



Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2024

Staffing and Morale Report

Community pharmacy staffing pressures and morale have reached an all-time low. This is pushing businesses to the brink, driving professionals to consider leaving community pharmacy, and impacting the care they can offer patients and local communities.

Staffing pressures are significantly impacting pharmacy businesses and their ability to assist patients effectively. Patient aggression, medicine supply issues, and staff shortages are all continuing to contribute to the challenges faced by pharmacy teams.



This report from Community Pharmacy England's 2024 Pressures Survey is based on the views of the owners of over 6,100 pharmacy premises in England and 2,000 pharmacy team members. It has shown that:

- **Three quarters of pharmacy team members report that their pharmacies are experiencing staff shortages, with approximately 1 in 10 pharmacy owners having no choice but to close their pharmacy temporarily because of this.**
- **Nearly all community pharmacy team members report that staff shortages have led to longer waiting times for patients and increased pressure on staff.**
- **62% of pharmacy staff report that staff shortages have led to a reduced ability to offer services or advice to patients in need.**
- **Almost all (92%) pharmacy staff members report they are not coping well because of the workload, with 85% of team members also saying it's hard to cope because of problems sourcing medicines, and over half reporting patient abuse.**
- **The wellbeing of pharmacy team staff has been ranked by pharmacy owners as one of the most serious worries they have about their businesses.**
- **Three quarters of pharmacy owners state that finding permanent staff is increasingly difficult.**

Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2024

Community Pharmacy England represents all c. 10,500 community pharmacies in England. This report has been produced based on the results of Community Pharmacy England's 2024 Pharmacy Pressures Survey, which was carried out between early March 2024 and early April 2024. The survey consisted of two parts, an online questionnaire specifically for pharmacy owners (or head office representatives) and another separate questionnaire for pharmacy team members (or head office representatives).



Community pharmacy staffing pressures are persistent whilst morale is at an all-time low, pushing businesses to the brink and forcing professionals who love working with patients to consider leaving the sector altogether. We are deeply concerned about staff wellbeing and the negative impact that the current pressures are having on both the mental health of the community pharmacy workforce and on patient care.

Janet Morrison OBE
Chief Executive
Community
Pharmacy England



I have not had a day off in two and a half years as I can't afford a locum. My last day off was for my youngest son's funeral.

Pharmacy owner



These results highlight the ongoing and significant workforce challenges in community pharmacy. Only by tackling these challenges head-on can we ensure our workforce meets the evolving needs of the NHS and its patients and look forward to a better future for pharmacy teams across England.

Marc Donovan OBE, Community Pharmacy England Committee Member and Chair of the Community Pharmacy Workforce Development Group

Community Pharmacy in crisis: our urgent need for support and funding



Pharmacy owners and their teams are under immense pressure, yet they continue to go above and beyond for their patients and communities. Despite their dedication, recruitment and retention issues are worsening, with three-quarters of pharmacy owners struggling to find permanent staff. The decline in staffing and morale is the worst yet, exacerbated by severe financial and operational challenges. Without urgent action, the future of community pharmacies in our towns and neighbourhoods is at serious risk.



We have been trying to recruit new staff for my pharmacies for over 18 months now. We are overwhelmingly understaffed at the moment, and trying to fill the gaps in our teams has become increasingly difficult. It is painful that we are now so underfunded that paying a better, and reasonable, salary for pharmacy staff has become impossible. None of this makes any sense: the NHS are asking pharmacy teams to do more and more for patients and the public, but we need to be able to pay people fairly to do that.

