

Community Pharmacies Survey

A report by Healthwatch Harrow



December 2022

“They were a lifeline during the pandemic.

They are under appreciated, and very important when it’s difficult to access GP services.”

Local Resident

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1. Introduction

What is Community Pharmacy?

Community pharmacies have over the years been seen as being increasingly more accessible to the community because they are visible on our highstreets and in our supermarkets. They are pharmacies not located in clinical settings (such as hospitals).

In Harrow there is a mix of independent pharmacies and pharmacies that are part of a national chain like Boots and Superdrug.

The community pharmacies have varying opening hours and some of them close as late as 10pm and open 7 days a week.

Survey Context

With the increasing pressure on the NHS, such as longer waiting times for routine appointments and consultations, community pharmacies can provide an important supporting role, in offering clinical advice, routine vaccinations and potentially other services as well - such as health checks.

We surveyed local people, to assess whether they have a community pharmacy on their doorstep, know how to access them out-of-hours (evenings and weekends), which services they currently access through their pharmacy, and preference for additional services. Participants also had the opportunity to share their general views and experiences.

To close the survey, we obtained feedback about GP prescribing (such as experiences of medication renewals and reviews).

The information collected offers insight as to what local people experience, and expect of their community pharmacies, and alongside other intelligence gathered by Healthwatch Harrow, particularly on GP and acute care services, will aide the commissioning and provision of local services.

2. Executive Summary of Findings

During Autumn 2022, 69 local people completed our survey on community pharmacies.

This page summarises key findings - see section 3 for findings in full.

Survey Response - In Summary

Community Pharmacies

- A clear majority of respondents (91%) live within walking distance of a community pharmacy.
- Just a fifth (20%) say they know how to access out-of-hours (late night) pharmacy services.
- Two thirds of respondents (67%) trust their pharmacist to give advice on medical issues.
- On services received, a broad majority (85%) use their pharmacy for prescriptions, with a notable 30% receiving vaccinations. Health advice and blood pressure checks are also utilised. Health checks, which are generally not offered, would be a welcome addition for some.
- Staff are commented to be helpful, with telephone access, delivery services and extended opening hours appreciated.
- While a majority of respondents are happy to access advice, others doubt levels of training and qualifications, with staff turnover (limited continuity) and lack of privacy in-store also said to reduce confidence in asking questions.
- It is felt that pharmacies could 'do more' to help relieve pressure on GPs.

GP Prescribing

- A broad majority of respondents (87%) are prescribed medication from their GP.
- Systems for medication renewals are generally considered to be 'easy and reliable' with online and more traditional (paper form) methods cited.
- While newer systems are said to be 'working well', it is also commented that GP and pharmacy prescribing is 'not joined up' and that staff are not always conversant with the process - leading to mistakes, inconvenience if having to chase-up, and delays.
- Many have said that obtaining a review appointment is difficult, particularly those with a face-to-face preference.
- It can also be a challenge to manage timings, with some now finding it 'harder' than before to remember when, for example, to renew.

3. Our Survey - Analysis of Feedback

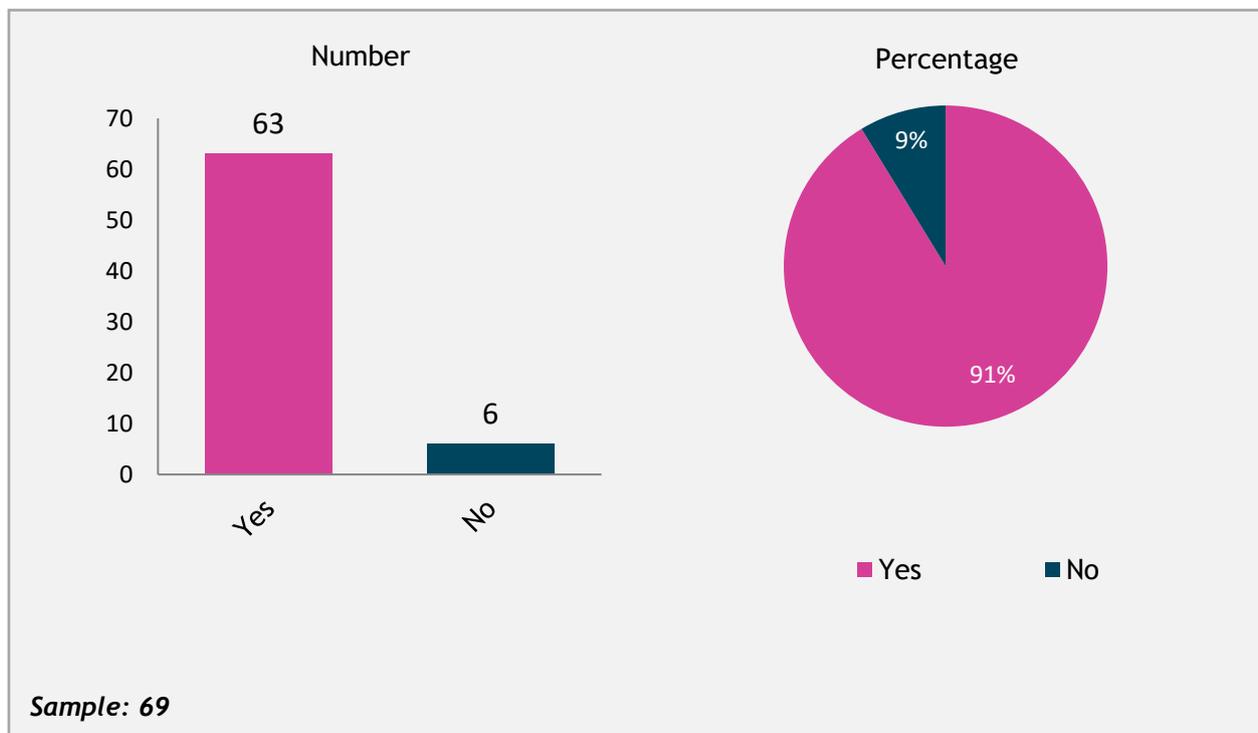
During Autumn 2022, 69 local people completed our survey on community pharmacies.

