

Pharmacy First

October 2024



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Introduction

Healthwatch Halton is the independent voice of the public in health and social care in Halton. We gather feedback from the public through engagement and projects and use that feedback to work with health and social care providers and commissioners to improve service delivery.

Healthwatch Halton is delivered by Engaging Communities Solutions CIC (ECS) and ECS recently undertook a project across its seven local Healthwatch to gather feedback from people about their knowledge and experience of Pharmacy First and other community pharmacy services.

Pharmacy First was launched by the NHS in January 2024 with the aim of enabling pharmacists to provide advice and treatment such as antibiotics for a range of minor ailments. This service would then be able free up GP appointments for those with more serious or long-term health conditions.

This report outlines the feedback from the people of Halton who took part in the project by completing a short survey.

Methodology

This project used a survey that was available online and as a hard copy where required. We promoted the survey through our Healthwatch network, on our website and through social media. We also undertook surveys face to face with members of the public at a range of locations during our outreach activity.

Who took part

There were 166 responses to the survey from people who said that they lived in Halton.

The largest group of people who took part, 32%, were aged 65–79 years old with the next largest group being those aged 25 to 49 years old at 25%.

21% of people were aged 18 to 24 years and 18% were aged 50 to 64 years old. 16 to 17-year-olds accounted for 1% of people responding to the survey and people aged 80 and over made up 3%.

64% of people who responded to the survey were women and 36% were men.

76% of people said that they were from a White British ethnic background and 2% identified as White Irish. Just under 1% said that they were from a White other background.

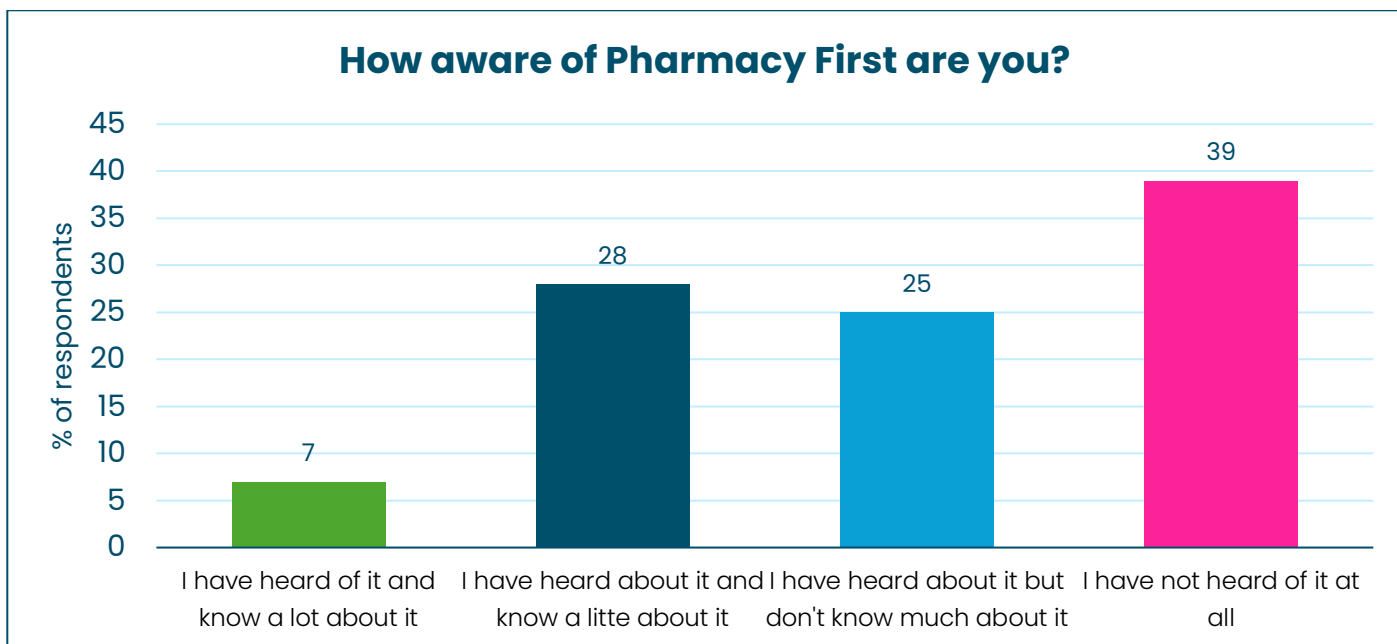
1% of people said that they were from an Asian/British Asian Chinese background; just under 1% said that they were from an Asian/Asian British Bangladeshi background; just under 2% were from an Indian background and 3% were from a Pakistani background. Just under 4% of people said that they were from a different Asian/Asian British background.

Under 1% of people said that they were from a Black/Black British African background and 2% were from a Black Caribbean background. 1% of people said that they were from another Black/Black British background.

