

Access to Medication in Shropshire

A report into people's experiences of accessing medication in Shropshire.

Hot Topic October – December 2025
Report published – May 2026

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About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Shropshire is your local health and social care champion.

If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services in your area, we want to hear about your experiences. We are independent and have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice. Last year, the Healthwatch network helped nearly a million people like you to have your say and get the support you need.



We work to make your voice count when it comes to shaping and improving services. We use a variety of methods to find out what people like about services, and what could be improved, and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen. Our reports go to:

- The organisations who provide services
- The commissioners who pay for services (e.g. Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board, Shropshire Council)
- Service regulators (the Care Quality Commission, NHS England)
- Our national body Healthwatch England to let them know how local services are working in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

We are not experts in health and social care. The engagement methods we use include surveys, focus groups and just a call for people to share their experiences of a particular service or issue with us over the phone, by email, through our website or when we meet them face-to-face.

If you have an experience to share about the issues raised in the report, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Executive Summary

Healthwatch Shropshire have previously published two reports highlighting people's experiences of using pharmacy services in Shropshire (see 'Context'). Since April 2025 we received **34 comments**. Some of these were about the Prescription Ordering Direct service which was withdrawn in November 2025. We also heard from some Shropshire Councillors about constituents who had experienced difficulties accessing medication.

The ongoing changes to primary care services and experiences people were sharing led Healthwatch Shropshire to put a call out for people across the county to get in touch to help us to understand **how easy it is for people in Shropshire to access their medication**.

We collected feedback via:

Social media engagement, and

In-person conversations at community events and outreach visits.

We received **20 responses** relating to medication access and pharmacy services through our hot topic.

Key findings

Of the 20 people who responded to the most recent call for experiences:

45% (9/20) said the **NHS App** made ordering and receiving prescriptions *quick and easy*.

20% (4/20) praised the **speed and helpfulness** of their local pharmacy.

20% (4/20) reported **unacceptable waiting times** for prescriptions to be processed or collected.

10% (2/20) described the **prescribing system as confusing or inefficient**.

A small number of responses described **multiple pharmacy trips**, stock issues and communication gaps.

Key message

People value efficient digital systems and helpful staff, but delays and system frustrations still affect a significant proportion of those trying to access their medication.

This report brings together what we have heard from over 55 people regarding access to medication since 1st April 2025.

Context

In **2020** Healthwatch Shropshire published the report [‘Experiences of accessing Primary Care Services in Shropshire’](#). We had completed seven Enter & View visits to GP practices speaking to 58 people, heard from 149 people through general engagement and 24 people who specifically shared their experiences of pharmacy services. At the time we heard from a local pharmacist who raised their concerns about the increasing pressure being put on the service:

In 2019 ‘Pharmacists are being asked/commissioned/expected to see extra people especially through the winter period with sinus problems... There is a national concern about the stress on Pharmacists with increased responsibility, increased disturbances throughout the day. The pressure on staff has increased but the hours have not increased. There is an increased workload and effectively decreased pay.’ (p.31)

In **2025** we published our next report [‘Shropshire Pharmacy Services and Consultations’](#) following the introduction of ‘Pharmacy First’ in early 2024 which meant pharmacists could supply **‘appropriate medicines for 7 common conditions including earache, sore throat, and urinary tract infections, aiming to address health issues before they get worse.’**

Just part of the enhanced¹ pharmacy offer, including:

- Appliance Use Review
- Blood Pressure checks
- Flu Vaccination Service
- Lateral Flow Device service
- New medicines service
- Pharmacy Contraception Service
- Smoking Cessation Service
- Stoma Appliance Customisation

Seventy-five people shared their views through our survey, 72 of these were answering as patients or on behalf of patients. Three people shared their views as members of community pharmacy staff. We also heard from 18 people through our general engagement.

In this report we heard that the three services people used the most and satisfaction levels (% where it was rated it as very good or good) were:

1. Collecting prescribed medication – 65%
2. Seeking advice and help with a medical condition – 83%
3. Buying non-prescribed medication – 100%

The majority of feedback people shared about their experience of using pharmacy services was positive, with praise being given to pharmacy staff for their professionalism and helpful approach. However, we also heard about the impact the additional demand on pharmacy staff was having on waiting times for prescriptions to be dispensed, for example:

“Took three visits to pharmacy to be able to collect prescription and had to wait on final visit for it to be put together. Was told it’s taking longer to do and repeatedly told its 1.5 weeks despite it being two weeks since I ordered and it was still not compiled. I now have it delivered as far faster and more reliable.”

