

Boots Pharmacy Hub Dundee engagement

Themed findings and feedback

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Background

In March 2025, HIS facilitated an engagement exercise within the Boots Pharmacy on Albert Street, Dundee. The pharmacy is a unique space, offering pharmaceutical services and third-sector support from We are With You under one roof.

Discussions were held with participants who use the space. These explored what good pharmacy experiences look like to them and where they feel improvements could be made. Participants included:

- A group of 4 males in 40s and 50s, With You staff member supplementing discussion

Male in 40s, With You staff member supplementing discussion

- Male and Female couple in 40s, With You staff members supplementing discussion

What they like

Three key themes emerged from discussions for what people liked most:

1. Socialisation

- *'Enjoy having a blether'*
- *'Better than getting a script and leaving on your own'*
- *'Makes a difference to have a chat and be offered a cup of tea etc'*
- *'Not just a chemist - more to it as a community space'*



Service users spoke highly of the ability to socialise in the space available to them within hub. With groups often appearing at the same time on certain days, this allowed familiarity and friendships to develop. On most days, people would use the space to remain for longer and chat and have a tea or coffee.

2. Additional supports

- *'Good people who work here'*
- *'Feel lucky to come to this pharmacy'*
- *'Only chemist in town where they get the extra support'*



With dedicated third sector staff on hand throughout the week, service users were appreciative of the access to social support within the pharmacy. Staff themselves supported service users as necessary which including help with phone calls, paperwork etc, and talking through any health issues. They may also speak up on their behalf around having a private space to take OAT rather than the cubicle. Additionally, this support from With You and cohesiveness amongst regular attendees also encouraged safeguarding and welfare checks amongst one another.

3. Accommodating space

- *'Tolerant staff'*
- *'Focus on the person and not just the medicine'*
- *'Less stigmatising space, mutual respect and trust'*



Compared to other pharmacy spaces, people mentioned that this space felt more accommodating towards them. One individual attended with their partner despite not being a member of the pharmacy and spoke of negative experiences and stigma he felt at other services.

What could improve

Themes which emerged as to what people felt could improve most

1. Waiting times

- *'Would like the freedom to have the script sorted as soon as'*



Amongst what people felt could improve was the time having to wait around for their medication. Longer waiting times can often have knock on effect for people if they may have a doctor appointment or other commitments. Some often have been moved around chemists and noted that waiting time are usually longer in this space than in others but the other services available make up for this.

2. Presenting so frequently

- *'Have to attend even if unwell'*



The need to present so frequently, often 6 or 7 weeks was seen as a burden especially with some having to commute across the city. Some felt they are forced in for their script and lacked awareness of the contingencies when ill.

Others say the daily commitment impacted on other personal obligations they have. Additionally, staff highlighted the added difficulty presenting for those at 'higher risk' i.e. homeless or recently released from prison.

3. Wider addiction service link

- *'Stigma going to DDARS facility'*

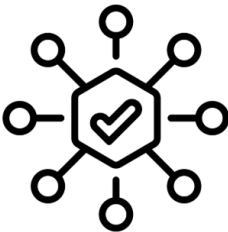


Service users spoke also of issues they had in interactions with wider statutory addiction in services in addition to the pharmacy. For example, they would often feel stigma and not fully informed of what treatment or medication they were moving on to. With You staff echoed these issues stating they would try to advise people of their rights around them. Greater understanding of people's situation would be beneficial and With You have made attempts to arrange for representatives to attend at the pharmacy to facilitate this.

Staff feedback

Separate discussions were held with staff members to further supplement feedback from service users and provide greater depth of detail to the operation of the pharmacy hub. Feedback is presented into responses from We are With You staff as well as from the lead pharmacist and pharmacy assistant.

