

Pharmacy closures: Impact on Surrey residents

Local residents and community groups were concerned about the negative impact which the closure of several pharmacies were having on them, and shared these concerns with Healthwatch Surrey.

These included:

- Boots, Thames Ditton High Street
- 'Little Boots' Pharmacy, Cranleigh High Street
- Boots, Merrow Park
- Lloyds in Sainsburys, Burpham

What did we do?

We set out to build an accurate picture of the level and nature of the impact which the closure of these pharmacies were having on the local population.

We did this via

- An online survey
- Engagement events
- Paper copies of our online survey

Who did we speak to?

429 people completed our survey, either online or via a paper copy, or spoke to us directly.

Across the three areas (Thames Ditton, Cranleigh, Burpham and Merrow), on average, **65%** of people were impacted by their local pharmacy closure.

A [national survey](#) conducted by Healthwatch England – with support and input from Healthwatch Surrey – found that only 2% of people have never used a community pharmacy, which underlines the important role community pharmacies play within the health system.

Across the 3 areas in our survey, on average, **69%** of residents would consider going to their pharmacy instead of their GP practice for minor illnesses or health advice.

Quotes from our survey:

“The pharmacy was part of the community, conveniently located and brilliant for advice for minor ailments. It has become much harder to get prescriptions, and even harder to get advice instead of going to the GP as it feels like pharmacy staff in our remaining pharmacy on Epsom Road are doing their best, but too busy. There is no privacy. The pharmacy is small, and I don't feel I can take the time to talk to staff as so many people are waiting in line.”

Guildford resident

“As I don't drive and the bus services are infrequent in my area I have to go out of my way and make special journeys into Esher to get medication and / or seek medical advice. I have to walk and it takes me c30-40 minutes each way which can be problematic as I have an arthritic knee. I need ready and regular access to a pharmacy for both myself and my husband who has many medical issues so the closure of this local pharmacy is having a bad impact on us.”

Thames Ditton resident

What did our engagement tell us?

- Residents value the service and clinical expertise which their local pharmacy can provide – they are often the most visible and accessible part of the health system.
- The impact of the closure of one pharmacy on the alternative provision in the area is a huge concern for local residents – if alternatives don't meet their needs in terms of capacity, space or opening hours the value of the service is hugely reduced.
- Travel distance from home is the most important core indicator for people when visiting a pharmacy, but this is more complex than a crude mileage value – people need to be able to walk, or have reliable / accessible / affordable public transport options.
- Good customer service is also considered to be critically important, but people's confidence in this is eroded if a pharmacy is seen to not have sufficient capacity.
- Some of those affected are not online, and therefore their voices may not be heard as part of digital data and opinion gathering needs typically used to inform Pharmaceutical Needs Assessments.*

What did we recommend?

Based on the survey findings, Healthwatch Surrey have recommended the following to the Surrey Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA)* Steering Group:

1. When evaluating existing/changes to pharmacy provision, the real impact on local residents – based on what they are saying, not a generic distance metric – should be considered.
2. Consideration of alternative pharmacy provision must take in to account opening hours and capacity to deal with increased customer numbers.
3. How easily residents can walk/get public transport to a pharmacy – and specific local needs in this regard based on local demographics– should help to determine what is considered as “acceptable”.
4. Local residents should be kept informed about changes to pharmacy provision in their area, including alternatives in light of planned closures. This recommendation reflects that of Healthwatch England at a national level.*
5. A range of opportunities to for people to share their views should be offered to residents across Surrey, including non-digital methods.

What impact have we had?

Following our recommendation, walking time maps and a new question assessing how pharmacists would handle increased demand if the nearest alternative pharmacy were to close will now be included in the latest PNA. We will continue to share the views of patients as part of the PNA Steering Group.

* The Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) is a statutory requirement under the NHS (Pharmaceutical Services and Local Pharmaceutical Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2013. It highlights the needs of residents in Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole for pharmaceutical services.