



# SELF CARE

Taking charge of your health

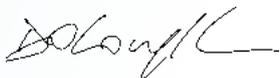


# Self care can be defined as the care taken by individuals of their own health and wellbeing at the lowest level of complexity with advice from a healthcare professional.

Self care empowers people to manage important elements of their own and their loved ones' lives. It includes taking actions to improve their health and wellbeing to prevent and decrease the likelihood of disease and to restore health after illness or injury. It is the first step and first choice for Irish people who are taking an increasingly active role in their healthcare.

Self care is not a new concept, people have always taken action to look after their personal health and treat minor illnesses. Although, by definition, self care can take place without the need to visit a healthcare professional, effective and safe self care is best undertaken with the benefit of professional advice. Pharmacists have the skills and training to ensure that patients have an open source of professional expertise in self care matters.

The Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) and the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) have for some years been working together and with other stakeholders to encourage the adoption of self care. Last year we jointly commissioned detailed market research to better understand the role of self care and the importance of pharmacy for adults in Ireland. This publication looks at the research findings and maps out a path to the better understanding and uptake of self care in Ireland.



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# INTRODUCTION

**Healthcare in Ireland is going through a period of significant change – we have an increasing and ageing population, evolving health structures, greater private sector involvement in the health arena, a growing incidence of chronic diseases, ever-increasing public expectations of the service and the development of new treatments which offer hope to patients but which also pose a strong financial challenge to the State. This challenge is compounded further given the State’s requirement to control healthcare expenditure.**

Patients are no longer passive recipients of healthcare and advice. Greater health literacy and greater access to information, combined with increased individual interest in personal health and personal choice, is leading to more and more patients actively looking after themselves. In addition, public awareness has increased the importance of certain lifestyle factors, such as avoidance of smoking and a balanced diet, in maintaining health and preventing illness.

In this context, self care can be seen as the most widely available form of healthcare. As pressure grows on the Irish healthcare system, self care will come to be seen as a means of controlling and rationalising healthcare and medication costs.

If we are to successfully confront the demands on our health system as the population ages, we need to ensure that we all stay fit and healthy for as long as possible.

In Ireland, conditions like cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and obesity are often caused by known and avoidable risk factors, such as poor diet, a lack of physical activity and smoking.

The treatment and management of chronic illnesses account for a large share of health resources, including:

- 80% of all GP visits;
- 40% of hospital admissions; and
- 75% of hospital bed days<sup>1</sup>.

There is considerable scope to reduce the number of avoidable cancers through the promotion of healthy lifestyles in areas such as improved diet, more exercise and reduced alcohol intake. Cancer and cardiovascular disease were each responsible for about one third of all deaths in 2013<sup>2</sup>.

1 Committee on the Future of Healthcare Sláintecare Report, May 2017

2 National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026, May 2017

We live in a world where if a condition is diagnosed early, it can often be quickly, effectively and efficiently treated using modern medicines, other medical interventions and behaviour modification. We are at a crucial point as a society where we need to encourage small but significant changes in the behaviour of adults and children to avoid a potential health crisis, which could overwhelm the system in the years ahead.

The benefits of self care for both individuals and health systems are well documented.

*Healthy Ireland*, the Government framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Ireland over the coming generation, has been developed in response to rising levels of chronic illness and lifestyle trends that threaten health and persistent health inequalities. *Healthy Ireland* is based on evidence and experience from around the world, which shows that to create positive change in population health and wellbeing, a whole-of-Government approach and involvement of local communities, as well as all of society, is required.

Although no economic studies have been carried out in Ireland, studies have been carried out in other jurisdictions to measure the aggregate cost savings of using over-the-counter (OTC) medicines for the most common self-treatable conditions, and their results are relevant to Ireland.

In the UK, it is estimated that up to 18% of general practice workload relates to minor ailments at a cost of £2 billion annually. Similarly, 8% of Emergency Departments (ED) consultations involve consultations each year for minor ailments costing the National Health Service (NHS) £136 million annually<sup>3</sup>.

The Australian Self Medication Industry (ASMI) estimates that 25 million minor ailment consultations are carried out by GPs in Australia annually; the time investment required for these consultations equates to the involvement of 1,000 full-time GPs who could instead be available to treat more serious conditions. ASMI concludes that it represents AUD 260 million in misallocated resources<sup>4</sup>.

