



Pharmacy First

healthwatch
Bedford Borough



Engaging
Communities
Solutions

Pharmacy First Report:

The hidden healthcare resource

October 2024

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Introduction

Healthwatch Bedford Borough is the local, independent voice for the public regarding health and social care services. We gather feedback from the public through outreach activities and tailored work, using the feedback to inform health and social care provision and support commissioners in improving service delivery.

Engaging Communities Solutions CIC (ECS) delivers the Healthwatch Bedford Borough contract. ECS recently undertook a project across its seven 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 views of the people of Bedford Borough who took part.

What we did

The project was conducted through a survey made available online via SNAP Survey and shared with people through websites, social media and the ECS Healthwatch network. We also completed surveys with people in person at outreach activities across Bedford Borough to ensure that people who were digitally excluded were able to take part and offer their opinions on the Pharmacy First service.

Who took part?

A total of **135** surveys were completed by people who said that they resided in Bedford Borough.

The largest age group who took part was people aged 65–79 years old (33%), followed by those aged 25–49 years of age (26%) and those aged 50–64 years old (23%). 15% of people who took part said that they were aged 80 or over and 2% said that they were aged 18–24 years. Nobody was aged under 18 years.

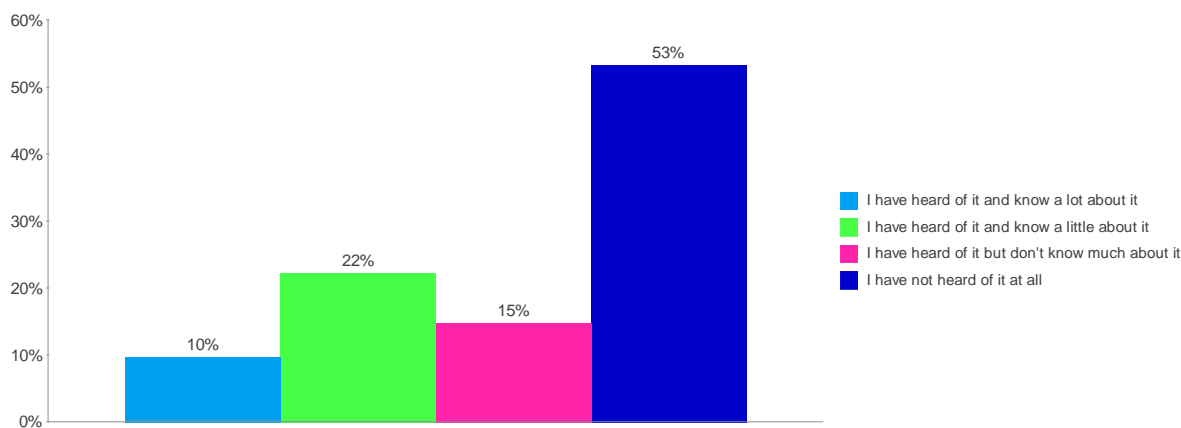
Most of the people who took part in the survey were women (76%), compared with 24% stating that they were men.

The largest group of people taking part in the survey identified as White British (59%); whilst people who identified as being from an Asian/British Asian background accounted for 21% of people who took part. 6% of people were from a Black/Black British background and 5% of people said that they came from a White background that was not White British. 3% of people were from mixed ethnic backgrounds.

56% of people said that they had a long-term health condition and 29% said that they had a disability.

Data Analysis

How aware of Pharmacy First are you? Bedford Borough



53% of people who took part in the survey said that they had not heard of Pharmacy First at all.

