

Getting your prescriptions – your local pharmacy



"I now have requested for all my medications to be stopped. Reason: - I can't cope anymore with the stress it causes to collect my prescriptions. It is too much. I was made to feel guilty for asking what the problems are"

**Report to commissioners, Thames Valley Pharmacy,
and Oxfordshire Pharmacies. July 2022.**

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1. Executive Summary

Community and NHS pharmacies and their staff have acted as an essential lifeline to Oxfordshire residents, especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and vaccination drive. Described as “*one of the four pillars of primary care*” pharmacies can provide a holistic, community based, professional service which, if used effectively, perform a key function in taking pressure off GP and other primary care services.

From April to June 2022 Healthwatch Oxfordshire held a survey for people in the county to tell us their experiences of getting prescriptions from pharmacies. This was in response to an increase in people telling us they were facing challenges and delays in getting prescriptions from their pharmacy. A total of 469 people gave their views. 92% of total respondents told us they had used the pharmacy within the previous two months.

Of these, 67 were in response to specific local issues in Eynsham, and comments relating to these were separated from overall analysis and explored separately on page 19.

The results outlined in this report, and selected comments from respondents illustrate good practice and care, but also highlight some of the challenges faced at the current time. There are significant pressures on pharmacies, and these inevitably have an impact on service and experience of patients.

Findings from analysis of 390 responses (excluding Eynsham) show:

- Over half (53%) were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” and 35% were either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with their experience of getting prescriptions
- When asked about any issues getting prescriptions we heard:
- 49% responses indicated they had **no problems getting their prescription**
- 29% told us that their **prescription was not ready**, often resulting in multiple visits or long waiting times
- 18% had been told to “**come back later**” often returning on multiple days
- 8% told us that there was “**no pharmacist to dispense my prescription**”, 8% that the “**pharmacy was closed**” 8% “**had to go elsewhere to collect prescription**” again with impact on daily life

(NB: people could indicate more than one choice)

Key insights from all respondents' comments:

- People **valued efficient service, simple process** and clear communication for getting prescriptions. Many commented on the good service from pharmacy staff, with comments that staff were "patient" "kind" and "polite".
- The need for **clear and timely communication with the patient** was clear, particularly around collection, delays, closures, supply or incomplete medications. Without this, patients seemed to be sometimes at the mercy of circumstances beyond their control.
- **Clear lines of communication between GP and pharmacy** was also essential in the chain of events, and including keeping patients informed
- **Clear communication would significantly lessen the impact on patient wellbeing.** People described the impact of the challenges faced in getting prescriptions on their health. "Anxiety" and "stress" was the most common response. Some told us of particular fears, about maintaining stability in health condition, mental health, and increased stress about management of conditions such as cancer, blood pressure, heart, pain and hormone levels.
- People's responses showed that they were **aware of pressures and took responsibility where possible to put coping strategies in place**, to manage uncertainty of prescriptions and "*plan accordingly with my time*". This included ordering well in advance and switching to online orders. However, this was not always possible or successful, and again communication was key to help people manage

Key insight from Eynsham:

- Significant local issues impact on patients using Lloyds Pharmacy in Eynsham, including shortage of pharmacists, closure, and communication issues – and need to be resolved

2. Recommendation

Healthwatch Oxfordshire will convene a roundtable discussion with stakeholders to explore the issues raised in this report.

The following recommendation is made for the attention of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Oxfordshire County Council Public Health. **The written responses to the report and recommendation can be found in the Executive Summary of this report on Healthwatch Oxfordshire website.**

Recommendation:

- **Commissioners to take note of report findings to inform future commissioning and planning of pharmacy services across the county**

In addition, for note by the above commissioners, along with GPs, Primary Care Networks, Thames Valley Pharmacy, and pharmacy providers.

- To take note of the findings of this report
- To take note of insight into specific local issues in Eynsham and continue to work to seek a resolution
- Communication with patients, as highlighted in this report, is key throughout the process of ordering and collecting medications. Patients need to be part of the communication loop to enable them to plan and manage their own health. This includes communication between GPs and pharmacies

This report builds on Healthwatch Oxfordshire's previous report on experiences of Oxfordshire's pharmacy services (2021), from which recommendations were accepted as part of the Oxfordshire Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, published in March 2022 by Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

3. Background

This insight work into prescriptions was driven by an increase in enquiries to Healthwatch Oxfordshire in early 2022, along with rising service review comments, and concerns raised to us by the public. Some told us they were facing challenges and delays in getting prescriptions from their pharmacy. We also drew on insights from Enter and View visits to pharmacies in West Oxfordshire at the time.

This report focuses solely on what people told us about getting prescriptions. It does not focus on the wider services and support offered by pharmacies, or on the initial ordering process.

Community and NHS pharmacies and their staff have acted as an essential lifeline to Oxfordshire residents, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and vaccination drive. Described as *"one of the four pillars of primary care"* pharmacies can provide a holistic, community based, professional service which, if used effectively, can perform a key function in taking pressure off GP and other primary care services. They also play a role in delivery of improved public health

and prevention, health support and advice to the local community. Community pharmacies will continue to play a key role as outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan and as structures change towards Integrated Care Systems (ICS) as outlined in NHS Health and Care Act (2022) reforms.

Commissioning pharmacy services in the county

Pharmacy services and support are delivered via a range of settings including community (retail) pharmacies, some online, or as part of GP practices. Primary Care Networks have had clinical pharmacist roles within their teams since 2019, commissioned by NHS England, but their role is not usually to prescribe.

