



PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Pharmacy and Post Offices

Brief Summary of PSNI's position:

- Amongst the many services provided by Post Offices, the relationship of Post Offices in providing access to healthcare services is under-appreciated
- Alongside high street pharmacies, Post Offices are anchors of service provision within local areas, especially in deprived or remote communities
- The future maintenance of a rural and urban Post Office network could be supported by consideration of the opportunities to co-locate Post Offices within a community pharmacy. Several successful examples of this co-location exist in Northern Ireland. These opportunities should be explored before final decisions on closure are made.
- The Network Change Programme should be more open and transparent in its intended closure programme, mapping out all post offices in Northern Ireland, highlighting those earmarked for closure and placing this information in the public domain. This might then further facilitate intervention from other parties to develop proposals to maintain a Post Office service by, for example, co-location of services within a local community pharmacy.

The role of Post Offices in providing access to healthcare

Post Offices provide a gateway for low income groups to receive their full entitlement to free health care. Post Offices supply, collect, and provide general information about the HC1, HC2, HC3 and PS7 forms.

- The HC1 form must be completed and approved to qualify members of the public for exemption from prescription charges (e.g. those in receipt of income support).
- Completing the requirements of the HC2 form entitles an individual to free dental treatment, eye tests and some glasses
- The HC3 form is an application form for limited support with some health costs, but not prescription costs
- HC5 is a claim form for a refund of NHS wigs or fabric supports
- The PS7 form enables those who are entitled to free prescriptions to receive a refund if they have already made a prescription payment.

The Post Office also provides the useful HC11 information leaflet "Help with Health Costs" which explains to the public the myriad of different levels of



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support with healthcare costs available, and how to process a claim for entitlement.

Finally, in rural communities *without* a pharmacy, but *with* a post office, the Post Office can become a place where repeat prescriptions are collected. This is a valuable service to many elderly and immobile residents living within rural localities.

Post Offices and Pharmacies as anchors of local communities

Alongside a community pharmacy, Post Offices are often vital hubs of both small village, and suburban economies. Without either service, village high streets and suburban shopping parades can often die out due to a lack of essential footfall to support ancillary businesses.

Both community pharmacies and Post Offices require a level protection to preserve and enhance the existence of sustainable communities and service provision beyond simply the major urban retail centres.

Post-Office and Pharmacy co-location

As an example, Saintfield Post Office has successfully co-located with its neighbouring pharmacy, providing mutual benefit to both parties including increased footfall to the premises and reduced overheads in terms of rent and rates per business unit.

The potentials for Post Offices to co-locate with other businesses, including community pharmacies should be an essential part of any evaluation before earmarking a Post Office for closure.

Presentation of closure plans

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland urges that the Post Office Network Change Programme makes strides to be more open and transparent in the progression of any post office closure plans for Northern Ireland. In particular, the Society is aware of plans in London to develop a map of all post offices in London, highlighting those which have been earmarked for closure. A similar map for Northern Ireland, placed in the public domain, may assist stakeholders, such as local community pharmacies, in considering the available options to save a local post office from closure by, for example, co-location with another existing business such as a community pharmacy.



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The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is the professional and regulatory body of pharmacists in Northern Ireland.

The Society primarily exists to provide a framework for the pharmacy profession to operate within that maintains patient safety at the centre of its practise, a role it has undertaken for over 80 years.

The Society also has an important role to play in representing the profession in order to deliver the highest professional standards, and ensure that the public receive the full benefits of the pharmacy profession's skillset and unique offering.

The Society registers and regulates over 1,950 pharmacists in Northern Ireland and over 500 premises.

The Society's primary interest in the Ad Hoc Committee's investigation into postal services is to assist the Committee in exploring available avenues to ensure the maintenance of local sustainable communities in which essential services such as Post Offices and Community Pharmacies can continue meeting the varied and ever-changing needs of the local populations.