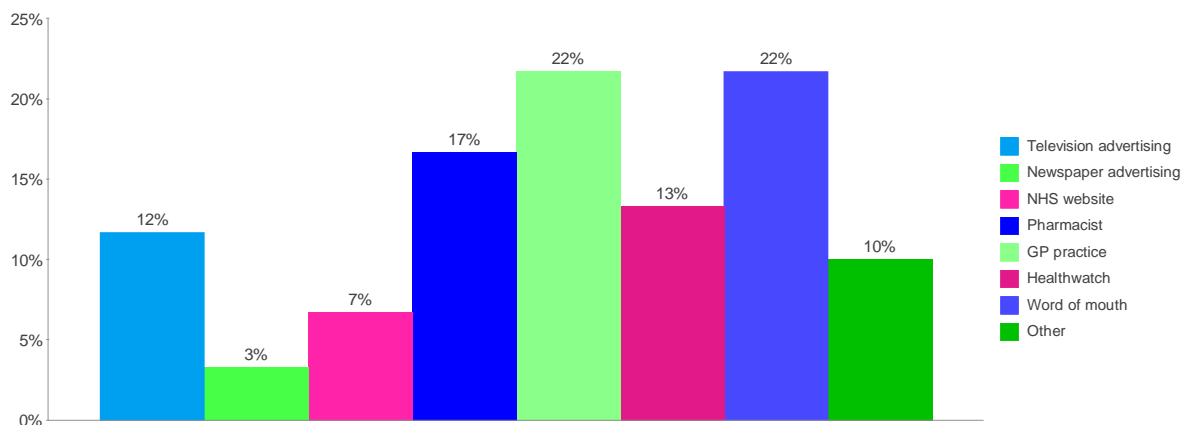
22% of people said that they had heard of Pharmacy First and knew a little about it whilst 15% said that they had heard of it but did not know much about it.

The smallest group, a mere **10%**, stated that they had previously heard of it and knew a reasonable amount about the service.

When considering whether there were differences between different demographic groups and levels of awareness, there were no particular differences between most demographic groups and levels of awareness, except for those who said that they had a long-term health condition. This group presented as less likely to have any knowledge of the service than those who did not have a long-term health condition.

61% of those who had a long-term health condition said that they had no knowledge at all of the service, compared to **45.3%** of those who did not have a long-term health condition.

If you have heard of the Pharmacy First service, how did you hear about the service? Bedford Borough.



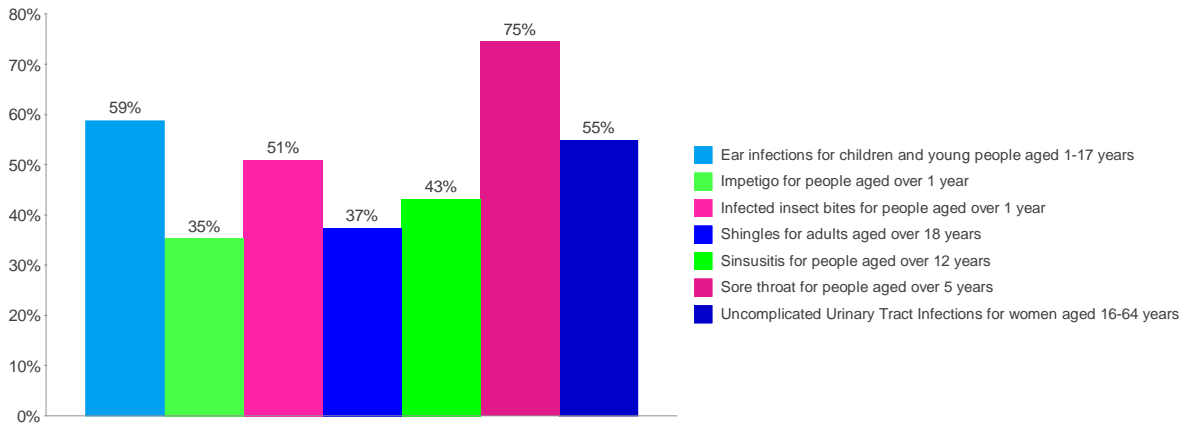
People who had heard of it were asked to indicate how they had heard about Pharmacy First. They were able to choose each of the options that was relevant to them.

22% said that they had heard about it from their GP practice, with a further **22%** stating that they had heard of it through word of mouth. **17%** had heard of it through a pharmacist and **13%** through Healthwatch Bedford Borough promotion. **12%** reported that they had seen the television advert and **7%** advised that they knew about it from an NHS website. **3%** said that they had seen newspaper advertising. **10%** said that they knew about through other means and those people were asked to tell us what these other ways were.

People said that they had heard through their workplace as some stated that they worked in the *NHS, and others through the BBC website or through social media platforms such as X (formally Twitter.)

*Please note that this may have skewed some of the results as we have a large number of clinicians following our social media platforms.