Anil Sharma
Community pharmacy owner
in the East of England

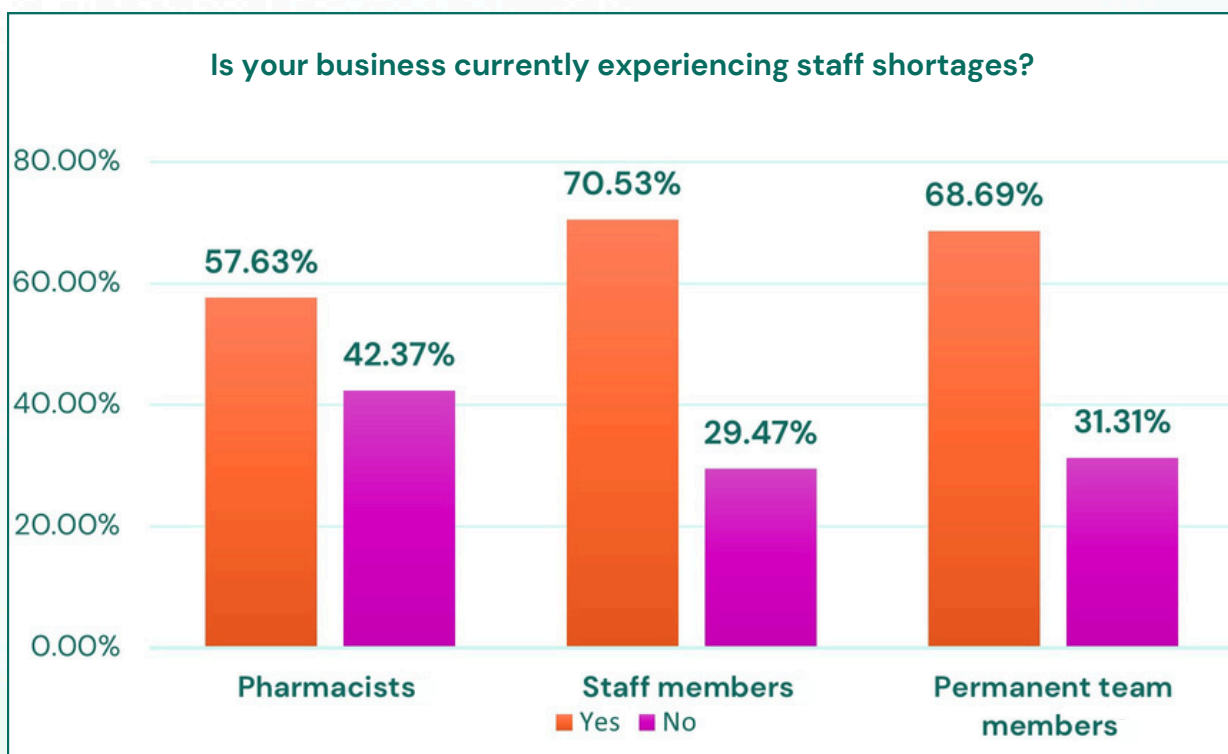


Key findings

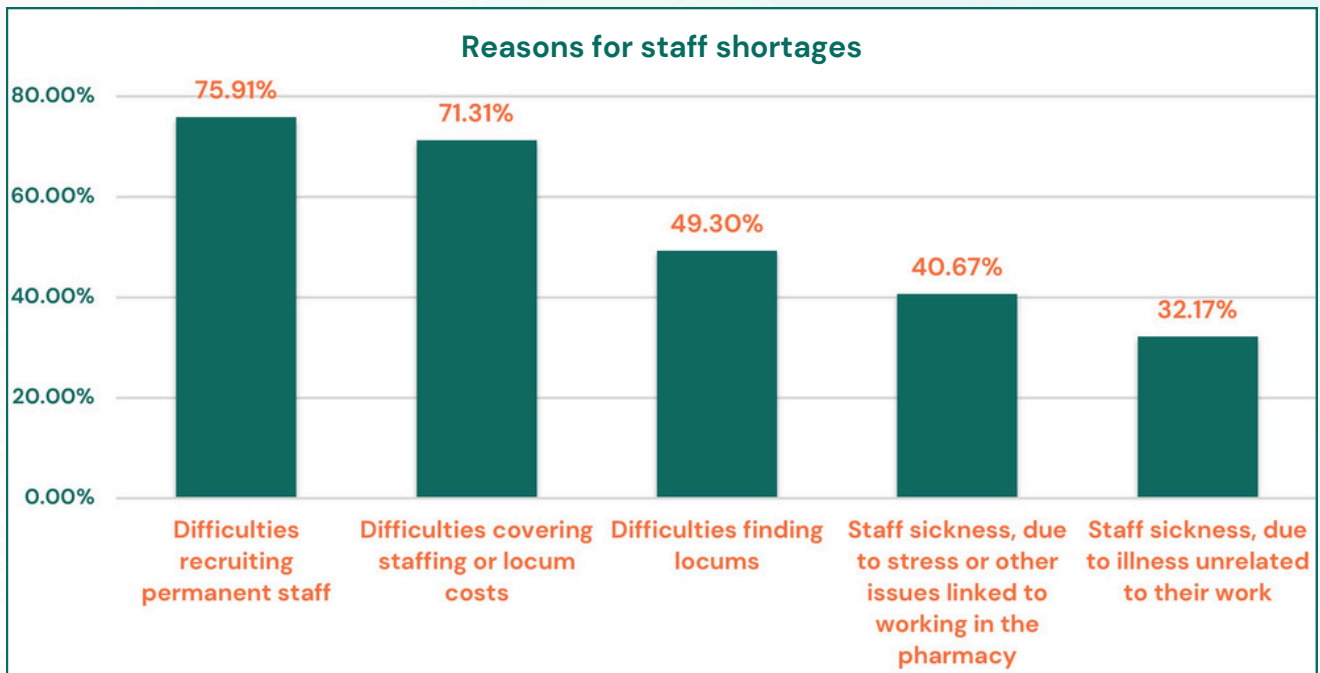
1

Community pharmacies are facing widespread workforce shortages and problems recruiting, and staff wellbeing is one of pharmacy owners' biggest worries.

- The majority of pharmacy business owners report experiencing staff shortages, with the worst shortages being for non-pharmacist staff members.
- 71% of pharmacy businesses report experiencing shortages of pharmacy staff members, and 58% are facing shortages of pharmacists.
- 69% of pharmacy owners also report a shortage of permanent team members.



- Retaining and hiring good staff has become increasingly difficult for pharmacies. The two most frequently cited reasons for staffing shortages by pharmacy business owners are difficulties in recruiting permanent staff (76% cite this) and challenges in covering staffing or locum costs (71% cite this).