A 'community pharmacy' is typically a service not in a clinical setting (such as a hospital) and widely includes local services in high streets, supermarkets and other community spaces.

We asked questions around access, medical and clinical advice, which services are currently utilised and preference for additional services. Participants also had the opportunity to share their general views and experiences.

To close the survey, we obtained feedback about GP prescribing (such as experiences of medication renewals and reviews).

3.1 Do you live within walking distance of a community pharmacy?



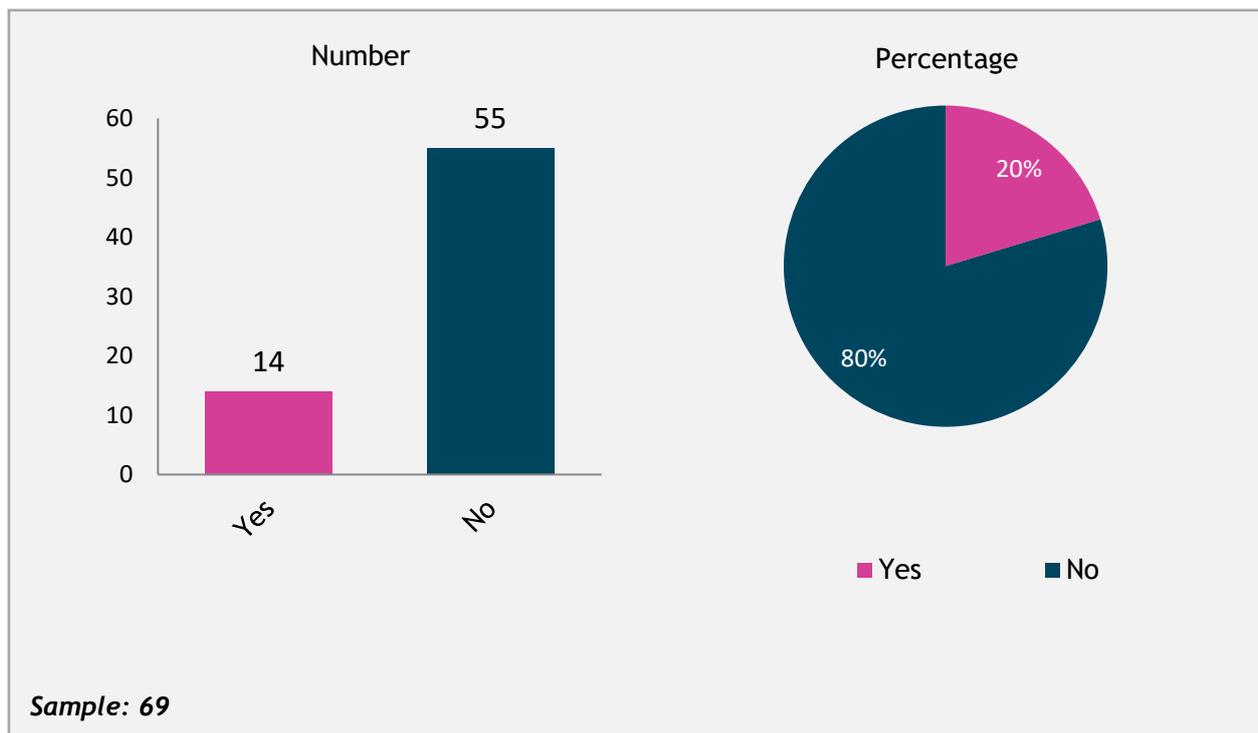
A clear majority of respondents (91%) live within walking distance of a community pharmacy.

3.1.1 By Postcode: Live within distance of a community pharmacy

		%
	HA1	100%
	HA2	100%
	HA8	100%
	HA9	100%
	HA3	93%
	HA5	93%
	All Respondents (Baseline)	91%
	HA7	67%

When looking at responses by locality, we find that those living in HA7 are least likely to live within walking distance (this is based on a limited volume of feedback).