According to a 2012 economic analysis conducted by Booz & Co for the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, each dollar spent on OTC medicines saves \$6 to \$7 for the US healthcare system. The availability of OTC medicines currently provides \$102 billion in value to the US healthcare system annually.<sup>5</sup>

Simple and strategic changes in the way self care is defined and organised in Ireland can make a difference to the long-term wellbeing of the Irish people. In both health and fiscal terms, prevention is better than cure.

3 MINA Study for Pharmacy Research UK, January 2014

4 ASMI - Australian Self-Medication Industry Inc. (2010) Health Reform Roadmap Could Benefit from Minor Ailments Initiative (ASMI - Australian Self-Medication Industry Inc)

5 "The value of OTC Medicine to the United States," Consumer Healthcare Products Association Study by Booz & Co., 2012

## MEASURING PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO SELF CARE

There are many different factors that influence perspectives of personal health and the likelihood of an individual embarking on self care. IPHA and the IPU are dedicated to gaining a better understanding of public attitudes to self care and how pharmacists can support it. With this in mind, specially commissioned market research was carried out in 2017 by Behaviour & Attitudes.

The aim of this research was to provide unique insights into public attitudes to self care in Ireland, as well as the view of the Irish public of the role of the pharmacist and the value they place on the availability and advice of the pharmacist. The research involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches<sup>6</sup>.

## ATTITUDES TO HEALTH

The vast majority of those surveyed strongly agreed that they have a mature and responsible attitude to maintaining their own health. Of the 966 interviewed, those who appear to be less mature and responsible, relatively speaking, tend to be men and from either end of the age spectrum; they are under the age of 25 or older than 65.

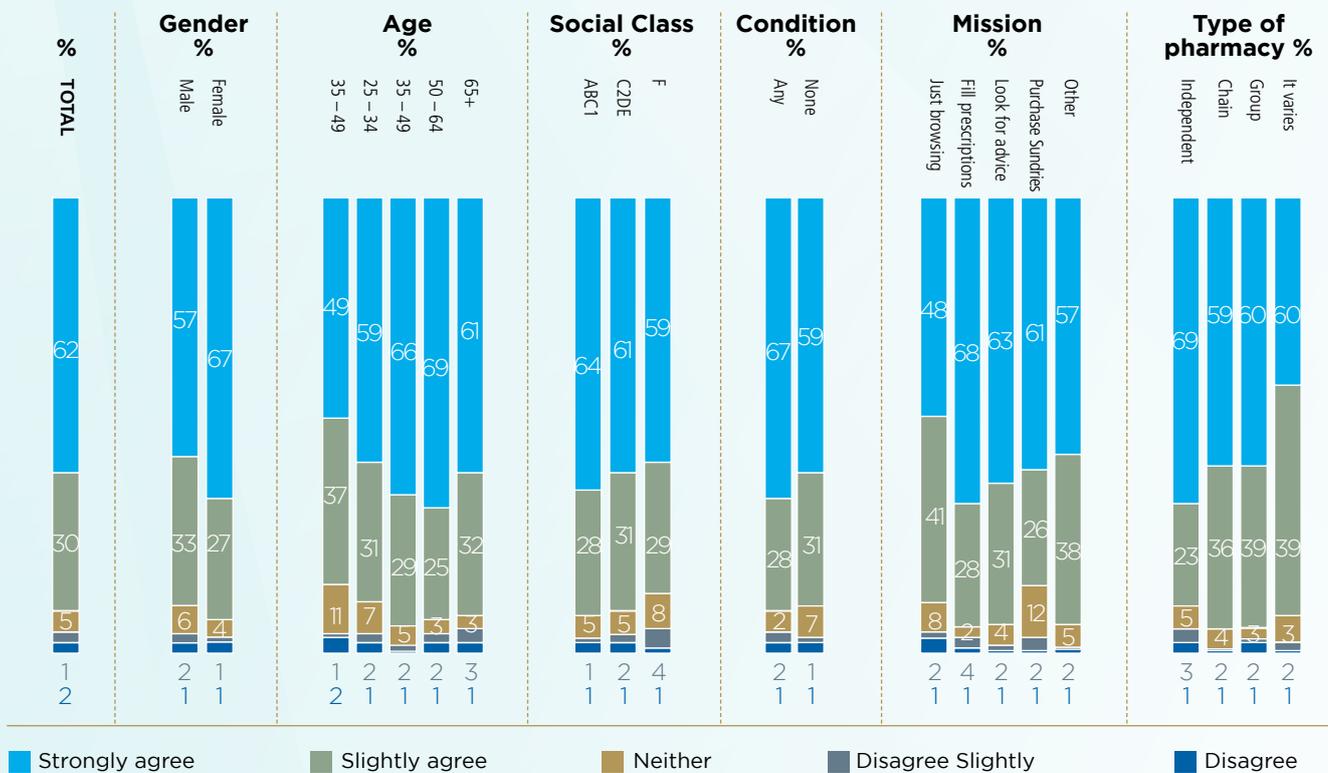
Perceptions of the pharmacy are particularly positive with a majority of those surveyed indicating that they are prepared to try something recommended by the pharmacist and indeed the pharmacist has an important influence over how they approach their health and any treatment that they take. This shows that for most the pharmacist is an important intermediary in their self-help or wellness routine.