Community pharmacies in England are commissioned and contracted under the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework, which sets guidelines and standards for their service.

As of June 2022, commissioning of essential, targeted and advanced pharmacy services and prevention in the county is via a combination of routes, including NHS England, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Oxfordshire County Council Public Health.

From 1st July 2022, commissioning and oversight responsibility for pharmacy services will transfer from NHS England and the Clinical Commissioning Group to the Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board. This board will be functional from 1st July 2022, and Clinical Commissioning Groups will cease to exist, (following legislation under the additional Health and Care Act, March 2022). The recommissioning of the pharmacy services contract will begin in 2023.

Pharmacy in Oxfordshire

A *Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment* for Oxfordshire was published in April 2022. This is a statutory report produced by the local Health and Well Being Board at least every three years. A needs assessment enables commissioners and health decision makers to evaluate and review community pharmacy services, and identify gaps in provision, and ensure they can plan to meet the needs of their growing population. It sets the service within the strategic context, including population growth and needs, health commissioning and oversight structures.

The report identified 105 community pharmacies serving Oxfordshire residents, including independent businesses and larger providers, along with 2 remote internet providers. Some sit outside the county boundaries but serve Oxfordshire. 26 GP practices in the county are recognised as 'dispensing practices'. A total of 11,739,221 prescriptions were issued by Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group GPs and dispensed to patients from March 2020- April 2021; a significant proportion of which was provided through local pharmacies.

Gaps in access and provision were assessed. This maps access criteria for patients to be within 20 minutes' drive or within a 5 miles radius of at least one

pharmacy. Whilst the report found that cover for service in Oxfordshire was overall good, stating, *"no parts of Oxfordshire are considered to have gap status"*, it did highlight need for more choice in Oxford City Centre, and noted that additional cover in Upper Heyford had already been agreed by NHS England South-East due to expanding housing growth. The report noted there may be "future need" to the West of Didcot, which would be reassessed in a future pharmaceutical needs assessment, once development here matures and demand for services can be better understood.

The needs assessment adopted recommendations found in Healthwatch Oxfordshire's previous report *"Using pharmacies"*, published in May 2021. This was based on views of 370 people given from May to September 2020. This report can be seen here: <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/report/using-pharmacies-in-oxfordshire-in-2020-may-2021/> It included recommendations for improved communication with the public around functions and role of community pharmacies and need for services to gain better feedback from people using pharmacies.

Of particular relevance, the needs assessment (p.17) also accepted a Healthwatch Oxfordshire recommendation from the report, resulting in action for commissioners to:

(vii) Address issues highlighted with repeat prescriptions including delays, medication errors, and reliability of the service

It is this aspect of the service that this report now covers below.

Pressures on pharmacy

National and local pressures on the NHS, GPs, pharmacies, staff availability and medicines supply, have been highlighted along with impact on patients. There is a national shortage of trained pharmacists and added demand as Primary Care Networks have recruited to the role. The causes are complex and system wide, and some beyond the control of local solutions.

A survey in 2022 carried out by the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (of over 5000 pharmacy premises) found challenges to staff recruitment, retention and cover, stress and wellbeing, impact of COVID, increased demand and customer abuse, along with funding and financial pressures on the business model. They noted impact on their customers, with increased time taken to give prescriptions, and noting 91% of pharmacies had staff shortages, with *"two-thirds of pharmacies have had to cut back on services or the advice they offer to people, and 29% have had to reduce their opening hours"* described as a *"last resort"*.

Medicines supply and shortages has also been challenging, (Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) for women being an example), leading to recently

updated government regulatory processes to try and manage supply, provision and access of certain medicines.

These pressures and concerns have also been echoed by the local community pharmacy representative body, Thames Valley Pharmacy.

The Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework sets out clear guidance for planning and action in the absence of a pharmacist, including ensuring that a person can collect medication elsewhere, and provision of temporary cover. However, prescriptions cannot be dispensed without a pharmacist on the premises and providing locum cover can be a challenge.

4. Methods

Healthwatch Oxfordshire held an online survey open from April to June 2022. This was promoted via our website, social media, local voluntary sector links, local newsletters, Patient Participation Groups and via health and care commissioners and providers. Paper surveys were also provided on request, with FREEPOST envelopes.

We attended Oxford's Eid Extravaganza, giving out 100 surveys in paper form with Healthwatch Oxfordshire information and speaking to members of the public.

The survey was extended to stay open in June to address lower uptake of the survey by residents of Oxford, and those from ethnicities other than white British. We spent time in out on streets in face-to-face outreach, basing ourselves near pharmacies at Headington, Cowley retail and Cowley shopping centres, Manzil Way and Rose Hill. We also promoted the survey again via Oxford networks.

5. Results

The survey received 469 responses (460 complete and 9 partially). Of these, 67 were comments relating to Eynsham pharmacy (Lloyds), in response to specific local issues, and leading to our Enter and View focus in the area.

People may often take time to fill in surveys when it reflects a particular experience or issue they are facing – often a problem or concern – and when they are wanting their comments to be heard. Whilst acknowledging this, the survey

responses served to give a good insight into the current challenges faced in getting prescriptions. 92% of respondents had used the pharmacy in the previous 1-2 months. Responses represented use of both smaller independent, bigger chains, and medical centre-based pharmacies. 9 respondents used an online pharmacy.