3.2 Do you know how to access out-of-hours (late night) pharmacy services?



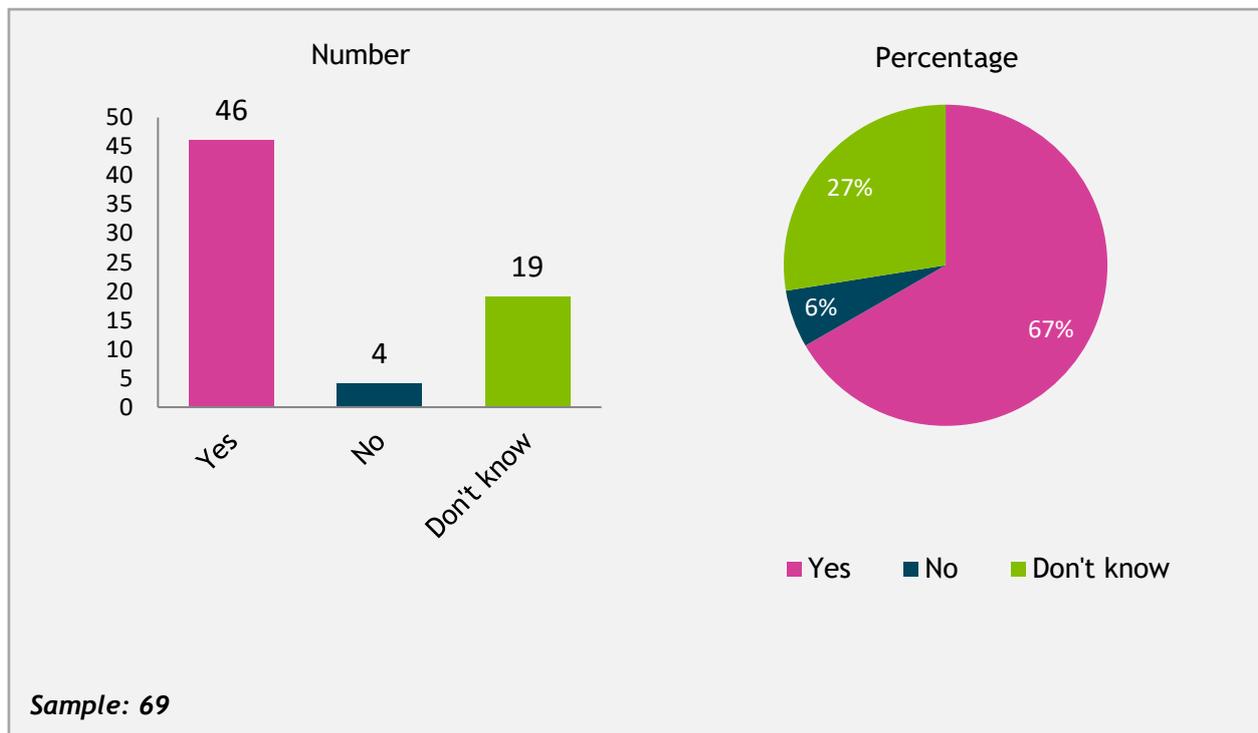
Just a fifth of respondents (20%) say they know how to access out-of-hours (late night) pharmacy services.

3.2.1 By Postcode: Know how to access out-of-hours pharmacy services

		%
	HA9	50%
	HA5	29%
	HA3	27%
	All Respondents (Baseline)	20%
	HA2	8%
	HA1	0%
	HA7	0%
	HA8	0%

