

Workforce sustainability

Pharmacy Guild position statement – updated April 2025

Our position:

More funding is urgently needed to address the wage cost pressures facing community pharmacy and ensure long term workforce sustainability.

This will need to come via a government Budget, as current annual cost pressure uplifts are not allowing pharmacy owners to give staff sufficient pay increases, leading to workforce retention and recruitment issues.

Our advocacy activities:

We have consistently provided evidence that wage cost pressures represent the single largest unmet cost pressure facing community pharmacy and that this is driving concerning workforce sustainability issues.

We noted this was in addition to other material unmet cost pressures, which have led to growing financial viability challenges.

Our advocacy led to DHBs/Health New Zealand (HNZ) agreeing to an independent review of wage cost pressures in 2020.

This review vindicated our concerns and demonstrated material unmet cost pressures, finding remuneration gaps relative to the general market for all community pharmacy roles, ranging from 12%-42% below market (in 2020).

Service delivery and availability will ultimately be impacted if community pharmacies are not able to recruit and retain sufficient staff through appropriate levels of pay.

Ongoing advocacy:

- Advocated for pharmacists working in rural and regional communities to be included in the Voluntary Bonded Scheme to help address severe recruitment challenges, workforce burnout and geographical shortages.
- Wrote to HNZ in October 2023 about the hospital pharmacy pay equity offer and its impact on the community pharmacy workforce.
- Included workforce sustainability as a key sector issue in our briefing to the incoming Minister of Health in November 2023, and raised this during our first meeting with him in February 2024.
- Conducted a community pharmacy workforce survey in April 2024 to better understand the true number of pharmacist, technician, and retail staff roles currently vacant.
- Shared the workforce survey data with HNZ so the next Health Workforce Plan could accurately reflect the workforce pressures community pharmacy is experiencing, meaning our sector is acknowledged alongside others in the health sector.
- Raised community pharmacy workforce sustainability, and the need to attract and retain more community pharmacists and technicians, in our briefing to the incoming Minister of Health in February 2025.
- In this briefing we requested that the Minister and his officials actively engage with the sector and key stakeholders on the development of a comprehensive community pharmacy workforce plan to address our sector's current shortages and future pressures.
- The Community Pharmacy Leaders Forum, which the Guild leads, committed to developing a comprehensive workforce plan in April 2025.



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Workforce survey data:

During April 2024, 114 pharmacies shared their data, or 10.73% of the community pharmacy sector. A summary of the survey data is below. This demonstrates (assuming the sample is representative of sector) that there are material sector-wide vacancies, with 913 pharmacists, 140 Pharmacy Accuracy Checking Technicians (PACTS), 466 technicians, and 252 retail staff roles currently vacant.

	Pharmacists	PACTS	Technicians	Retail staff
Current staff (total FTE)	298	24	289	318
Staff vacancies (total FTE)	98	15	50	27
Average time taken to recruit (weeks)	44	24	18	9
Sector staff vacancies (estimate)	913	140	466	252

Other survey findings:

The average rate of burnout among respondents and their teams (a scale of 0-100 was available) was 73.

62.5% of respondents answered yes to the question: Do you or any of your staff (to your knowledge) intend to exit the pharmacy workforce in the next 12 months? Reasons given for likely exit were pay rates, burnout, and workload due to staff shortages and increasing compliance and administration requirements.

General comments received about the issues affecting the community pharmacy workforce had several key themes:

- Owners want to be able to pay staff more but can't afford to.
- Impossible to get locums – makes it difficult to plan for and take leave.
- Concern about impact of burnout on patient safety.
- Many have reduced hours, services, etc due to staffing shortages.

International benchmarks:

These indicate we need at least 1,200 more pharmacists to operate across all settings, at our current scope of practice. This estimate is in line with the survey findings (community pharmacy employs 76% of all practicing pharmacists - June 2024).

New Zealand currently has 7.95 pharmacists per 10,000 people (June 2024). This is much lower than other comparable countries (Australia, Canada, USA, Ireland), with WHO data showing most sit above 10 pharmacists per 10,000 people.

More information:

For more detail on this work, contact membership@pgnz.org.nz or **04 802 8200**.