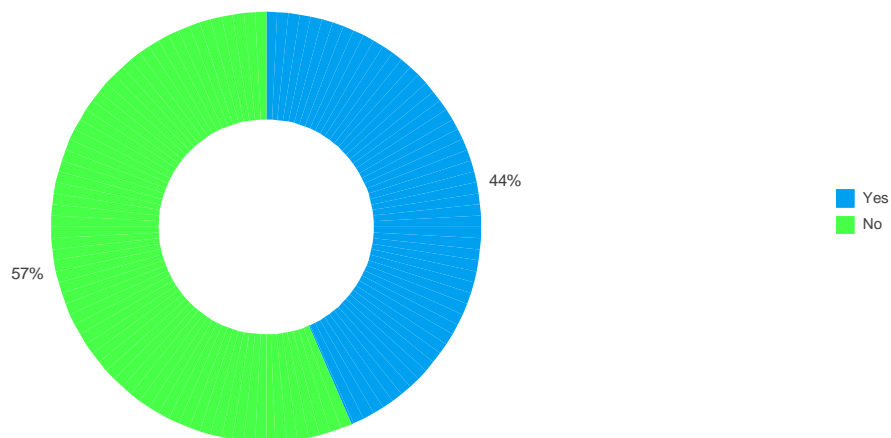
Which of the following were you aware that Pharmacy First offers? Bedford Borough.



People were asked what they knew about the services offered through Pharmacy First. **76%** of the people who answered the question said that they knew that Pharmacy First included sore throats for people aged over 5 years; and **59%** knew that it included ear infections for children and young people aged between 1 and 17 years. **55%** of people knew that it included uncomplicated urinary tract infections for women aged between 16 and 64 years and **51%** knew that it included infected insect bites for people over a year old.

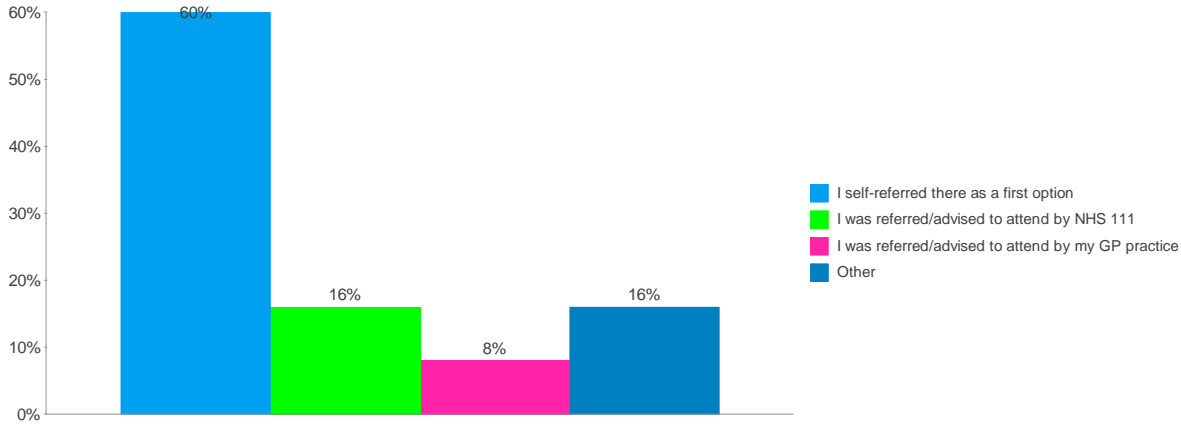
Less than half of people knew that it included sinusitis for over 12's (**43%**); shingles for over 18's (**37%**); or impetigo for people aged over one year of age (**36%**).

Have you used the Pharmacy First service? Bedford Borough



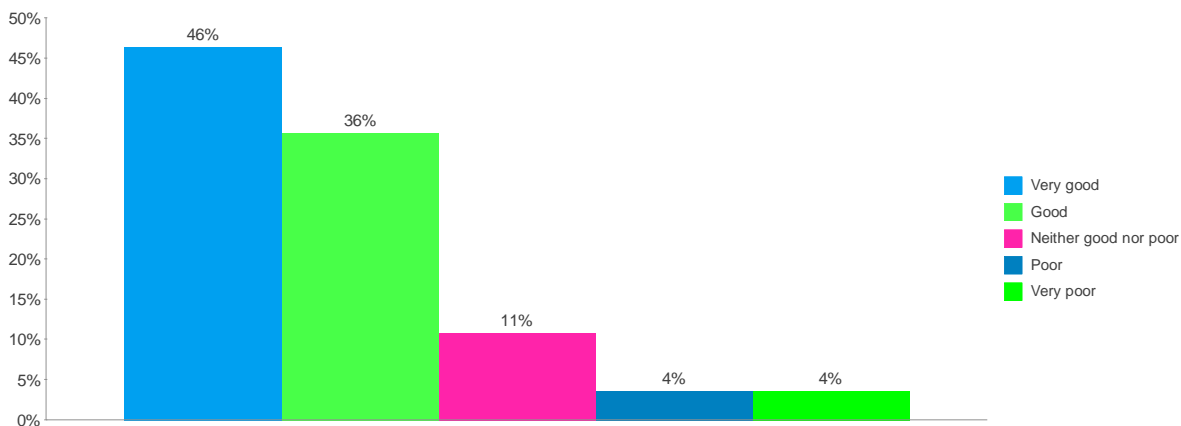
People were asked if they had used the Pharmacy Service. **44%** of people who answered the question said that they had used the service.

