



PAGB General Election toolkit

Key messages and policy asks

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The Consumer
Healthcare Association



The case for prioritising self-care

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In the public's interest

In 2023, PAGB published new research to understand public attitudes to self-care and the challenges and benefits of patients taking a more proactive approach to care for common health conditions. The findings from this research – detailed in PAGB's report *'Take care – of yourself and the NHS'*¹ – demonstrate how self-care is in the interest of patients:



Self-care can benefit the entire population, with **96%** of people in the UK experiencing at least one self-treatable condition annually.¹



30% of those who tried to get a GP appointment for a self-treatable condition found it difficult. Of those who saw a GP, **53%** were told to use over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. Taking a more proactive approach to self-care could mitigate the time and effort that is potentially wasted through a visit to the GP.¹



Self-care is what people want, with **71%** saying they thought that more medicine should be available without a prescription.¹



Effective use of OTC and self-care can positively impact the population's quality of life, with a further report commissioned by PAGB estimating a quality-of-life benefit of **£15bn** to UK consumers.²

NHS savings

In July 2023, Frontier Economics published a ground-breaking report, commissioned by PAGB, which found that the OTC sector can bring significant benefits and savings to the NHS:¹



£6.4 billion saved annually in avoided prescription and appointment costs

£1.7 billion saved annually by substituting GP and A&E appointments with OTC usage

£1.4 billion that could be saved by a 5% reduction in NHS prescribing from reclassification



¹ Frontier economics, [The economic impact of over-the-counter products in the UK](#), 12 July 2023.

Economic benefits of the OTC sector

The Frontier Economics's report,¹ commissioned by PAGB, found that OTC products have a distinct positive impact on the broader UK economy, as well as the NHS.

£ 18 billion

annual savings due to 164 million avoided lost work days per year – that's equal to 5 days per year where employees rely on OTCs to work

£ 3.5 billion

contribution by the OTC sector to the UK economy each year



How to realise the potential of self-care

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Increase awareness and trust in self-care

There is limited awareness of self-treatable conditions in the UK, with only 36% feeling confident in managing common ailments like headaches and coughs.¹

As a result, two in five adults (39%) have requested GP appointments for minor health issues including colds, a blocked nose, insect bites and stings or headaches.¹

Furthermore, there is a growing demand for enhanced education and clearer guidance on self-care. 73% of individuals believe that the NHS should take the lead in self-care education, while just over half (57%) advocate for governmental involvement. Additionally, 52% identify parents as crucial providers of self-care education.¹

How can the next government make this happen?



Launch a nationwide campaign to enhance public awareness of comprehensive primary care services.



Ensure the campaign prioritises easily accessible information on the importance and methods of accessing trusted self-care advice, which industry is willing and ready to support.



Integrate self-care education into the school curriculum; empowering students with essential knowledge and skills to manage their health effectively.

Harness digital to support self-care

As the NHS continues its digital transformation and primary care recovery, there is a renewed opportunity and need to empower people to engage in self-care through digital tools.

However, PAGB’s digital audit, which evaluated the government’s commitments to digitising the NHS, has uncovered shortcomings in the proposed funding model by the Department of Health and Social Care to manage the increase in NHS App registrations, as well as a lack of functionality, integration and personalisation.¹

Despite 1.2 billion NHS website visits between October 2021 and September 2022, 33.6 million registered users of the NHS App as of December 2023, and 22 million calls to NHS 111 in 2022, recent analysis shows individuals are not being effectively directed to self-care advice via these tools when it is most appropriate, placing undue burden on in-person services.

How can the next government make this happen?



Ensure that NHS England provides comprehensive self-care information accessible through its website and the NHS App



Support NHS England to maximise opportunities to provide self-care advice and information via NHS 111 online and telephone service.



Encourage ICSs to include information on self-care on their websites and ensure that NHS England provides support and national guidance on information to include on these pages.



**Creating a supportive
self-care environment**

PAGB

Fully integrate pharmacy's role in primary care

We need to future-proof the healthcare system by leveraging the increasing capabilities of community pharmacists and supporting people to self-care.