Information provided below on demographics, (including ethnicity, gender and age) includes *total* survey respondents (including Eynsham). To avoid skewing the results, we then removed Eynsham when creating additional graphs based on sentiment. Specific insight and comments about Eynsham have been handled separately and can be found on page 20.

In reviewing comments and views, *all* were reviewed to develop and report narrative *themes*, including those from Eynsham. A choice of comments is used to best illustrate themes but represent similar sentiments of the many comments that we had from respondents.

Who did we hear from?

Of all survey results, including Eynsham responses, the following demographics were noted:

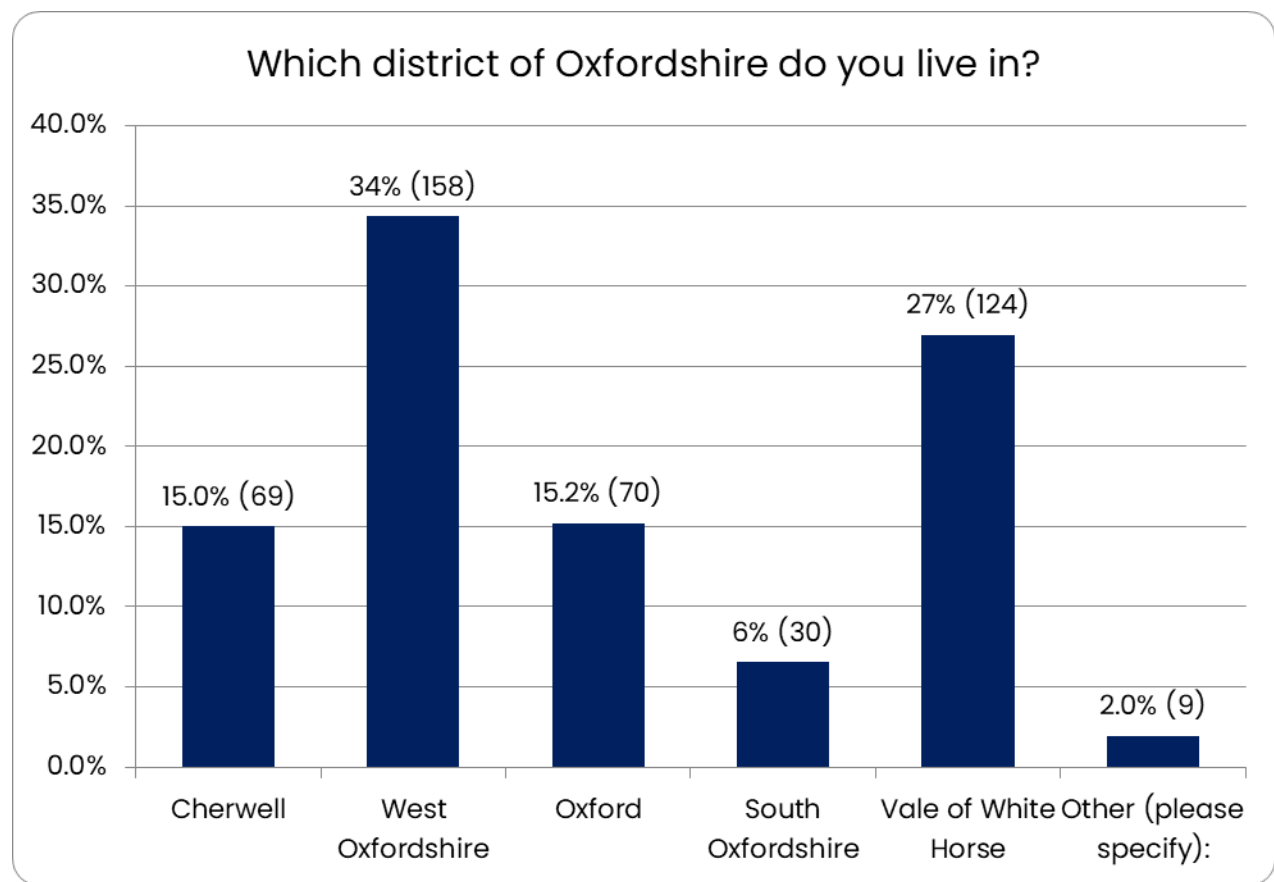
Age and number of respondents	18-24 (4)	25-49 (74)	50-64 (147)	65-79 (184)	80 over (43)	prefer not to say (9).
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Gender: Woman (312), Man (135), Prefer not to say (11) Self describe (3).

Ethnicity

Responses are near to being representative of population of Oxfordshire including 16% ethnic minority percentage in the county named in the 2011 census (JSNA). Responses included people describing their ethnicity as Arab (3), Asian/ Asian British Chinese (2), Asian/ Asian British Indian (4), Asian/Asian British Pakistani (4), Black Black/ British African (17), Black/ Black British Caribbean (5), Black British any other background (1), Mixed/multiple ethnic (1), White British (374), White any other white background (23), White Irish (3), Prefer not to say (16) and the remaining self-described.