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



Those that said that they had used the service were asked how they had accessed the service. **60%** of people said that they had self-referred to the service as a first option; **16%** said that they had been referred to or advised to attend by NHS 111, and **8%** had been referred or advised to attend the pharmacy by their GP practice. **16%** said that they had chosen to use the service for another reason.

How would you rate the service that you received from Pharmacy First? Bedford Borough.



When asked how they would rate the service that they received from Pharmacy First, **82%** of people said that it was very good or good. **8%** said that it was poor or very poor, with others giving a neutral answer.

People were asked to explain why they had given the rating that they had. There were a small number of comments made about the services that can be divided into the following themes.

Efficiency

The use of Pharmacy First was seen as being efficient and quick by people.

'The service was excellent, quick and thorough.'

'It was quite quick and easy.'

Lack of information

People commented that the service was not well known, or they were not aware that it was called Pharmacy First.

'...not well advertised. Very poor, actually.'

'I was not aware that it was called Pharmacy First. Just knew of the service, not the name.'

Not needing to book a GP appointment

Other commented that it saved having to book a GP appointment and as such, the service was quicker.

'You get most of your answers without going to the doctor. Most doctors take about two weeks to respond.'

'...range of advice for a service user, as was unable to get a GP appointment for them.'

Quality of advice

People felt that they got good advice from the pharmacist.

'The pharmacist was quite good and nice and clear when talking to me about what the next steps were.'

'Really informative... and very knowledgeable.'

Referred back to the GP

However, there were also comments that people had been referred back to their GP practice after going to the pharmacist.

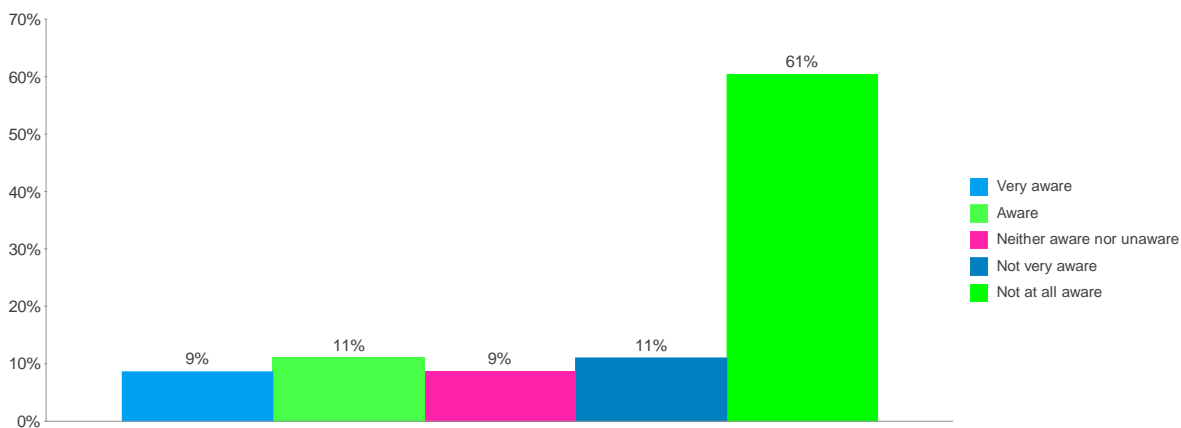
'Still directed to GP surgery, although condition was listed that they should have been equipped to deal with. Felt very much like they ticked a box.'

'Still needed to go to the GP.'

