

Insights into people's experiences of pharmacy services in North Tyneside

Review of findings – June 2022

Background

Over the last 2 years Healthwatch North Tyneside has collected people's experiences of pharmacy services in the area. Evidence has been gathered via two specific surveys:

- Experiences of getting prescriptions during the pandemic – Dec 2020–Mar 2021 (58 survey responses and 6 interviews)
- Evidence gathering for the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) for North Tyneside – Jan – Mar 2022 (301 survey responses)

In addition we received pharmacy-related feedback via our work with all North Tyneside GP practices, through our work with Phoenix detached Youth project (hearing from 45 young people) and our other regular engagement activities.

This report pulls together the themes and insights from across all the data and suggests associated recommendations. Figures given are mostly from the PNA evidence gathering. Other evidence is broadly in line with this, unless otherwise stated.

Themes and Insights

General feeling

- People are generally very happy with the pharmacies they use. In our annual survey 86% gave a rating of 4 or 5 for their overall experience of pharmacies (on a scale of 1–5, where 1 was very poor and 5 was excellent).
- Pharmacy staff were praised for their efficient service and good customer manner.
- People value being known personally by their pharmacy staff.
- People appreciate being able to access advice about medication and medical issues from knowledgeable and professional staff. Some felt this meant they were less likely to need to consult their GP.

Usage

- 59% of people in our PNA survey use a pharmacy at least monthly and 14% at least weekly, therefore most of our feedback reflects the experience of regular users.
- People always (69%) or mostly (23%) use the same pharmacy.
- Other pharmacies are used on occasion for convenience or if needed outside normal opening times.
- Pharmacies are mainly used for prescriptions (37%) and over-the-counter medication (18%).
- People were unaware of the full range of services offered by pharmacies.
- People have made suggestions about additional services that could be provided.

Access

- 93% say pharmacy services are easy to access.
- 70% can get to their main pharmacy within 10 minutes.
- 41% travel by car and 40% go on foot.
- 77% are satisfied or very satisfied with their pharmacy's opening hours.
- Some people would like increased opening – longer hours during the week and at weekends. Also availability of pharmacist during lunchtimes.

- Problems of digital exclusion and ordering of repeat prescriptions raised in earlier feedback during lockdowns seem to have settled. This may be because a range of ordering options are now commonly available and people have found a method that suits them.
- Looking to the future, over half of people (54%) want to be able to visit their pharmacy in person while a third (31%) want to use online services.

Key issues

- Delivery of prescriptions by local pharmacies was greatly valued during the pandemic and continues to be a helpful option for many. Concern about introduction of charges was expressed in our feedback during lockdowns and Healthwatch produced a summary of delivery services in response. This has not been raised as a concern more recently.
- A few people feel that dispensing of prescriptions could be more efficient with all stock available first time. Problems with stock availability have come up intermittently throughout the time period.
- Some people had issues with early prescription requests not being processed and people being unsure when prescriptions would be ready to collect. Text reminders and updates were really helpful to other people
- People with multiple prescriptions to collect say it would be easier if they were synchronised.
- A small number of people say busy waiting areas have been an issue, resulting in long waits and concerns about privacy.
- There was a very small amount of feedback about poor customer service and long waits. In spite of this, it seems people rarely opt to change their nominated practice for receiving electronic prescriptions.

Recommendations

- Access to pharmacies could be improved, particularly for those working office hours, by ensuring a spread of pharmacies across the borough that provide extended opening, lunchtime services and publicising these.
- Wider promotion of the range of services offered by pharmacies.
- Staff should be aware of people's concerns over privacy, especially at busy times, and offer use of consulting room.
- Where possible, synchronise prescriptions for people with multiple items on different repeats or collecting for those they care for.
- Monitoring medication/stock shortages and setting up processes to facilitate access to alternatives.
- Ensure busy times are managed effectively and seating is available. Consider fast track queue for prescription collection, query box for later response etc.
- Consider suggestions for provision of additional services including: dressing changes, trials of health monitoring devices and disability equipment, C-Card for young people to access free condoms, B12 injections, mental health support, free dosette service.
- Consider supporting local pharmacies to offer a free delivery service.

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