

Bedford Borough Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2025 Executive Summary

Summary

This Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) examines the current provision of pharmacy services in Bedford Borough and evaluates potential gaps in service delivery. The Health and Social Care Act 2012¹ shifted the responsibility for developing and updating PNAs from Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) to Health and Wellbeing Boards. Under this legislation, each Health and Wellbeing Board was required to produce and publish its first PNA by 1 April 2015. Updated assessments must be published every three years or sooner if significant changes in pharmaceutical services occur, provided an earlier update is deemed proportionate to those changes. Bedford Borough's Health and Wellbeing Board published the last PNA² on 1 October 2022 and has prepared an updated PNA for publication by the 1 October 2025.

The Health and Care Act 2022³ delegated responsibility of commissioning community pharmacy services from NHS England (NHSE) to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), with NHSE retaining accountability. NHS Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes (BLMK) ICB took responsibility from 1 April 2023, with NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex (HWE) ICB delivering this function on behalf of the East of England. Recent announcements indicate that the architecture of the NHS is likely to undergo significant changes during the lifespan of this Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (2025-2028). These potential changes include shifts in service delivery models and integration with local healthcare systems. As these developments are subject to ongoing policy discussions and government reviews, the information provided in this document reflects the current position as of the date of publication.

The PNA serves as a critical document for the ICB in reviewing applications for inclusion in the pharmaceutical list. It is also a key resource for commissioning of enhanced community pharmacy services and locally commissioned services.

To develop this iteration of the PNA, an independent subject matter expert organisation was commissioned; North of England Commissioning Support (NECS). NECS worked with Bedford Borough Council's shared Public Health team who led the development of this PNA on behalf of the Bedford Borough Health and Wellbeing Board. A steering group was convened to guide the process, and input was gathered from various stakeholders, including BLMK ICB, Bedford Borough Council, BLMK & Northamptonshire LPC (Community Pharmacy BLMK & Northants), Healthwatch Bedford Borough, and local community pharmacists. The objective was to address issues affecting Bedford Borough's commissioning of community pharmacy services and identify future priorities for these services.

A statutory consultation took place between xxxx and xxxx, to gather feedback from statutory consultees, the public, and other stakeholders on the PNA's content. This feedback has been incorporated into the final revised version. The PNA also aligns with the health needs identified in Bedford Borough's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)⁴. The reference section in appendix 10 details data sources utilised in the production of this PNA and time periods covered by the data utilised. The information relating to services is correct as of 1 September 2025.

This PNA covers the following areas:

- An overview of the PNA process, including the identification of localities.
- An analysis of current and future health needs.
- A description of community pharmacies in Bedford Borough.
- An evaluation of existing service provision, accessibility, and any gaps.
- Insights into potential future roles for community pharmacies.
- An assessment of community pharmacy's contributions to the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy⁵.
- Key findings from stakeholder engagement and the statutory consultation.
- A summary of findings and the PNA statement.

The assessment concludes that there are no gaps in the provision of necessary services across localities in Bedford Borough, but better access to essential services could be secured by some improvements to out of hours provision in rural areas.

Whilst better access to essential services in Rural North and South would be secured by their provision on Saturday evening after 5pm and by some provision on Sundays, this does not highlight a specific need for an additional community pharmacy. Access issues should be better understood to establish whether any further action is required. For example, there may be an opportunity to work with the ICB, Community Pharmacy BLMK & Northants and local pharmacies to review the potential of exploring an extended rota.

A number of community pharmacies provide advanced services that seek to improve the safe and effective use of medicines. Almost all pharmacies provide some of these services, and we would wish to encourage all community pharmacies to make greater use of all advanced services, and also that referrals via healthcare services such as GP practices and secondary care services further utilise newer services, in particular regarding the Pharmacy First service.

There is adequate provision of existing locally commissioned services across Bedford Borough, although access and equity of provision could be improved for some services e.g. needle exchange, supervised consumption of opiate substitutes and services under the PHES contract. It is recommended that the Public Health team should work with partners including the ICB and Community Pharmacy BLMK and Northants to explore this further and scope any further work necessary.

The Bedford Borough economy of community pharmacies has been relatively stable since the last PNA, with no changes resulting in identification of gaps, despite some pharmacy closures. However, it is not certain that this stability will continue and any changes occurring in the life of the PNA will need to be considered fully to ensure their impact is understood.

¹ The Health and Social Care Act 2012: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/contents>

² Bedford Borough PNA 2022: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/files/bedford-borough-pna-fv.pdf>

³ The Health and Care Act 2022: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/31/contents>

⁴ Bedford Borough JSNA: <https://bedford.jsna.uk/>

⁵ Bedford Borough Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/files/joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2024-27.pdf/download?inline>