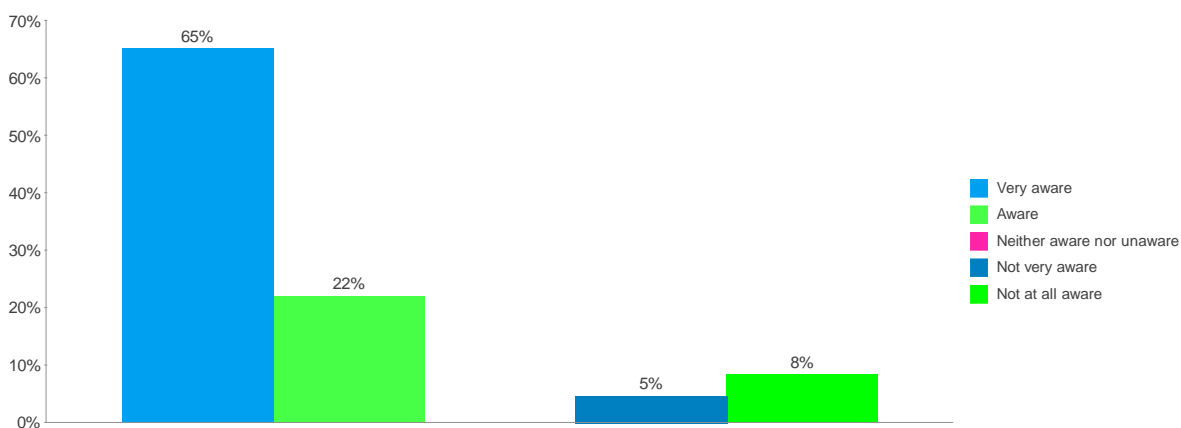
All people completing the survey were asked what other services they were aware community pharmacies were able to provide.

72% of people said that they were either not at all aware or not very aware that community pharmacies could carry out appliance use reviews. **20%** of people were either aware or very aware that appliance reviews could be carried out by pharmacies whilst others gave a neutral answer.

Appliance Use Review. Bedford Borough.

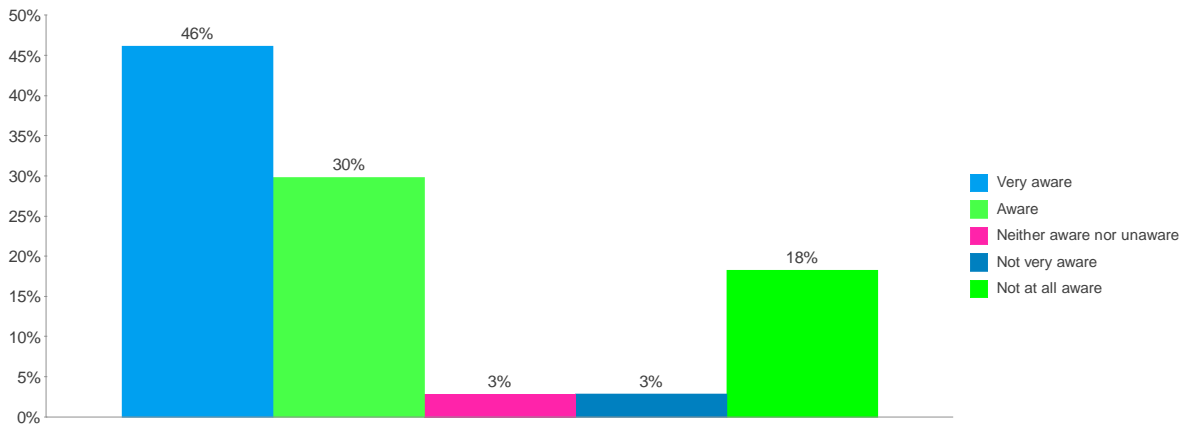


Flu Vaccination Service. Bedford Borough.



