



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health



Pharmacy Workforce Working Group 2024 Summary Report

April 2025



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Introduction

The [Emerging Risks to Pharmacy Workforce project](#) assessed potential challenges to maintaining a professional pharmacy workforce in both community and hospital settings in Ireland. The key findings were compiled in the [Workforce Intelligence Report](#), which outlined several recommendations and actions to ensure a sustainable future pharmacy workforce for Ireland.

The first recommendation of the report was to establish a multi-agency group focused on national strategic workforce planning for pharmacy. To this end, the 'Pharmacy Workforce Working Group' was established in April 2024. This group has joint oversight by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the Department of Health (DOH). It includes membership from:

- The Schools of Pharmacy / Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning (APPEL)
- Health Service Executive (HSE), Pharmacy Workforce Development Division
- Hospital Pharmacists Association Ireland (HPAI)
- Irish Institute of Pharmacy (IIOP)
- Irish Medicines Verification Organisation (IMVO)
- Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU)
- Pharmacists in Industry Education and Regulatory (PIER)
- Community Pharmacist
- Early-Career Community Pharmacist*

The group met quarterly throughout 2024 to discuss progress on the recommended actions arising from the report. The group also discussed changes and updates in pharmacy practice and policy, which influence, inform and evolve demands for, and availability of pharmacists in the health service. As part of its work, the group also identified ongoing challenges it faces in the delivery of specific recommended actions.

We are pleased to present this report, summarising the progress made on all recommended actions during the working group's inaugural year.

* A pharmacist within the first 5-years of their first-time registration

Recommendation 1: Strategic workforce planning

A national strategy for pharmacy workforce planning in Ireland should be designed to align with national and international best practice, taking a multi-agency, data driven approach as part of an integrated healthcare system.

| Action | Owner | Update |
|---|-------------|---|
| 1.1 Establish a multi-agency group focused on national strategic workforce planning for pharmacy. | PSI and DOH | The Pharmacy Workforce Working Group had its first meeting in April 2024 and met three additional times throughout the year. The group has committed to meeting quarterly in 2025. |
| 1.1.1 Develop a strategic workforce plan for pharmacy that is integrated with national workforce planning initiatives, using a suitable framework that incorporates available data, receives input from all relevant stakeholders and is time bound with an agreed built in review schedule. | DOH | Work is on-going in this area under the remit of the DoH. Available workforce data is being collated and considered as part of the national pharmacy workforce planning agenda. |
| 1.1.2 Calculate the number of pharmacists required to meet the current and future needs of the pharmacy sector and health system using an appropriate workforce planning projection model. | PSI and DOH | PSI issued a survey to registrants in Q3 2024 with the objective of gathering data to inform early workforce modelling efforts. The survey collected information on demographics and areas of practice within the profession. It also provided insights into ways of working within community pharmacy practice. This report will be published in early 2025. This data can be used to further inform efforts on strategic workforce planning development by the DOH (See also 1.1.1) |

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| <p>1.2 Collect data required to support workforce planning and modelling, including student related data, and pharmacist workforce data at the point of first time registration and continued registration.</p> | PSI | <p>The Schools of Pharmacy collect data from their students as part of annual surveys.</p> <p>PSI currently collect data from pharmacists seeking to voluntarily cancel from the register, and in relation to information about a pharmacist’s area of practice. This information is collected on a voluntary basis. Scoping was undertaken in 2024 to understand proposed legislative amendments which would enable the PSI to mandate the provision of relevant workforce information from applicants/registrants. This scoping exercise involved reviewing the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Registration) Rules 2008 and engagement with other national healthcare regulators. (See also 1.1.2)</p> |
| <p>1.2.1 Produce a national annual pharmacy workforce report, including in flows and out flows of pharmacists from the register, pharmacist sentiment, and other relevant workforce information to inform nationally led strategic workforce planning initiatives.</p> | PSI | <p>The Pharmacy Workforce Survey Analysis Report (2024), collected qualitative, sentiments-based data, and was published in April 2024. This report includes feedback from pharmacists and pharmacy students on a number of themes, including role identification and details, locum work, work conditions, governance roles, career progression, and role expansion. This data can be used to further inform efforts on strategic workforce planning development by the DOH. (See also 1.1.1)</p> |
| <p>1.2.2 Seek to implement legislation to make completion of an annual workforce survey mandatory for all pharmacists at the point of continued registration that is underpinned by an agreed minimum dataset.</p> | PSI | <p>PSI has been considering the changes that would be required to enable this legislation. Work in this area will continue in 2025. (See also 1.2)</p> |

Recommendation 2: Leadership of and for the profession

There must be clear strategic direction for the contribution of pharmacy to the future health system, and appropriate professional leadership for pharmacists.