### Profile of Sample: Conditions and Ailments

### NATIONAL SURVEY

Base: All ever visit pharmacy – 966

I like to be very involved in decisions about my own health and medication that I take x Demographics



6 Three quantitative projects with an additional qualitative component were deployed, involving a series of focus group discussions with a broad range of different types of individuals, some of which involved in-group visits to pharmacies. As well as this group-based approach, a series of one-to-one qualitative intercept interviews was undertaken with people as they left pharmacies, enabling a more discursive and interactive interview being undertaken as close as possible to the point-of-purchase or moment of consideration.

92% of respondents indicated that they like to be involved in decisions about their own health and medicines that they take, which is consistent with a desire for increased self care. The research showed that younger adults are much less likely to strongly agree that they like to be very involved in decisions about their health and medication, whereas a preference to do this grows substantially up to the age of 65.

## PATIENT AILMENTS

A third of those who participated in the research suffer from one of a number of significant conditions, the most pervasive of these being high or low blood pressure (10%), arthritis (9%), diabetes (8%) and high cholesterol (7%).

Two out of three do not experience any one of these more significant health conditions.

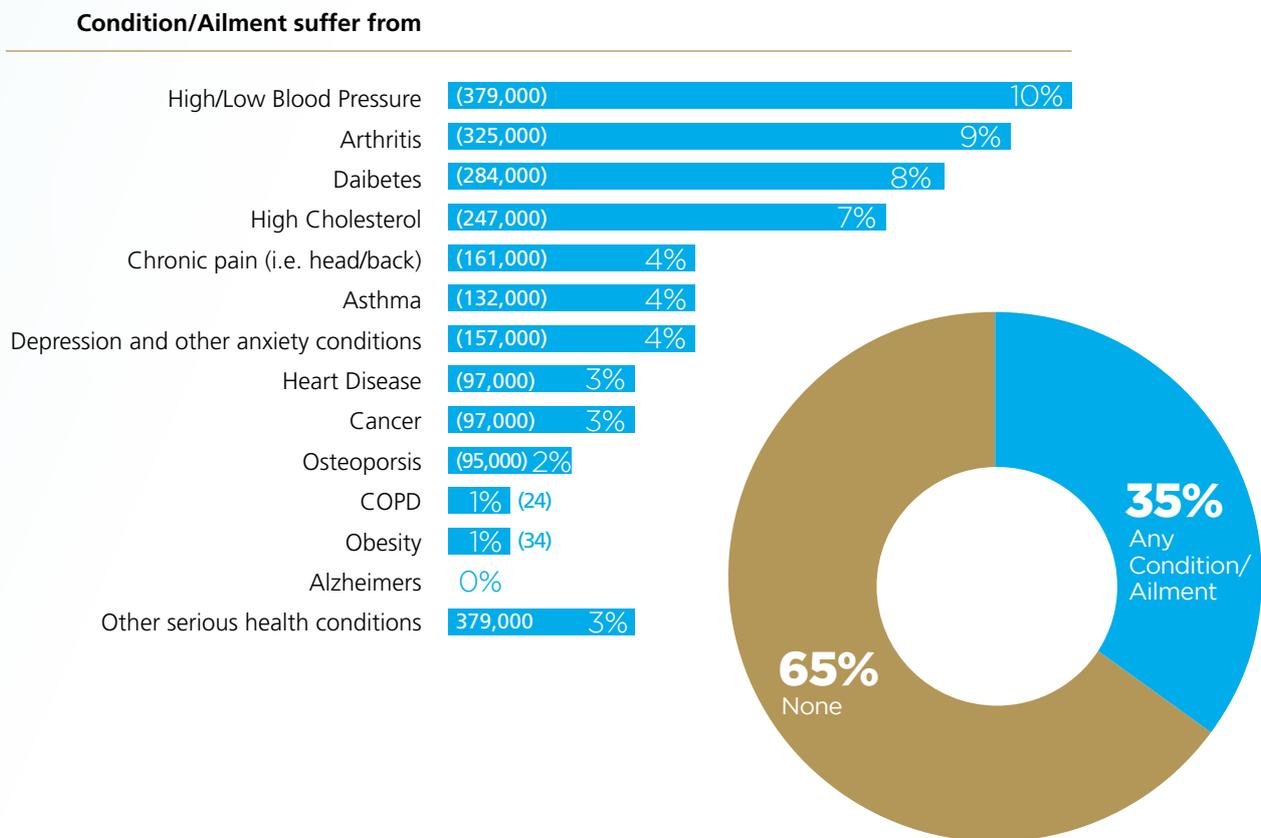
From this we can assume that a third of the population might be comparatively more focused on their personal health, whereas the other two-thirds may have less immediate reasons or needs to do so.