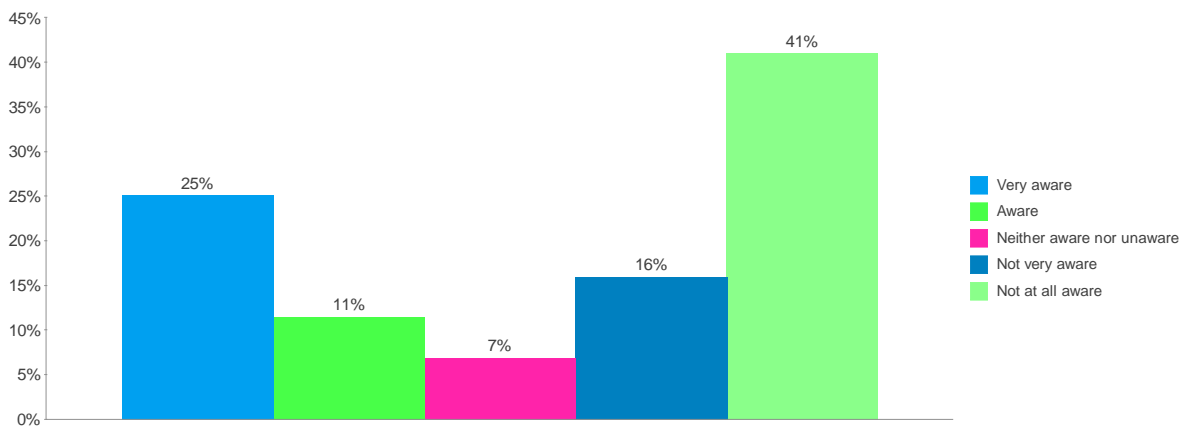
Awareness of the flu vaccination service was high with **87%** of participants stating that they were very aware or aware that this was available through community pharmacies. **13%** of people were either not very aware or not at all aware of the flu vaccination service.

Blood pressure checks. Bedford Borough.



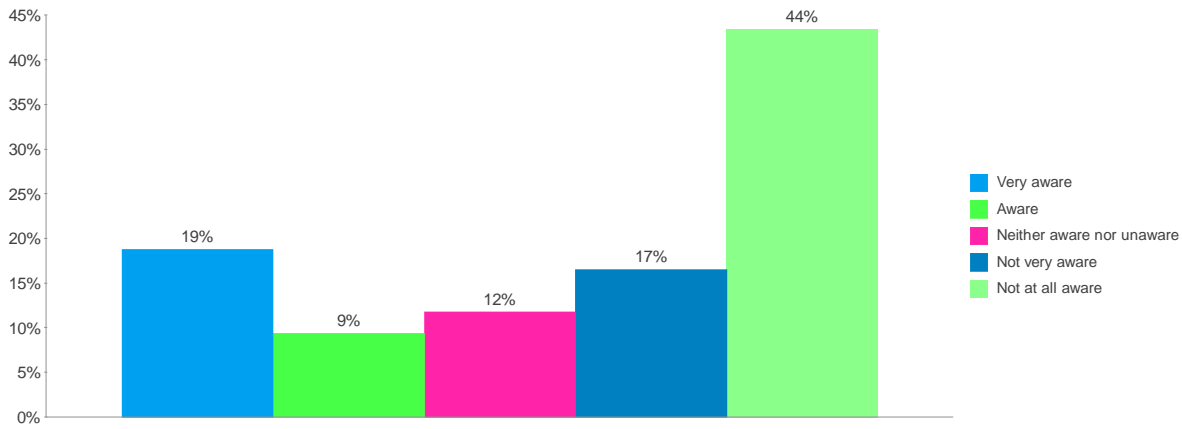
76% of people said that they were very aware or aware that blood pressure checks were available through community pharmacies and 3% gave a neutral answer. 21% of people said that they were either not very aware or not at all aware that blood pressure checks were available, with the greater number of these having no awareness at all.

Lateral flow device service for eligible groups . Bedford Borough



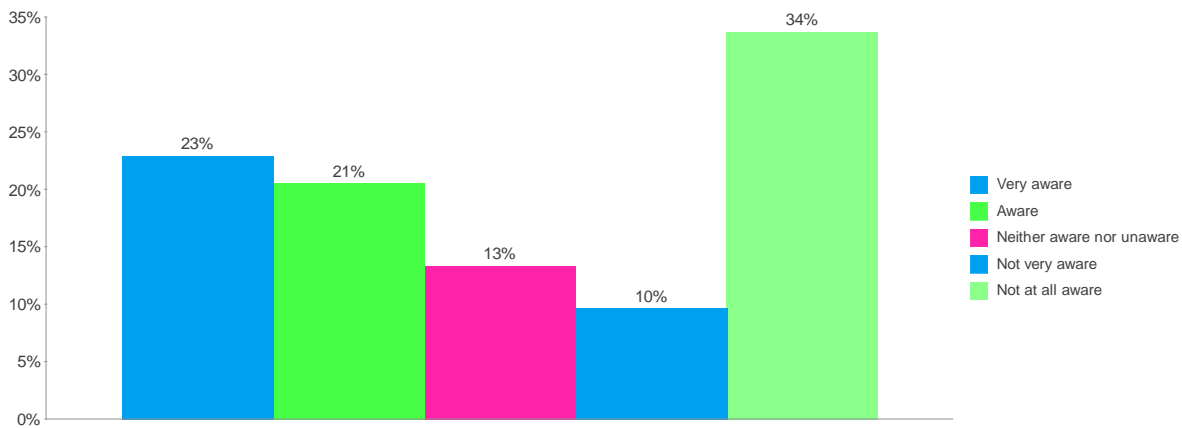
There was relatively low awareness of the lateral flow device service for eligible groups with only 36% of people saying that they were aware or very aware of the service. 57% of people said that they were not very aware or were not at all aware of the service.