- Staff wellbeing is one of the biggest concerns for pharmacy owners. Pharmacy business owners list team wellbeing as their third highest concern (45% said they are extremely concerned) after finances (73% extremely concerned) and medicine supply issues (69% extremely concerned).
- Close to 4 in 10 (39%) pharmacy business owners cite that staffing is a major worry in their business at the moment.



We are unable to find new people to fit the roles available. We have done lots of interviews but yet to find a colleague who would be able to manage the workload or pressure involved.

Pharmacy owner



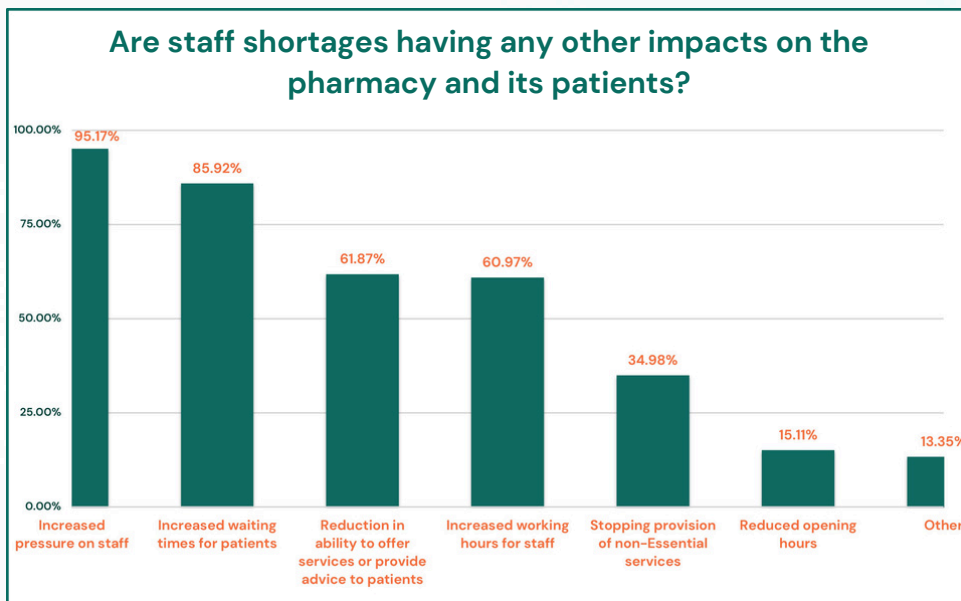
The increased pressures are not sustainable long term and will cause staff illness and absence, which will increase the pressure on staff. Each action of the community pharmacy has to be properly funded to allow the service to grow to cover the workload that is being transferred from other NHS service providers.

