

IPU Medicines Shortage Survey



Patients Protected by Pharmacist Positive Work in Addressing Medicine Shortages

28 April 2024: The problem of medicine shortages remains high, with a latest IPU annual survey revealing that every pharmacy in Ireland has been challenged by medicine shortages in the past four months. The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has said this highlights the need to expedite the planned introduction of a serious shortage protocol under the Health Miscellaneous Bill for all molecules in short supply, and ensure that the legislation will be flexible enough to find solutions for patients.

The IPU Medicine Shortage Survey found that all pharmacists have experienced medicine shortages in the last 4 months with a considerable 57% (60% in 2023) of pharmacies experiencing more than 40 medicine shortages in that period.

Among the key findings of the Irish Pharmacy Union's (IPU) Medicine Shortage Survey are:

- 84% of pharmacists expect this problem to increase over the next 12 months.
- Irish community pharmacists are spending over 4 hours 37 minutes per week managing

medicine shortages, work that often goes unnoticed and not recompensed.

- 62% believe that allocations imposed by manufacturers is the leading cause of medicine shortages.

Medicine shortages can have a serious impact on patients and their families according to Clare Fitzell, IPU's Head of Strategic Policy. "Behind each medicine that is in short supply are patients who need them for their health and wellbeing. Medications in short supply this year have included certain steroid creams used to treat eczema, ADHD medication and Ozempic. Medicine availability issues have potential to impact medical conditions and can create considerable stress and inconvenience to patients.

"Pharmacists are highly experienced and work with prescribers to source alternatives where required. However, this process is often time consuming for healthcare providers and takes too long for patients.

The amount of time spent by pharmacies on dealing with shortages has increased significantly since 2018. The average pharmacist spends 4 hours 37 minutes per week dealing with shortages, in 2018, 5-10 hours per month was more typical.

"There is no expectation that this problem will improve in the next year with 84% of pharmacists surveyed predicting it will get worse", Ms Fitzell said. "This is a global problem and therefore we must look at what Ireland can control and implement this rapidly. In particular, moves to introduce a Serious Shortage Protocol must be expedited to ensure effective use of healthcare professional resource."

The Health Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2024 is currently before the Oireachtas. This will allow the Minister for Health to introduce a scheme where pharmacists can appropriately substitute medicines for patients without needing to revert to the prescribing doctor. "This should dramatically speed up the process for both pharmacists and prescribers and crucially will ensure that patients get appropriate medicines quicker."

Concluding, Ms Fitzell said, "Medicine shortages are a growing and significant problem. The focus in Ireland should be to address what is in our own control and how we can best support patients. There are very obvious and beneficial proposals that can be introduced, and the patients of Ireland cannot afford for these to be delayed any longer."

ENDS