



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Review of Dispensing Volumes in Community Pharmacies



**Response by the Welsh Government**

January 2022



# 1. Background

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## 1.1 Prescriptions dispensed in the community

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Prescribing a medicine continues to be the most common therapeutic intervention in healthcare<sup>1</sup> with more than 82 million prescriptions items prescribed in the community in Wales in 2019-20.<sup>2</sup>

The long-term trend shows large increases in the number of items prescribed and dispensed over time; whilst increases have slowed in recent years, in common with the rest of the UK the number of prescriptions in Wales has grown by a third since 2007-08.

Whilst a small proportion of prescriptions are dispensed by dispensing doctors and dispensing appliances contractors (DACs), the vast majority (>90%) are dispensed by community pharmacies.

## 1.2 Community pharmacy contractual reform

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In recent years, community pharmacists in Wales have played an increasing role in the delivery of NHS clinical services. The Welsh Government and Community Pharmacy Wales (CPW), as the representative body for all community pharmacies, have agreed wide-ranging reforms to the contractual arrangements for community pharmacy to support the availability of an increased range of clinical services. Whilst already underway, the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework agreement announced in November 2021 will mean the pace and scale of reforms will accelerate in the next three years.



If our ambition for community pharmacy to make a more telling contribution to improving the health and wellbeing of people in Wales is to be realised, there is a need for the way pharmacies operate now to change. In future, we must ensure that the unique skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are utilised in supply chains only where they add value, and unnecessary dispensing transactions are minimised so that capacity of pharmacy teams is released to provide pharmaceutical care.

Recognising the importance of containing future growth in prescription volumes, the contractual reform agreement between the Welsh Government and CPW included a commitment to commission an independent review of dispensing volumes in Wales. This document describes how we will work with health boards, community pharmacies, GPs and other stakeholders to implement the recommendations of the independent review.

1 <https://www.nhs.uk/about-the-nhs-website/professionals/healthandcareprofessionals/your-pages/documents/rps-medicines-optimisation.pdf>

2 <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-09/prescriptions-wales-april-2019-march-2020-610.pdf>

## 2. The Review

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### 2.1 Overview

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In 2019, the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care (WIHSC) at the University of South Wales was commissioned to undertake a review of dispensing volumes in community pharmacies in Wales. Specifically, the review aimed to consider:

- whether it is feasible to reduce the volume of prescriptions issued and dispensed in Wales through practical changes to prescribing and dispensing arrangements; and
- whether such changes would significantly release pharmacist time to provide direct patient care.



The fieldwork for the review was completed in 2020 and 2021, and the findings of the review have been collated in a report published by the University of South Wales that can be accessed at [www.gov.wales/medicines-medical-devices#content](http://www.gov.wales/medicines-medical-devices#content).

The report provides a summary of the peer reviewed and ‘grey’ literature, and draws conclusions based on an analysis of prescribing and dispensing data from Wales and other parts of the UK alongside the views of review participants.

The review identified several priorities for action that can be classified under four broad themes:

- 1 reducing the number of dispensing events in primary care;
- 2 non-medicine supply: Reducing the dispensing of products, dressings and/or appliances where community pharmacy provides no added clinical value or efficiency;
- 3 reducing the prescribing of items of low clinical value; and
- 4 remodelling community pharmacy services to better use the skills available in community pharmacy to provide advice and where appropriate supply medication without the need for a prescription.

## 2.2 Priorities for action

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### 2.2.1 Reducing the number of dispensing events in primary care

The review concluded that, on balance, there would be a benefit to pharmacies, GPs and patients if dispensing intervals (the time between needing one prescription and the next) were extended. That is to say where clinically appropriate, more patients should be able to have their prescribed medicines dispensed less frequently. Currently patients in Wales have to make more trips to the pharmacy to collect their medicines, and GPs and pharmacies have to write and dispense more prescriptions than in other parts of the UK. Whilst there has been a long held view that 28 day prescribing intervals could reduce medicine waste, there was little robust evidence to support this view. Indeed evidence suggests shorter intervals may have a negative impact on adherence to treatment and that what is needed is a more flexible approach to meet the needs of individuals. Stakeholders perceived Wales as being behind other countries in extending prescribing intervals to longer than 28 days.