New medicine service. Bedford Borough.



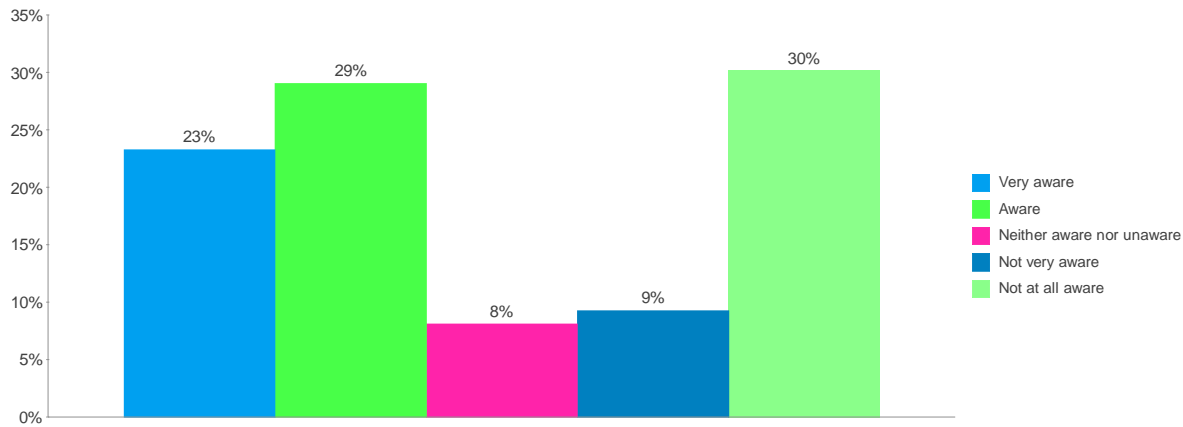
61% of people had limited or no knowledge of the new medicine service offered at community pharmacies, with only 28% of people advising that they were either very aware or aware of the service.

Pharmacy contraception service. Bedford Borough.



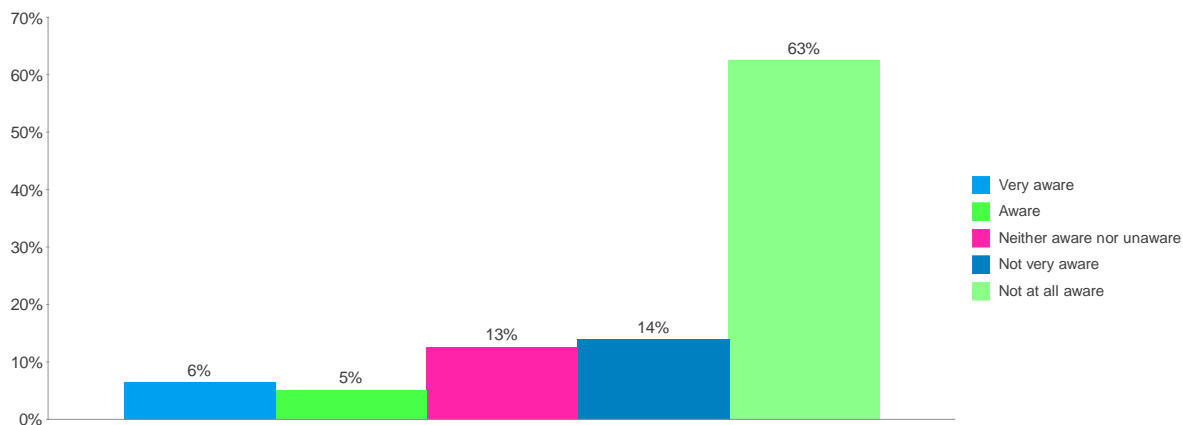
44% of people were either very aware or aware of the pharmacy contraception service and 44% were not aware of the service. 13% were undecided.

