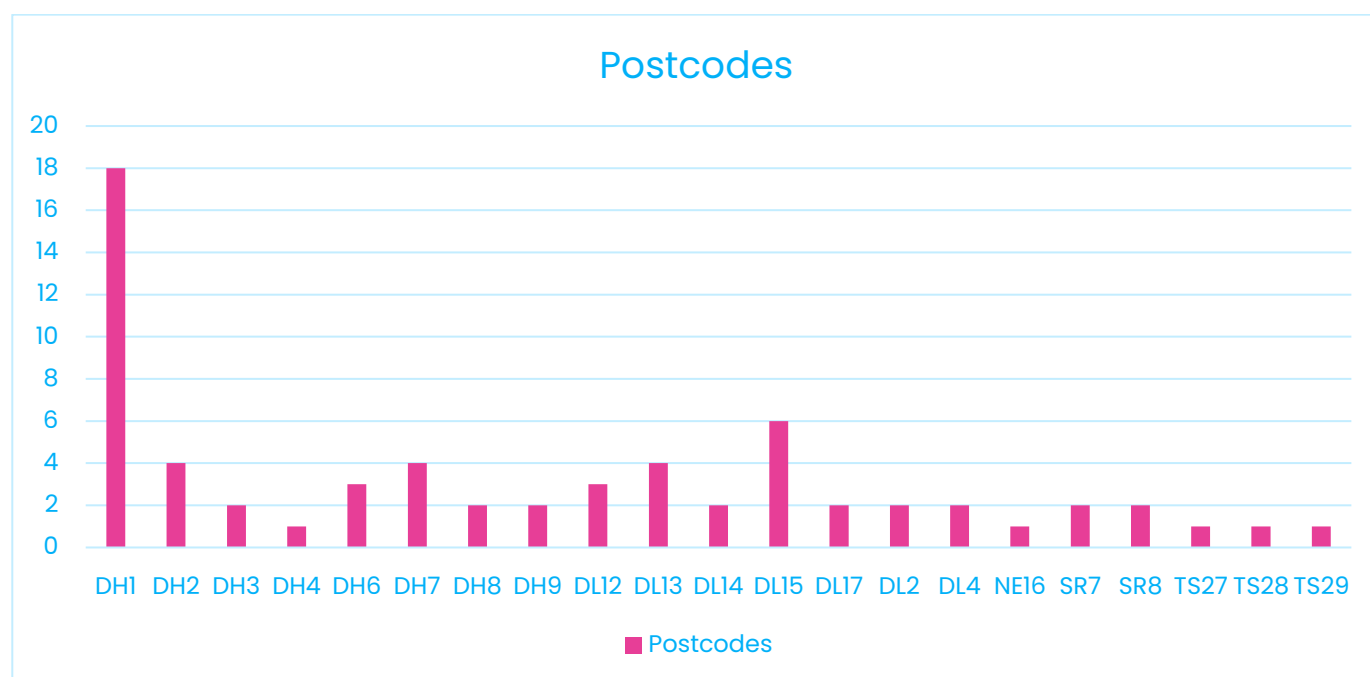
Demographics



| Long term conditions or disabilities | Response Percent | Response Total |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| A physical or mobility impairment | 23% | 11 |
| Deaf or hearing impaired | 4% | 2 |
| Blind or sight impaired | 6% | 3 |
| Learning disability | 4% | 2 |
| Mental health condition | 19% | 9 |
| Asthma, COPD, or respiratory condition | 27% | 13 |
| Cancer | 4% | 2 |
| Cardiovascular condition | 2% | 1 |
| Chronic kidney disease | 0% | 0 |
| Dementia | 2% | 1 |
| Epilepsy | 0% | 0 |
| Diabetes | 15% | 7 |
| High blood pressure | 33% | 16 |
| Prefer not say | 4% | 2 |
| None of the above | 21% | 10 |
| Other: Hypothyroidism, Ulcerative Colitis (in remission), Incontinence, Rheumatoid arthritis, Fibromyalgia, Leg ulcers, PBC, Crohn's Disease | 12% | 6 |

We had a wide spread of respondents across 21 postcode areas in County Durham and one out of area response for the Darlington area.



Appendix

Further information on Pharmacy First:

https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/how-pharmacies-can-help/?wt.mc_id=pharmacyfirst_General_phrase&wt.tsrc=ppc&gad_source=1&gclid=EALalQobChMIjsH22OKuigMV_qhoCRIMThRbEAAYASAAEgLCzPD_BwE&gclidsrc=a_w.ds

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/primary-care/pharmacy/pharmacy-services/pharmacy-first/>

Find a local pharmacy:

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy/>

Have you heard of the new Pharmacy First service and what do you think about access to pharmacy services?