District



(District location – all respondents)

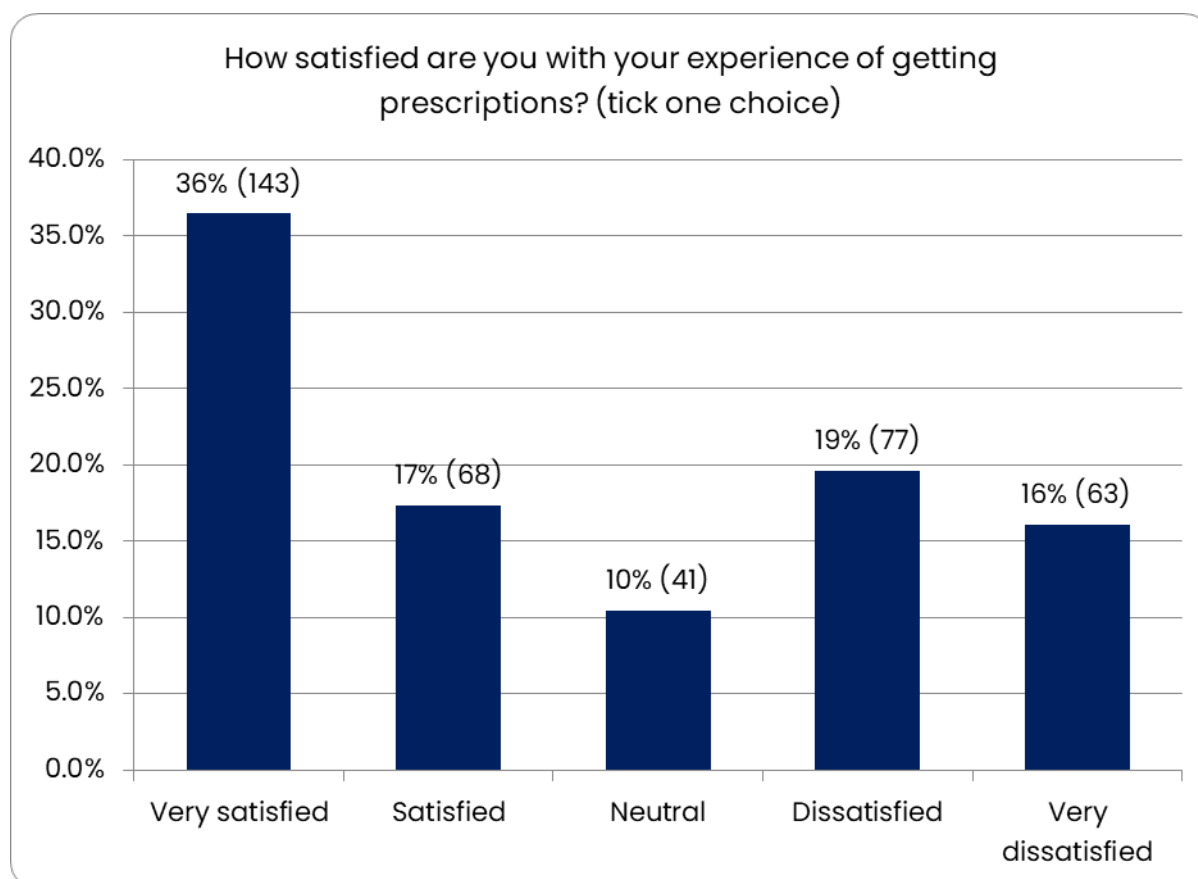
The high number of responses from West Oxfordshire reflects the specific local concerns as noted above.

Respondents heard about the survey via a range of sources: Healthwatch Oxfordshire newsletter and website (124), Patient Participation Groups or GP surgery (93), via social media (163), local newsletters and websites (23) and 28 were reached on the streets, with the rest via direct friend or community contacts.

Reach: Ensuring survey responses are representative of Oxfordshire demographics is a core priority, and we need to continue to improve uptake. We actively work in different ways to ensure a mix of voices is heard, including gathering views through other methods than surveys, and through targeted focus and on the street survey promotion.