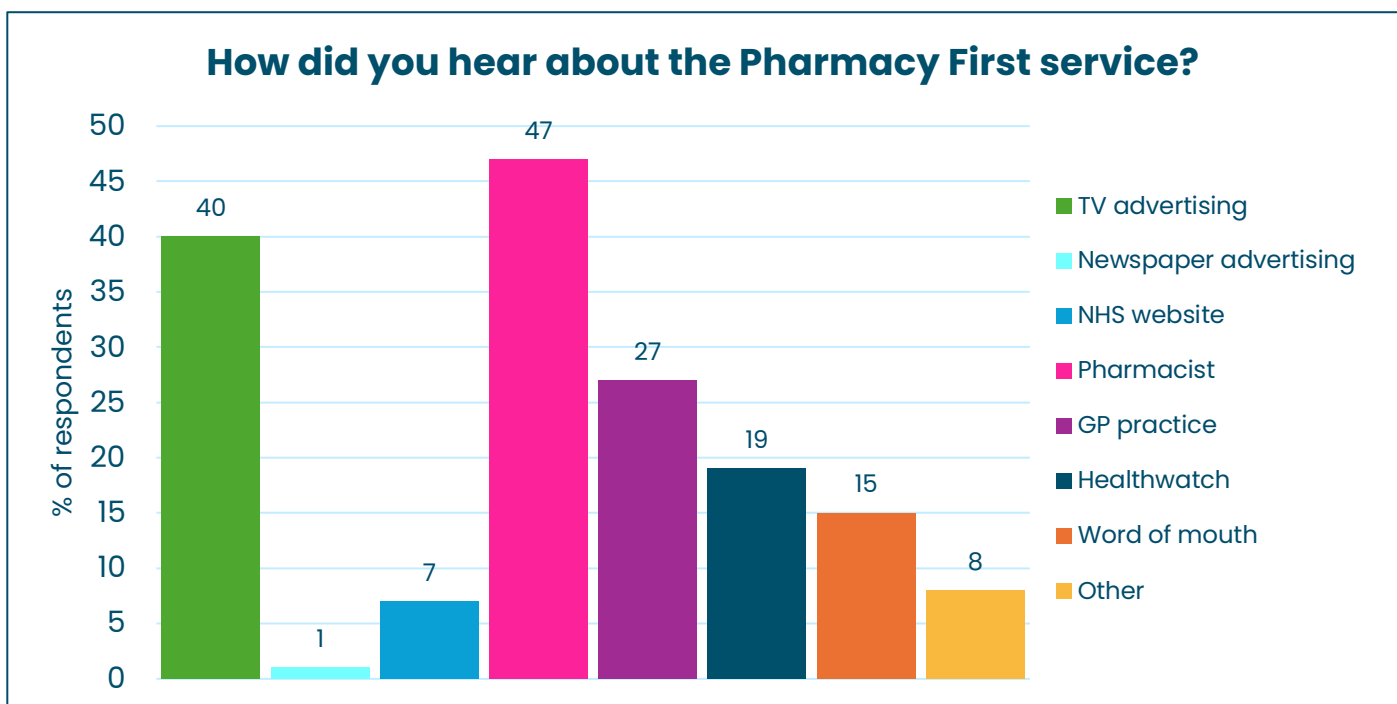
2% of people said that they were from a mixed Asian and White background and 4% said that they were from another mixed background.

34% of people said that they had a long-term health condition and 18% said that they had a disability.

Findings

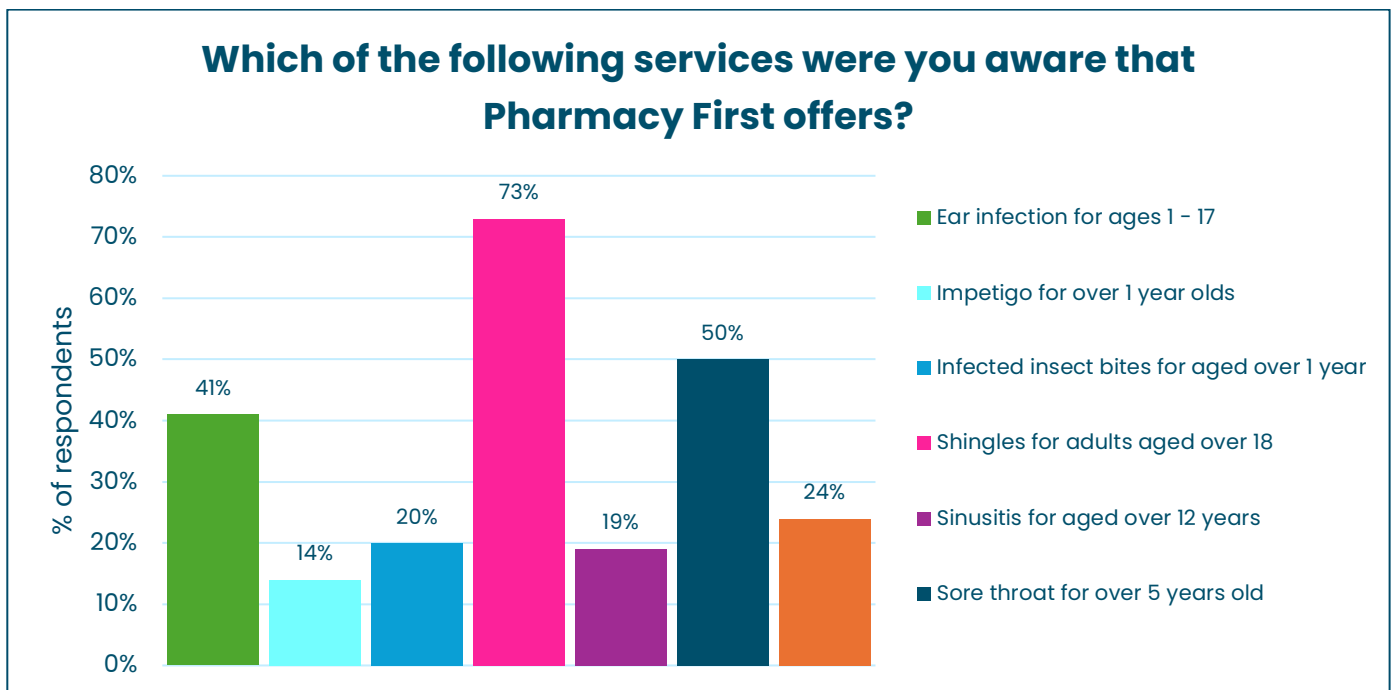


39% of people in Halton said that they had not heard of Pharmacy First at all. 7% said that they had heard of Pharmacy First and knew a lot about it.