### 2.2.2 Non-medicine supply: Reducing the dispensing of products, dressings and/or appliances where community pharmacy provides no added clinical value or efficiency

The review found there are likely to be more efficient ways to supply non-medicine items such as gluten free foods, dressings, and appliances (which comprise more than 2 million prescriptions per year) other than through community pharmacies.

Stakeholders agreed that the unique expertise of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians added little value to such transactions and there appears to be very little support for the continued provision of such items through community pharmacies.

Specifically the review highlighted successful examples or opportunities where supplies were or could be made other than through pharmacies.



These included:

- **Gluten-free product supply** – A pilot scheme in Hywel Dda University Health Board offers patients with Coeliac disease alternative options for gluten-free product supply. In the pilot, rather than receiving a prescription for gluten free products patients are offered pre-payment cards to meet the difference in cost of gluten-free products over equivalent products that are not gluten-free. The cards can be used to purchase gluten-free products in any retailer. The pilot has proven popular offering additional flexibility and wider product choice.
- More efficient arrangements for **supply of dressings**, noting the often inefficient processes for ordering dressings which can result in problems of storage, waste and administrative burden for community pharmacy contractors. A number of alternative methods of supply have already been adopted across Wales utilising dressing supply contractors and/or health board centralised schemes. Whilst the scale was likely to be smaller, similar benefits would be derived from ensuring the **supply of stoma and incontinence appliances** was moved away from community pharmacies to other suppliers such as DACs.
- Reducing prescribing of items identified as being of **low clinical value** by the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group (AWMSG). Further information is available at: [www.awttc.org/medicines-identified-low-priority-funding-nhs-wales](http://www.awttc.org/medicines-identified-low-priority-funding-nhs-wales).



### 2.2.3 Better use of pharmacists skills to prescribe and/or supply medication

Reconfiguration of primary care treatment pathways could better utilise the skills available in community pharmacies particularly to support the **direct supply of medication without prescription or prescribing** by appropriately trained pharmacists. The review highlighted the opportunity to utilise contractual reforms supporting increased clinical service provision by pharmacies to support reconfiguration of treatment pathways in primary care. This could include the supply of medication without the need for a prescription as in the Common Ailments Service, or for a limited number of conditions increasing the use of pharmacist prescribers to integrate provision of the service with clinical supply (for example the provision of routine contraception from community pharmacies).

### 3. Responding to the review's findings

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The Welsh Government welcomes the findings of the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care (WIHSC) independent review of dispensing volumes in community pharmacies.

The review's findings support the view that it is feasible to reduce the volume of prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacies through practical, system level changes to prescribing and dispensing arrangements. Such changes are likely to release significant amounts of pharmacist time to provide more focused direct patient care through clinical services, supporting our longer term aspirations for community pharmacies that meet the needs of the people of Wales now and in the future.

In addition to the benefits arising from pharmacists having more time to deliver clinical services, implementing actions in the areas identified by the review are likely to have benefits for general practice through a reduction in the administrative workload involved in generating repeat prescriptions.

Most importantly, taking a more flexible approach to balance more appropriately, patient convenience with clinical appropriateness, cost-effectiveness and patient safety, is likely to have considerable benefits for patients. For some these benefits may arise through less frequent journeys to a pharmacy to collect prescriptions; from de-medicalising the supply of non-medicine consumable items; and from improved medication adherence or service satisfaction.

Realising the benefits identified in the review will require a range of stakeholders to come together to determine and implement a range of specific actions. A list of high-level actions have been developed and can be found as an annex to this response.



# Annex: Detailed action plan

Proposed Action	Completion date	Stakeholders
Reducing the number of dispensing events in primary care		
The All Wales Medicine Strategy Group will review and update its guidance on prescribing intervals	Summer 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre</li> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> </ul>
The Welsh Government will issue a Welsh Health Circular providing direction on implementing extended prescribing intervals	Summer 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre</li> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Royal Pharmaceutical Society</li> <li>• Royal College of General Practitioners</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>
The Welsh Government will consult on making amendments to the NHS Pharmaceutical Services (Wales) Regulations 2020 to support original pack dispensing and to provide additional flexibility in the dispensing process for pharmacists to apply discretion to avoid minor prescription alterations	Spring 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• Royal Pharmaceutical Society</li> <li>• Royal College of General Practitioners</li> </ul>