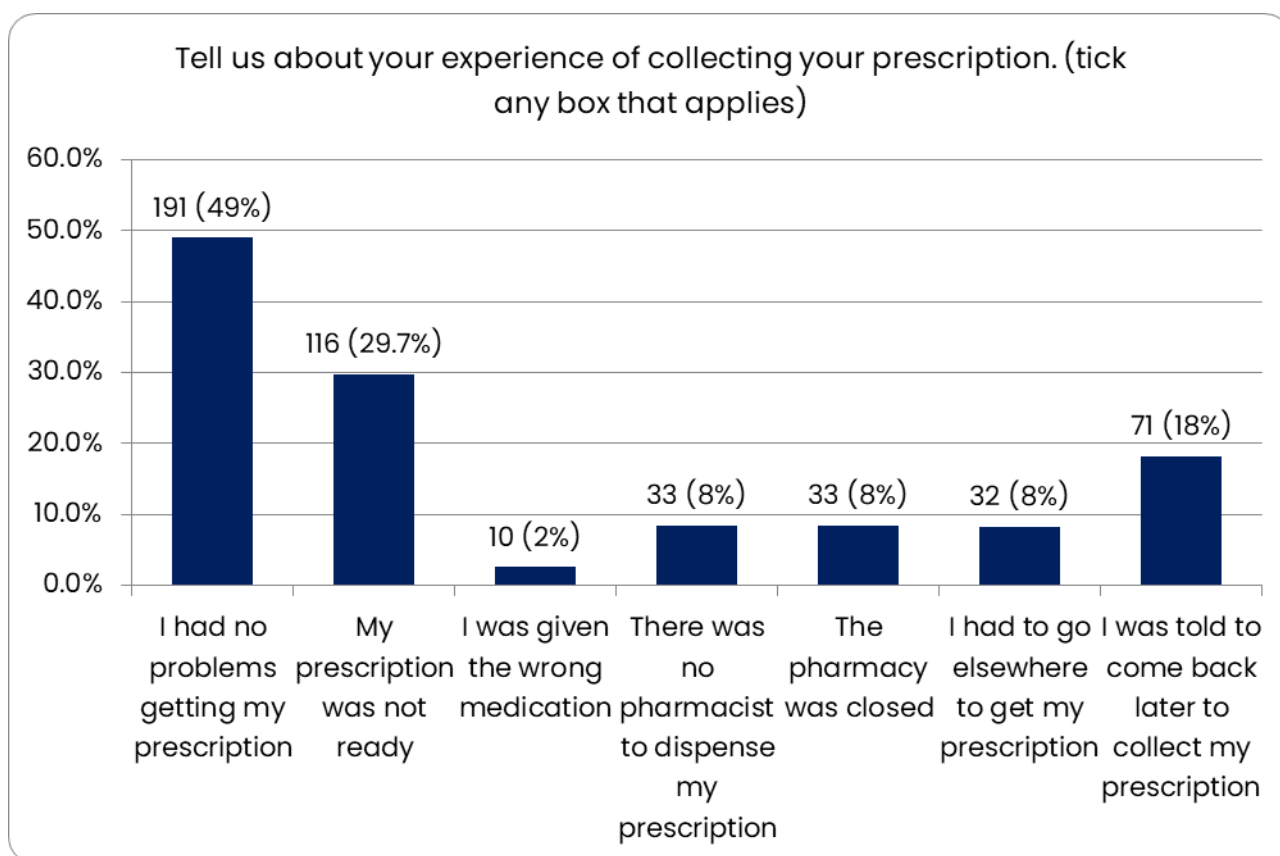
6. What people told us

Q.9 asked people to tell us **how satisfied they were with their experience of getting a prescription**, with over half (53%) “very satisfied” or “satisfied” and 35% either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.



(Q 9. Based on 392 responses excluding Eynsham)

Comments responding to Q.6 set these sentiments in context. We asked people to tell us about their **experience of getting a prescription**, giving a selection of choices, (of which they could choose more than one).



(Q 6. 390 respondents excluding Eynsham)

Of 390 responses (excluding Eynsham) 49% responses showed they had **no problems getting their prescription**, commenting on the ease of using the Patient Access App, good communication, helpful staff and simple ordering process. Those who noted no problems, held positive views and were either “very satisfied”, “satisfied” or a few “neutral” with the service for getting prescriptions.

“Love this pharmacy. Prescription always ready”

“Ordering repeat prescriptions using the Patient Access app, is very efficient and effective”.

“A very smooth process from placing repeat prescription request with my GP via NHS App to collecting it from the pharmacy - well done all!”

“Ordering my repeat prescription has always been very easy and pleasant :) I order the prescription online, receive a text confirming it's ready and then collect. Never had to wait for too long and the ladies who deliver my prescription are always very lovely”

“Stress free and delivery service if necessary”

A further 73% of responses cumulatively, noted some challenges with prescriptions.

29% told us that their **prescription was not ready**, often resulting in multiple visits or long waiting times.

"Having to stand in a queue for at least 30 mins to be told they don't have the script, or insufficient to cover the script. Or it's not ready. Happens so regularly we have given up using this pharmacy and now use one in the next village"

"Was told on phone prescription was ready – when asked for in pharmacy was told not ready or had to get it in – several times"

18% had been told to **"come back later"** and collect the prescription – not always convenient.

"For urgent antibiotics, I waited over 24 hrs for the pharmacy to reopen. Tuesday-Thursday. And then waited for over an hour in the pharmacy for the antibiotics to be dispensed. While feeling extremely unwell".

"I have had to queue to ask for the prescription, then been sent away for 20 minutes while it was dispensed, although it was sent electronically days before"

"On numerous occasions they have taken payment before checking stock and refused to refund requesting I come back another day. I now drive an extra 5 miles to go elsewhere to avoid this pharmacy"

"Due to staff shortages and huge backlogs, I have had great difficulty getting my medication recently. My elected pharmacy was so short staffed that they were closing early or asking queueing customers to come back another day"

For carers of family members, those working, living at a distance, older or disabled, having to come back repeatedly could have considerable impact on daily life.

"As the son (of elderly mother) it has been a big disruption on my working week as have to keep coming back to see if her prescription is there"

"It is difficult and dispiriting. I am registered blind and have to travel about 3.5 miles to collect. I can't drive so can't easily just 'pop back later' "

One person over 80, commented that they were *"Very weary after making wasted journeys"*.

8% told us that there was **"no pharmacist to dispense my prescription"**

"Often there's no pharmacist, queues are 45 min, prescriptions approved weeks ago not ready, a chaotic system so the staff can't find anything"

"Most times I visit there is always a big queue and even though it was sent over a week ago, I have to wait for them to dispense and check it. They've started closing 1-2 which is lunchtime when I could collect and have randomly been closed for a whole day"

8% also told us that they couldn't get their prescription as the **"pharmacy was closed"**.

