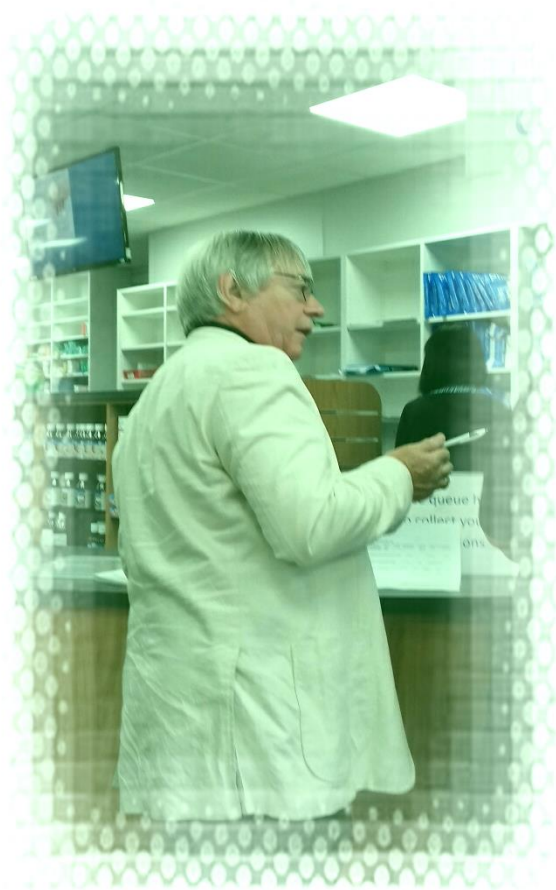


# Using pharmacies or dispensing doctors in County Durham

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Research into the experiences of people accessing pharmacy  
services in County Durham



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## Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD)

On the 1st April 2013 under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 152 local Healthwatch organisations were established throughout England.

These Local Healthwatch have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion whose aim is to:

- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services to better meet their needs
- Support people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting
- To encourage and support people and groups to share their views about services; listen to people's needs and experiences of services

We achieve this by:

- Listening to people, especially the most vulnerable, to understand their experiences and what matters most to them
- Influencing those who have the power to change services so that they better meet people's needs now and into the future
- Empowering and informing people to get the most from their health and social care services and encouraging other organisations to do the same



**We advise**



**We listen**



**We speak up**

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## Executive Summary

Following a work plan request by the County Durham & Darlington Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) and County Durham Public Health Team it was agreed that Healthwatch County Durham would carry out a consultation exercise from July to September 2017, capturing the views and experiences of individuals accessing pharmacy and dispensing doctor services across County Durham. We wanted to collect views about the following:

- The public's knowledge of services that pharmacies can offer
- If there is an appetite across the County to access such services
- What other services they would like to see

Overall we collected the views and experiences of 397 individuals, 252 of these were from our on-line survey; 37 from attendees at our Annual Event, 8 from two community groups and 100 through consultations carried out by volunteers at 7 pharmacies across the county.

Three Enter and View visits were also conducted.

## What People Told Us

- 54% access pharmacy services at least monthly
- 52% always visit the same pharmacy service
- 94% can easily access pharmacy services
- 62% normally get to their pharmacy by car or taxi
- 36% use a high street pharmacy with 26% using a GP practice dispensary
- Respondents stated that the top 3 things that pharmacies do well are providing good customer care with friendly, caring staff; making sure prescriptions are available in a timely manner; providing good advice and information
- Other services that respondents would like to access from pharmacies include extended opening hours; disposal of Sharps boxes; blood pressure monitoring
- Respondents said that pharmacy services could be improved by extended opening hours including pharmacists being available at lunchtimes and Saturdays; bigger waiting areas; dispensing more quickly
- Respondents' awareness of the services that pharmacies provide range from dispensing medicines (93%) to sexual health testing (38%)
- Respondents' use of services range from the dispensing medicines service (78%) to sexual health testing (1.28%)
- 78% feel comfortable about getting advice from and talking to a pharmacist about health problems
- 56% are able to talk in the pharmacy without being overheard
- 75% have new medication explained to them by a pharmacist
- 80% said that the pharmacy usually has their prescribed medication in stock
- 94% said that the pharmacy staff are polite and helpful
- 8% have used a commercial, online pharmacy

## Key Recommendations

The responses from those who participated in the survey form the basis of our recommendations, which are listed below:

Facilities to enable customers to talk to the pharmacist without being overheard should be made available and clearly advertised.

