

Community pharmacies could play bigger part in tackling poor health

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Community pharmacies could play a vital role in tackling major public health concerns such as obesity and smoking because the vast majority of people in England live within easy walking distance, say researchers.

The Durham University study, published in *BMJ Open*, is the first to show that most people can get to a community pharmacy easily with the greatest access in deprived areas.

The findings show that the often-quoted inverse care law, where good medical care is most available to those who need it least, does not apply to pharmacies.

The researchers are now calling on the Government to enable community pharmacies to provide more services to help tackle major [public health](#) concerns such as obesity, smoking and alcohol.

Overall, 89 per cent of the population was found to have access to a community pharmacy within a 20 minute walk. A 20 minute walk from each pharmacy was represented using a straight-line distance from the central point of each pharmacy's postcode. Access in areas of highest deprivation was even greater with almost 100 per cent of households living within walking distance.

The study supports the recent initiative by NHS England, Call to Action, which aims to give community pharmacies a stronger role and inform strategic policy making in terms of commissioning community pharmacy

services.

Lead author, Dr Adam Todd from Durham University's School of Medicine, Pharmacy and Health, said: "The role of the community pharmacist has changed significantly in recent years and there is now more focus on delivering public [health services](#), such as promoting healthy lifestyles and modification of health-related behaviours.

"However, these results show that pharmacies are well-placed in the community to deliver [public health services](#). This is particularly important for the poorest areas where more people die from conditions such as smoking, alcohol misuse and obesity compared to people from more affluent areas.

"With easy access without patients needing to make an appointment, the results suggest there is potential for community pharmacies to deliver [public health interventions](#) to areas which need it most."

Dr David Branford, English Pharmacy Board Chair, said: "Community pharmacists provide frontline healthcare in deprived communities. The causes of health inequalities are complex and pharmacists are well-placed to understand and deliver tailored solutions which will work well in the communities they serve.

"The less formal approach and sheer convenience provided by a high street presence means they are a beacon of wellbeing and advice to many who would simply never engage with other healthcare settings.

"This study confirms their accessibility and the huge potential they have for delivery of quality healthcare to those who need it most."

The research team used postcodes for all community pharmacies in England and coordinates of each postcode for the population. These

were then matched to a deprivation index as well as to the type of area e.g. urban, town and fringe, hamlet or isolated dwelling.

More information: 'The Positive Pharmacy Care Law: An area-level analysis of the relationship between community pharmacy distribution, urbanity and social deprivation in England', Adam Todd, Alison Copeland, Andy Husband, Adetayo Kasim, Clare Bamba, Durham University, published in *BMJ Open*, 13 August 2014.

Provided by Durham University

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