"So disorganised, my prescription is never ready even if I order it two weeks in advance. They often don't have a pharmacist so are effectively shut as they can't give you your prescription"

"Too often this pharmacy is closed as it seems to have trouble getting a pharmacist working there. They also won't do repeat prescriptions"

"Being closed on a weekend is frustrating and at Easter I thought that they might make an exception - no. They were closed from the Thursday through to the following Tuesday. I had to go elsewhere - not for the first time"

8% also noted that they had been asked to **"go elsewhere to collect their prescription"**. This can be the process followed when there is not a pharmacist on site to dispense, or medicines are not available, and a person is signposted to another pharmacy nearby. Prescriptions information are available to pharmacists via the Electronic Prescriptions Service (EPS) on the NHS 'spine' - the digital central point allowing the exchange of information across local and national NHS systems. However, some still rely on paper prescriptions via the GP.

"I have three medications. They were unable to supply the one I need most urgently so they gave me a paper prescription for all three to take to another pharmacy"

Going elsewhere to get prescriptions was not always successful. Of 96 responses who had been asked to go elsewhere, 65% had been successful, but 35% had not been successful, some described frustration and delays including missing out on medicines.

"I tried a different pharmacy located in my local supermarket but they were also unable to provide my medication due to staff shortages. I was given a paper copy of my prescription and advised to go elsewhere"

"I shouldn't of had to ring around searching for the product elsewhere"

"I had to get an emergency prescription elsewhere because my branch was closed (no pharmacist) & I had run out of medication having waited over a week for delivery and they did not answer the phone"

Wrong medication

A small number of people (2%) told us they had been given the wrong medication, or that mistakes had been made.

"Given wrong medication, luckily checked the item before leaving. similar coloured pack as my correct meds but completely different drug & wrong dosage. Did apologise but Pharmacist did not seem overly concerned. I think the

robotic dispenser had been wrongly loaded but does not excuse for not being checked when packaging up"

"One of my medicines was missed completely. I contacted the surgery and three days later I am still waiting. I ran out of this tablet two days ago. I was given two medications I hadn't had for four months"

Shortages of medications

Across the responses, some people noted shortage or supply issues with some medications. Hormone replacement therapies (HRT) particularly were noted, mirroring the national picture.

"Oestrogel is out of stock and has been for over 3 months. I've asked to be notified and kept up to date and nothing. I know the cause is supply and demand but there has been plenty of time to make more. In desperation I've managed to find some from various private medical suppliers at very high cost. I don't understand why private and independent pharmacies are managing to get stock but local pharmacies are not"

"Half of my medication was ready, half was not due to supply issues, I understand this happens and is not the pharmacy fault however if they had informed me, I could have requested that a GP prescribe an alternative"

Impact of challenges on health and wellbeing

People described the impacts of the challenges faced in getting prescriptions on their health- both mental and physical. "Anxiety" and "stress" was the most common response. Some told us of particular fears about maintaining stability in health condition, mental health, and increased stress about conditions such as cancer, blood pressure, heart, and hormone levels. Some noted increased pain, or inability to manage pain without medications. Some felt impacts of delays or missed prescriptions could be potentially "life threatening".

"It stressed me a lot and gave me severe pain, I was 😞 exhausted"

"Needless worry and stress that as an 80 year old I do not need"

"I felt anxious as the medication I'm taking cannot just be missed, it causes unpleasant side effects if this happens"



Word-cloud of people's sentiments: impact on health of challenges of getting prescriptions

7. Overarching themes

Process of getting prescriptions

Some responses highlighted the process of ordering prescriptions. People valued simple process and clear communication.

"Log on to NHS app and reorder prescription. Within a couple of days, get a text telling me prescription is ready to collect. BRILLIANT!!!"

"Electronic submissions each time from GP or repeat via my app request. Always timely from chemist (even the high quantity and awkward medications). They are very friendly and helpful each visit"

"Currently because the prescription is a regular one, I can ring the pharmacy to tell them what is required. The pharmacy then requests authorisation from the Doctor/ surgery"

"If one telephones to ask if the prescription is ready and they say yes, this does not mean it's ready to collect. - 'Ready' simply seems to mean that it has been collated, but not necessarily approved by the pharmacist- On more than one occasion I had driven to collect my prescription having been told it was ready; to then be told to come back as the pharmacist needs to approve it"

Waiting to collect prescriptions could be stressful, many responses spoke of long waiting times and queues at pharmacies,

"I have to wait about a week from submitting my prescription request to my prescription being available to collect. There appears to be an overlong delay"

between my submission and getting a GP's signature, and then another overlong delay between that signed prescription being transmitted to the Pharmacy. I use the NHS app"

"Having to stand in a queue for at least 30 mins to be told the don't have the script, or insufficient to cover the script"

A number of people noted concerns with social distancing in queues.

Not everyone was able to manage online process.

"My only complaint is that they don't print repeats, my mum is 90 and can't do things online so each time I have to ask for them to be printed"

Communication with pharmacy

Whilst the process worked well for many, the need for clear and timely communication with the patient was clear, particularly around timing, delays, supply or incomplete medications.

"The pharmacy is very proactive, and texts to confirm that prescriptions are ready. It liaises with GP practice in the event of shortages, and the staff are extremely helpful in arranging for alternatives. They will even 'advance' medication when urgent and can view the prescription"

Clear lines of communication from pharmacy and between GP and pharmacy was also essential in the chain of events, and in keeping patients informed.

"Main issues are you are told by pharmacy to order at least 5 to 7 days before you run out but GP will not issue like that if they think you are ordering too soon so you can't win. Then if GP doesn't see the request on same day you can wait up 4 days before the pharmacy see it then add their 5 to 7 days on top so I'm always at risk of running out which causes anxiety!"