Pharmacy owner

2

Staff shortages are impacting patient care and leading to increased pressure on pharmacy teams.

- 95% of pharmacy team members said that staff shortages have resulted in increased pressure on staff, and 61% said they have led to increased working hours for staff.
- 62% of pharmacy team members report that staffing shortages have led to a reduction in their ability to offer services or advice to patients, and 86% say they have led to increased waiting times for patients.

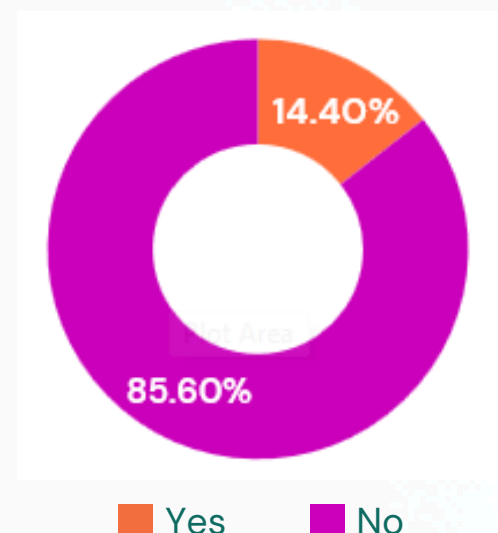


3

Some community pharmacies are being forced to close temporarily because of staffing shortages.

- 14% of pharmacy owners reported that their pharmacy had been required to close temporarily because of workforce shortages.
- Closing a pharmacy because of staff shortages is a last resort for pharmacies. Worryingly, pharmacy owners revealed in this year's survey that during February and March 2024, a total of 711 pharmacy premises across the country had to close temporarily due to staff shortages. Each pharmacy was on average closed for an estimated 5 hours.

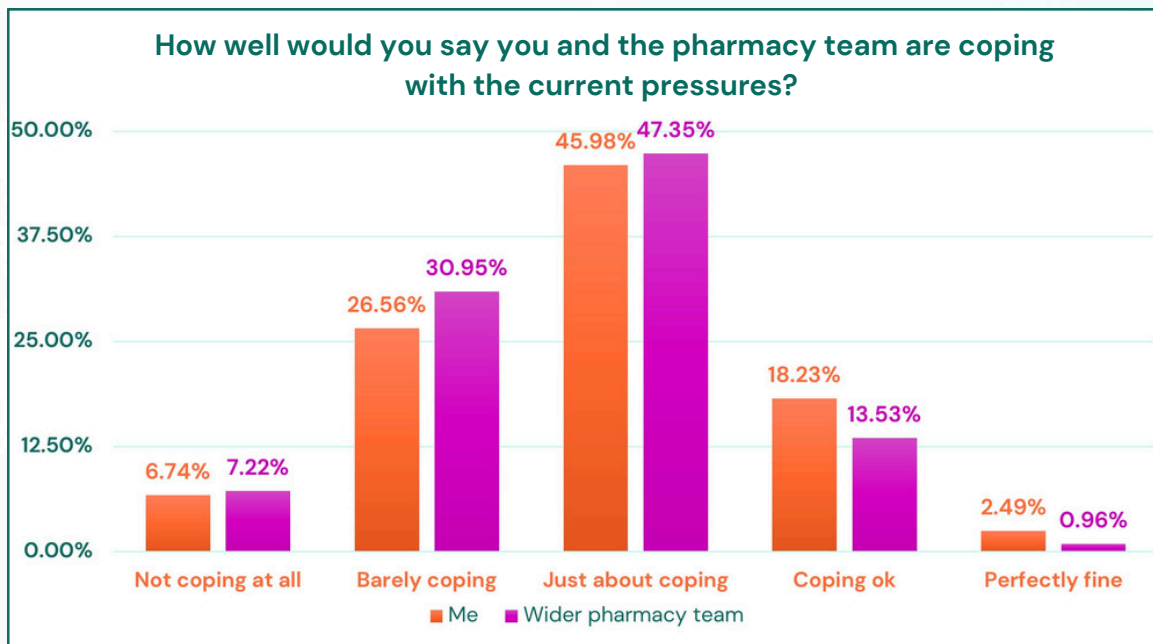
Has your pharmacy/any of your pharmacies had to close temporarily due to staff shortages?