Although the public are very aware of some services pharmacies offer, others with a lower profile should be more clearly displayed as this could reduce pressure on other parts of the health care system.

The LPC should lead on developing a strategy that encourages younger users to access pharmacy services.

When explaining new medication to customers, pharmacists should make it clear that this is what they are doing as currently only 75% of respondents were aware of this happening.

One of the things that pharmacies were identified as doing well was making sure prescriptions were available in a timely manner. It was also identified that pharmacies could dispense medications more quickly. We would suggest that this is looked into further to identify where the problem lies.

Specific issues were raised by blind and partially sighted customers and these should be addressed.

Consideration should be given to providing better access for disabled customers, including the provision of a space for wheelchair users.

More continuity in relation to staffing could support an increase in people using pharmacy services as people prefer to talk to someone familiar about their health problems.

Lunch time, later and weekend opening hours would enable more people to access the pharmacy service. In addition respondents requested that pharmacy opening times should be in line with GP surgery opening hours.

Consideration should be given to offer some, if not all, of the following additional services - disposal of needles, sharps boxes, Healthchecks e.g. blood pressure measured, hearing aid batteries, holiday jabs, increased stock levels to ensure more medication is available for more of the time, a card payment system.

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## Background to the Work

In 2016 Healthwatch England (HWE), with the support from the Healthwatch network, produced a Briefing Paper. The paper stated:

*Our work over the last year has shown that the public are aware of the pressure the health and social care system is under and that they want to help.*

*Through our conversations and engagement with people we have learnt that there is huge potential for enhancing the role of pharmacies to create a more flexible, sustainable and consumer-focused primary care service.*

*Polling by YouGov and Healthwatch England in 2015 revealed:*

- *Three quarters of people say they would go to a pharmacist, rather than a GP, to get medication for a minor illness. Only 1 in 10 say they wouldn't.*
- *Over half would go to a pharmacist to seek advice for a specific minor illness or injury.*
- *A third of people would consider using a pharmacy instead of visiting a GP for general medical advice.*

The paper went on to say that there was still work to do to educate the public about the role of their local pharmacy can play and the range of services available.

Healthwatch County Durham attended a presentation by County Durham & Darlington Local Pharmaceutical Committee where it became clear that pharmacies are delivering a vast range of services that the public are unlikely to be aware of, supporting the findings laid out in the HWE Briefing Paper. In addition Durham County Council's Public Health Team requested support with a public survey of pharmacy and dispensing doctor services, to inform the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), 2018-2021, which is produced every 3 years. It is used by NHS England when it assesses new pharmacy applications and by commissioners of pharmaceutical services. The PNA also links into the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Public Health Pharmaceutical lead was keen to gather the public's views on pharmacy / dispensing doctor services early on in the process of writing the PNA

As a result a work plan request was submitted to the Healthwatch County Durham Board in June 2017, and it was agreed by the board that the work could go ahead. A survey was seen as the most appropriate way of engaging with the public and was designed to meet the needs of HWCD, the LPC and Public Health, in order to capture the views of County Durham residents (see Appendix One). In order to have a greater reach people could complete the survey online via Survey Monkey or they could complete a paper copy.

## What We Did

The public consultation took place during July- September 2017. It was agreed that views captured up to 30<sup>th</sup> June would be shared with Public Health to inform the PNA. Over a hundred surveys were shared with them.