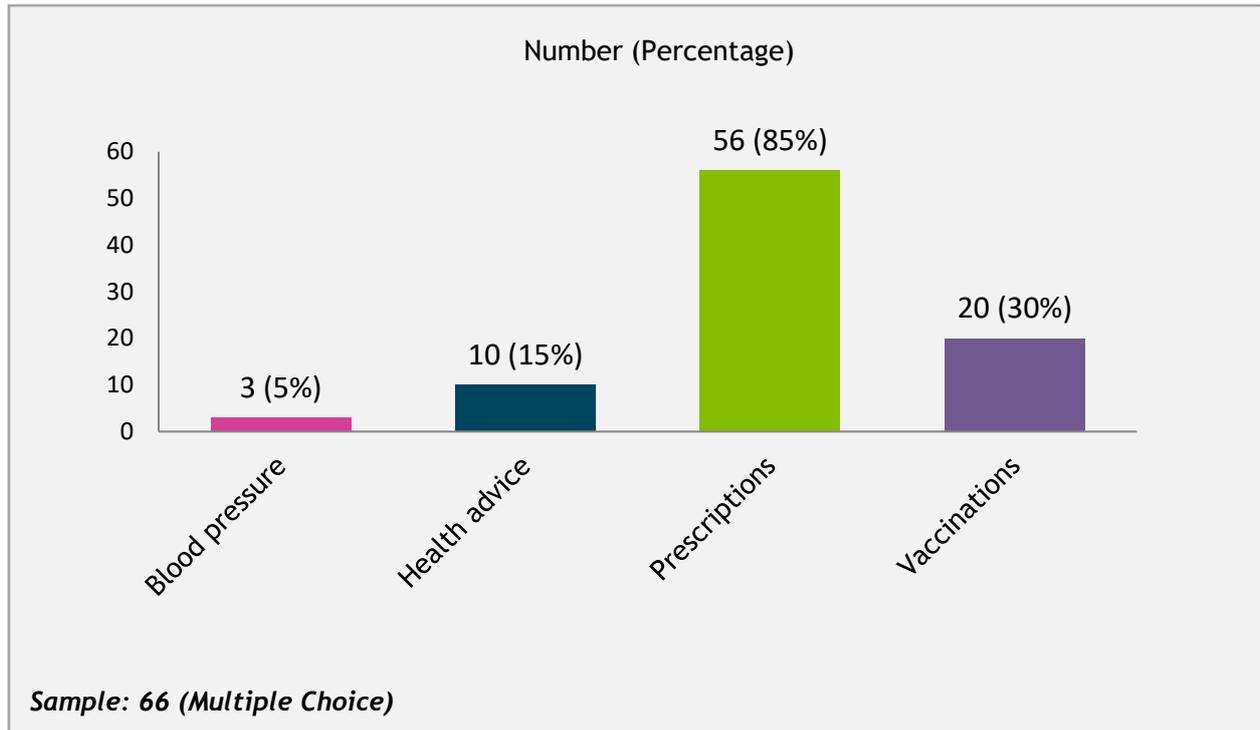
When looking at responses by locality, we find that those living in HA9, HA5 and HA3 are most aware of out-of-hours services (this is based on a limited volume of feedback).

3.3 Do you trust your pharmacist to give you advice on medical issues?



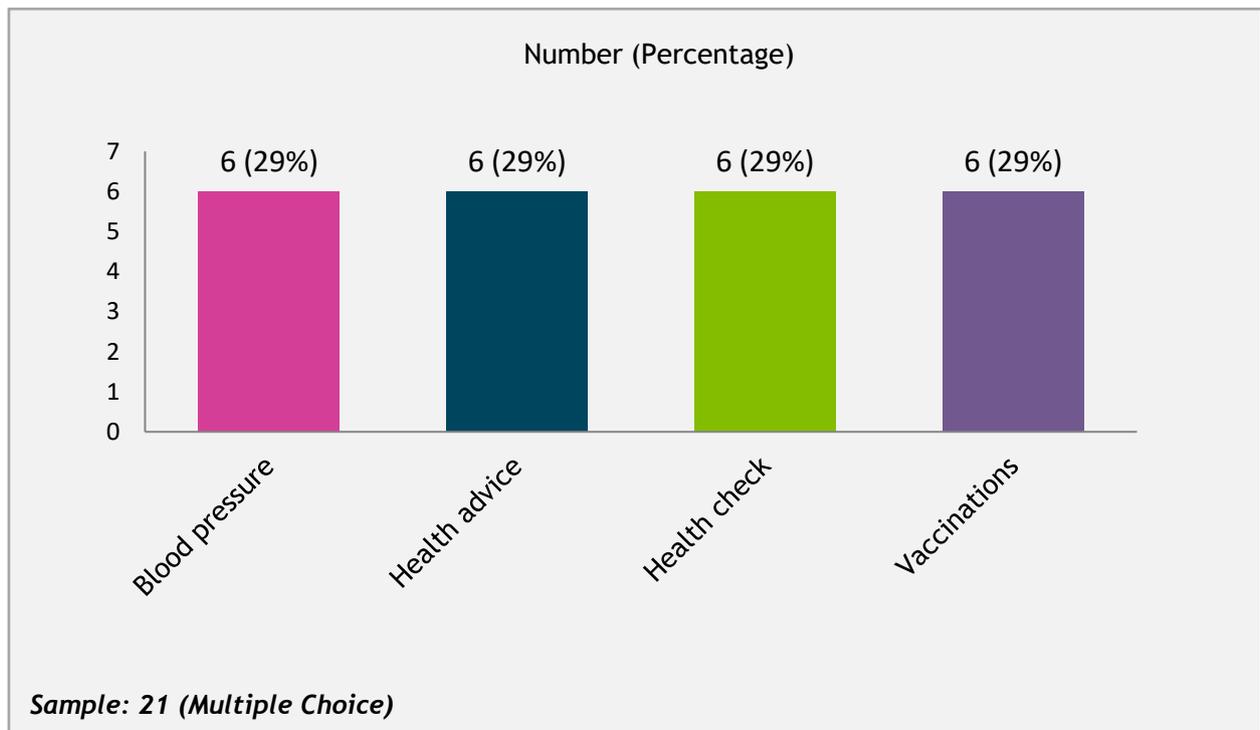
Two thirds of respondents (67%) trust their pharmacist to give advice on medical issues.