People who had heard of Pharmacy First were asked how they had heard of the service. They were able to indicate all the ways through which they had heard of Pharmacy First.

47% of people said that they had heard of the service through a pharmacist and 40% through television advertising. 27% said that they had heard of Pharmacy First through their GP practice and 19% through Healthwatch. 15% said that they had heard of Pharmacy First through word of mouth; 7% through an NHS website and 1% through newspaper advertising. 8% of people said that they had heard of the service through other channels, and these included through social media and NHS 111 as well as radio advertising in a national pharmacy store.



There were varying degrees of awareness of what was offered through Pharmacy First. 73% of people were aware that Pharmacy First was able to provide advice and treatment for shingles in adults; 50% were aware that sore throats in people aged over 5 years was included.

41% of people were aware that ear infection in children and young people were included. Much lower percentages of people were aware that Urinary Tract Infections for women (24%); infected insect bites (20%); sinusitis for over 12-year-olds (19%); and impetigo (14%) were included.

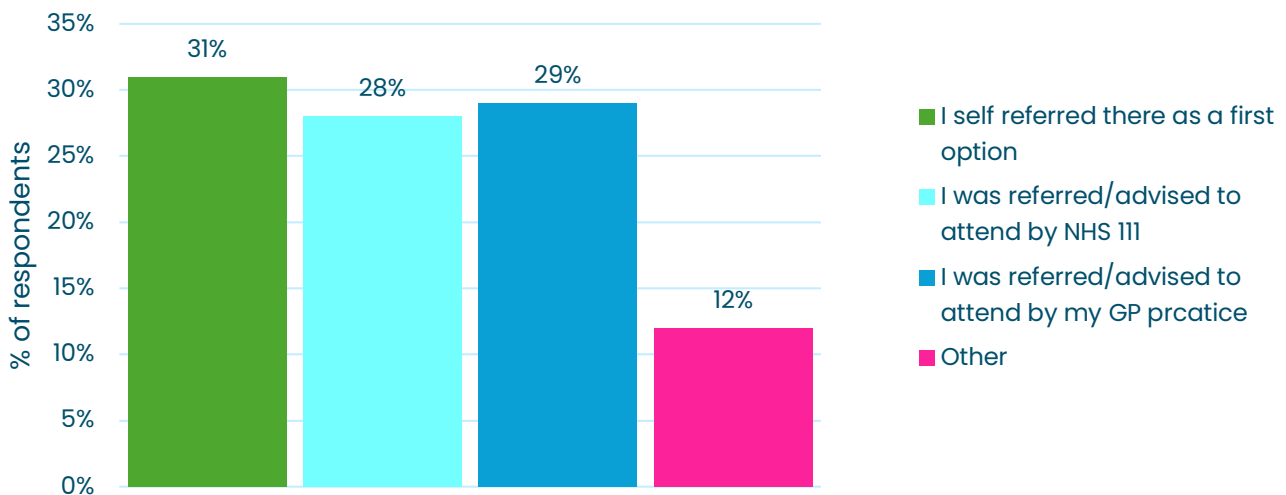
Have you used the Pharmacy First service?



51% of people who had heard of Pharmacy First said that they had used the service.

Those that had used the service were then asked how they had made the choice to use the service. There was a relatively even split between self-referring to the service (31%) ; being referred or advised to attend by their GP practice (29%) ; or screenbeing referred or advised to attend by NHS 111 (28%). 12% of people said that they had chosen to attend for another reason. Their reasons included seeing a TV advertisement and asking for advice from the pharmacist.

If yes, how did you choose to use the service?



How would you rate the service you received from Pharmacy First?



When asked to rate the service that they received from Pharmacy First, 91% of people said that it rated it as very good or good; and 4% said that it was poor or very poor. The remainder gave a neutral answer.

People were asked to explain the reason for their rating. Their responses can be broken down into the following themes.

People said that they had not needed an appointment, and this meant the service was quicker and more convenient than having to try to get a GP appointment.

'I was happy I didn't need to see a GP.'

'Good service, no appointment needed.'

However, it was also the case that there was feedback on long waiting times at the pharmacy.

'Gave up after an hour wait.'

'I now find it a long wait to see an assistant, then another long wait for a person to be free to see me in privacy or at the counter.'

For this person the service being busy meant that there was a lack of privacy for both them and others using the pharmacy.

'Because of crowding I am listening to other people at the counter detailing their problem. Which I think is rather embarrassing for them.'

People also spoke about not being able to get the medication that they had hoped for, which they found frustrating.