We:

- Worked with the LPC’s Chief Officer to raise awareness of the consultation with local pharmacies by giving a presentation to the LPC and by jointly writing to pharmacists
- Worked with Public Health’s Pharmaceutical Lead to raise awareness of the consultation with Durham County Council employees by posting the item on the council’s intranet
- Supported our volunteers to carry out surveys with the public, ensuring a range of locations e.g. urban, rural and a range of pharmacies e.g. large chains, supermarkets, independents.
- Were given the names of 6 pharmacies by the LPC that were happy to host an Enter & View visit
- Invited the LPC’s Chief Officer to speak at our annual meeting about this work and launch the survey
- Advertised the Survey Monkey link via our website, our monthly e-bulletin and social media channels and shared it with partners and networks across the County

In addition we held seven focused engagement events, which took place at Lloyds Consett, Lydon Pharmacy, Stanley, Miller’s Spennymoor, Asda Spennymoor, Tow Law Pharmacy, The Village Pharmacy, Newton Aycliffe and Boots, Crook.

The survey was designed to capture the public’s knowledge of pharmacy services and what else they would like to see offered to support pharmacies to increase the number of users and support the commissioning process. There was an opportunity for participants to make comments within the survey. The survey was a way of gathering views that were fed into the first draft of the PNA. The information captured will also inform CCG’s, pharmacies across the County and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Respondents were asked to provide the first half of their postcode to enable us to identify which locales were represented. Unfortunately not all respondents carried out this request. Postcode areas that were identified are:

DH1	DH7	DH8	DH9	DL12	DL13	DL14	DL15	DL16	DL17
TS21	TS28	SR7	SR8						

## Outreach Engagement with Volunteers

Along with Claire Cowell, HWCD’s Volunteer Co-ordinator, 8 volunteers attended 7 pharmacies across the county asking people about their knowledge and experience of pharmacy and dispensing doctor services. In total 100 surveys were completed by them.



## What We Heard

### Surveys

Of the 397 completed surveys, 252 were completed on-line and 145 were completed during our engagement activities. The responses were analysed via Survey Monkey and the key findings are highlighted below.

In terms of how the public access pharmaceutical services across County Durham:

- 54% access pharmaceutical services once a month, with 52% of people always / usually using the same pharmaceutical service.
- 93% can easily access pharmaceutical services, with 62% of them visiting a pharmacy by car or taxi.

In terms of how the public feel about talking to a pharmacist:

- 78% felt comfortable about getting advice from and talking to the pharmacist about their health problems
- 56% of were able to talk in their pharmacy without being overheard

However, 113 people (28%) surveyed could not talk in their pharmacy without being overheard and a further 60 people (15%) didn't know if any private facilities were available.