¹ [NHS England » Pharmacy services](#)

- “Even when leaving prescription, a week before collecting never ready. Always a long queue and long wait or have to come back later in day or another day.”
- “I order my repeat medication with plenty of days left to make sure I don’t run out. I had to go back several times for just one box of tablets required as they kept saying it wasn’t ready then I got to the point where I only had one left ... after leaving it five days before going to collect I then shouldn’t have to come back three times when it’s only one item.”
- “Rude staff, long wait between ordering medication at GPs and collection, long queues in the pharmacy.” (p.21)

People shared their concerns about pressures on pharmacies, for example:

- “This morning I waited to collect a prescription for ... 50 minutes. I left the pharmacy without the medication. This wait is not unusual at the moment and has been the case for at least the past two months. The service is simply inadequate for a town [of this size]. I need to stress that this is not a complaint about the staff of the pharmacy, who are unfailingly polite and helpful and working under extremely trying circumstances. This is a complaint about staffing levels, and it is only the management ... that can do anything about that.” (p.23)

Responding to suggestions for improvement from the public, Healthwatch Shropshire made four recommendations, the first being to ‘reduce delays in dispensing medication and increasing access to GP appointments’.

NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin provided the following response to this:

'We [NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin] recognise the frustration caused by delays in medication dispensing and difficulties accessing GP appointments. The feedback highlights significant challenges related to increased pressure on pharmacy services, with concerns around capacity, funding, and workforce shortages. These issues are compounded by the growing demands of additional workloads.

To address these concerns, we are actively exploring ways to streamline process through enhancing integration and supporting workforce development to build capacity in primary care.' (p.27)

This report

Access to regular medication is essential for managing long-term health conditions, recovery from illness, and day-to-day wellbeing.

Across Shropshire, access depends on effective coordination between:

- GP practices (prescribing)
- Pharmacies (dispensing)
- Hospital clinics
- Digital services such as the NHS App

Nationally, demand for pharmacy services has increased, and workforce and stock pressures continue to impact public experience.

In September 2025, NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin made the decision to withdraw the Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) services, a phone and email system of ordering repeat prescriptions set up in 2016/17. From November 2025 people needed to go back to ordering their prescriptions through their GP and encourage people to use the [NHS App](#).

Throughout the year Healthwatch Shropshire noticed an increase in comments regarding pharmacy services, receiving 34 comments since April. Many of them

were in response to the closure of POD and the value of the ability to speak to a member of staff, for example:

G ‘What? So, they are closing POD? I didn’t know this, should I have known? How would I have known? So, I need to get another app now to order? I’m on medication and so is my husband, usually I would email, and POD would get back to me. The prescription would then be ready to collect in 4 working days. They [were] very good at telling me if I ordered too soon... I have just got my head around their email process. I have ADHD so it is really hard for me to stay on top of this for me and my husband. Do you know if the [NHS App] has a pre-order reminder notification? That could be useful for me as nothing stays in my brain long enough. POD were very supportive with that though; they have had to put a couple of rushed prescription requests through for me before.’

In September 2025, we were contacted by a Local Councillor sharing concerns regarding delays in accessing medication in a local pharmacy:

‘Throughout the day, queues of up to ten people are a common occurrence. While the staff are consistently praised for being courteous, kind and dedicated, they are clearly under significant pressure, and the current working practices seem unfair to them.

A more urgent issue is that many [people] frequently receive only part of their medication. This is particularly serious as some prescriptions are time-critical and essential for managing long-term or life-threatening conditions. The requirement to order prescriptions often only a week in advance exacerbates these difficulties, with delays causing considerable issues. Prescriptions ordered after 9am on a Thursday are often not available until 2pm the following Monday and sometimes well into the next week.

Additionally, there appear to be problems with deliveries or suppliers, leaving staff to manage overflowing prescription boxes, which create further delays and challenges. This is in stark contrast to the pharmacy’s previous operations, where such disruptions were typically only experienced around Christmas when advance ordering was expected and manageable.

Patients are understandably very concerned as their health, and in some cases, their lives depend on timely access to medication. Many elderly [people] are unable to use alternative pharmacies due to travel difficulties, leaving them reliant on this service.

I urge you to review current working practices, address any issues with suppliers and consider whether additional staffing support is necessary to alleviate the burden on the existing team. It is important to note that no complaints have been made about the staff themselves; on the contrary, they have been commended for their dedication and professionalism under very challenging circumstances.’ **Shropshire Councillor**

Prompted by this and the withdrawal of the Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) service, Healthwatch Shropshire decided to ask people to share their current experiences of accessing medication.