Over 99% of people living in areas of the highest deprivation are within a 20-minute walk of a community pharmacy,¹ making pharmacies an accessible healthcare setting for people with health concerns.

PAGB welcomes recent policy developments that prioritise the use of pharmacy to support self-care and help reduce pressures on the NHS. This includes the revived ambition to make more medicines available over-the-counter (OTC) in pharmacies.

How can the next government make this happen?



Enable community pharmacists to routinely populate medical records, to ensure a consistent and comprehensive record of an individual's treatment.



Explore future opportunities to maximise the role of pharmacy in supporting people to self-care and expand access to OTC medicines.



Support joined-up working between GPs and community pharmacists by establishing a defined and adequately resourced pharmacy lead in each Primary Care Network.

Remain a leader in reclassification

For over 40 years, the UK has led the way in reclassification – the switching of prescription-only medicines (POM) to make them available over-the-counter (OTC) without a prescription – delivering huge benefits for individuals, the NHS and the economy.

Greater reclassification of POM to OTC could result in a **5% reduction in NHS prescribing expenditure and £1.4bn in avoidable NHS costs**. Moreover, a recent survey shows that it's what people want with 71% agreeing that more medicines should be available OTC.

To that end, PAGB has been working with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and the Department of Health and Social Care – via the Reclassification Alliance – to establish a renewed ambition for switching medicines and identifying therapeutic areas where there are immediate opportunities for reclassification to increase patient access.

PAGB looks forward to continuing this valuable work with the next government to **ensure successful implementation of these commitments and explore the longer-term opportunities to increase access to medicines**.

How can the next government make this happen?



Explore opportunities to widen the use of 25 OTC products over 5 years (widening the conditions products can be used to treat and/or the quantity its available in) to expand access to self-care.



Re-evaluate the restrictive criteria for switching a POM to OTC to allow timely access to effective treatments (e.g. injectables to treat life-threatening allergic reactions).



Incentivise the OTC sector to reclassify their products in the UK to retain our position as a world-leader in reclassification of medicines.



Recognise the OTC sector as a cornerstone of the UK life sciences sector

The OTC market in the UK is substantial, with just under 1bn OTC units sold per year, just shy of the 1.37bn NHS prescription items dispensed each year.¹

This equates to a contribution of £3.5bn to the UK economy each year, including over £2.8bn from exporting manufactured products, and the remaining £600m making up OTC sector worker's wages.¹

Despite the significant economic contribution and market presence of the OTC sector, it is yet to be fully recognised within the UK life sciences sector. To date it is not represented on the UK Life Sciences Council and some OTC companies have struggled to access grants and public funding for innovation.

To secure OTC sector investment in the UK, its **value must be recognised by any incoming government as a key contributor to the life sciences sector and UK economy.**

How can the next government make this happen?



Prioritise collaboration and engagement with the OTC sector to ensure that the UK remains an attractive destination for the OTC sector to innovate.



Ensure OTC sector representation on the Life Sciences Council through PAGB, the consumer healthcare association.



Optimise grant and funding opportunities for small and medium OTC sector businesses.

Ensure an attractive regulatory environment for the UK OTC sector

To ensure the OTC sector – which currently contributes £3.5bn to the UK economy each year – continues to invest in the UK, the next government should put in place policies that ensure an attractive regulatory environment for OTC products and consumer medical devices.¹

The UK's exit from the EU has provided the opportunity for the UK to ensure an agile, innovative and world leading regulatory regime that protects patients and the public, whilst facilitating access and investment in the UK.

Currently, however, our members are experiencing challenges with the MHRA – as a result of inadequate funding as well as lengthy and unpredictable processes – that are impacting industry's perception of the UK regulatory environment.

There are also new opportunities to shape regulation, such as through legislation for the new regulatory framework for medical devices – which will include consumer health devices.

How can the next government make this happen?



Ensure open and collaborative partnerships between the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), government and industry.



Guarantee better regulation by reducing existing bureaucratic barriers and future-proofing against new barriers.



Ensure that OTC products are considered as part of innovative schemes to encourage access to medicines.