3.4 Which services do you use at your community pharmacy?



A broad majority of respondents (85%) use their pharmacy for prescriptions, with a notable 30% receiving vaccinations. Health advice and blood pressure checks are also mentioned.

3.5 Which other services would you like your community pharmacy to offer?



Even numbers of people (6) would like their local pharmacy to also offer blood pressure checks, health advice and checks, and vaccinations.

3.6 Any other comments about your community pharmacy?

Staff are commented to be helpful, with telephone access, delivery services and extended opening hours appreciated.

While some people are happy to access advice, others doubt levels of training and qualifications, with staff turnover (limited continuity) and lack of privacy in-store also said to reduce confidence in asking questions.

General products are considered to be expensive and one person complains of receiving pills, for the same ailment, of differing sizes and colours over time.

It is felt that pharmacies could 'do more' to help relieve pressure on GPs.

Selected Feedback

Positives:

"It is a busy pharmacy however the staff are always helpful."

"The pharmacy is easy to access by phone. Happy to advise on various issues."

"They provide an excellent delivery service for those who have difficulty getting to the pharmacy."

"Very friendly and helpful. Open outside 9-5 hours which is very convenient."

Negatives:

"I have no idea of the training or qualifications of my local pharmacist. I therefore don't know if they would diagnose a problem. Minor, perhaps yes, more complicated/hidden, no."

"Lots of staff changes. I have no confidence in them to give clinical advice."

"Continuity is not possible (seeing the same person) so no one would properly do the follow ups."

"Do a great job but no privacy in store which may limit what I would feel comfortable discussing. Also very cramped so little space which is an issue with viruses."

"Absolutely love it. Very friendly, they know my whole family. However, the prices are extremely expensive for other products, always go to larger retailers and I do feel bad about that."

"Not open on Saturdays."

“Although eternally grateful to the NHS, I do dislike the way my drugs are sourced from different manufacturers. For example, a pill, normally round and blue could, the following month then be pink and oval! I can just about manage but for the elderly and frail it must be very difficult to keep track of their needs.”

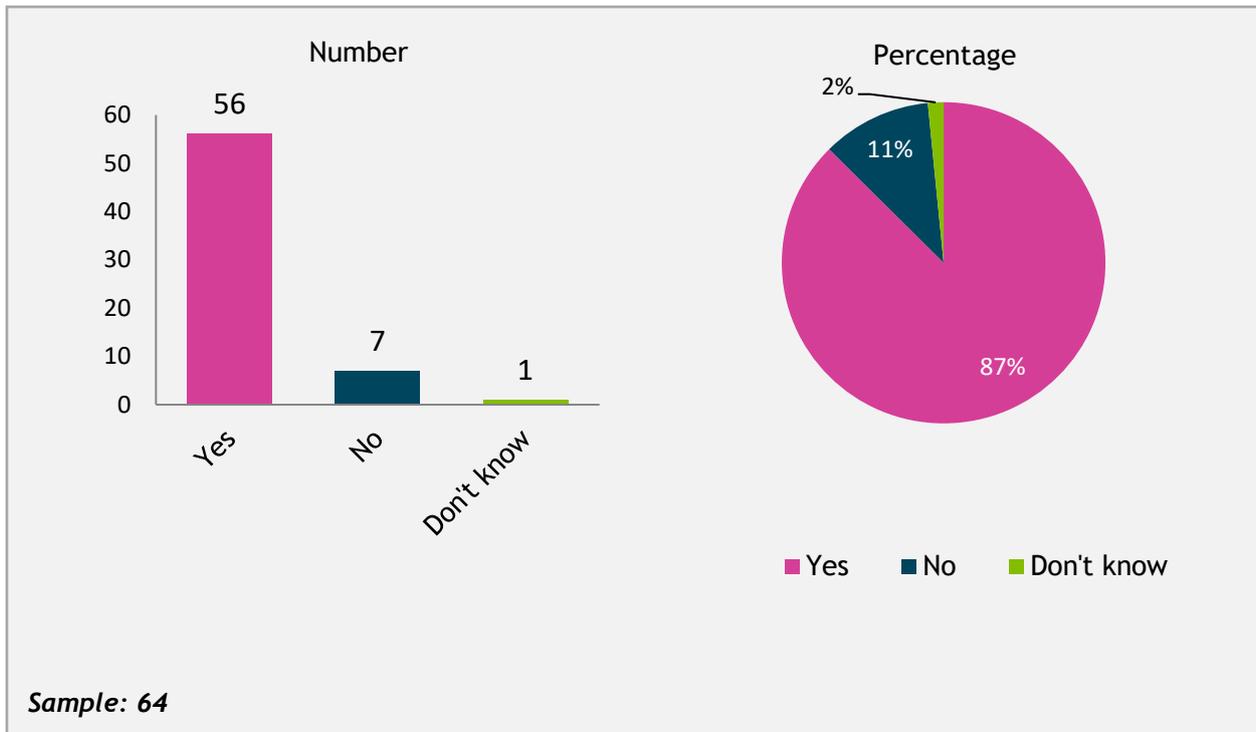
Other Comments:

“I feel they could do more and thereby relieve pressure on my GP practice.”