What we did and who we heard from

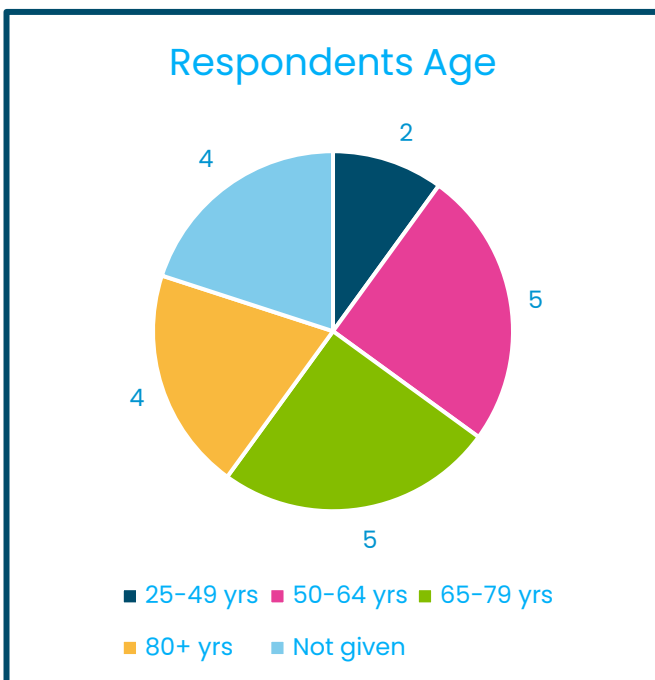
Engagement period: 1st October – 1st December 2025

How we engaged

We:

- Posted questions and polls across our social media channels
- Collected comments via Facebook and Instagram messages
- Spoke to people at local community engagement sessions
- Encouraged people to share their recent experiences of accessing medication

The flyer features the Healthwatch Shropshire logo at the top right. On the left, there are two overlapping speech bubbles, one green and one pink. On the right, there is a photograph of a pharmacist in a blue uniform standing behind a counter, talking to two elderly customers. Below the photo, the text reads: 'Share your recent experience of getting medication from your GP surgery, local pharmacy, or online via the NHS App'. Underneath that, it says 'Contact us' followed by the phone number '01743 237884', the email 'enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk', and the website 'www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk'. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner.



Responses

We received **20 usable comments** from people living across Shropshire. We heard from two men and 18 women.

Although a small sample, the messages were consistent and provided clear themes around what is working well and what needs improvement.

We have based this report on these comments and include the 34 unsolicited comments we have received since 1st April 2025. **Total 54 comments**

What people told us



People who responded to our call between October and December shared a range of positive and negative experiences.

Comments fell into the following broad categories (some responses included more than one theme):

| Theme | Number | % |
|--|--------|-----|
| Access via NHS App – smooth and efficient | 9 | 45% |
| Waiting times / delays | 4 | 20% |
| Positive experiences (e.g. quick, easy, excellent service) | 4 | 20% |
| Staff helpfulness | 3 | 15% |
| Concerns (e.g. confusing, inefficient, or frustrating processes) | 2 | 10% |
| Stock issues / multiple trips | 2 | 10% |

(Percentages rounded; adds to >100% as responses could contain multiple themes.)

This report also includes comments people have shared with us since April 2025 about their experiences of accessing medication, either by phone, through our webform or when we have spoken to them face-to-face at an engagement stand in a local hospital or an event.

What's working well

Although experiences varied, many people who we heard from between October and December praised both **digital systems** and **pharmacy staff**.

1. NHS App ordering is smooth and efficient

45% (9 out of 20) described their experience with the NHS App positively:

- "NHS App prescription service is so smooth."
- "Quick and easy."

People appreciated being able to order repeat prescriptions without calling the GP or visiting the pharmacy.

G "The NHS app has worked well especially with script ordering and monitoring my appointments and letters."

G "I like using the NHS app, I prefer to use that compared to other methods. My pharmacy is connected to my GP practice and usually my prescription is ready to collect in just under 1 week. I don't have any issues or concerns; it works well for me'.

2. Friendly and supportive pharmacy staff

Several people recognised the effort and care of pharmacy teams:

- "Staff amazing – system awful, but staff always helpful."
- "Excellent service."