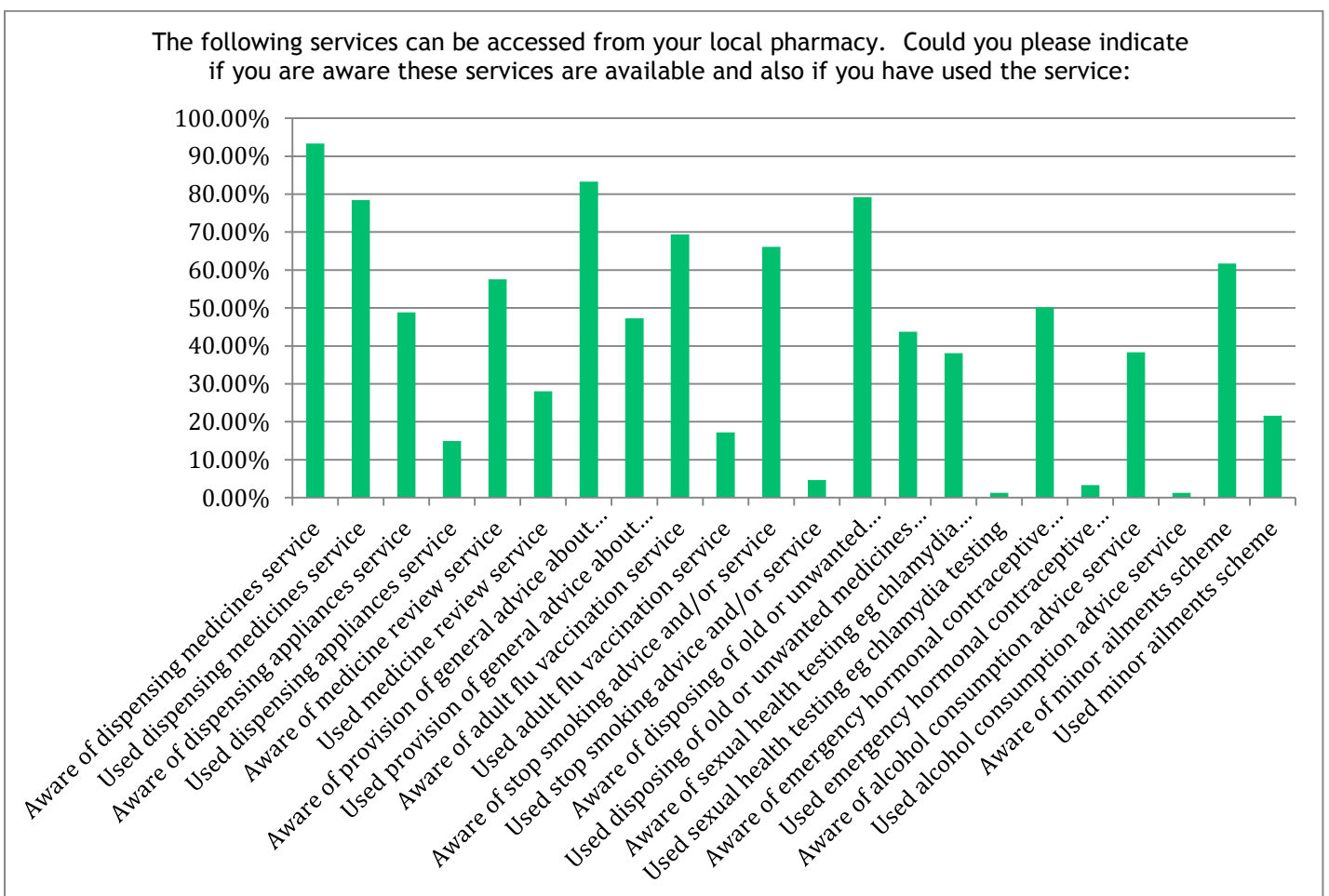


In relation to medication:

- 75% said that when they got new medication the pharmacist explained how, when and why they should use or take it
- 80% said the pharmacy usually had their prescribed medication in stock

Of the services offered by pharmacies 93% of respondents were aware of the dispensing medicines service with 78% having used it; 61% of respondents were aware of the minor ailments service with 21% having used it. At the other end of the scale:

- 69% were aware of the adult flu vaccination service but only 17% had accessed it
- 66% were aware of the smoking cessation service but only 4% had accessed it



We were interested to find out if any of the respondents had ever used a commercial, online pharmacy. In response to the question the majority of respondents said they hadn't. Of the 32 (8%) people who had used a commercial, online pharmacy 9 people stated that they used it because the medication was cheaper online. Other responses included convenience and privacy.

The common themes made in the free text boxes include:

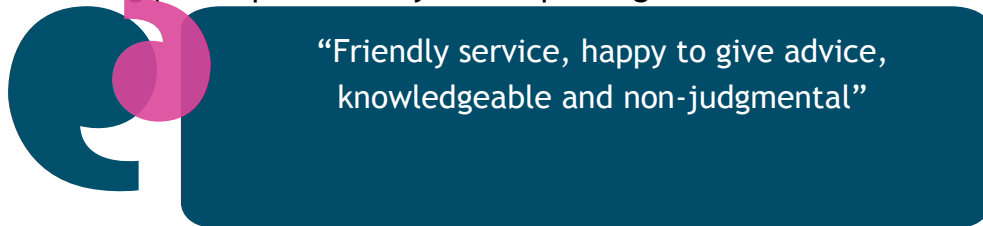
- Respondents were consistently positive about their local pharmacy with almost 94% of respondents (367) stating that pharmacy staff are polite and helpful
- Providing good customer care with friendly, caring staff
- Making sure prescriptions are available in a timely manner
- Providing advice and information about illnesses and medication