“Maybe they could flag if prescriptions need to be reviewed?”

“They do a great job - I worry that encouraging people to get medicines delivered will lead to losing these vital services.”

3.7 Do you receive prescribed medication from your GP?



A broad majority of respondents (87%) are prescribed medication from their GP.

3.8 If yes, what is your experience? For example, how easy is it to get renewals, or to see a GP for a review?

Systems for medication renewals are generally considered to be ‘easy and reliable’ with online and more traditional (paper form) methods cited.

While newer systems are said to be ‘working well’, it is also commented that GP and pharmacy prescribing is ‘not joined up’ and that staff are not always conversant with the process - leading to mistakes, inconvenience if having to chase-up, and delays.

Many people have said that obtaining a review appointment is difficult, particularly those with a face-to-face preference. It can also be a challenge to manage timings, with some now finding it ‘harder’ than before.

Selected Feedback

Positives:

“Very easy and very reliable.”

“Quite easy. I complete the renewal prescription form at my GP practice and collect from my pharmacy.”

“I renew my prescription with the GP online. It’s good, and texted when ready.”

“Quite easy to get renewals. Pharmacist reviewed within the last year.”

“My support worker orders my repeat prescription .”

“My GP surgery had a problem some years ago with repeat prescriptions, however, they devised a new system which, overall, works extremely well.”

Negatives:

“The prescribing system from GP to pharmacist is not joined up. Phoning for repeat prescriptions is tortuous - long wait times and staff not fully conversant with IT systems. All in all needs a big upgrade.”

“Fairly easy but mistakes made. Items that have not been renewed occasionally still received.”

“I use the online request service for repeat prescriptions, which is reasonably easy. Not so easy to see a GP for a review.”

“Very difficult getting a face-to-face appointment with GP.”

“Getting harder to remember asking for renewals in time.”

Other Comments:

“Generally easy to get renewals and to book reviews, as long as you do both in good time.”

“Any change is a challenge.”

4. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public, and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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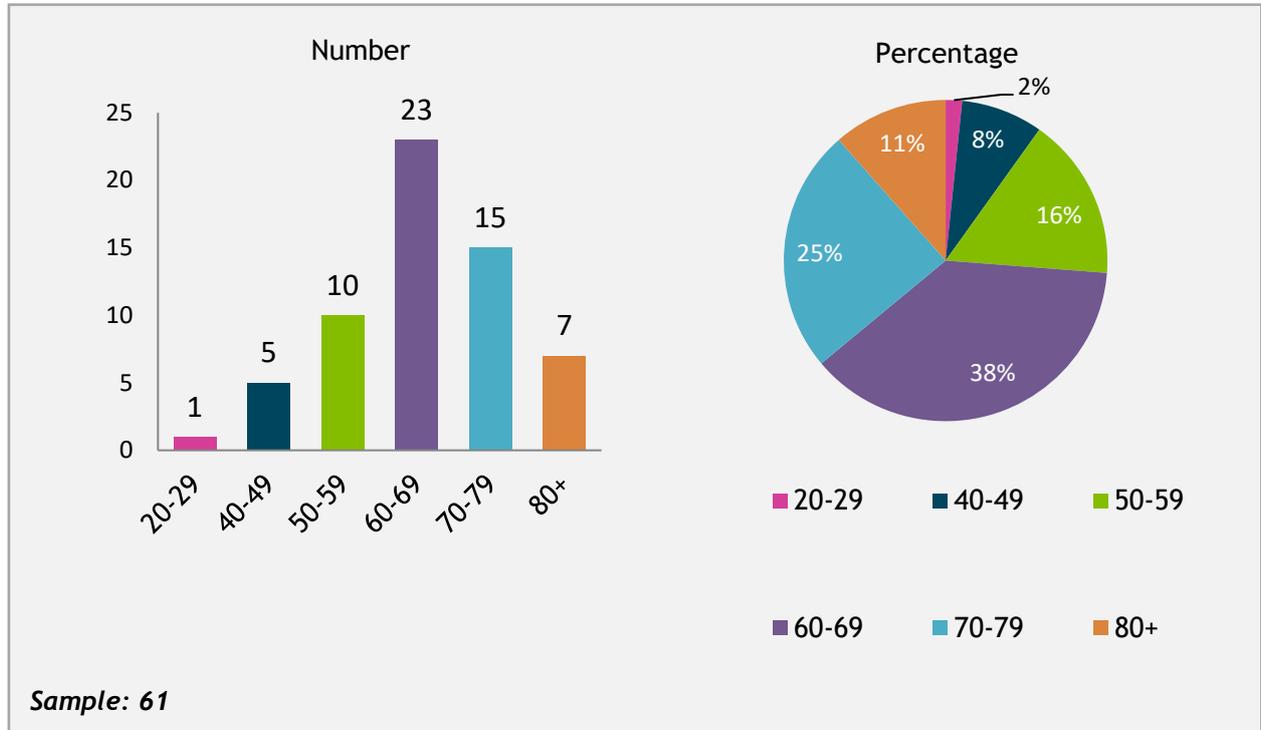
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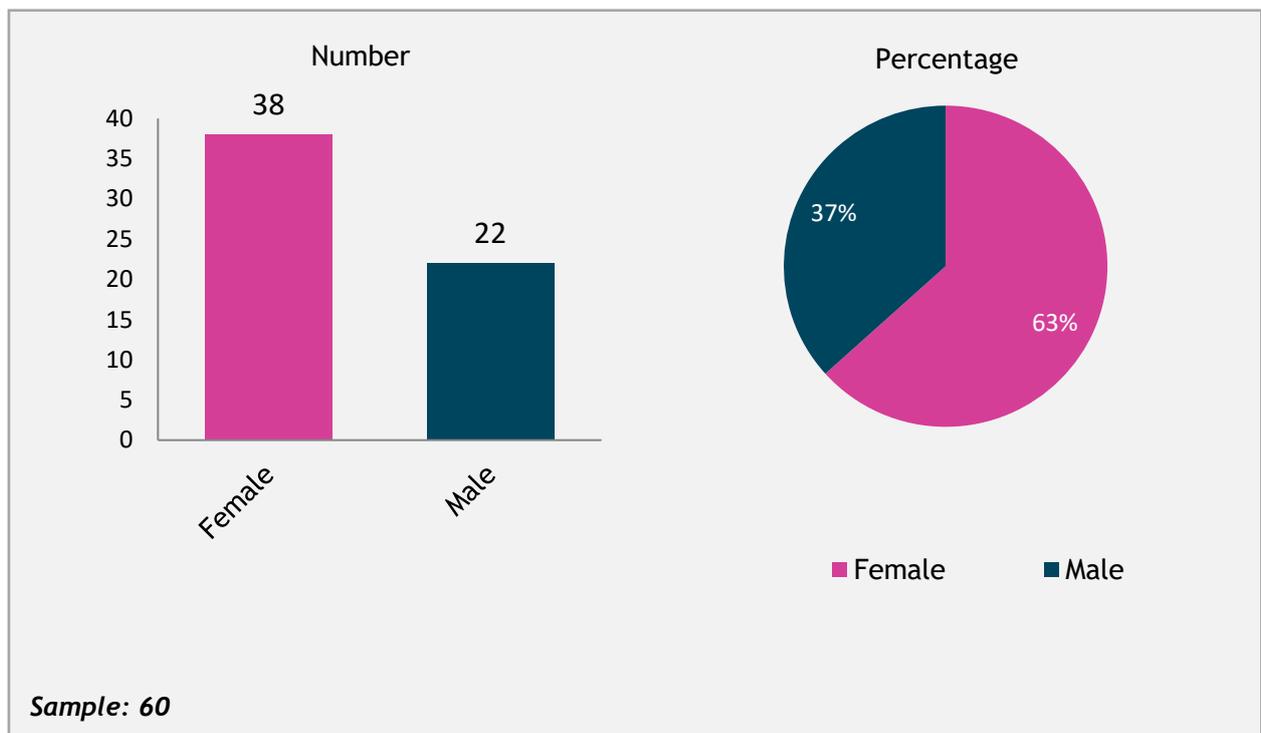
Appendix - Demographics

The demographics of participants are stated as follows:

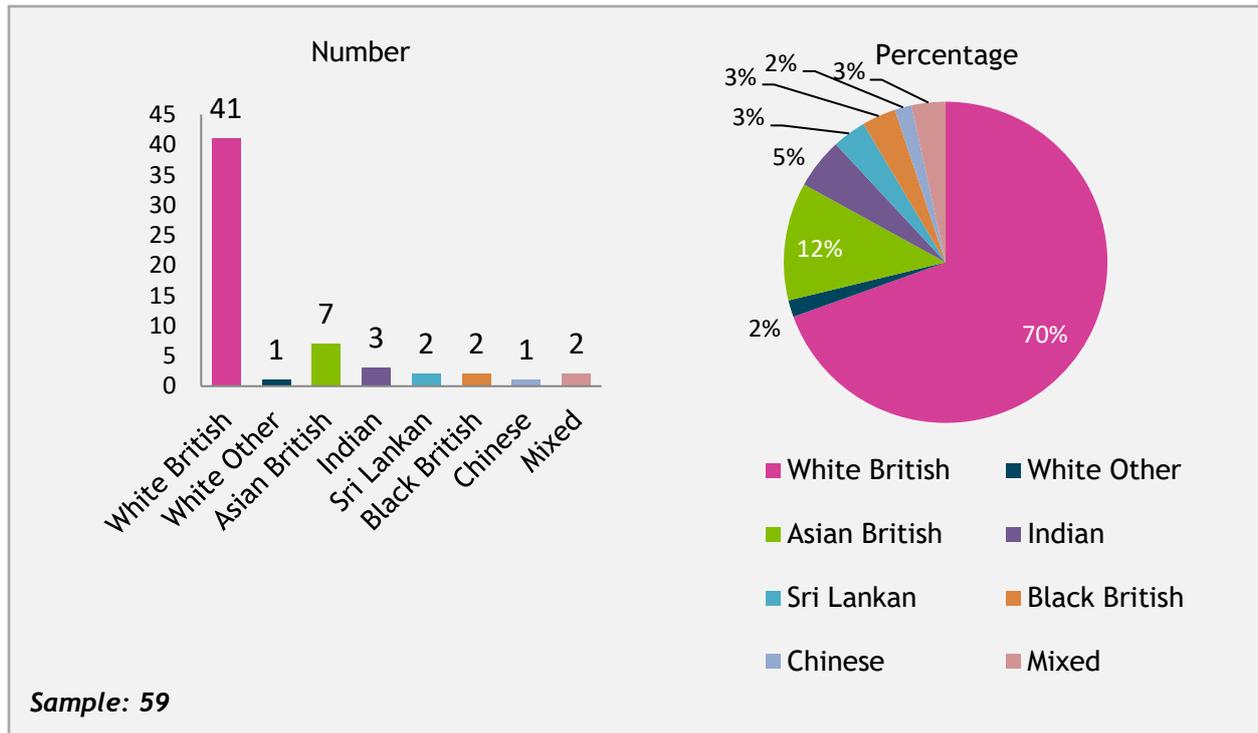
Age



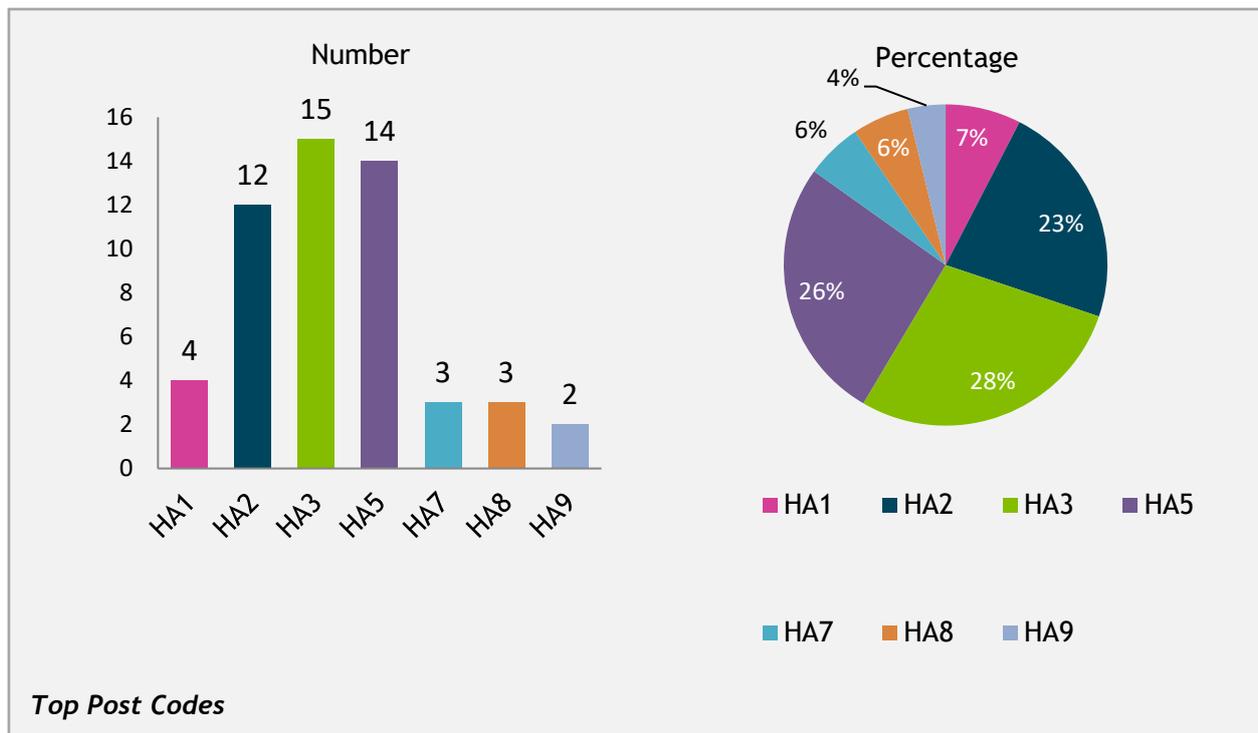
Gender



Ethnicity



Post Code Area



“Although eternally grateful to the NHS, I do dislike the way my drugs are sourced from different manufacturers.

For example, a pill, normally round and blue could, the following month then be pink and oval! I can just about manage but for the elderly and frail it must be very difficult to keep track of their needs.”

Local Resident