4

Pharmacy teams are struggling to cope with staffing and other pressures, as well as abuse from some patients.

- 77% of pharmacy team members report that their work is negatively impacting their mental health and wellbeing.
- 1 in 3 staff members report they are either barely coping or not coping at all, while nearly 40% indicate that their colleagues are not coping at all or barely coping.



- 92% of pharmacy staff members cite workload as a reason they are not coping well.
- Over half mention patient abuse as a major reason it's difficult to cope at work, with others citing lack of staff as a problem.



The pharmacy team view

Community pharmacy team members and owners have very candidly shared the toll staff shortages are taking on them:

It is so stressful that I am contemplating leaving the profession - I would rather have a reduced salary doing something less stressful.

Pharmacy team member

Increased staff absence due to stress and patient aggression, leading to problems becoming worse.

Pharmacy team member

Staff burnout and colleagues leaving. Business is running on a thread and staff are being pushed beyond their limits.

Pharmacy team member

So much work pressures, underfunded, under resourced and we're stressed.

Pharmacy team member

Experiencing burnout as I have not had my full holiday entitlement. I had to return to work the day following the death of a parent due to locum shortages. Ridiculous locum costs have also had a negative effect.

Pharmacy team member



Context and Trends

Staff shortage crisis, workforce wellbeing and burnout

The results of the Pressures Survey paint a stark picture of the challenges facing community pharmacies right now. Among these challenges are significant staff shortages, exacerbated by an ever-increasing workload that strains resources and stretches pharmacy teams to their limits. Pharmacy team wellbeing, resilience, and morale are at an all-time low as the demands on pharmacy teams take their toll.

This is echoed by The Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) and Pharmacist Support's annual Workforce Wellbeing survey, which found that the majority of pharmacists surveyed are at high risk of burnout. Factors causing poor mental health and wellbeing include inadequate staffing (70%) and lack of work/life balance (53%).

In addition to the workforce plan, we believe the NHS and Government should consider the impact of the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS), which, since its introduction in 2019, has led to the recruitment of over 5,000 pharmacists, primarily from community pharmacy, into GP surgeries and PCNs. This has resulted in shortages, temporary closures and rising costs.



As the profession's independent charity, Pharmacist Support has seen firsthand the significant impact these mounting pressures are having on our pharmacy teams. Over the past few years, we've witnessed a substantial increase in demand for our services, delivering over 2,500 counselling sessions since the launch of this service in 2021, with calls to our peer support service, Listening Friends, rising by 74% in the last year alone.

With staff wellbeing ranking as one of the top concerns for pharmacy owners, it is clear that immediate action is needed to support the health and sustainability of our pharmacy workforce."

Danielle Hunt
Chief Executive
Pharmacist Support

Patient impact

Sadly, it's not only pharmacy staff feeling the pressure: patients who rely on pharmacies are also bearing the brunt of these challenges, experiencing delays in services and reduced accessibility to the essential medications they need.