Healthwatch County Durham would like to hear about your experiences of local pharmacies as part of the Health and Wellbeing Board's review looking at whether there are adequate pharmacy services to meet the needs of the local population, including the new Pharmacy First service launched in 2024.

Did you know you can now get treatment for some common conditions directly from your pharmacy, without the need to see a GP or a prescription.

The Pharmacy First service can treat:

Earache, impetigo, infected insect bites, shingles, sinusitis, sore throat and urinary tract infections.

1. Pharmacy First service

Q1

Have you heard of the new Pharmacy First service?

Yes

No

Q2

Have you used the new Pharmacy First service?

Yes

No

Q3

If so, what did you seek treatment for?

Earache

Impetigo
infected insect bites
Shingles
Sinusitis
Sore throat
Urinary tract infection
Prefer not to say
Other (please specify):

Q4

Would you be happy talking to your local pharmacist about any of the conditions mentioned above?

Yes

No

Not sure

Q5

What conditions would you be happy to discuss with the pharmacist?

Earache

Impetigo

Infected insect bite

Shingles

Sinusitis

Sore throat

Urinary tract infection

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify):

Q6

Have you used pharmacy services for any ailments and illnesses prior to the launch of the Pharmacy First service?

Yes

No

Q7

If so, what did you seek treatment for?

Aches and pains – back pain, headache, period pain, teething

Allergies – bites and stings, hay fever, skin reaction

Cold and flu – cough, congestion, sore throat, fever / temperature

Ear care – earache, ear infection, ear wax

Eye care - bacterial conjunctivitis, styes

Gastrointestinal care - diarrhoea, constipation, indigestion, haemorrhoids

Head lice

Mouth care - cold sores, oral thrush, ulcers

Skin care - athlete's foot, contact dermatitis / atopic eczema, nappy rash, warts, and verrucae

Vaginal thrush

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify):

Q8

If you have used the Pharmacy First service how would you rate the service you received?

Poor

Fair

Good

Very Good

Excellent

Q9

What was good about the service/treatment you received?

Q10

What (if anything) could be improved about the service/treatment you received?

2. Access to pharmacy services in County Durham

Q11

How often do you access pharmacy services ?

At least once a week

At least monthly

At least every three months

At least every six months

At least once a year

Less than once year

Q12

Do you always use the same pharmacy service?

Always

Usually

No

Q13

Do you feel that you can easily access pharmacy services?

Yes
No
Don't know

Q14

Thinking about the pharmacy service you use most often, how do you usually access this service?

Online
On foot
Public transport
Car or taxi
Other

Q15

What type of pharmacy service do you use most?

A dispensary in my GP practice
Pharmacy services from a community pharmacy available e.g. on the high street, in a supermarket
Pharmacy services available from an online only (or internet) pharmacy
Other:

Q16

What does your dispensary/pharmacy service do well?

Q17

Is there any way your dispensary/pharmacy service could be improved?

Q18

Could you please provide a postcode:

Q19

Please tell us your age

13 to 15 years
16 - 17 years
18 - 24 years

25 – 49 years
50 – 64 years
65 to 79 years
80+ years
Prefer not to say
Not known

Q20

Please tell us your gender *

Woman

Man

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self describe:

Q21

Please tell us which sexual orientation you identify with

Asexual

Bisexual

Gay man

Heterosexual/straight

Lesbian/Gay woman

Pansexual

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self describe:

Q22

Please select your ethnicity

Arab

Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi

Asian/Asian British: Chinese

Asian/Asian British: Indian

Asian/Asian British: Pakistani

Asian/Asian British: Any other Asian/Asian British background

Black/Black British: African

Black/Black British: Caribbean

Black/Black British: Any other Black/Black British background

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic group background

White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh

White: Irish

White: Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller

White: Roma

White: Any other White background

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify):

Q23

Do you consider yourself to be a carer?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Q24

Do you have a disability or long term health condition?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Q25

Which of the following disabilities or long term health condition do you have?

A physical or mobility impairment

Deaf or hearing impaired

Blind or sight impairment

Learning disability

Mental health condition

Asthma, COPD or respiratory condition

Cancer

Cardiovascular condition

Chronic kidney disease

Dementia

Epilepsy

Diabetes

High blood pressure

Prefer not to say

None of the above

Other (please specify):

You have completed this survey!

Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey.



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✉ @hwcourtydurham
f HealthwatchCoutyDurham