Proposed Action	Completion date	Stakeholders
Community Pharmacy Wales will propose a mechanism to ensure the viability support and ensure the viability of community pharmacy contractors affected by changes to the distribution of pharmacy funding through the transition period	Spring 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> </ul>
The Welsh Government will continue to support opportunities for community pharmacy contractors to adapt working practices to release pharmacist time for providing patient focussed services, in particular using advances in automation and technology	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> </ul>
Health Education and Improvement Wales will continue to support community pharmacy contractors to develop and utilise the skills of the whole pharmacy workforce to maximise the time pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can spend delivering direct patient care	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> </ul>
The Welsh Government and Digital Health and Care Wales will implement the recommendations of the e-Prescribing Strategy Review <a href="http://www.gov.wales/written-statement-statement-eprescribing-programme#content">www.gov.wales/written-statement-statement-eprescribing-programme#content</a>	Implementation to begin in spring 2022 with full implementation in three to five years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Royal Pharmaceutical Society</li> <li>• Royal College of General Practitioners</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> <li>• Other prescribers in primary care</li> <li>• Dispensing Appliance Contractors</li> </ul>

Proposed Action	Completion date	Stakeholders
Local Health Boards to adapt existing clinical effectiveness, quality and prescribing programmes to support the implementation of extended prescribing intervals	March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Local Medical Committees</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>
Non-medicine supply: Reducing the dispensing of products, dressings and/or appliances where community pharmacy provides no added clinical value or efficiency		
The Welsh Government to work with local health boards and the NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership to establish national arrangements for the management and supply of gluten-free foods for people with Coeliac disease building on the success of the model piloted in Hywel Dda University Health Board Partnership to review and identify appropriate mechanisms for centralising, at a Health Board or National level, the management and supply of gluten-free products in-line with the piloted model in Hywel Dda University Health Board	Autumn 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> <li>• Coeliac UK</li> </ul>
Local health boards to review current arrangements for management and supply of dressing products, and ensure direct supply or other non-prescription arrangements are used for the majority of dressing supplied in the community	Spring 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government</li> <li>• Dressing Supply Contractors</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>

Proposed Action	Completion date	Stakeholders
Local Health Boards to review existing methods of management and supply of stoma and incontinence appliances and utilise dispensing appliance contractors or health board direct supply arrangements wherever possible dispensing appliance contractors and/ or a Health Board centralised scheme is adopted	Spring 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government</li> <li>• Dispensing Appliance Contractors</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>
The All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre to continue to progress with the programme of work to minimise the prescribing of items identified as low value and develop tools and reports to measure progress	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> <li>• NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership</li> </ul>
The All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre to support the development of evidence-based prescribing guidance, educational resources, shared care and best practice tools to optimise the use of medicines in NHS Wales	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>
The All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre to develop a Medicines Optimisation framework and ensure engagement with stakeholders through a range of multidisciplinary events and the production of resources	Spring 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> <li>• Royal Pharmaceutical Society</li> <li>• Royal College of General Practitioners</li> </ul>

Proposed Action	Completion date	Stakeholders
Better use of pharmacists skills to prescribe and/or supply medication		
<p>The Welsh Government, local health boards and Community Pharmacy Wales will continue to promote Local Health Boards and Third Sector organisations to promote existing community pharmacy services which supply medication without a prescription</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	
<p>Community pharmacy contractors should maximise the provision of existing pharmacy services which supply medication without a prescription, such as the Common Ailment Service</p>	<p>March 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• General Practitioners'</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>
<p>The Welsh Government will make arrangements to maximise the use of prescribing within community pharmacies through the development of a national extended minor illness and contraception management service</p>	<p>Spring 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Health Boards</li> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>
<p>The Welsh Government will undertake a study to explore the extent to which ailments currently managed in general practice can be transferred and managed by community pharmacists, with the intention of increasing the range of conditions community pharmacists in Wales can manage through the Common Ailments Service or other existing or new community pharmacy services.</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Pharmacy Wales</li> <li>• General Practitioners' Committee Wales</li> <li>• Community pharmacies</li> <li>• GPs</li> </ul>