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| <p>2.1 Bring the appointment of a Chief Pharmaceutical Officer forward for consideration within the Department of Health to provide strategic leadership, evidence based analysis and expert advice to the Department of Health, Government, broader health system, and regulatory and professional bodies, helping to shape policy and optimise the contribution of the pharmacy sector around the needs of the health service.</p> | DOH | <p>Work is on-going in this area under the remit of the DoH.</p> <p>The appointment of a Chief Pharmaceutical Officer was also a recommendation of the final report of the Expert Taskforce to Support the Expansion of the Role of Pharmacy in July 2024.</p> <p>The appointment of a CPO was also a commitment in the Programme for Government, published January 2025.</p> |
| <p>2.2 Commission a feasibility study tasked with proposing a suitable and viable approach to addressing the need for professional leadership for pharmacy.</p> | PSI | <p>A medium-term timeline is assigned to this action. Initial research was carried out in 2024. A commitment to delivering on the recommendations of the Workforce Intelligence Report has been included in the PSI Corporate Strategy for 2025-2028</p> |
| <p>2.3 Develop a national strategy and implementation plan for the pharmacy sector that clearly articulates a vision and role for pharmacy within the future integrated healthcare system.</p> | DOH and HSE | <p>The final report of the Expert Taskforce to Support the Expansion of the Role of Pharmacy was published in August. Work is on-going in delivering the recommendations of the Taskforce, which sets out an expanded scope for pharmacy practice in Ireland. The Department are working to implement the recommendations from the Expert Pharmacy Taskforce, prioritising delivery of all the regulatory enablers to facilitate community pharmacies to establish Common Conditions Services.</p> |

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| <p>2.3.1 Advance initiatives and policies for pharmacists to expand their current scope of clinical practice based on the evidence base for need within the health system and capacity within the sector.</p> | <p>DOH and HSE</p> | <p>The introduction of Advanced Specialist Pharmacist positions as part of the revised career structure in HSE Acute Hospitals is in progress, with implementation planned for 2025. (See also 2.3)</p> |
| <p>2.4 Develop a national strategy for the future role of pharmacy technicians within the health system, examining topics such as scope of practice, the need for regulation of the role, standardisation of the qualification and workforce planning.</p> | <p>DOH</p> | <p>A review of pharmacy technician roles and skills-mix in pharmacy teams was proposed for consideration by HSE Senior Leadership Team for HSE funded services in December.</p> <p>The DoH met with hospital pharmacy technicians in 2024 to listen to the concerns of this group and their position on the potential for regulation of the sector.</p> <p>This is a long-term action of 5+ years.</p> |

Recommendation 3: Innovation and technology

The development and integration of process innovations and digital solutions should be expedited to benefit patients, pharmacists, and the wider health system.

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| 3.1 Ensure pharmacy stakeholders are involved at the design and development stages of national eHealth infrastructure projects, including ePrescribing and the National Shared Care Record, to ensure maximum benefits for patients and the health system are realised when these systems are implemented. | DOH and HSE | <p>The ePrescribing Project Board includes a representative from community pharmacy and since December 2024, the PSI. The HSE ePrescribing Project Team also meet with the PSI, the IPU, and other key stakeholders and hold meetings every six to eight weeks.</p> <p>The multi-stakeholder Pharmacy eHealth Group, established by the Department of Health, meets every two months to discuss and provide feedback to national projects and digital health initiatives of relevance and importance to pharmacy.</p> |
| 3.2 Develop and implement solutions, including digital solutions, aimed at reducing the administrative burden associated with the national drugs reimbursement schemes operated by the HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS). | HSE | <p>The HSE PCRS division faced recruitment constraints this year and were unable to provide representation on the working group. The group endeavours to secure this membership for 2025 to ensure all necessary stakeholders are involved to progress actions.</p> |