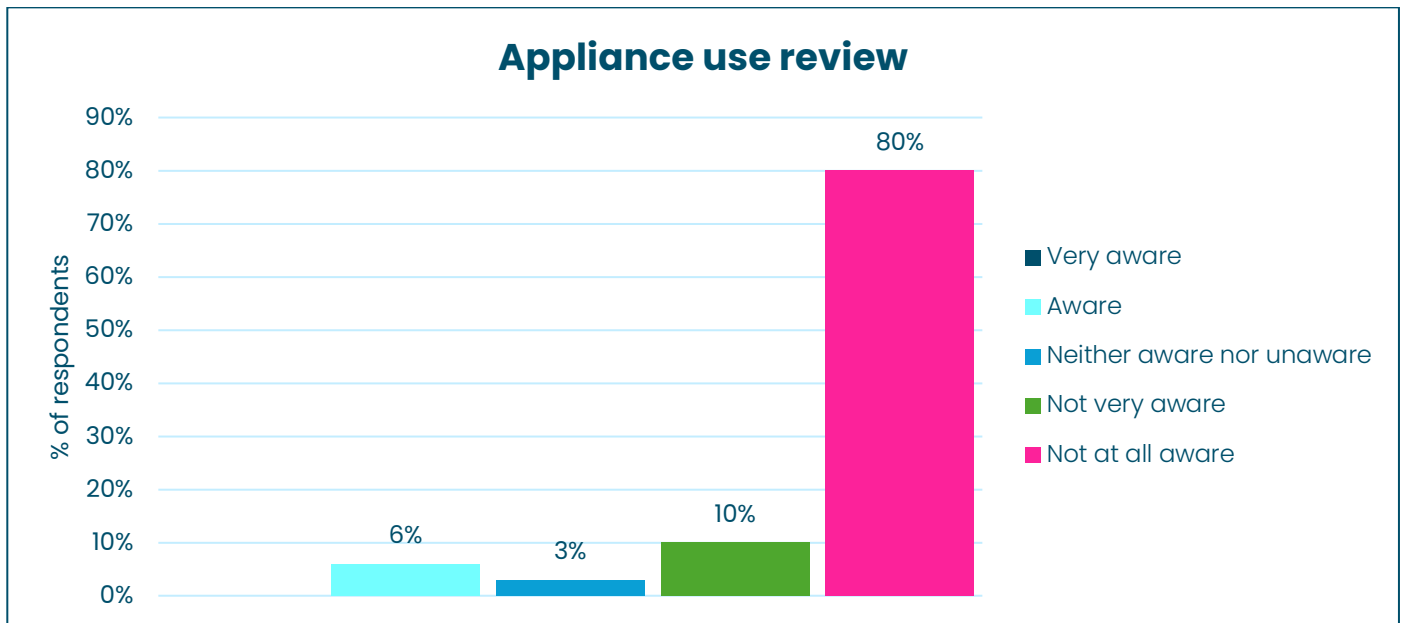
'Unfortunately, because I have an underlying health condition and I was on Methotrexate, they couldn't help me. This is clearly ridiculous as I have been on this medication for approximately 18 years and prior to Pharmacy First I would always use my pharmacist and didn't have any issues. I suggest you rethink how this is marketed as clearly, it's not for everyone or at least change the guidelines to reflect patients like myself.'

'I was referred by the [GP] receptionist to attend the pharmacy for treatment... the pharmacist did not provide antibiotics as I had hoped but instead gave me some medication to add to water which worked eventually.'

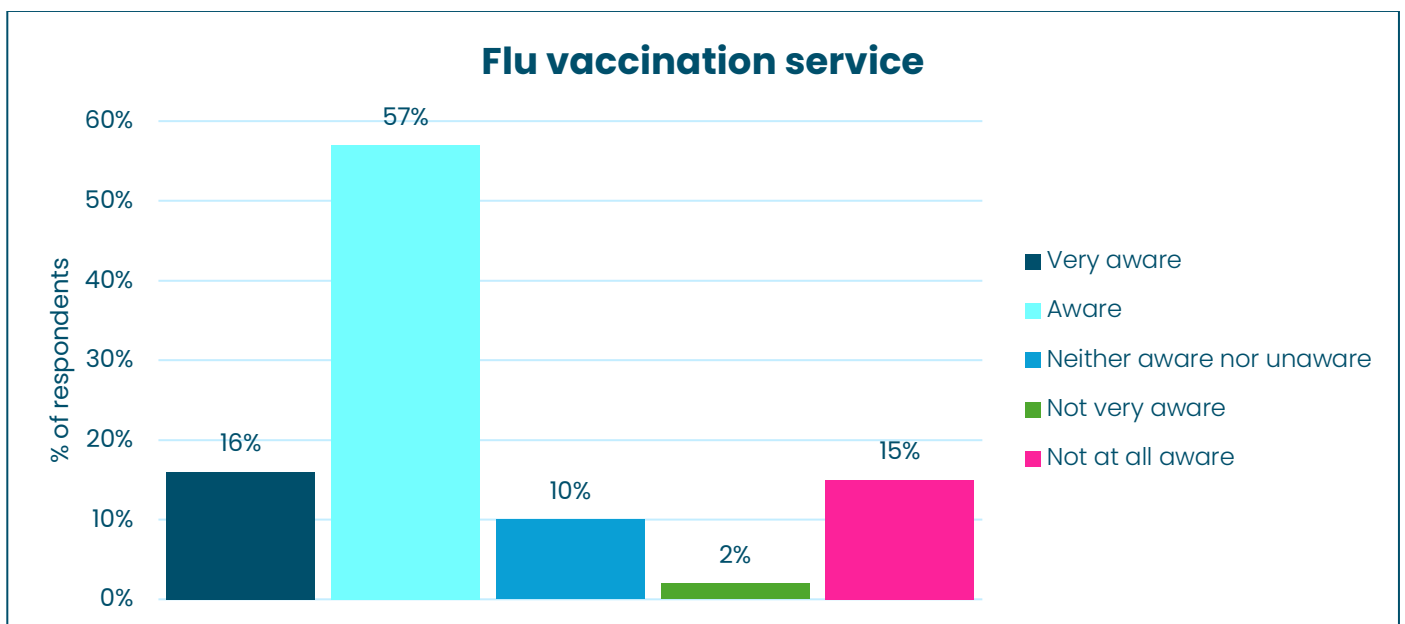
Other people who had not been provided with antibiotics as they were expecting were happier with the outcome because they had been provided with an explanation of why they had not been given.