G "My daughter was bitten by something recently, and it was flaring up, but she didn't want to go to the GP as she hadn't had

a great experience there, so she went to her local Pharmacy and they were great, she was prescribed anti-biotics there and then'.

One person shared with us their experience of going to their pharmacist for contraception:

G "I asked over the counter if there was someone available that I could get advice from, they asked me to take a seat and that someone would come over to me when they were available. I didn't have to wait long, and a female pharmacist came over and invited me into a private consultation room, she was very nice, friendly, calm and patient; she spent about 15 minutes with me. She asked me lots of questions and gave me lots of options, together we decided on a solution... At no point did I feel judged or embarrassed to be discussing these things, I felt completely comfortable and able to ask any questions. She asked me if I was happy for my GP to be notified and for it to be added to my medical records... After the consultation I was asked to take a seat again and that I would be called to the counter when it was ready to be collected. They started dispensing it straight away... it was completely discreet... I would encourage everyone to always go to their pharmacy first."

3. Quick processing and collection

A small number of people emphasised fast turnaround:

- "Brilliant service."
- "Prescription ready the same day."

G “I use the NHS app, and it works well for me, I am able to order what I want and then get text notifications from [the pharmacy] to say that they have received the prescription, they also give an estimated collection date. It is all in one place and works well.”

When attending a public engagement event our Engagement Officer heard from a member of the public about a new service at their GP practice:

G “Prescriptions at my practice are now being put in 24-hour lockers for people to access and collect their prescriptions in their own time, a text code is sent out for you to access your locker. My GP is really progressive...”

These positive experiences show that where systems and staffing levels allow it, some pharmacies deliver excellent service.

Health inequalities

‘Health inequalities are unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society.’ [NHS England](#)»

[What are healthcare inequalities?](#)

A number of people shared their concerns about the impact of new technology and changing systems on elderly and vulnerable people, including those with long term conditions and people needing a large number of medications. Particularly those without the support of family or friends:

Older people:

G “[The NHS] seem to not care about older people”
Member of the public aged 80+ spoken to at an engagement event.

“My son and daughter in law have to organise all my medications as I find it so confusing what and when to take it – thank goodness I have them to help sort it all out for me.”

“I really worry about the elderly who don’t have access to technology or have anyone who can help them with it. The move to technology concerns me. It is as if the NHS are moving forward without considering the older generation.” Carer aged 50-65

“Everything is going to technology now, I don’t know how I am going to manage, I am 65 and have issues with my memory, I have to write everything down, so I really don’t know how the older generations are going to manage, they don’t even have phones. My mum will never manage with medicine management changing to the app. She is too old to learn and doesn’t want to learn, at that age you shouldn’t have to. But the NHS don’t care about the older generations now, they know they will be gone soon, they are just going to move forwards without them’. Carer

Mental health

One person shared their experience of trying to get a GP appointment to discuss medication following hospital discharge and its impact on them:

G “I have recently been discharged from A&E following a visit as I was having more seizures, when they discharged me, they said they wanted my GP to increase my medication and that they would send the discharge notes about this to them. But when I call to ask about this medication increase, they tell me I will have to wait 4 weeks for an appointment, but this is urgent, I am having seizures, it can't wait 4 weeks, I don't know what to do. I don't need a medication review; I just need an increase. I don't want to keep relying on and going to Ill and A&E, I have autism and aspergers, this is very stressful for me.”

As part of our face-to-face engagement this year, we heard from veterans and their families:

G “Yes, it is all moving to the NHS app and people will have to be responsible and do it all for themselves now. Will be a bit hard for those experiencing mental health issues I would imagine.”

We also heard from someone who is homeless about the difficulties they have managing their medication:

G “I've just gone and got these pills, and it's so complicated I've got to take about eleven of them each day and I'm not sure how I'm going to keep them safe and remember that. I've got loads of other meds I have to take each day for my mental health, and I just have to carry them round in my bag... It worries me.”

Themes for Improvement

Even though many experiences were positive, around **40%** of respondents to the most recent call for people to share their views and experiences reported problems that caused stress or inconvenience.

1. Improve waiting times and reduce delays

20% (4 out of 20) said delays were the biggest issue:

- "Pharmacy ordering wait time unacceptable."
- "Had to wait days for routine medication."

People described:

- Delays between GP authorisation and pharmacy dispensing
- Long queues
- Wasted trips when prescriptions weren't ready



"I went to get a flu jab and took my prescription in at the same time, and it took over a week for it to be ready when it should take 3 days."