When asked what additional services respondents would like to access from their local pharmacy or GP practice dispensary the three most requested were:

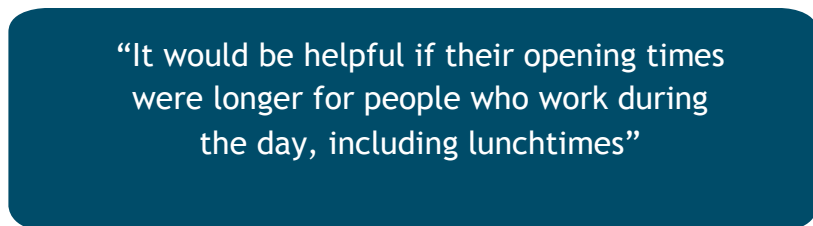
- Extended opening hours
- Disposal of needles and Sharps boxes
- Healthchecks e.g. blood pressure monitoring

Respondents were asked how the pharmacy could be improved. Several themes emerged including:

- Extended opening hours including pharmacists being available at lunchtimes and Saturdays
- Appropriate premises- bigger waiting area with privacy to talk to the pharmacist
- Having prescriptions ready and dispensing them faster

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“Friendly service, happy to give advice, knowledgeable and non-judgmental”

A dark blue rounded rectangular bubble with a white quote icon on the right side. The text inside is white.

“It would be helpful if their opening times were longer for people who work during the day, including lunchtimes”

Blind Life in County Durham, a group of blind and partially sighted people who meet on a regular basis kindly commented on their experiences of using local pharmacies. Their comments ranged from making suggestions that would assist them in taking medication, to communication between the surgery and the pharmacy, to the size of waiting areas.

In addition we recently consulted with some women who were victims of domestic abuse on their experiences of accessing health services. It was highlighted in some cases that it was problematic accessing prescription medication. If a victim was fleeing domestic abuse then it was possible she was leaving home without ID or prescribed medication. In some instances there were time delays making it very stressful. It would be worth considering if pharmacies could support these women in some way to access prescribed medication.

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## Enter & View Visits

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 allows Healthwatch Authorised Representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes and pharmacies. These are called Enter and View visits and three of these were conducted. Although these visits are quite separate to the consultation on pharmacy services, these visits provided an opportunity to talk to people face to face about their experiences and enabled us to take their views into account.

Three Enter and View visits were conducted at:

- Intrahealth Pharmacy, Chilton
- John Low Ltd Pharmacy, Shotley Bridge
- Bewick Pharmacy, Newton Aycliffe

Some recurring themes were identified:

Customers valued that staff were friendly, helpful and polite but also had a professional and considerate balance. They also valued the fact that staff remembered them personally, as this created a feeling that they were genuinely interested in a customer's wellbeing.

Retaining the staffing levels and quality of staff was important.

Good teamwork was highlighted and people talked about how cover is managed, so that services were not affected when staff were unavailable.

The locality of the pharmacy was raised as being important and the convenience of the pharmacy and GP being based at the same site. People felt this allowed for a much better and smoother service where the pharmacy and GP could work/communicate together.

Customers commented on what the pharmacies do well i.e. being given good advice, having time available to do that and good communication. High on the priorities for customers was a quick and efficient service, with staff trying hard to solve problems/find a solution, recommending ideas for health improvement.

Other positives included information on other available services being well publicised; always had medication in stock; checking that the customer understood their medication; prescriptions were ready in time.

Issues raised were concerned with the physical space and practicalities of using a service (car parking), data collection using technology; opening hours matching surgery hours (where this was on the same site).

Whilst the three visited Pharmacies held these issues in different priority order, the comments were all raised as important (Car Park and Data entry more specific to one pharmacy).

These comments reflect the main findings of this report.