'Helpful, didn't get the antibiotics that I had hoped for, but they explained why this was.'

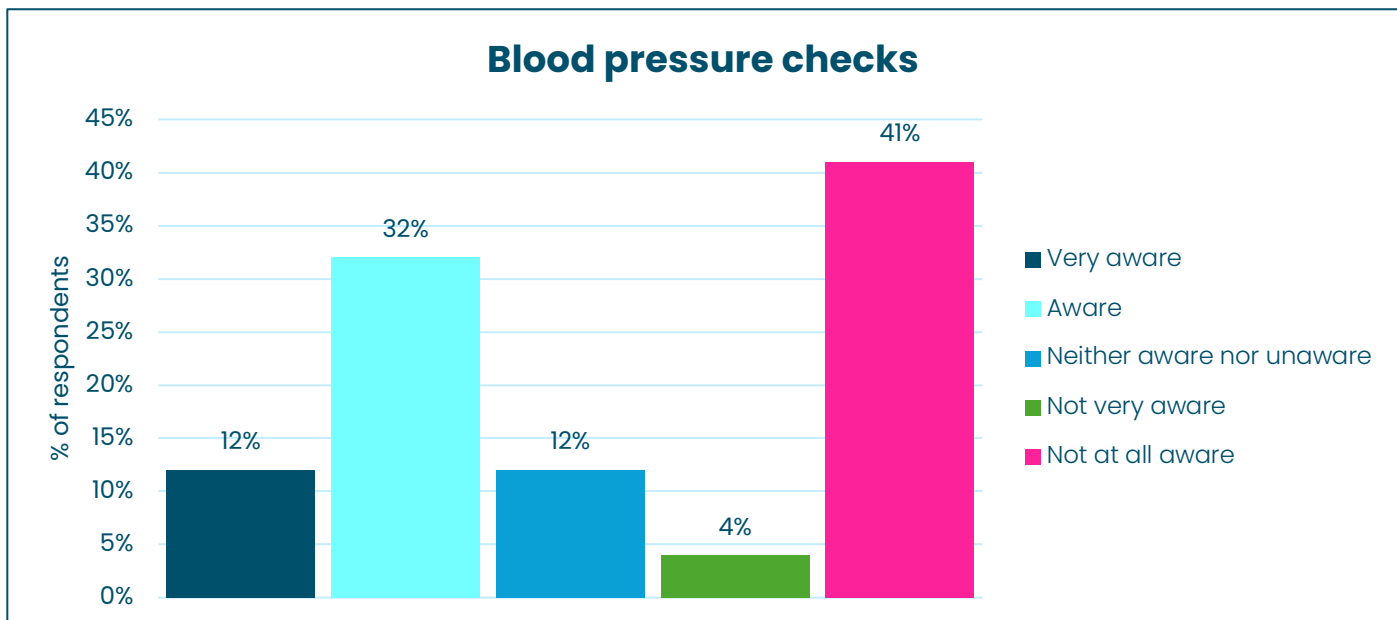
All people who took part in the survey were asked about their awareness of the other additional services offered by community pharmacies.



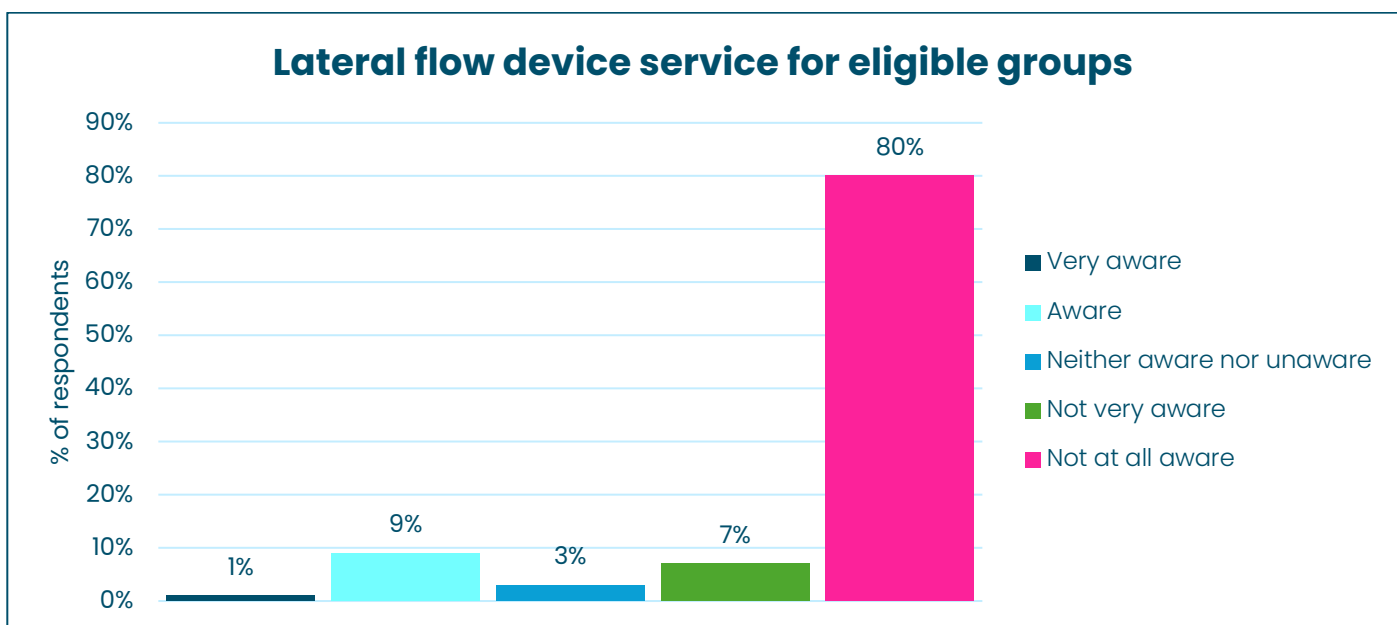
80% of people were not aware of the appliance use review service and 6% were aware of the service.



