

Importance of Pharmacy has Increased

The importance of community pharmacies has increased throughout the pandemic according to new research from B&A. The study, published by the IPU, found that with overall visits to GPs decreasing during the pandemic, pharmacies have grown in importance. 39% of people now see their pharmacist as their most important healthcare professional.



Dermot Twomey, President,
Irish Pharmacy Union

The 2021 edition of the Irish Pharmacy Index is the 15th annual study to quantitatively measure public attitudes to pharmacy in Ireland.

Key findings of 2021 study include:

- The number of people citing pharmacists as their most important healthcare provider has increased by almost a third;
- The majority of people (54%) visited the GP less often throughout the pandemic period, with many consulting with their pharmacist instead;
- Pharmacists play a much greater role in the healthcare of younger adults. Someone under the age of 25 is four times more likely to have been to the pharmacy in the past week than a GP;
- Up to half (48%) of the adult population indicated that the pandemic has either had some or a significant impact on their health with the biggest impact being on younger adults;

- 85% of people see pharmacies as highly accessible and 57% believe they are increasing in relevance; and
- There is clear support for pharmacies expanding the range of services they provide, including 88% favouring the availability of vaccines in pharmacies.

Commenting on the findings, IPU President, Dermot Twomey said, "The role of the community pharmacy has been expanding and increasing in importance for many years. This accelerated during the pandemic as pharmacies kept their doors open during each lockdown. With people visiting GPs less, or GPs favouring virtual appointments, the accessibility of pharmacies is driving healthcare in our communities."

The report found that 85% of people find pharmacies accessible compared to 51% for GPs and just 13% for hospitals. Furthermore, the longer opening hours typically offered by pharmacies were recognised, with 75% agreeing that pharmacies are available at a time that suits compared to just 31% for GPs.

Mr Twomey welcomed the exceptionally high levels of trust (97%) patients have towards their pharmacies by patients,

"Pharmacists pride themselves in their personal approach to healthcare and supporting patients. The direct personal interaction allows us to provide valuable advice to patients in a quick and convenient way."

Public support for expanding the role of pharmacies is very strong with 95% favouring pharmacists being allowed to prescribe medications for minor ailments. "The pharmacy profession stepped up during the pandemic in a big way. The sector has now administered more than 215,000 COVID-19 vaccines in just two months. Prior to that, when called upon and empowered to do so, we extended and repeated prescriptions for patients for up to nine months when other healthcare providers weren't available, to ensure safe continuation of patients' medication and to help manage their existing health conditions. Both are examples of how increasing the role of pharmacies can rapidly lead to successful results."

Mr Twomey concluded by calling for a concerted government effort to maximise the value of the pharmacy sector in post-pandemic healthcare, "We are all optimistic that the crisis of the pandemic will recede in the coming months. Now is the time to plan for how healthcare will operate in future. Ireland's 1,800 community pharmacies have the ability and experience to provide more services in order to help ensure the implementation of the *Sláintecare* goal of 'care in the community'."

"The types of services which community pharmacists are ideally positioned to deliver include a pharmacy-based Triage Programme including a Minor Ailment Scheme and for women to be allowed to access contraception directly from their community pharmacist without prescription."

"These services are being offered by pharmacies in other countries and the approach is working. It's more efficient for patients and is more cost effective for the State."

"The public wants this and pharmacists want this. All we need now is for the government to take notice and to start availing of this huge potential."

Vaccine Hesitancy Drops

Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy has dropped by 36 points over the past 10 months, according to the latest research carried out by Ipsos MRBI for the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA).

Last October, when IPHA began tracking public appetite for Covid-19 vaccines, 12% of people said they would not get vaccinated for the disease. In the same month, 33% said they were unsure. By this month, the proportion of people who said they will not get vaccinated for Covid-19 had dropped to 5%. Just 4% are unsure.

In the 18 to 34-year-old cohort, 86% either intend to get vaccinated for Covid-19 or have already received a vaccine for the disease. Last October, 19% of people in that age cohort said they would refuse a vaccine against 7% this month. A further 32% of 18 to 34-year-olds said they were unsure about vaccination last October compared with 8% this month.

In the 18 to 24-year-old cohort, 10% said they were unsure about getting a Covid-19 vaccine against 15% last month. In the same age cohort, 4% said they would refuse to get vaccinated for the disease – the same proportion as last month.

Overall, 91% of people either intend to get vaccinated or have already received a vaccine for the disease. The results show that 5% of people will take a Covid-19 vaccine. But when combined with the cohort that has received at least one Covid-19 vaccine dose, or 86% of the sample*, that number rises to 91%.

Bernard Mallee, Director of Communications and Advocacy at IPHA, said, "No vaccine is manufactured start-to-finish in one factory or even in one country. Ingredients can come from all over the world and, often, multiple sites are involved in production. So, it is vital that the integrity of the global supply chain is maintained."