Smoking cessation service. Bedford Borough.



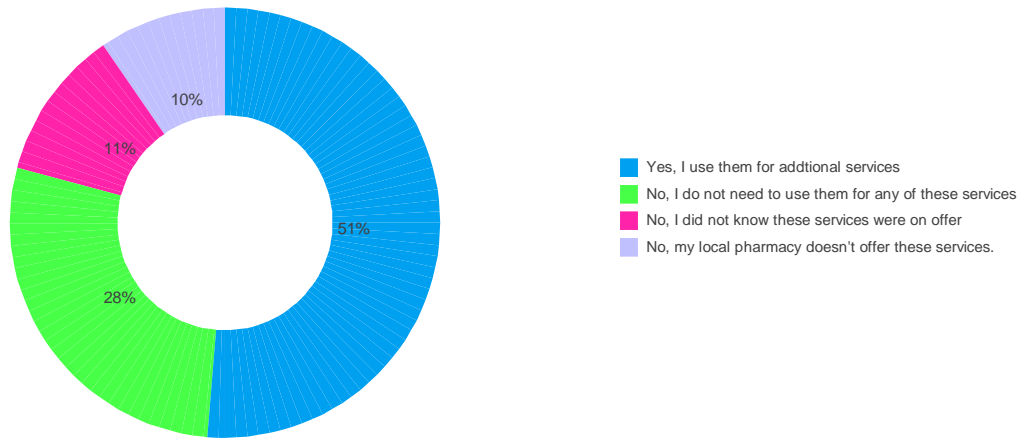
A little over half (**52%**) of the people who answered the question were aware or very aware of the smoking cessation service offered at community pharmacies. **39%** were not very aware or not at all aware of the service.

Stoma appliance customisation. Bedford Borough.



77% of people were not aware of the stoma appliance customisation service and **11%** said that they were aware of the service to some degree.

Have you used your local pharmacy for any of these services? Bedford Borough.



51% of people said that they used their community pharmacy to access additional services. 28% of people said that they did not use them as they had no need of the services offered. 11% said that they did not use them because they were not aware of the services and 10% said that their local community pharmacy does not offer additional services.

Conclusion

The feedback from the surveys suggests that there is still somewhat limited awareness of the Pharmacy First service in Bedford Borough, with 53% of the 135 people who completed the survey saying that they did not know the service at all. People who knew about the service were seemingly still lacking in knowledge of what the service was or entails, with only 10% of people saying that they were both aware of the service and knew a lot about it.

Awareness of what is offered by the service was variable with services for impetigo, shingles and sinusitis being the least well known of the services.

However, for those that had used the service on previous occasion, satisfaction with the service was high and people generally saw the service as being efficient and a way to avoid having lengthy waits for a GP appointment. There were some who had approached Pharmacy First for advice and treatment and had been referred back to their GP because the service was not able to cater for them due to their existing health issues. This was a source of frustration for them.

Awareness of the other additional services provided was also variable with people having relatively high levels of knowledge in relation to the flu vaccination service and blood pressure testing available at pharmacies, and as such higher levels of use of these services compared to services such as the pharmacy contraception service or smoking cessation.

Overall, people who used the services of Pharmacy First were positive about it but there is more that can be done to raise awareness of both the new Pharmacy First service and the other additional services that were already available at community pharmacies to encourage more use and reduce the burden on GP appointments.

Recommendations

Recommendations made from findings

1	A large proportion of people said that they were not aware of the Pharmacy First service. Therefore, it is recommended that the service be increased in knowledge. Given the population's literacy and language needs, we'd suggest a basic EasyRead mailshot to homes, including the age ranges for eligibility.
2	People were generally happy with the service when they used it, but some expressed frustrations with its limitations and a lack of awareness of those limitations. In addition to advertising the service more widely, it is recommended that more information on its limitations and where people should seek alternative help instead of the pharmacy is recommended.
3	People had limited knowledge of many of the additional services offered by community pharmacies, other than flu vaccinations and blood pressure checks. Therefore, it is recommended that consideration is given to how awareness can be raised across each of the additional services that are available through community pharmacies.

Thank you

Healthwatch Bedford Borough would like to extend our thanks to all those who took part in this survey, whether online via our SNAP Survey portal or via face-to-face interviews at community and faith-based settings across Bedford Borough over the summer months.

Our heartfelt thanks must also go to our pharmacy colleagues for their expertise and diligence when supporting the residents and patients of Bedford Borough.




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