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| <p>3.3 Develop and implement solutions, including digital solutions, aimed at reducing the regulatory burden associated with manual, paper-based processes.</p> | PSI | <p>The PSI engaged in discussions on the validation of pharmacy software systems with the DoH in 2024, together with other stakeholders and groups who have gone through a similar process of software development and implementation. Work is on-going in this area.</p> <p>PSI engaged with stakeholders and the DoH to ensure legislative amendments were introduced to reduce the administration burden associated with the supply of vaccines and emergency medicines. This included the removal of the requirement to notify GPs, and allowing for the maintenance of electronic vaccination records.</p> |
| <p>3.3.1 Implement legislation required to facilitate digital solutions that reduce regulatory burden associated with manual, paper-based processes.</p> | DOH | <p>Initial discussions on digitisation are on-going. See both 3.3 and 3.4.</p> |
| <p>3.4 Identify and highlight to members and other stakeholders, integrated technology and digital solutions, both currently available and emerging, that can reduce the administrative burden associated with dispensing and operational tasks within pharmacy.</p> | IPU and HPAI | <p>The IPU published a White Paper, <i>Key Enablers for a Sustainable Pharmacy Model</i>, which identified a number of objectives to reduce the administrative burden within pharmacy, including implementing integrated ICT systems and digitalising reimbursement procedures.</p> <p>IPU, DoH, and HSE have established an administrative burden working group. This group is focusing on the identification and implementation of short- and medium-term solutions to reduce administrative burden in community pharmacies; these include better integration of systems and integration of IHIs into PMR systems to allow seamless patient identification. Work will continue in 2025.</p> |

Recommendation 4: Attracting and recruiting pharmacists

Access to the pharmacy profession and proportion of those selecting patient-facing roles should be monitored to ensure sufficient numbers are available to meet the needs of the sector.

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| <p>4.1 Ensure the number of pharmacy students being trained in Ireland is sufficient to meet the needs of the sector, informed by national strategic workforce planning and modelling.</p> | <p>Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science and DOH</p> | <p>In October 2024, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science announced funding to support the development of three new pharmacy programmes at the Atlantic Technological University (ATU), the South East Technological University (SETU), and the University of Galway.</p> <p>ATU, SETU and the University of Galway have applied to participate in the PSI accreditation process in 2024 and 2025.</p> <p>See also 1.2</p> |
| <p>4.1.1 Ensure the number and range of experiential learning placements available aligns with the number of pharmacy students being trained, and reflects current and emerging practice needs.</p> | <p>APPEL and Schools of Pharmacy</p> | <p>APPEL and the Schools of Pharmacy are satisfied that the availability of the statutory 4th and 5th-year experiential learning placement remains sufficient to meet current requirements and adequately cover the emerging practice needs.</p> |

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| 4.2 Monitor and report on student sentiment to identify risks to attrition from the workforce through a dedicated annual survey. | APPEL | A survey to assess student sentiment was issued to 4 th years in December 2024. The results of the survey will be reviewed annually and shared with the PSI. The 2024 survey will be made available in due course. |
| 4.2.1 Implement actions to address concerns of pharmacy students as appropriate to increase their retention within the profession. [†] | APPEL and Schools of Pharmacy | APPEL and the Schools of Pharmacy continue to monitor student sentiment and are satisfied that existing approaches to showcase career opportunities are addressing student needs, e.g. through inviting guest speakers, local pharmacy career events or at the APPEL Future of PharmaClE annual careers event . |
| 4.3 Streamline the Third Country Qualification Recognition (TCQR) process for pharmacists who wish to practice in Ireland and who received their qualification from a country outside the EEA. | PSI | The revised Third Country Qualification Recognition (TCQR) route was approved by the PSI Council in 2024, and a consultation on the associated fees was issued. It is expected this new process will be fully operationalised in 2025. |

[†] The movement of early-careers pharmacists away from community pharmacy was noted as a concern at the initial working group meeting so an expression of interest and subsequent additional membership was issued to a current community pharmacist with less than 5-years' experience to ensure their perspective and insight was heard.

Recommendation 5: Career sustainability and progression

Patient-facing pharmacy roles must be sustainable and appropriately supported, with diverse career development and progression opportunities.

