



Summary of AIMp meeting with Pharmacy Minister Andrea Leadsom

At a meeting with the Minister on 8th March in Jardine Pharmacy in Towcester, AIMp CEO Dr Leyla Hannbeck and our Board Member Has Modi discussed the current challenges in community pharmacies and offered solutions on how the community pharmacy network could support the NHS.

AIMp outlined to the Minister that pharmacies have always been willing to support the NHS and be a key solution in the prevention agenda and management of long-term conditions. However, the current shortfall in pharmacy funding which has remained stagnated for five years despite the rise in inflation has left many pharmacies struggling to keep their heads above the water – pharmacy operators do not get NHS pension, and for many everything they own is in their business. The Minister also heard that many independents are hanging in there by borrowing because even closing a pharmacy costs a lot of money which they do not have.

In addition, it was highlighted to the Minister that the sector is consistently seeing medicines prices go up and pharmacies are left out of pocket because the concessions are not granted on time and the system is flawed. Our contract is overly and unnecessarily complicated and not fit for purpose.

On workforce, AIMp outlined to the Minister that the ARRS scheme created a lack of level playing field in community pharmacy and that a similar investment in community pharmacy would make a big difference allowing the sector to invest in workforce, host multi-disciplinary teams where possible and deliver on prevention agenda and management of long-term conditions.

The Minister responded that there are no funds available to fund community pharmacies and that the government receives reports that pharmacies ARE in fact making money – when asked to be more specific about this and say which pharmacies are making money, she said Boots and some other large multiples. She also suggested that like Boots, independents should also strive to increase their retail offering and provide more private services.

We outlined to the Minister that not all pharmacies can be compared to Boots. Over 90% of the activities in Independent pharmacies are NHS activities and many independent pharmacies are based in areas of deprivation and health and inequality where the public cannot pay for private services or goods and expect NHS to cover the costs.

The Minister further mentioned that there is not a shortage of pharmacies in England and that data suggests that we have more pharmacies than is needed.

She outlined that the priority is to fix the issues with medicines shortages and that she agrees with us that the price fluctuations have left contractors out of pocket and that this must be addressed.

The Minister said that the government is interested in hearing about how pharmacies could be a solution to NHS challenges and wanted to hear more specifically about the role the pharmacy network could play in the prevention agenda. In response to this we outlined that the network could manage the vaccination services such as flu, covid, and AIMp has also asked NHS England to consider pharmacies delivering the MMR vaccine to encourage uptake of vaccination against Measles. This is because the sector has a track record of delivering vaccination services successfully.

AIMp provided the Minister with examples of how we could manage diabetes screening as part of the current hypertension service (if funded appropriately) and how this could save GP appointments and reduce hospitalisations. We outlined that the pharmacy network is well-placed to manage the long-term conditions following diagnosis by GP practices, including managing medicines optimisation as part of the medicines use review service which the sector used to offer but was discontinued by NHS England. We asked for this service to return to community pharmacy – GP practices should be freed up to focus on diagnosing and the rest of the care journey for the patient should be passed on to community pharmacy network. This is how **investing to save** for the NHS could work.

We will continue highlighting the case for community pharmacy to stakeholders and decision-makers including at our upcoming Parliamentary event on 20th March at Westminster.