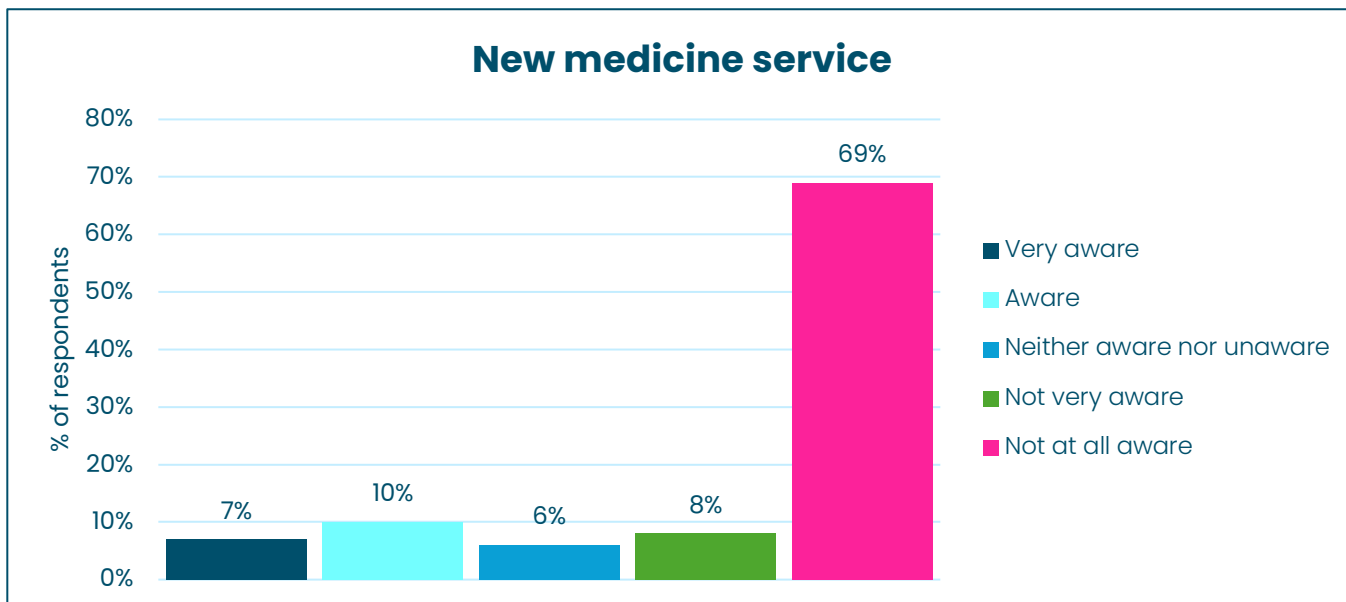
73% of people were either aware or very aware of the flu vaccination service and 17% were either not very aware or not at all aware of the service.



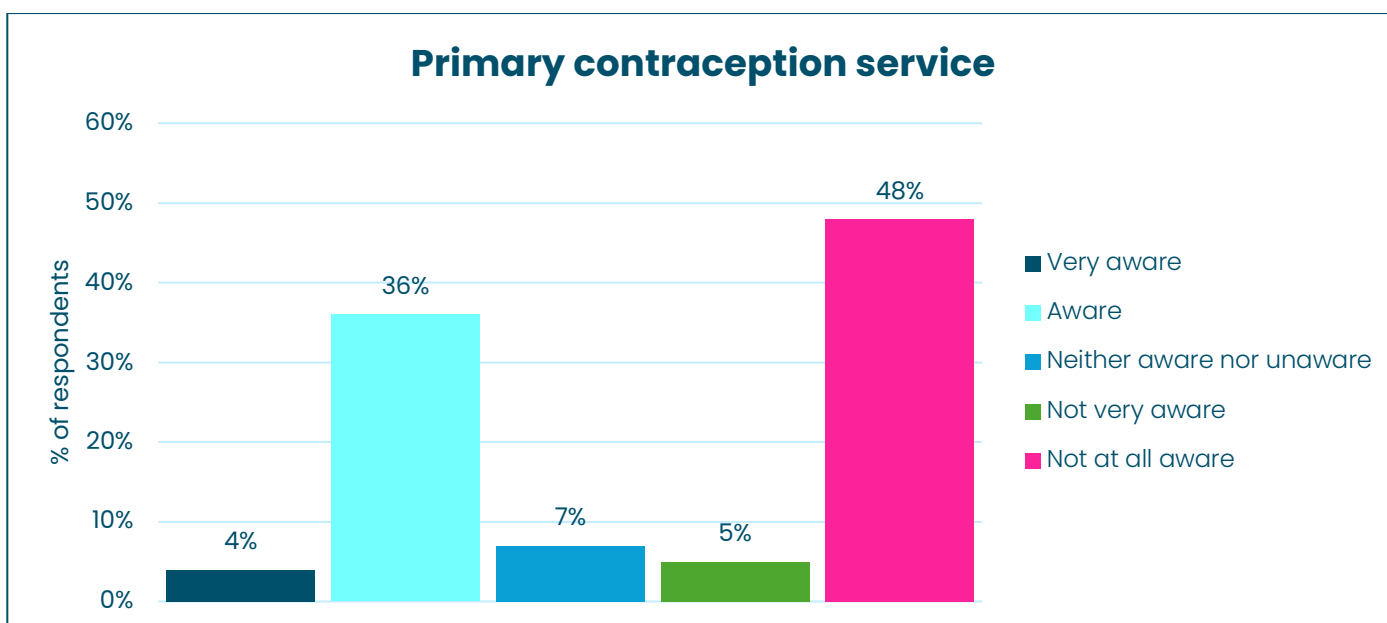
44% of people were very aware or aware that pharmacies were able to offer blood pressure checks; 41% were not at all aware that blood pressure checks were available at community pharmacies.