## What We Found

From the findings of the 397 people who responded to our survey there is no doubt that people accessing pharmacies and GP practice dispensaries across County Durham value the services that they provide. The main findings are:

- 52% of people used the same pharmacy and 54% visited at least monthly
- The majority of respondents, 369, can easily access pharmacy services
- 36% use a high street pharmacy with 26% using a GP practice dispensary
- A large number of respondents are aware of certain services that pharmacies provide e.g. dispensing medicine, 364 people; provision of general advice about medicines, 325 people; aware of disposing of old or unwanted medicines, 309 people
- Whilst a significant number of respondents are aware of certain services, much smaller numbers of respondents use these services eg aware of the minor ailments scheme, 241 people, using the scheme, 85; aware of the adult flu vaccination service, 271 people, using the scheme, 67; aware of smoking cessation services, 258 people, using the scheme 18
- 78% feel comfortable about getting advice from and talking to a pharmacist about health problems
- 56% are able to talk in the pharmacy without being overheard, with 113 people believing that this wasn't possible
- Most respondents, 75%, have new medication explained to them by a pharmacist with 80% stating that the pharmacy usually has their prescribed medication in stock
- An extremely high number of respondents, 94%, found the pharmacy staff to be polite and helpful
- 8% have used a commercial, online pharmacy

## Recommendations

Following a review of our findings we would recommend that:

Facilities to enable customers to talk to the pharmacist without being overheard should be made available and clearly advertised. This may mean the provision of a 'consultation booth', better signage of existing facilities or verbally informing the customer that a private space is available when it becomes clear that the advice being sought is of a personal/confidential nature.

Although the public are very aware of some services pharmacies offer, others with a lower profile should be more clearly displayed as this could reduce pressure on other parts of the health care system. Similarly, consideration should be given to increase the uptake of certain services specifically medicine reviews, minor ailments scheme, adult flu vaccination, dispensing appliances, smoking cessation, emergency contraceptive service, alcohol consumption advice and sexual health testing. These services are used by less than 30% of the respondents.

The LPC should lead on developing a strategy that encourages younger users to access pharmacy services. This could increase the uptake of particular services e.g. emergency contraceptive services and sexual health testing. As customers of the future, this could also prevent younger people turning to online pharmacy services in the future - virtually all adults surveyed aged 16 to 34 years were recent internet users (99%), in contrast with 41% of adults aged 75 years and over. (Office for National Statistics, May 2017)

When explaining new medication to customers, pharmacists should make it clear that this is what they are doing as currently only 75% of respondents were aware of this happening.

One of the things that pharmacies were identified as doing well was making sure prescriptions were available in a timely manner. However one of the areas identified that pharmacies could improve was dispensing more quickly. We would suggest that this is looked into further to identify where the problem lies in relation to slow dispensing e.g. is the patient aware of the prescribing/dispensing process?

Specific issues were raised by blind and partially sighted customers. To address these issues respondents said that brail dots covering print on bottle labels and boxes would enable them to access their own medication. Changes to the packaging should be pointed out to these customers.

Consideration should be given to providing better access for disabled customers, including the provision of a space for wheelchair users.

More continuity in relation to the pharmacist on duty could support an increase in people using pharmacy services as people prefer to talk to someone familiar about their health problems.

Lunch time, later and weekend opening hours would enable more people to access the pharmacy service. In addition respondents requested that pharmacy opening times should be the same as the GP surgery opening hours.

Consideration should be given to offer some, if not all, of the following additional services - disposal of needles, sharps boxes, Healthchecks e.g. blood pressure measured, hearing aid batteries, holiday jabs, increased stock levels to ensure more medication is available for more of the time, a card payment system.

## Thank You

Healthwatch County Durham would like to thank those who have contributed to this piece of work.