Question topic	We are With You Staff	Pharmacy staff
Relationship with other staff 	• Good and productive overall relationship with each service • We help the Boots staff as necessary i.e. with IEP and give advice in conjunction with the pharmacy i.e. not backloading on equipment	• Feel happy to signpost people to the hub and the services that can help them • The staff help 'hugely' to de-escalate certain situations as they will know and understand more about their personal

	• Try to link in with pharmacy team if any concerns to report • Staff from VoiceAbility (independent advocacy) engage well, makes a difference to service users • Helpful to have open communication with pharmacy staff for the things that can be helped • Work in tandem as well as possible and they can help with matters such as getting a doctor appointment quicker	circumstances • Having pre-existing relationships with third-sector staff is very helpful for pharmacy staff who may not be here as often • Situations may unravel very quickly so it's beneficial to have that rapid help on offer • Grateful for With You colleagues - feel we provide better service here because of it, never feel they make a demand they can't deal with
Views on hub model 	• We give feedback with patients and have conversations around wellbeing, reporting back any risks to other staff • Taken years to refine the model between the 3rd sector services and the pharmacy • Often bogged down in past with foodbank referrals, so happy to be in place now to focus just on the specialized work • Consistency of services is key - some didn't last long and were the right fit to work within the space • Try to manage crisis as well as possible and de-escalate though conscious to try not being relied upon too often and have most things passed to them	• Happy with presence of other services though sometimes not easy to know who might be there on a given day • The model takes burden off pharmacy staff as in other spaces they may have to try and take on extra responsibility to take and share notes with other staff around service user behaviour which is not always ideal especially if lack of staff continuity • Space was often chaotic initially, especially with the small window open on a Sunday • Not all other Boots pharmacies are aware of the model offered at this space • Useful for pharmacy if the NHS side of prescribing could be sped up - may sometimes take a couple of days and delay may lead to crisis
What they see/hear from service users	• When in crisis, we encourage people to sit down and talk it out • Service users find this to be a safe space - can present with any issues and discuss,	• Daily customers often feel the wider public are given preferential treatment in the pharmacy to them so sometimes it can be hard to balance tensions • Try best to plan the workload

	• Use a trauma informed approach • Safety element of the people knowing With You staff are here which is helpful for the community • People likely to take notice and speak with other services i.e. help to quit smoking • Service users begin to take ownership over the space - self police to an extent	for the day - feel the system works pretty well especially when patients may have long waits for scripts and With You staff can help • For those in crisis and/or under influence, pharmacists may initially hold script and try to have initial chat to describe how it's not safe and the consequences • Having the hub has given confidence to the staff to be able to deal with potentially uncomfortable situations • The hub has helped to support discussions, stop escalation of people if the person is presenting in a chaotic manor.
Interactions with other external services 	• Always try to encourage DDARS staff to come and make use of the space • Often end up acting as an advocate on behalf of people when calling for extra support • Well known within Dundee - linked in well with wider system to refer people further i.e. housing • Positive community response • Link with work apprenticeships through SDF • Services offer to work ad hoc to help with crises escalating i.e. taking heartrate etc and escalating towards GP if necessary.	• Don't interact much with external services, normally usually signpost to the hub. • They do advocate for people with GPs and Health services, have seen a big difference in this as staff gain a better understanding and relationships with the people accessing the service.

Key points & lessons learned

- Pharmacies are well-regarded as a location for those seeking support for substance use beyond providing opiate agonist therapy and harm reduction. They can provide opportunities for wider psychosocial support and advocacy.
- Participant views felt this would be even better if all pharmacies could reduce the time waiting to collect prescriptions, the reason for any delays explained to them and treated in the order they arrive in the pharmacy.
- Similarly, some degree of flexibility and contingency around the frequency of physically presenting for prescriptions would be welcomed.
- Co-location of health and 3rd sector services provides a synergy around the services provided. Whilst this may not always be possible, where conditions allow, this should be explored wherever possible as part of recovery orientated system of care.

This engagement provided a valuable insight into the views of those using pharmacy services. It also provides an example of how this could be undertaken as part of community engagement when health and social care services are being planned, or when changes to services are being considered in line with the HIS guidance 'Planning with People'.

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