

NHS Community Pharmacy Services in Devon

March 2026

Introduction

Significant collaborative work has taken place between NHS Devon, Community Pharmacy Devon, and local councils to develop a [Devon Community Pharmacy Strategic Framework](#).

Published in April 2025, the five-year framework sets out a shared system vision built around four key elements:

- improving access
- strengthening the workforce
- increasing system capacity
- enhancing integration across primary care

A central theme running through all four areas is the expansion of [Pharmacy First](#) consultations, which are designed to improve timely access to care closer to home while releasing additional capacity in general practice to focus on patients with more complex needs and long-term conditions.

Trained pharmacists can provide consultations, treatments and where necessary prescription medication for a range of conditions.

New referral mechanisms within Pharmacy First are also helping to strengthen communication and clinical handover between primary care providers, supporting an increase in appropriate referrals from general practice into community pharmacy.

Alongside this, the workforce skill mix is being actively developed, with pharmacy technicians now delivering flu and COVID vaccinations, undertaking blood pressure checks for the hypertension case-finding service, and providing contraception.

This work collectively supports a more resilient, accessible, and integrated community pharmacy offer for the population of Devon.

Devon Community Pharmacy Strategic Framework

NHS Devon continues to strengthen the role of community pharmacy through a coordinated programme of service development, resilience planning, digital modernisation, workforce strategy, and system-wide integration.

A comprehensive mapping exercise using [Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment \(PNA\)](#) data has identified gaps in both national and locally commissioned services, leading to the commissioning of the Specialist Medicines Service, progress on local Patient Group Directions (PGDs), and ongoing oversight through the Pharmacy First Implementation Group. Patient Group Directions is a legal framework that allows authorised healthcare professionals to supply or administer specified medication to patients without a prescription following a strict set of inclusion/exclusion criteria.

The Community Pharmacy Strategic Framework is now fully aligned with the PNA process, ensuring a consistent and evidence-based approach to future commissioning.

System resilience has been enhanced through a jointly developed support package with [Community Pharmacy Devon](#), alongside workforce wellbeing initiatives such as a resilience workshops, an all-day resilience conference and forthcoming peer support and mentorship programmes. Community Pharmacy Devon is the local voice for all community pharmacies in Devon. They represent over 220 pharmacies across the county.

Modernising ways of working remains a key focus, with the [Booking and Referral Standard \(BaRS\)](#) and [GP Connect](#) introduced in 2025/26 to improve referral and communication pathways between general practice and community pharmacy. Further opportunities—such as hub-and-spoke dispensing, direct booking, and private service development—are being explored for 2026–2029.

Public awareness campaigns promoting national services are already live, with additional campaigns planned for 2026/27 to highlight the roles and capabilities of community pharmacy teams.

System efficiency work is progressing through investment in an electronic repeat dispensing (eRD) Champion to support electronic repeat dispensing, and increased use of the NHS App for repeat prescribing. The system is preparing to respond to emerging opportunities from IT developments and contractual changes between 2026 and 2029.

Workforce planning has progressed significantly, with community pharmacy elements incorporated into the wider primary care workforce strategy and baseline workforce data captured through the community pharmacy survey.

While long-term forecasting of training placement capacity remains challenging, close collaboration with the University of Bath has enabled greater flexibility and a broader range of potential training sites. Devon continues to be a national leader in rotational foundation pharmacist and pharmacy technician apprenticeship placements. Designated Prescribing Practitioner and educational supervisor capacity has expanded, with further growth linked to the commissioning of prescribing services in community pharmacy. Recruitment activity has been strengthened through school engagement, national webinars, and collaboration with Bath University and local acute trusts, contributing to increased student numbers and reduced reliance on clearing. Work to establish communities of practice has had

limited success to date, though the independent prescribing pathfinder programme and “treat and teach” models provide a strong blueprint for future development.

Pharmacy First

Within the Devon Community Pharmacy strategic framework, the system committed to increasing the uptake and utilisation of Pharmacy First services across Devon.

Nearly all pharmacies are actively providing Pharmacy First services.

Against our ambition to deliver a 40% year-on-year increase in Pharmacy First consultations, current activity levels indicate we are on track to exceed this, with a projected 45% year-on-year rise.

This growth reflects both improved access for patients and the strengthening role of community pharmacy in supporting wider system capacity and demand management.

To support the continued growth of Pharmacy First consultations, NHS Devon has maintained investment in Primary Care Network (PCN) Community Pharmacy Leads. Each Primary Care Network has a dedicated pharmacist working within a local community pharmacy who is funded for two days per month to work across both pharmacy and general practice. Their role is to identify and overcome barriers to referrals, strengthen working relationships, and improve understanding of the full range of services that community pharmacies can provide.

NHS Devon appointed a Community Pharmacy PCN Engagement Lead in January 2025 to build on this work and provide system-wide focus, oversight, and coordination across public engagement, GP engagement, and wider system adoption of Pharmacy First. The value of this role has been clearly demonstrated and has been extended for 2026.

This role has supported targeted public awareness campaigns and close collaboration with general practice. Work is also underway to increase referrals from NHS 111, and the system has now received its first referrals from Newton Abbot Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC).