"Problem of having no good communication between pharmacy and doctors... one saying they had sent to doctor then doctors saying they had not received prescription"

"Lack of communication appears to be a problem, one person will inform the medication will be ready for collection, for example, in 5 days time then it's not"

Following up information on phone could be a challenge, and frustrating for patients.

"It's farcical. Not only is my pharmacy not keeping me up to date, just like the GPs, it's impossible to get through to ever speak to anyone"

"My biggest issue was getting another prescription from my GP. Due to staff shortages unable to speak to anyone on the phone Answer machine so I had to go to the surgery. The issue after that was dealt with that day and new prescription sent up electronically to pharmacy"

"Trying to phone through in advance to check on availability can be frustrating"

One person who faced supply issues with medications commented.

"I was promised a telephone call to inform me if they had secured the prescription or if an alternative had been prescribed, however this didn't happen and I had to call the health centre as the pharmacy phone was off"

Impact of staff pressure

Many commented on the good service from pharmacy staff, with comments that staff were "patient" "kind" and "polite". However, a number of comments revealed people's awareness of stresses including staff shortages, leading to disorganised premises, stressed and sometimes impatient staff.

"Very understaffed, long queue almost out of the door. Nobody answers the telephone"

"... worried about the pressure on staff with no one to relieve them for breaks"

Coping strategies

People's responses showed that they were aware of pressures and took responsibility where possible to put coping strategies in place to manage uncertainty of prescriptions.

Some noted they had changed to online prescriptions orders.

"No longer collect. Use pharmacy by post. 100% reliable"

"... running out of regular medication despite submitting request weeks in advance, have now switched to online pharmacy which is brilliant"

Others made sure they ordered the medications well in advance to try and avoid problems and delay and to *"plan accordingly with my time"*

"I always try to collect after 10 days to ensure it's there"

However, this was not always successful, and again communication was important.

"Despite ordering medication more than 2 weeks in advance it was never ready when I went to collect it. They spent ages finding the prescription always saying it was someone else's fault – e.g. me, the GP"

One person told us they had stopped ordering altogether...

"I now have requested for all my medications to be stopped. Reason: – I can't cope anymore with the stress it causes to collect my prescriptions. It is too much. I was made to feel guilty for asking what the problems are"

8. Eynsham

People using Eynsham Medical Centre and living in Eynsham can get their prescriptions from Lloyds Pharmacy in the village. Those who live further afield, in more rural areas, beyond 1.5 miles can get prescriptions from the medical centre dispensary.

Eynsham has faced specific localised issues in the past year, partly due to staff shortages at Lloyds pharmacy. There has been some closure of the pharmacy in absence of pharmacists and other staff and when it was not possible to find cover. This has impacted on patient service and prescriptions, as well as placing additional pressure on Eynsham medical centre dispensary. As a result of these issues, we heard from 67 people using Lloyds in Eynsham. 93% had used the pharmacy in the last two months.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire is aware of the challenges and has been in dialogue with the providers, the medical centre and commissioners. An Enter and View report for Lloyds Pharmacy, Eynsham will be available on the Healthwatch Oxfordshire website <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-work/enter-and-view-reports/>

Comments echoed themes outlined in the report above, but clearly people were facing significant challenges. 88% respondents told us they were either “very dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied” with their experience of getting prescriptions. They voiced huge frustrations with service, including finding *pharmacy closed* (37%), *no pharmacist on site* to dispense (34%), told to *come back later* (45%) or *go elsewhere* (11%) and *prescription not ready* (54%). People spoke of long queues and delays, and poor communication. Many spoke of increased stress and anxiety, and significant impacts on their daily lives.

“The pharmacy often doesn't have a pharmacist onsite, meaning that I am unable to collect prescriptions for both myself and my frail elderly parents. The pharmacy appears to close suddenly with no warning, and when it is open, the service is incredibly slow. This often means a queue builds outside, with elderly people having to stand for extended periods of time in all weather conditions”

“very long queues to collect prescriptions and sometimes a 'one on one out' locked door policy”

“Waiting times are ridiculous and the telephone is rarely picked up as the staff are too busy”

One person outlined the time-consuming process they had to take to get their medications at Lloyds.

"I was given a prescription for two lots of medication from my GP, I went to the pharmacy and they only had one item in stock and needed to order the second item. I left without any medication. The next working day I went to the pharmacy and after waiting 20 minutes I was told the pharmacist had gone to lunch and to come back. I returned again another day but the queue was about 10 people outside on the pavement, so I gave it a miss. I went on the next day and after a 30 minute wait (outside then inside) I was told the item they had ordered had not come in and they needed to reorder. Following day still no medication (after a 45 minute wait) so I asked for my script back and I went to Witney. The pharmacist in Witney couldn't dispense my medication as Eynsham had already ordered it so I went back and arranged for me to collect it from Long Hanborough pharmacy"

Some of those who were able were changing to online orders or going elsewhere. We will share the results of this survey with the provider concerned.

9. Summary of what we heard

The results outlined in this report, and selected comments from respondents illustrate some good practice and care, but also highlight the challenges faced at the current time. There are significant pressures on pharmacies, and these inevitably have an impact on service and experience of patients.