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| 5.1 Publish guidance that clearly sets out the distinct responsibilities associated with each governance role within Retail Pharmacy Businesses. | PSI | This guidance was published in May and was communicated to pharmacists through PSI newsletters and website updates. |
| 5.2 Provide access to dedicated leadership and governance training resources which can support pharmacists' career pathways. | IIOPI | The IIOPI provided access to pharmacists to the LIFT/IIOPI Leadership Pilot in 2024. |
| 5.3 Create a national framework to allow for recognition of specialist and advance practice for pharmacists that supports the needs of the health system and aligns with a future national strategy for pharmacy. | HSE and DOH | See 2.3.1 |
| 5.4 Further develop specialised and advance practice in line with the national strategy for pharmacy and provide for a system of recognition of qualifications obtained outside of Ireland | DOH | <p>The Minister accepted the recommendations of the Expert Taskforce to Support the Expansion of the Role of Pharmacy, which recommended that pharmacists should be able to prescribe for a range of common conditions. They have recommended an initial list of eight conditions which can be extended over time as the service evolves. The Group has also recommended the development, over the coming years, of more widespread models of pharmacist prescribing across the health service.</p> <p>Work on the implementation of the expansion of the scope of pharmacist practice, following on from the recommendations of the Expert Taskforce is on-going.</p> |

Recommendation 6: Working conditions

Working conditions for those in patient-facing roles must ensure that pharmacists are enabled to deliver safe, consistent, high-quality service.

| Action | Owner | Update |
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| <p>6.1 Establish a dedicated forum for pharmacist employers and employees with a time-bound scope and terms of reference, with a view to proposing and communicating best practice in relation to working conditions that must be addressed to ensure a sustainable community pharmacist workforce into the future. The focus of the forum will be on, among other matters, rest periods/lunch breaks, employee benefits, administrative burden, and appropriate delegation of non-pharmacist specific tasks.</p> | IPU | <p>This forum has been established. The forum had its inaugural meeting in December 2024. The forum consists of twelve pharmacists, six from an employee perspective and six from an employer perspective and is independently chaired by Mary Rose Burke. Terms of reference for the Forum have been established, and it works independently from the IPU. The Forum is tasked with agreeing recommendations that will be presented to the IPU Executive Committee for consideration.</p> |
| <p>6.1.1 Publish guidance on expectations of pharmacy owners, superintendent pharmacists and supervising pharmacists in ensuring safe staffing levels, adequate staffing mix and appropriate rest periods in community pharmacy.</p> | PSI | <p>This project is scheduled to commence in 2025.</p> |
| <p>6.2 Expand and promote the range of workplace health and wellbeing resources and professional supports available to pharmacists experiencing burn out and stress</p> | IOP | <p>The IOP is collaborating with the Centre for Positive Health Psychology at RCSI to build on the work the dentists have done in this area and is actively reviewing its available resources to ensure currency of support.</p> <p>The IOP continues to host resources for pharmacists around Mental Health and Wellbeing.</p> |

Conclusion

The PSI and DOH wish to commend the working group members and stakeholders on their ongoing commitment and collaboration in advancing the recommended actions from the [Workforce Intelligence Report](#) throughout 2024. Many of these actions are not merely once-off deliverables but intricate plans necessitating significant stakeholder involvement and engagement across all levels of the Irish healthcare system, government, the pharmacy profession, and the public. While it is important to celebrate areas of success and improvement, it is essential to acknowledge the interdependent and dynamic nature of workforce planning and the need for flexibility in addressing issues at a national level.

Challenges

Ensuring appropriate membership and representation on the Pharmacy Workforce Working Group, to advance all the necessary actions, was a fundamental challenge in the group's first year. The absence of the HSE (PCRS) representation, due to resourcing constraints, posed challenges given their ownership and/or involvement across multiple actions. However, the group remains committed to delivering on the recommendations and ensuring that the pharmacy workforce in Ireland is well-supported and resourced to meet current and future service demands.

Planned focus areas/work for 2025

In its second year, the Pharmacy Workforce Working Group will continue to oversee and work to implement the recommendations and actions of the Workforce Intelligence Report. This includes continuing to provide input into nationally led strategic workforce planning initiatives, prioritising appropriate membership and representation in the working group, and examining how data can be further leveraged to monitor pharmacy workforce capacity, together with the delivery of another workforce survey in 2025.