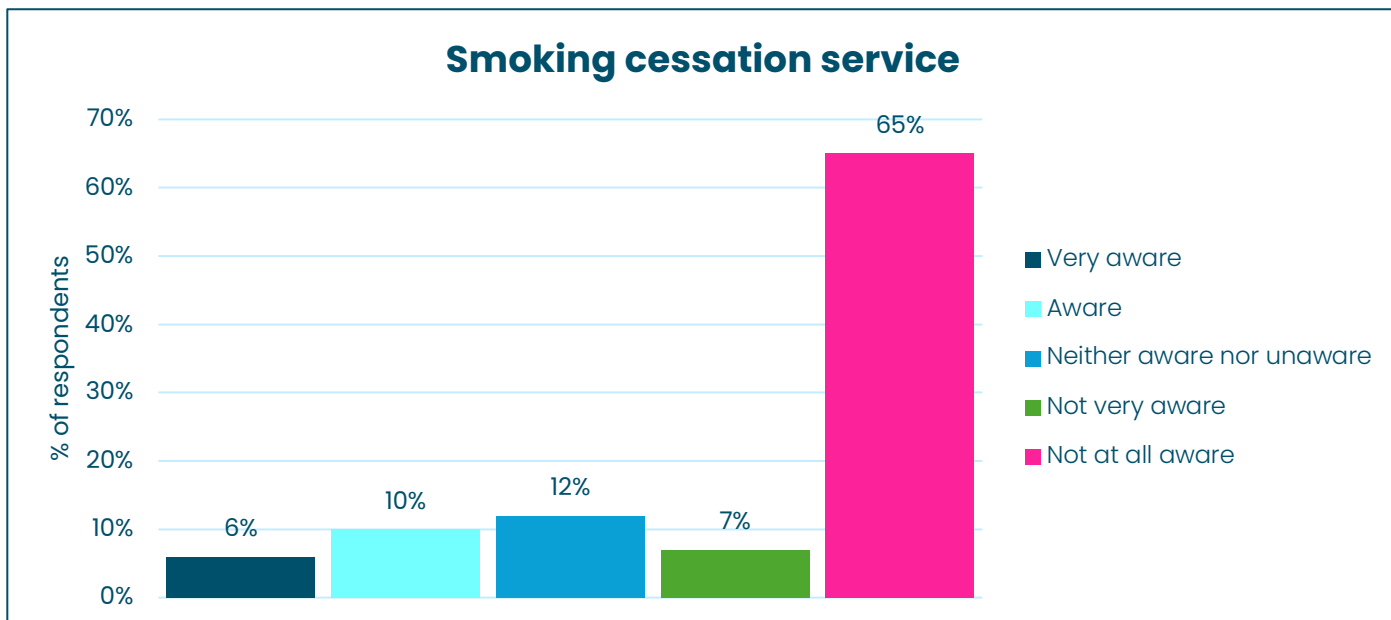
80% of people were not at all aware that community pharmacies were able to offer a lateral flow device service for eligible groups and 10% were either aware or very aware of the service.



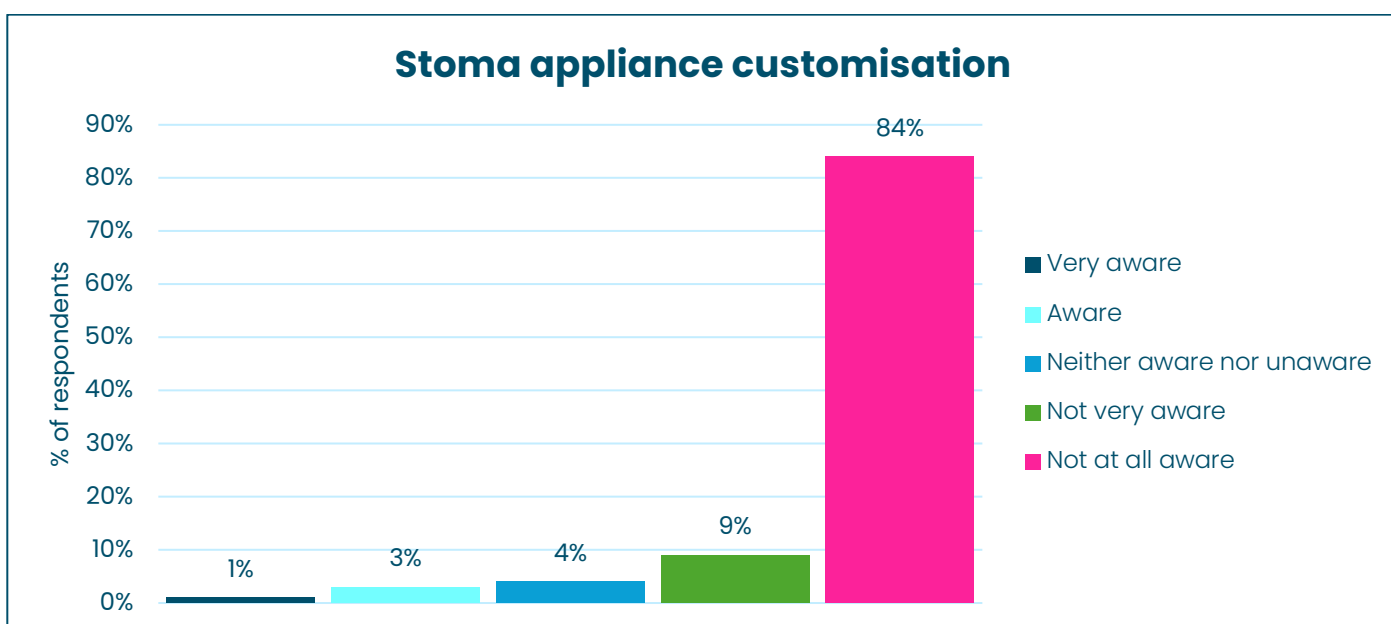
69% of people were not at all aware of the new medicine service at community pharmacies and 17% were either aware or very aware of the service.