Key insights from all respondents' comments:

- People **valued efficient service, simple process** for getting prescriptions and clear communication. Many commented on the good service from pharmacy staff, with comments that staff were "patient" "kind" and "polite"
- The need for **clear and timely communication with the patient** was clear, particularly around collection, delays, closures, supply or incomplete medications. Without this, patients seemed to be sometimes at the mercy of circumstances beyond their control
- **Clear lines of communication between GP and pharmacy** were also essential in the chain of events, and including keeping patients informed
- **Clear communication would significantly lessen the impact on patient wellbeing.** People described the impact of the challenges faced in getting prescriptions on their health. "Anxiety" and "stress" was the most common response. Some told us of particular fears about maintaining stability in health condition, mental health, and increased stress about managing conditions such as cancer, blood pressure, heart, pain and hormone levels

- People's responses showed that they were **aware of pressures and took responsibility where possible to put coping strategies in place**, to manage uncertainty of prescriptions and *"plan accordingly with my time"*. This included ordering well in advance, and switching to online orders. However, this was not always possible or successful, and again communication was key to help people manage.

Key insight from Eynsham

- Significant local issues in Eynsham impact on patients using Lloyds Pharmacy and need to be resolved.

10. Recommendation

Healthwatch Oxfordshire will convene a roundtable discussion with stakeholders to explore the issues raised in this report.

The following recommendation is made for the attention of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Oxfordshire County Council Public Health:

Recommendation:

- **Commissioners to take note of report findings to inform future commissioning and planning of pharmacy services across the county**

Their responses can be found in the Executive Summary of this report on Healthwatch Oxfordshire website.

And **for note** by the above commissioners, along with GPs, Primary Care Networks, Thames Valley Pharmacy, and pharmacy providers:

- Note of the findings of this report
- Note of insight into specific local issues in Eynsham and continue to work to seek a resolution
- Note communication with patients, as highlighted in this report, is key throughout the process of ordering and collecting medications. Patients need to be part of the communication loop to enable them to plan and manage their own health. This includes communication between GPs and pharmacies

This report builds on Healthwatch Oxfordshire's previous report on experiences of Oxfordshire's pharmacy services (2021), from which recommendations were accepted as part of the Oxfordshire Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, published in March 2022 by Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

11. One person's story

Observations from recent personal experiences of collecting complex medications...

"I am frequently in the pharmacy collecting complex medications for my wife, and my experience of what is happening here echoes across the county.

Recently I have seen the pharmacy struggling with the demands of the rising population within the area. That rising demand has been met with the closure of 2 pharmacies in the town and the creation of one new one on a new estate.

The medical centre branch was built when the centre had circa 5,000 patients. It now has 17,500. It is a very small space which limits the numbers of staff it can effectively employ. Usually there are 2 serving, one on the script computer, and a pharmacist. The physical volume of collated prescriptions continually threatens to overwhelm them, with orderly racking having to make way for stacks on floor space. Much time is taken simply trying to find the patient's prescription.

In the years 2005–2009 a single pharmacist provided consistent and informed leadership, knowing many of patients and their problems. After they retired things went downhill on a steady basis. In the last 12-months there have been many different pharmacists employed there, and times when none was available at all, necessitating the random closure of the premises.

Now demands are at their highest levels, there are less pharmacists, and my observation is that those that are there would struggle to handle one to one patient consultations, under current workloads.

During the pandemic, I fully expected that we would see supplies of medication becoming depleted, but this did not happen at scale. This year, that has changed, and medications are in short supply. I spent 2 half hour sessions in the pharmacy trying to get my wife's monthly order fulfilled. This gave me ample time to watch what was happening around me:

In the first session, I watched as 10 customers were served. Of those, 3 were told their scripts were not ready. 3 went away happy customers. 4 had shortages of supply on one or more medications. These 4 took up a lot of staff time as people got agitated and further attempts were made to find solutions, which did not exist. They were all told to speak to their doctors to see if alternatives could be prescribed or to seek supplies elsewhere, and in the case of very old and infirm customers, it was clear they were overwhelmed by frustration and stress.

The second day was similar but one elderly man, who was seated throughout, waited for over 30-minutes only to be told that one of his requirements was “unavailable” at the wholesaler. He staggered to his feet and tried to understand what he was being told and what he should do. He was simply frightened by the implications, and I wondered how he would cope when he left the premises.

In my case I had to manage the collation of my wife’s medication by leading the staff through what was missing (they didn’t know) and in the end the pharmacist went around picking up boxes and gave them to me, after labelling.

Over the last 6-months I have turned up four times only to find the pharmacy unable to operate through lack of a pharmacist. On these occasions it was unclear when normal service would be resumed, so one had to take potluck and keep calling.

I know the staff well and they were doing the best that they could and were tired and stressed, but always polite to customers. Watching them in action I can understand why pharmacies are routinely struggling to get replacements for those who leave”.

12. Acknowledgements

Thanks to all who took the time to respond to us and tell us about their experiences via survey, face to face and in other ways. What you have told us will be used to improve the service for others.

13. References

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Pharmacy Services Negotiating Committee <https://psnc.org.uk/> for report on Pharmacy Needs (2022)

Pharmacy Thames Valley <https://pharmacythamesvalley.org.uk/> for overview and outline of current commissioned services
<https://pharmacythamesvalley.org.uk/commissioned-services/oxon-locally-commissioned-services/> (represents 258 community pharmacies in the Thames Valley).

Healthwatch Oxfordshire – our friendly staff are here for you to help answer questions or give you information on health and care services in Oxfordshire. If you need more information or advice, call us on **01865 520520** from 9–4 p.m. Monday to Friday

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01865 520520



hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk