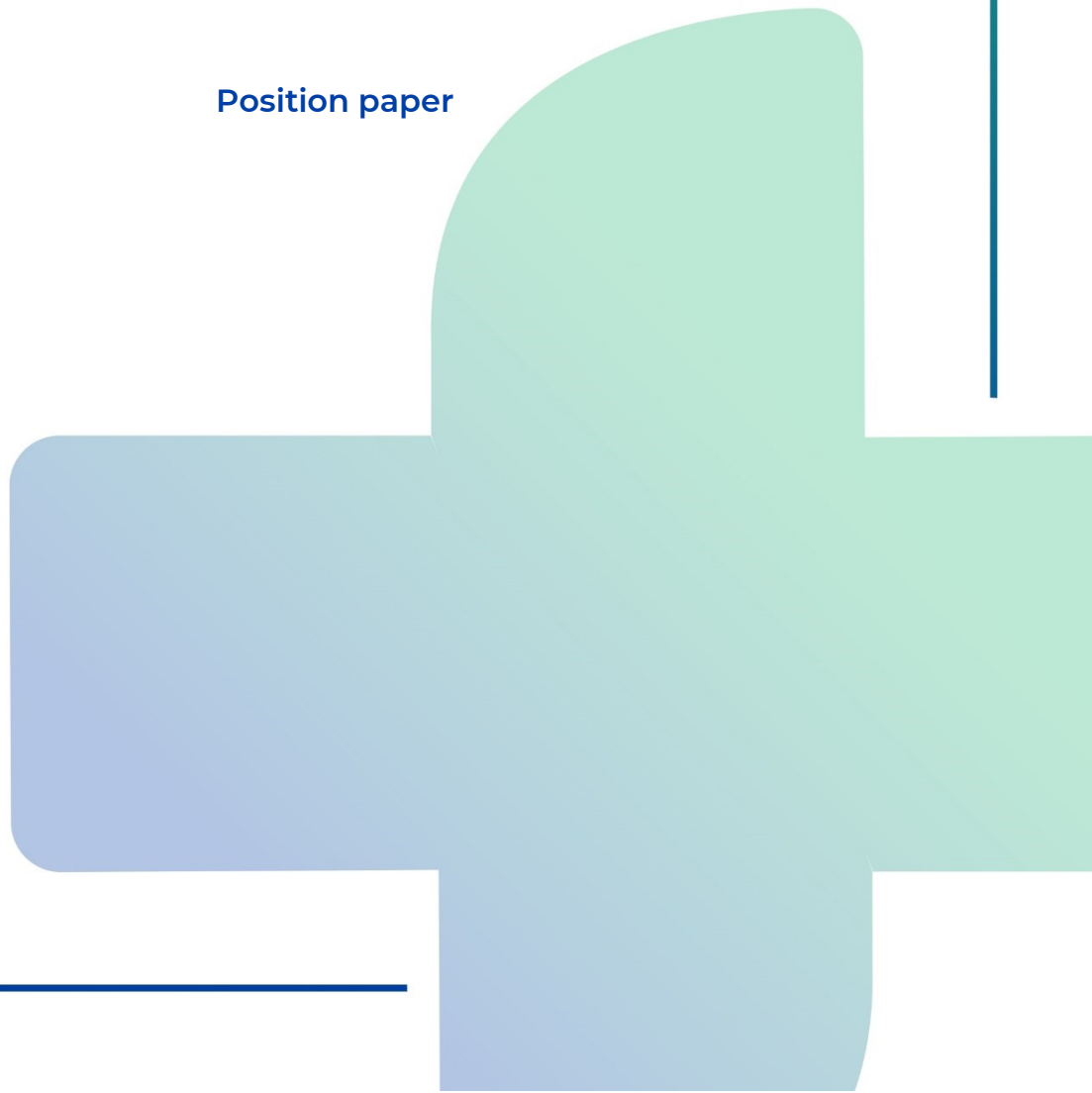




# The role of community pharmacists in vaccination

Position paper



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# Executive Summary

Community Pharmacists can contribute through diverse ways to vaccination strategies, protecting public health and contributing to a robust and sustainable healthcare system. Pharmacists are ideally placed at the heart of communities to provide information, advice, referral, treatment, and preventative actions to reduce the burden of communicable and vaccine-preventable diseases. As part of their wider public health mission, community pharmacists and pharmacy organisations are also involved in public awareness campaigns on topics such as antimicrobial resistance and vaccine hesitancy.

In addition to their core activities, community pharmacists across Europe are increasingly providing new and innovative services to complement wider efforts within health services to reduce the transmission of communicable diseases, improve effectiveness of treatment and increase vaccination coverage of the population.

At national and local level, community pharmacists engage in a number of activities and provide a range of services to increase vaccination coverage including screening and signposting in the pharmacy, advocacy on availability and benefits of vaccination and ensuring pharmacists themselves are vaccinated.

Many countries worldwide are moving towards expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists, namely through implementing pharmacist-led vaccination programmes.

Currently, pharmacists can vaccinate in their pharmacies in 15 European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Norway, Romania, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), for influenza and/or COVID-19.

In 9 of these countries (Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) pharmacists are able to administer other vaccines and medicines such as Pneumococcal, Travel vaccines, Herpes Zoster (shingles), Cholera, Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis, Anti-Tetanus Serum injection, Meningococcal, Tick-borne Encephalitis, Typhoid Fever and Hepatitis A, Japanese-Encephalitis, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Rabies, Human rotavirus, and Varicella.

Apart from these, in at least 3 other countries (Croatia, Estonia, the Netherlands) other healthcare professionals (e.g., physicians or nurses) can provide the vaccination service in a pharmacy.

Enabling pharmacists to administer vaccines increases accessibility, increases convenience for patients and most of all it improves overall vaccination rates. For example, evidence has shown that pharmacy-based vaccination services have led to increase flu vaccination rates among people who had missed their vaccination in the previous year and in those who would not have otherwise received a vaccine. Evidence also shows that one third of the vaccines were administered outside working days, highlighting the accessibility of the community pharmacies network and the contribution in decreasing work absenteeism.

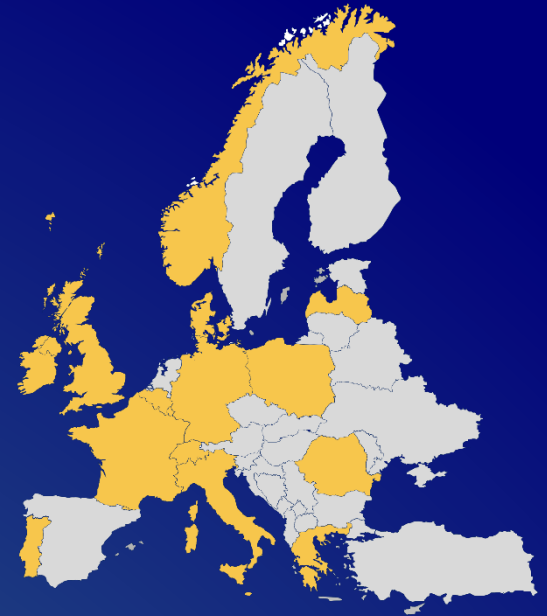
In this position paper PGEU suggests a number of policy recommendations to maximise the contribution that community pharmacists make to tackling vaccines-preventable diseases and improving vaccination coverage.

# The role of Community Pharmacists in vaccination

Pharmacists can vaccinate in their pharmacies for COVID-19/Influenza in

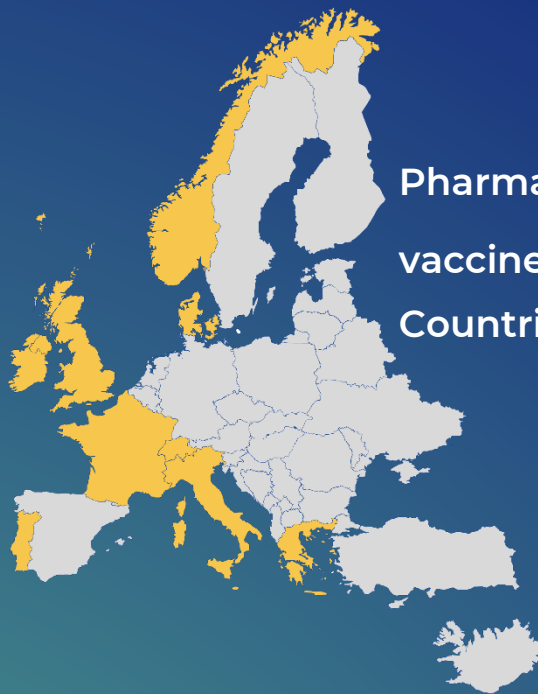
**15** European Countries

■ Vaccination in pharmacies COVID-19/Influenza (15 countries)



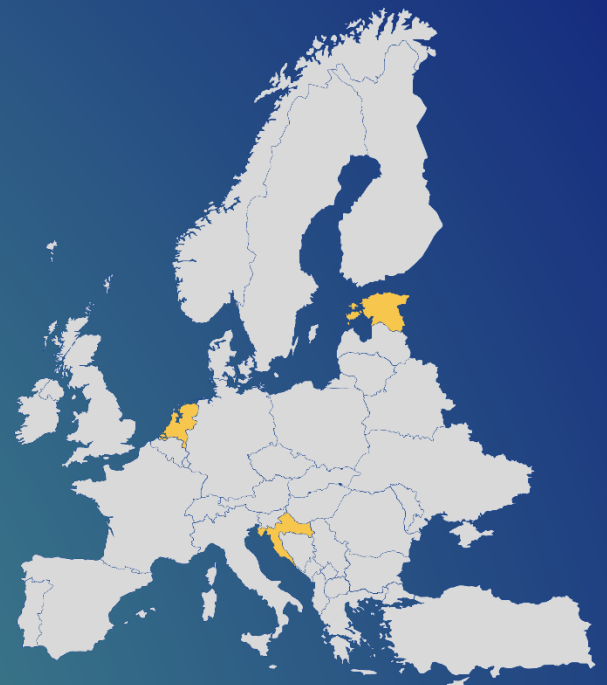
Pharmacists are able to administer other vaccines and medicines in **9** European Countries

■ Pharmacists are able to administer other vaccines and medicines (9 Countries)



■ Other healthcare professionals can provide the vaccination service in a pharmacy (3 Countries)

Other healthcare professionals can provide the vaccination service in a pharmacy in **3** European Countries



# Introduction

Community pharmacies work at the heart of communities. On average, 58% of EU citizens can reach their nearest community pharmacy within a five-minutes short walk. And this proportion increases to 98% when we consider a 30-minutes' walk.

The profession of pharmacist has developed throughout the decades, to adopt further clinical roles, providing care to the patients, promoting public health, and ultimately providing services to patients, including vaccination.

Community pharmacists can contribute through diverse ways to vaccination strategies, protecting public health and contributing to a robust and sustainable healthcare system.

Community pharmacists at the forefront of primary care provide information, advice, referral, treatment, and preventative actions to reduce the burden of communicable and vaccine-preventable diseases. As part of their wider public health mission, community pharmacists and pharmacy organisations are also involved in public awareness campaigns on topics such as antimicrobial resistance and vaccine hesitancy.

In addition to their core range of services and activities, community pharmacists across Europe are increasingly providing new and innovative services to complement wider efforts within health services to reduce the transmission of communicable diseases, improve effectiveness of treatment and increase vaccination coverage of the population.

Vaccination is a powerful tool to fight bacterial or viral-borne diseases. Immunisation strategies can also be effective against antimicrobial resistance (hereafter AMR) as:

- There is a direct influence of vaccination on the health burden of AMR by preventing the emergence and transmission of antibiotic-resistant and antibiotic-sensitive infections, and the associated antibiotic use.
- Vaccines have also an indirect influence on AMR by reducing resistant infections in unvaccinated populations through herd immunity.
- Infections where antimicrobials are not indicated but often wrongly prescribed, such as primary viral infections, can be prevented through vaccination, thereby reducing misuse and overuse of antimicrobials.
- Vaccines, by preventing infection, can also reduce the use of antimicrobials to treat secondary bacterial infections caused by viral diseases.
- Vaccines can give longer-term health benefits in preventing infections and resistance to vaccines is rarely observed.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Kennedy DA, Read AF. Why the evolution of vaccine resistance is less of a concern than the evolution of drug resistance. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A 2018;115:12878–86.

# Community pharmacists' role in vaccination

At national and local level, community pharmacists engage in a number of activities and provide a range of services to address communicable diseases and increase vaccination coverage such as participation in public awareness campaigns, screening and sign-posting in the pharmacy, advocacy on availability and benefits of vaccination, administering vaccines and ensuring pharmacists themselves are vaccinated.

Many countries in the EU and worldwide are moving towards expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists, namely through implementing pharmacist-led vaccination programmes.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, community pharmacists can provide a range of testing and management services for communicable diseases, vaccination in the pharmacy, support for travelling patients, amongst other relevant services for society.<sup>3</sup>

Robust evidence indicates that enabling pharmacists to administer vaccines can improve vaccination rates when given greater autonomy.<sup>4</sup> Pharmacy-based vaccination

services have been shown to increase flu vaccination rates among people who had missed vaccinations in the previous year and in those who would not have otherwise received a vaccine. Published evidence also shows that one third of the vaccines were administered outside working days highlighting the accessibility of the community pharmacy network.<sup>5</sup>

Pharmacies have been able to implement a wide array of interventions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, some of them beyond the traditional medicine dispensing roles and which may have contributed to alleviate the burden on other health care services and provide valuable support to patients, especially when facing unprecedented public health emergencies. Expanded powers granted and legislation passed acknowledged that contribution, which can be further extended to more countries in Europe and pave the way to explore further roles in vaccine administration, point-of-care test screening, and referral, in the area of vaccine-preventable diseases.<sup>6</sup>

At European level, PGEU has been involved in initiatives, actions and projects that promote vaccination such as:

**Coalition for Vaccination:** PGEU is one of the co-chairs of the Coalition for Vaccination (together with CPME and EFN). The Coalition for Vaccination brings together European associations of healthcare professionals and relevant student associations in the field of health and vaccination. It was convened by the

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<sup>2</sup> Skill-mix innovation, effectiveness and implementation: improving primary and chronic care / Claudia B. Maier.; European observatory on health systems and policies, 2022

<sup>3</sup> PGEU Position Paper on Vaccination and NCDs

<sup>4</sup> Maier CB, Winkelmann J, Pfrirer L and Williams GA (2023) Skill-Mix Changes Targeting Health Promotion and Prevention Interventions and Effects on Outcomes in all Settings (Except Hospitals): Overview of Reviews. Int J Public Health 68:1605448. doi: 10.3389/ijph.2023.1605448

<sup>5</sup> Thomson K, Hillier-Brown F, Walton N, Bilaj M, Bamba C, Todd A. The effects of community pharmacy-delivered public health interventions on population health and health inequalities: A review of reviews. Prev Med (Baltim). 2019 Jul;124:98-109.

<sup>6</sup> Pharmacy Services in Europe: Evaluating Trends and Value. Executive Summary. Lisbon: Institute for Evidence-Based Health (ISBE); 2020.



European Commission in 2019 based on the 2018 Council recommendation on strengthened cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases. It aims to support delivering accurate information to the public, combating myths around vaccines and vaccination, and exchanging best practices on vaccination. It aims to build vaccine trust and thereby help increase vaccine uptake.

**IMMUNION:** the IMMUNION (Improving IMMunisation cooperation in the European UNION) Project (2021-2023) strengthened the Coalition for Vaccination and the collaboration between its members, increased its visibility and engagement with wider networks working in vaccination, and improved healthcare professionals' access to validated resources and materials on vaccination, including the ones developed by the Coalition.

Moreover, PGEU has an ongoing engagement with the European Commission, EMA and ECDC to promote vaccination (influenza, COVID-19, HPV, among others), especially through communication campaigns such as the [#UnitedInProtection](#), showcasing [pharmacists' involvement in vaccination](#).

The European Parliament has recognized that pharmacies have proved to be a key sector in facing the COVID-19 pandemic, as it offered patient testing, vaccination, and first-contact advice. Furthermore, it has urged the European Commission to include the pharmacy sector in EU public health initiatives, and Member States to include them in their health, care, and research programmes, highlighting the valuable role of community pharmacies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future - European Parliament resolution of 12 July 2023 on the COVID-19 pandemic:

## Information and Managing Vaccine Hesitancy

Community pharmacists provide information and advice on local vaccination and immunisation schedules for their patients and the general public. This includes childhood vaccination schedules – which are particularly relevant as pregnant mothers and nursing families are regular visitors to community pharmacies – and also recommended and mandatory travel vaccinations and immunisations.

With their rigorous scientific educational background and an established position as a pillar of the local community, (often with life-long relationships with their patients and communities), community pharmacists are an excellent resource for providing evidence-based, unbiased, and balanced information on the benefits and risks of vaccination thus complementing information of physicians and other healthcare professionals.

Pharmacists, as the first point of contact with the healthcare system and often the last healthcare professional that patients see before taking their medication, are ideally placed to explain how vaccines work, debunking myths, and actively fighting mis- and disinformation in the society, improving health literacy.

## Identifying and reminding target groups

Pharmacists are able to identify and remind target groups to avail of their vaccination. This is especially important in certain populations such as chronic patients, citizens aged 65 years

lessons learned and recommendations for the future (2022/2076(INI))

or older, and those who need travel medication, among other groups.

As part of the multidisciplinary healthcare team, and whenever facilitated with access to shared electronic health records, pharmacists can help keep children up-to-date with vaccination schedules. Pharmacists can have an important role by sending reminders for patients through the use of integrated e-solutions in pharmacy softwares.

Finally, they are able to register and consult the vaccination status through shared electronic health records when the national legislation allows for that.

### Counselling and pharmaceutical advice

One of the main components of the work of community pharmacists is to provide information and advice to patients, on all medicines and health-related aspects, including vaccines.



### Awareness raising and advocacy campaigns

Information on vaccines is a key component of the general prevention approach, with pharmacists employing effective communication strategies to transfer information to patients.

Because of the proximity with the communities, pharmacies are especially well placed to raise awareness and conduct advocacy campaigns on vaccination, using the highly visible and geographically well distributed network of pharmacies throughout Europe.

Pharmacists participate in national initiatives and other several European flagship campaigns, such as those for COVID-19 testing and vaccination.

As pharmacies are visited daily by a large part of the population, this constitutes a key advantage and opportunity to inform the population.

### Vaccines administration in pharmacies

Either delivered by community pharmacists or other healthcare professionals (e.g., physicians or nurses), pharmacy-based vaccination improves convenience and access for all parts of the population. Studies and pilots have shown that this model increases coverage through complementary efforts.

In the cases that pharmacists are able to vaccinate, they need to go through certified training programmes, which include theoretical and practical training.

Currently, pharmacists are able to vaccinate in community pharmacies in 15 European



countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Norway, Romania, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), for influenza and/or COVID-19.

In 9 of these countries (Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) pharmacists are able to administer other vaccines and medicines such as Pneumococcal, Travel vaccines, Herpes Zoster (shingles), Cholera, Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis, Anti-Tetanus Serum injection, Meningococcal, Tick-borne Encephalitis, Typhoid Fever and Hepatitis A, Japanese-Encephalitis, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Rabies, Human rotavirus, and Varicella.

Apart from these, in at least 3 other countries (Croatia, Estonia, the Netherlands) other healthcare professionals (e.g., physicians or nurses) can provide the vaccination service in a pharmacy.

Where pharmacists provide such services, they must successfully complete a certified training programmes (including regular refresher courses) on administration of vaccines, the use of adrenaline (to manage anaphylaxis) and resuscitation procedures. Protocols are adhered to within the existing clinical governance and regulatory frameworks and pharmacists are qualified to prevent, mitigate, and report any adverse reactions should they occur. Whilst there are no increased risks of anaphylaxis events when vaccinating in a pharmacy compared to other healthcare settings, pharmacists are trained healthcare professionals who are able to act upon adverse events. Communication to the patients'

general practitioner outlining any vaccination provided is mainly performed via traditional communication methods. However, greater use of e-notification or annotation of the patients' medical record, (for example, the patients' electronic health records (eHRs)), could improve the efficiency of such communication in the future.

### Vaccination for Healthcare Professionals

As healthcare professionals themselves, pharmacists often ensure they are vaccinated each year against the seasonal influenza virus.

Evidence suggests that healthcare professionals who are vaccinated are more likely to encourage their patients to be vaccinated.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, in many countries, pharmacists like other healthcare professionals, are prioritized and often immunised against Hepatitis B, influenza and COVID-19.

In both cases, being vaccinated helps to prevent further transmission of the viruses between patients and their families when visiting the pharmacy.



<sup>8</sup> Paterson P et al. Vaccine hesitancy and healthcare providers. *Vaccine*. 2016;34(52):6700-6706.

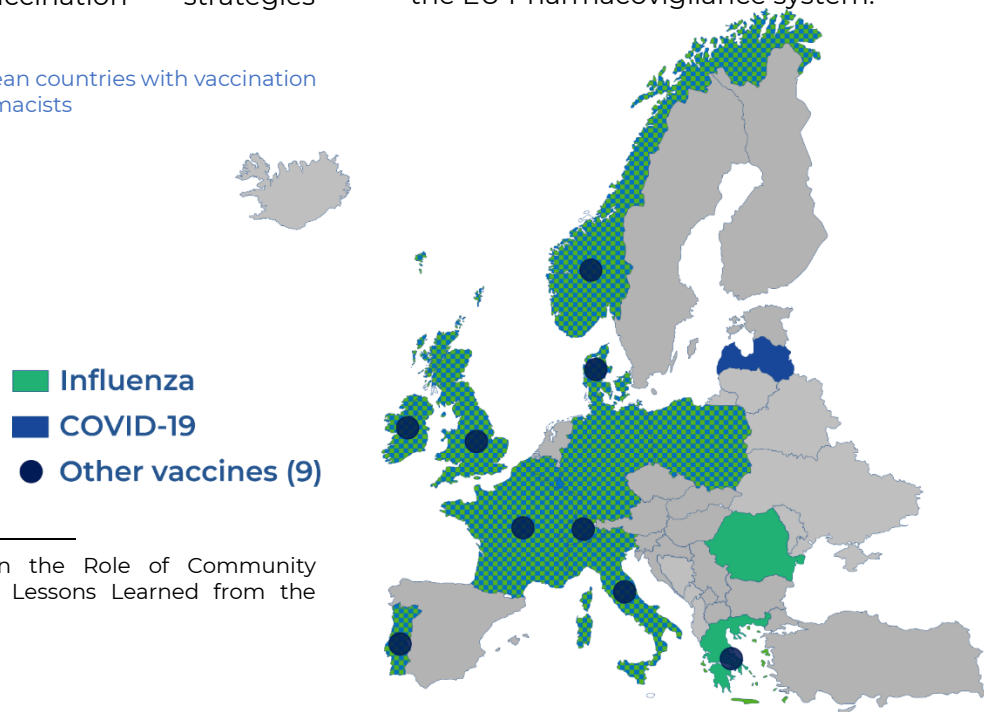
## Increasing vaccination coverage for public health emergencies

Another challenge that healthcare systems have been facing, in the post-COVID-19 pandemic state, is the emergence of a 'twindemic' of both the seasonal flu and COVID-19, for which prevention strategies are paramount.

In order to achieve a high uptake of the flu vaccination while ensuring that immunisation services can continue to be delivered safely and accessibly after the mass vaccination campaigns, in a number of European countries, healthcare systems have granted expanded powers to community pharmacists in relation to dispensing and administering flu/COVID-19 vaccinations.

These expanded powers include the supply of flu vaccines to risk groups without the prior need for a prescription (e.g., Belgium, Norway, and Portugal) and the launch of expanded pharmacist-delivered flu vaccination programmes (Germany, Italy, Poland), adding to the European countries that already have pharmacy-based vaccination strategies implemented.

Figure 1 - Map of European countries with vaccination in pharmacies, by pharmacists



Across Europe, community pharmacists have contributed and still contribute in various meaningful ways to COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, either through mass-vaccination or pharmacy-based campaigns. Their structural involvement in the administration of COVID-19 vaccines as part of mass vaccination campaigns for COVID-19 has been confirmed in 9 European countries. Community pharmacists also contributed in various other meaningful ways to COVID-19 vaccination campaigns such as through supply management tasks and vaccines preparation in e.g., mass vaccination centers, the distribution of vaccines to care structures and providing reliable and understandable information and advice to the general public.<sup>9</sup>

In particular, pharmacists have also often been the first trusted source for patients to address questions around the safety and effectiveness of new vaccines, debunking myths, and deconstructing arguments of misinformation. In that respect, community pharmacists are also excellently positioned to report suspected adverse reactions from COVID-19 and other vaccines, and as such are key contributors to the EU Pharmacovigilance system.

<sup>9</sup> PGEU Position Paper on the Role of Community Pharmacists in COVID-19 - Lessons Learned from the Pandemic, 2021

# Policy Recommendations

PGEU suggests a number of policy recommendations to maximise the contribution that community pharmacists make to tackling vaccine-preventable diseases and improving vaccination coverage.

## Advocacy and Communication



- European institutions and agencies should continue and strengthen collaboration and communication with community pharmacists and pharmacy organisations at European level, namely through joint initiatives and supporting actions such as the Coalition for Vaccination.
- National governments and stakeholders should support campaigns involving community pharmacists on the fight against disinformation and misinformation about vaccines, combating vaccine hesitancy and promoting vaccination uptake.
- National governments should recognize the valuable role played by community pharmacists in public health emergencies and support these interventions through appropriate service remuneration.
- Pharmacists should be better integrated into primary healthcare systems and services, for example, integration of electronic health records to facilitate efficient notification of pharmacists' interventions to the patient's medical record.



## Collaboration

- As proposed by the European Parliament<sup>10</sup>, the European Commission should include the pharmacy sector in EU public health initiatives and Member States should include the pharmacy sector in their health, care, and research programmes.



## Pharmacy-Based Vaccination



- Pharmacists should be enabled to provide new and innovative services in response to the threat posed by vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Services such as vaccinations should be globally commissioned within national health systems, supported by national health budgets, assuring economic sustainability of these services.
- Aiming at reinforcing prevention strategies, government-funded/supported pharmacy-based vaccination programs should be included as part of the overall health promotion national plans.
- National governments should expand pharmacy practice with the implementation of pharmacist-led/pharmacy-based vaccination programs.
- Professional bodies and pharmacists' associations should develop, implement, and assess continuous professional development courses, Standard Operation Procedures, and toolkits for pharmacy-based vaccination programs.

## Vaccination Strategies

- Due to the borderless nature of vaccine-preventable diseases, European institutions should promote sharing national best practices that include the participation of different healthcare professionals in effective vaccination strategies.
- National governments should include and integrate community pharmacists into national vaccination strategies, including communication campaigns.
- Pharmacists, as frontline workers, should get themselves vaccinated against influenza, COVID-19, and other vaccine-preventable diseases. Pharmacists shall be included as priority healthcare staff for vaccination schemes.

<sup>10</sup> COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future - European Parliament resolution of 12 July 2023 on the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future (2022/2076(INI))

## Annex: PGEU members examples on the contribution of community pharmacists to vaccination strategies



Belgium: Community pharmacists as vital support for COVID-19 vaccination campaigns

[Click Here](#)



Denmark: Almost a decade of vaccination in pharmacies

[Click Here](#)



France: From a pilot project to a full wide-spectrum vaccination service in just 5 years

[Click Here](#)



Germany: COVID-19 pandemic as an accelerator for pharmacy-based vaccination programs

[Click Here](#)



Greece: Pharmacy contribution to the national vaccination plan against COVID-19

[Click Here](#)



Ireland: Highest satisfaction rates for vaccination services

[Click Here](#)



Italy: positive COVID-19 vaccination experience in pharmacies leads to influenza vaccination

[Click Here](#)



Latvia: Competence to administer vaccines certified by a higher education institution

[Click Here](#)



Luxembourg: Pharmacists involved in community vaccination

[Click Here](#)

## Annex: PGEU members examples on the contribution of community pharmacists to vaccination strategies



Norway:  
Pharmacists with  
prescribing rights  
for COVID-19 and  
influenza vaccines

[Click Here](#)



Poland: From 0 to 2  
vaccines available in  
community  
pharmacies in just  
10 months

[Click Here](#)



Portugal: 15 years of  
history on  
pharmacy-based  
vaccination

[Click Here](#)



Romania: Digital  
interprofessional  
communication  
harnesses the full  
potential of vaccination

[Click Here](#)



Switzerland:  
Pharmacists  
contribute to the  
national vaccination  
plan

[Click Here](#)



United Kingdom:  
Pharmacy as  
integral part of  
vaccination  
strategies

[Click Here](#)

## About Us

The Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU) is the organization that represents Community Pharmacists, through the different Professional Bodies and Pharmacists' Associations in Europe. Currently PGEU represents 32 member-countries (through 41 National Associations), and is based in Brussels, Belgium.

PGEU represents over 400.000 Community Pharmacists, that work in over 160.000 Community Pharmacies in Europe. Every day, these pharmacies open their doors to over 46 million citizens that visit these healthcare points, providing care, dispensing medicines, and offering services to their communities.



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