### **Healthwatch County Durham Volunteers:**

Mervyn Hockin  
Jean Ross  
Jim Welch & Blind Life Durham  
Anne Glynn  
Helen Smith  
Pam & David Coombs  
Paul Stokes  
Jean Snow

### **The pharmacies and dispensing doctors services who allowed us to carry out consultations in their premises:**

The Village pharmacy, Newton Aycliffe  
Tow Law Pharmacy  
Boots, Crook Boots  
Millers, Spennymoor  
Asda, Spennymoor  
Lloyds, Consett  
Lydon Pharmacy, Stanley

### **The pharmacies who kindly allowed us to carry out Enter & View visits:**

Intrahealth Pharmacy, Chilton  
John Low Ltd Pharmacy, Shotley Bridge  
Bewick Pharmacy, Newton Aycliffe

### **Partners:**

County Durham and Darlington Local Pharmaceutical Committee  
Durham County Council's Public Health Team  
Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield Clinical Commissioning Group (DDES CCG)  
North Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (ND CCG)  
Pioneering Care Partnership  
Age UK County Durham  
Durham Community Action  
St. Andrew's Medical Practice, Spennymoor  
Advice in County Durham Network  
Investing in Children  
Durham County Carers Support  
SENDIASS  
Area Action Partnerships  
Durham Voice

## Appendix One

Healthwatch County Durham talks with and listens to people’s experiences of health and social care services to make sure that your views are taken into account when services are being designed.

We want to learn more about your experience of, and thoughts about, improving or changing pharmacy services in your community. Pharmacy services are either services you receive in your community pharmacy or from a dispensary in your GP practice. We would be grateful if you could complete the questionnaire below.

<b>How often do you access local pharmacy services in your area?</b>	At least once a week	At least monthly	At least every three months	At least every six months	At least once a year	Less than once a year
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<b>Do you always visit the same pharmacy service?</b>	Always	Usually	No
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<b>Can you easily access pharmacy services?</b>	Yes	No	Don't know / NA
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<b>Thinking about the pharmacy service you visit most often, how do you normally get there?</b>	On foot	Public transport	Car or taxi	Other
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<b>What type of pharmacy service is it?</b>	High street eg Boots	Supermarket	Doctor's surgery	Other
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The following questions ask about what local pharmacies do well and what could be improved.

<b>What does your pharmacy or GP practice dispensary do well?</b>
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<b>Are there any other services you would like to access from your local pharmacy or GP practice dispensary?</b>
<b>Is there any way your pharmacy or GP practice dispensary could be improved?</b>

**Thinking about services from pharmacies only:**

The following services can be accessed from your local pharmacy. Could you please indicate (✓) if you are aware these services are available and also (✓) if you have used the service.

Service	Aware ✓	Use ✓	Service	Aware✓	Use ✓
Dispensing medicines			Dispensing appliances		
Medicine review			Disposing of old or unwanted medicines		
General advice about medication			Sexual health testing e.g. Chlamydia testing		
Adult flu vaccination			Emergency hormonal contraceptive services		
Stop smoking advice and/or service			Alcohol consumption advice		
Minor ailment service e.g.- Advice and treatment about things such as, cystitis, constipation ,headaches & indigestion					

**Thinking about your experience of using local pharmacies:**

<i>Please place a ✓ in the appropriate boxes.</i>	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ NA
Do you feel comfortable getting advice from and talking to the pharmacist about health problems?			
Are you able to talk in your pharmacy without being overheard?			
When you get new medication from the pharmacist do they explain how, when and why you should use or take it?			



Does the pharmacy usually have your prescribed medication in stock?			
Are the pharmacy staff polite and helpful when you visit or contact them?			
Pharmacy name: (optional)			

Have you ever used a commercial, online pharmacy eg Express Pharmacy, to access pharmacy services?	Yes	No	Don't know
If Yes can you tell us why?			

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**

If you would like to receive our monthly e-bulletin then please give details of your email address, or for further information go to our website at [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net)

Email address:
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Age	Under 18	18-24	25 – 49	50 – 64	65 – 74	Over 75
Gender	Male	Female	Transgender	Other	Location (First part of postcode only)	
Ethnicity, please ✓						
White:	Mixed white and Black	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Other ethnic groups		
British	Caribbean	Indian	Any other black background	Chinese		
Irish	White & Black African	Pakistani		Any other (please state)		
Any other white background	White and Asian	Bangladeshi		Prefer not to say		
	Any other mixed background	Any other Asian background				

All information is kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act.