



healthwatch

in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

Patient Experiences of Pharmacy Services in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

An insight report based on feedback recorded between 1st April 2022 and 30th September 2023.





Why we produced this report

- Healthwatch England had identified serious concerns nationally in relation to:
 - Shortages of medication
 - Delays in getting repeat prescriptions issued
 - Shortages of staff
 - Closed pharmacies.
- We had highlighted similar concerns in our [previous report](#) published in May 2022 that were being raised locally around **access to services, waiting times** and **medication delays**.
- We wanted to see if these themes were still evident locally and to identify any new themes emerging
- We wanted to highlight what people had told us about their experiences of local pharmacies, to help inform future service development.

What we did

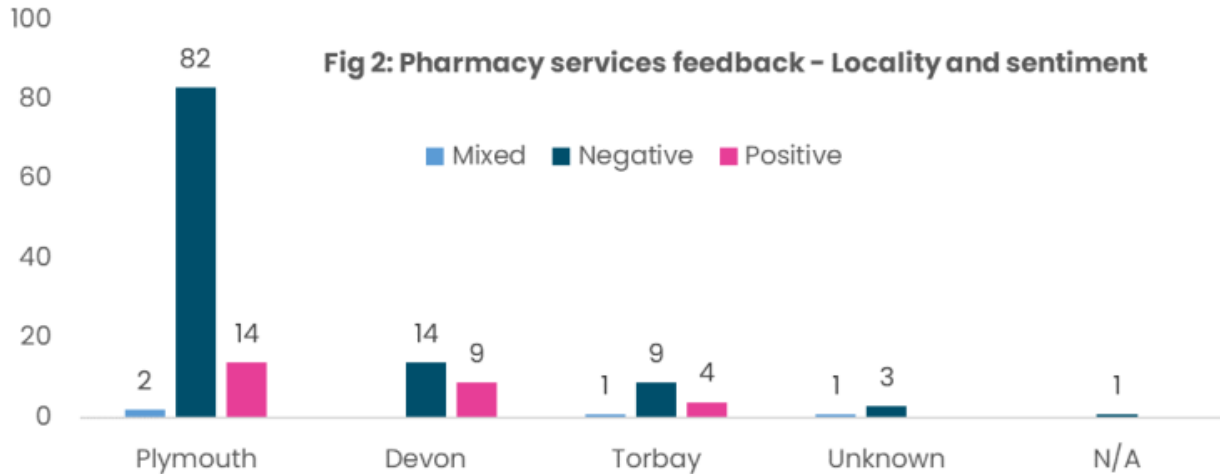
- We notified key NHS stakeholders of our plan to produce a report by escalating our concerns around pharmacy services to NHS Devon, The Primary Care Commissioning Committee, Quality and Patient Experience Committee and to The System Quality & Performance Group, Devon Local Pharmaceutical Committee, and NHS England Southwest.
- We analysed feedback from **141** patients and patient representatives that had been recorded through people contacting us via our contact centres and online feedback centres, between 1st April 2022 and 30th September 2023.
- We shared the intelligence we gathered from the public and our report with our national partners Healthwatch England, so they can continue to monitor the national picture and raise any concerns nationally with their partners, including the Care Quality Commission.





What we found

109 of the 141 experiences shared with us (77%) were negative in sentiment and of those, 82 experiences (75%) recorded related to pharmacy services in Plymouth.





What we found continued

We found that the most common themes relating to patient experiences centred around:

- **Medication** - 53 experiences (38%) - Supply issues, incomplete prescriptions and waiting times
- **Staff** - 37 experiences (26%) - staffing levels, capacity and quality of service
- **Administration** - 18 experiences (13%) - systems and protocols
- **Access to services** - 17 experiences (12%) - pharmacy closures and unanswered telephone calls

What people told us about their experiences

"Closed for whole afternoons without warning, very inconvenient."

"Phoned to check on prescription and told it was ready. Arrived at 4pm to find it closed and no info when it would be open."

"I had a phone call saying prescription was ready. Went to collect. Waiting for ages to be attended to. Then to top it off they could not find my prescription and I came away empty handed. Being told the

"They never answer the phone, hard to pick your prescription up as always shut when I drive past."

Despite being overrun with insufficient numbers, they provided a very good and kind service with a smile. The delays are down to understaffing

Queues are terrible, prescription never ready, not enough staff, staff not enough knowledge.

"I get regular prescriptions from here and can't fault them. I've also needed the advice of the pharmacists on more than one occasion always receiving excellent information and signposted to

"Slow - prescriptions not ready - not answering telephones - can't find if prescriptions ready."

"My partner who is at the end of life recently had his "Just in case" medication replaced because one or two items was out of date instead of just replacing the two items, they replaced everything. I had to go to 2 pharmacies before I found one who had the medication in stock. What a waste of medication, although I was told it does not cost very much!!"

appropriate services provided. Highly recommended.

Our recommendations



- We asked NHS stakeholders in Devon to respond to the experiences presented in our report and to provide details as to how the issues raised in this report will be addressed.
- Where pharmacies do not have capacity to answer telephone calls, we recommended that they consider introducing either an answerphone or a message facility so that patients can have their queries responded to as soon as possible.
- That NHS Devon considers our findings and provides Healthwatch with a response as to how the information will help to inform future strategy development.

Our recommendations continued

- That in line with Healthwatch England's recommendations, NHS Devon and NHS England Southwest plans how to develop capacity of the existing pharmacy workforce within the more comprehensive primary care teams across the NHS, as set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and that Healthcare Leaders locally and nationally should urgently consider how to tackle medicine shortages for the longer term.
- That University Hospital Plymouth NHS Trust considers working with Healthwatch Plymouth in monitoring patient experience feedback once proposed changes to the Outpatient Pharmacy Service are fully implemented.



Responses from the NHS to our report



- **NHS Devon** will use the outputs of our report to directly inform the development of its Pharmacy strategy, which is currently in development (2023/24) enabling us to show how the experiences of patients in Devon have been used to develop and improve services for pharmacy services and patients.
- **Community Pharmacy Devon** will review all recommendations made by the report and ensure that they are considered in full as part of processes for developing and improving pharmacy services, with the providers and the commissioners in Devon.

Responses from the NHS to our report

University Hospitals Plymouth provided an apology for the poor service experienced by patients and families at the outpatient pharmacy. In addition to already taking action to increase staff numbers, offer temporary seating and a courier service to the most vulnerable patients, they have recently procured a new outpatient pharmacy in 2024 which will move to a new, larger onsite location and will allow for a wide range of changes to take place such as:

- Recruitment of more staff
- Increased use of automation, with the opportunity to offer the most recent innovations around our service
- A home delivery service for patients who meet certain criteria, as well as looking to maximise the use of local pharmacies where possible.

All of which is aimed at improving the patient experience and



Next steps



- We will present our findings to key audiences such as Local Authority Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay in 2024.
- We will work with NHS Devon to ensure the public voice and involvement remains central to the development of the pharmacy strategy for Devon.
- We will continue to monitor patient feedback relating to pharmacy services and will continue to report our feedback data periodically to NHS Devon, NHS England Southwest, Devon Local Pharmaceutical Committee and Healthwatch England.



To find out more

Healthwatch England's findings - '*Your experiences of getting prescription medication*' is available [here.](#)

The latest Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay experiences of pharmacy services report is available [here.](#)

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voice
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