2. Address system inefficiencies

10% (2 out of 20) described the prescribing and dispensing system as "confusing", "awful", or "not joined up".

Examples included:

- Medication marked as ready on the app but not prepared in the pharmacy
- Prescriptions being split, requiring multiple visits

- Communication gaps between GP and pharmacy
- Difficulties when needing new medication

G “The only issues I have had is coordinating medication reviews, when a medicine is prescribed as temporary or acute and then times out and moved to a ‘past medication’ list, it is then unable to be requested. You then need to fight your way through on the phone to try and get a message to a GP. This is a lot of hassle and just adds to the GP problems, clogging up the phone lines for admin purposes... I didn’t even want to see a GP. I have heard that some practices are setting up prescription only phone lines to support with this.”

3. Explore ways to reduce stock shortages leading to multiple trips

Although only raised a couple of times, stock issues caused inconvenience:

- *“Had to go back two or three times.”*
- *“Left without the medication I needed.”*

G “System is awful, I have to wait 8-10 days from them receiving the prescription to collecting the medication. This is for two particular items. One is for asthma and the other [for hypothyroidism]. All other items on the prescription can be done within four days.”

4. Address variation in experience across different pharmacies and areas

Some respondents said that while one branch was excellent, another nearby had frequent delays, suggesting inconsistency in service levels.

G “When ordering repeat prescriptions, you get a message from the pharmacy to say they've received the prescription and then you get one saying when it's ready to collect. It can take a few days from when they receive it to when it's ready and this is not acceptable.”

Some people mentioned that there are no local services on Sundays:

G “[We] have three pharmacies, one ought to be open for an hour on Sunday. Telford... is the alternative which is very difficult to get to on most days let alone a Sunday as public transport is sporadic.”

5. Address health inequalities and improve information for the public

Consider the individual needs of the population, their ability to use online services, access new systems and processes, and receive information about the services and support available to them.

A number of people shared that they were confused about what they could expect (e.g. waiting times).

One person told us:

G “Some people still aren't understanding that they can't pick up their prescription on the same day they put the request in. It's an education process.”

We also heard that some people are not aware of what they were entitled to, such as free prescriptions, including veterans². Sometimes receiving conflicting messages.

² [War Pensioners: Other help you may be entitled to - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/war-pensioners-other-help-you-may-be-entitled-to)

G “I get a military pension for the injuries I received during my time in service, this also means that any prescriptions I need related to my injuries are also covered but one of the last times I went to collect a prescription the staff member implied that this covered all medications, including those not related to my injuries. I wasn't sure about this, so I paid anyway as I didn't want to go along with it and then it all turn on me months later. I asked if they had any evidence or information to confirm this but there was nothing they could show me at the time, so I am still none the wiser and still paying for all my other prescriptions.” Veteran

G “She said, ‘oh no, you're not going to pay for your prescription’. But I wouldn't have known that unless she had told me, I would have paid for it... She told me that she had to tick a box and then she took me right to the front of the queue and she got me sorted within 5 minutes, gave me my stuff... But the next time I went in, I was served by someone different, and I had to pay for it... They said it was because I wasn't ‘down as’ a war veteran. I'm a Royal Engineers veteran that served for 24 years in both Afghanistan and Iraq... I don't claim for this, that and the other so why am I caught in this fight over their mixed messages, no one knows stuff you see and that's the problem, some know about it and some don't, and... then you end up fighting with someone.” Veteran

NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin response

Healthwatch Shropshire has received the following response from the Interim Chief Medical Officer at NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and NHS Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent:

Feedback from patients and residents is always valuable, and we would like to thank Healthwatch Shropshire for undertaking this work and for highlighting important insights that support continuous improvement.

While the sample size is modest, the findings highlight encouraging progress as well as some of the challenges we face across all services that provide patients with access to medicines. While there are areas for development, we are also proud of the positive feedback reflected in the report. It is particularly encouraging to see evidence of good experiences of pharmacy teams across the county, the use of digital tools such as the NHS App, as well as growing awareness of Pharmacy First.

Following recent government changes, we are currently in a period of development, innovation, and quality improvement. With neighbourhood health now at the forefront of our work, this report comes at an opportune time to help us drive forward improvements, and to continue working closely with our partners to ensure we are doing so in a collaborative and co-ordinated way for the benefit of our patients and residents.

Thank you

We want to thank everyone who has contributed, supported and been involved with this project. Sharing your feedback with us has allowed us to understand how the services are being received, what works well and what needs improvement.



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