Temporary closures of pharmacies

Due to regulations, pharmacies can only dispense medicines legally when a pharmacist is on-site. Even if prescriptions are prepared, these cannot be given to patients without pharmacist oversight. If a pharmacist is unavailable, the pharmacy must close temporarily and notify the NHS, as per their [Terms of service](#).

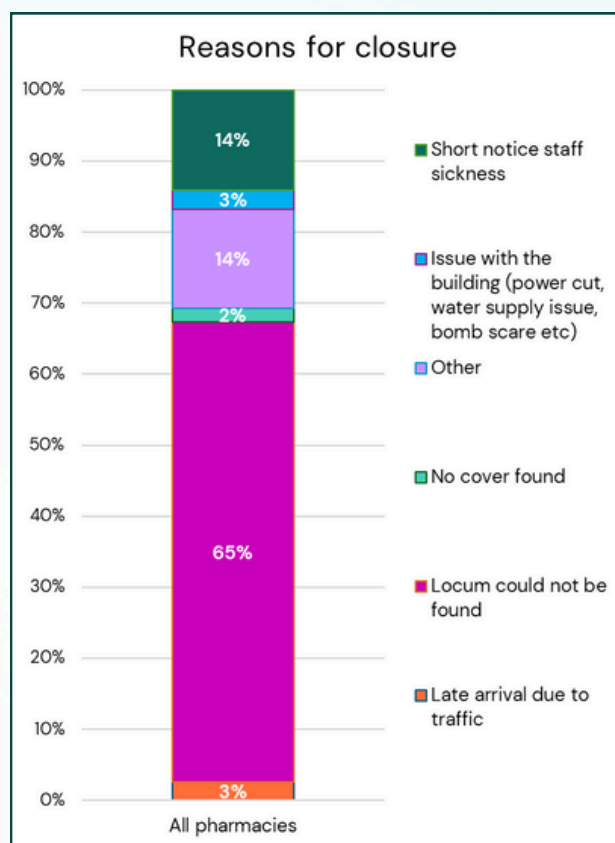
The findings of the Pressures Survey on temporary closures tally with national data. According to NHS data there were **44,768 recorded temporary closures** of community pharmacies between October 2021 to March 2024. There can be a variety of reasons for temporary closures, but our analysis of this NHS data shows that many of these are related to workforce issues.



Locum costs in particular continue to increase. In 2023 alone, locum rates went up by a staggering 85% from the year before and as the graph above highlights, the inability to secure locums has now become the number one cause of temporary pharmacy closures.



The following graph shows the most common reasons for temporary closures that were reported to the NHS between October 2021 and July 2024.



NHSBSA data as of July 2024

Talent retention battles

Pharmacy business owners have also told us that they are often grappling with the daunting task of retaining talent amidst strong competition from sectors such as retail and other industries. This further highlights the sector's vulnerability and the urgent need for support.

Our recommendations

Community Pharmacy England is calling for:

1 Increase community pharmacy funding to support recruitment and retention of pharmacy staff:

The NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan has acknowledged the need for more pharmacists and other pharmacy roles to meet growing patient demand. The NHS has set out ambitions to grow the community pharmacist workforce, but for this ambition to become a reality, the Government and the NHS must also provide fairer funding for pharmacies. The introduction of the National Living Wage uplift in April 2024 resulted in additional costs of £170 to £190m for the sector. Addressing the unaffordable 80% increase in locum pharmacist costs between 2022 and 2023 is also essential.



2 Fulfil all pharmacy workforce related pledges within the NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan:

The NHS and the Government need to work closely with the sector to develop and ensure that the pharmacy-specific workforce initiatives pledged within the NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan are upheld. Fully implementing plans to expand the training and development of the workforce will significantly aid recruitment and retention in the sector.



3 Consider the impact of the ARRS

In addition to the workforce plan, we believe the NHS should consider the impact of the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS), which, since its introduction in 2019, has led to the recruitment of over 5,000 pharmacists, primarily from community pharmacy, into GP surgeries and PCNs. This has resulted in shortages, temporary closures and rising costs.





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