48% of people were not at all aware of the pharmacy contraception service and 40% were either aware or very aware of the service.



65% of people were not at all aware of the smoking cessation service and 16% were either aware or very aware of the service at community pharmacies.



84% of people were not at all aware of the stoma appliance customisation service whilst 3% were either aware or very aware of the service.

Pharmacy First promotion

During our visits to local pharmacies, we asked how they promoted awareness of the Pharmacy First service. Several pharmacies were displaying information within the pharmacy.

Other methods of promotion included :

- Radio channel of information being provided over a loudspeaker of the seven symptoms the Pharmacists provided advice and NHS funded treatments where appropriate
- In-house leaflets created by pharmacies.
- Leaflets added to prescription items collected.
- Pull up banners listing the seven symptoms for all customers to see.
- Word of mouth. One pharmacy informed us that they told customers about the service when they came in.

Local pharmacy views on Pharmacy First

During our visits we also spoke with staff and asked for their views and observations on the Pharmacy First service to date.

The feedback we received highlighted similar issues to those that raised by the public.

1. Referral guidelines

'Generally working, although noticeable referral issues. Sometimes the customer has expectations given to them from the referrer to say that will be provided with antibiotics when clearly the customer has not been assessed and when you advise that they don't need antibiotics it can result in disappointment and sometimes frustration - more education of the referrers would be helpful.'

'GP and more so Ill service are not always following the guidance for referral, so they send patients, and we assess, and they don't meet the criteria, so it wastes time when we suggest they need to go back to the doctors, and this is unhelpful.'

'The care navigators and receptionists need further training to understand if they are referring the patient to attend the pharmacy that they understand the criteria to avoid wasting time and inconvenience to the patients when they already feel unwell.'

'We have two chemists in the local area, and we have had issues with the referral being sent to the other shop, which has caused inconvenience, but this is being addressed - to avoid this happening.'

An adjoining pharmacy to a GP service feels the biggest issue is that the care navigators are not referring patients to Pharmacy first. 'We have placed this significantly sized banner up to attract the patients to understand what we can help with, (there is not extra resource to do this), but if we don't advertise this we feel we will not reach the weekly numbers required to be funded for the service.'

2. Capacity

'There was a limit to the number of Pharmacy First patients we needed to see each week when this was launched to secure funding. This number has since increased as of September and this at times can be difficult to be reached, and will affect the funding we receive, so this has resulted in costs to increase the advertising we have to do as independent shops.'

'We, like other pharmacies, sometimes have to close the Pharmacy First at certain times to do prescriptions and blister packs or we will not be able to complete this as our resources have not been increased to deal with the increase in workload this can occur.'

'We have not had increase in staffing to deal with the increase in workload this can bring. I am concerned about the winter period and the increase in patients attending for other winter symptoms flu covid RSV numbers impacting on our ability to manage the numbers that we may need to treat but we will need to see.'

'Not sure if the doctors dispute with the government has impact on the number of patients coming across to access pharmacy first as the numbers seem to have dipped over recent weeks.'

'Sometimes customers come to the counter with symptoms that we could provide over the counter medication on e.g. oral thrush. I assume more symptoms will be added onto the list that we provide support with - we will embrace everything thrown at us to do.'

'When customers ask for a consultation, we ask them to fill in form whilst waiting to be seen by the pharmacist to speed up time for screening the eligibility of the symptoms and what we can provide or not.'

3. Self referrals

'Some patients have not been referred they are aware of the pharmacy first and present themselves at pharmacy and are seen and treated accordingly.'

'Patient self-refer without trying to get a GP or attendance at the walk-in centres and we can treat as per the guidance or offer alternatives that can sometimes help relieve symptoms.'

'Customers when they have used the Pharmacy First have given positive feedback and this is encouraging.'

Conclusion

While 60% of people said they had heard of the Pharmacy First service, only 7% of people said they knew a lot about the service. Those others who had heard of the service had varying degrees of awareness of the specific ailments that were covered by the service, and this was also the case with the additional services offered by community pharmacies.

Almost 40% of people said they'd not heard of the service and were not at all aware of what it was or what it offered.

Whilst most who had used the Pharmacy First service rated it highly, because of the convenience of the service, there were some that expressed negative sentiment due to the limitations of the service and poor signposting.

Recommendations

- 1.** Due to the limited number of people who were aware of the service to any great degree we recommended that consideration is given to how to raise awareness in general of both Pharmacy First and the other additional services that are offered by community pharmacies.
- 2.** Look at ways of addressing public awareness of the limitations of the service offered through Pharmacy First, including instances where people who have other long term health conditions should seek advice from their GP.
- 3.** Consider how to ensure that GP practices signpost their patients appropriately and do not refer people who have health conditions that prevent Pharmacy First being able to assist them to the service.



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