The Community Pharmacy PCN Engagement Lead has been visiting local pharmacies and working with practices involved in the Primary Care Acute Hubs. This has helped ensure that patients are directed to the right place, at the right time, and seen by the right clinician. It has also strengthened mutual understanding of service capacity within community pharmacy and supported more effective use of the skills and services available.

NHS Devon has continued to strengthen GP engagement with Pharmacy First by providing targeted communications, including GP Bulletin updates on the Booking and Referral Standard (BaRS) and direct practice-level emails reinforcing our ambition to have general practices referring at least 0.5% of their practice population to community pharmacy.

Additional communications were issued in October 2025 to align with GP contractual changes and support operational readiness. This sustained approach has contributed to steady month-on-month growth in GP referrals, an increase in 30% from April 2025 to December 2025.

In December 2025, 66% of general practices across Devon were making referrals.

Contraception service

In October 2025 NHS England, expanded the commissioned contraception service beyond the initiation or ongoing supply of oral contraception to include Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC), enabling community pharmacies to offer free contraception to all women of childbearing age.

To support this enhancement, a comprehensive information and FAQ pack was jointly developed by Torbay Council, Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council public health teams, and Community Pharmacy Devon to ensure clarity and consistency for both providers and service users.

NHS Devon's communications team is developing a suite of local assets—including social media graphics, digital screen content, and posters—to raise awareness and support uptake. In addition, the Community Pharmacy PCN Engagement Lead is an attendee at the Women's Health Improvement Group ensuring community pharmacy is fully represented, reinforcing the role of pharmacy services as a key component of the wider women's health improvement agenda.

Hypertension Case Finding Service

Community pharmacies in Devon continue to deliver sustained activity through the Hypertension Case-Finding Service.

Following blood pressure checks in community pharmacy, patients are being escalated for ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM), reflecting effective identification of individuals requiring further assessment, when required.

Under the 2025/26 Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework, all pharmacies are expected to complete at least one ABPM consultation, supporting early detection of hypertension and contributing to the wider cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention agenda.

Current digital systems do not yet enable full triangulation of data to confirm diagnosis outcomes following initial pharmacy checks, and this remains an area for future improvement.

Work is ongoing to strengthen local pathways and expand outreach opportunities—such as delivering checks at rugby fixtures and community wellbeing events—to reach eligible individuals beyond the pharmacy setting. The Community Pharmacy PCN Engagement Lead and Community Pharmacy Devon continue to feed operational insights and progress into the system-wide CVD prevention group,

ensuring alignment with population health priorities and supporting a coordinated approach to cardiovascular risk reduction across the wider Devon system.

Pharmacy First communications campaign

The new NHS Devon Pharmacy First campaign has been contributing to the performance of the pharmacy first service since July 2025 and built on three key pillars:

1. **Supporting people** - to access their pharmacy to access quicker and more convenient access to safe and high-quality healthcare for seven common conditions, without the need for a GP appointment and to free up those appointments for people who need them most.
2. To build **confidence and trust** in people using the pharmacies amongst the audiences that are infrequent users of pharmacy services, or more hesitant groups.
3. **Inclusion and accessibility**: engaging more diverse and hesitant groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, carers, digitally excluded)

With communication objectives to:

- Increase **awareness** that community pharmacy is able to provide clinical advice for seven common conditions
- Increase **knowledge** that community pharmacy is able to provide clinical advice and supply prescription-only medicines for seven common conditions
- Increase **intention** to use community pharmacy for the seven common conditions.

The multi-channel approach, the campaign utilised key messages that included:

- *For the seven common conditions, pharmacists will follow a robust clinical pathway which includes self-care and safety-netting advice and, only if appropriate, supplying a restricted set of prescription only medicines without the need to visit a GP.*
- *Four in five people in England can reach a community pharmacy within a 20-minute walk and there are twice as many pharmacies in the most deprived communities, making access to care quicker and more convenient*
- *The Pharmacy First service continues to free up GP appointments for patients who need them most, with trained pharmacists can provide consultations, treatments and where necessary prescription medication for a range of conditions, without the need to visit a GP.*

The campaign features local pharmacist from across Devon in [short adverts](#) and [films](#) promoting the service, achieving over a quarter of a million views on NHS Devon's YouTube channel.

The same pharmacists have featured on social media, digital and printed adverts, and waiting room screens with condition specific messaging, which now includes the expanded offer around emergency contraception and blood pressure checks.

With a strong Pharmacy First focus over the winter and Easter period, the communication campaign continues into 2026.

New Medicine Service Update

The New Medicine Service (NMS) is designed to support patients with long-term conditions who are newly prescribed specific medicines.

The service provides structured follow-up consultations to help patients understand their treatment, manage early side effects, and improve adherence. Since its introduction in 2011, NMS has become a core element of medicines optimisation in primary care, with strong evidence of improved patient outcomes and reduced medicines-related problems.

Significant updates to the service were implemented nationally in October 2025, including the expansion of NMS to cover depression, enabling pharmacists to support patients newly prescribed antidepressants. This addition reflects national recognition of the role community pharmacy can play in early mental health support, particularly during the initial weeks of treatment when adherence challenges are most common.

A mental health-focused consultation training programme has been incorporated into the Pharmacy Quality Scheme 2025/26, ensuring pharmacy teams have access to appropriate skills development.

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