### Profile of Sample: Conditions and Ailments

### NATIONAL SURVEY

Base: All Adults - 1,000

Firstly, which of the following conditions or ailments, if any, do you personally experience?



## PHARMACY USAGE

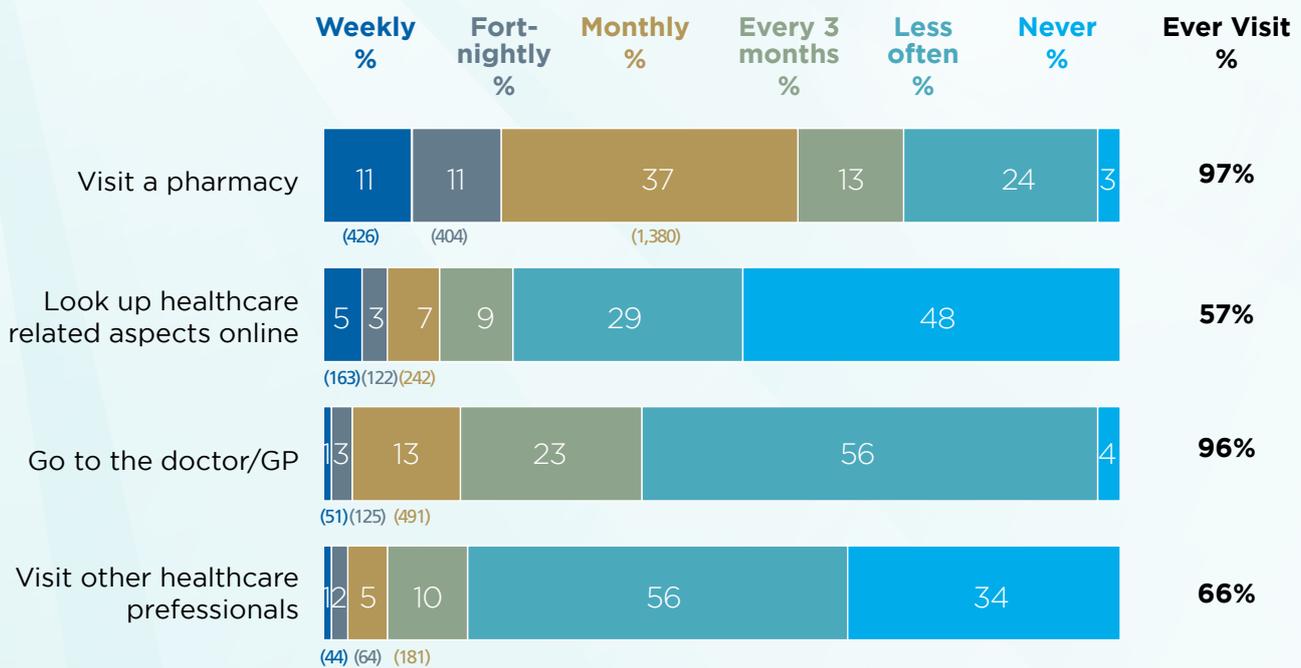
Three in five (59%) of the adult population visits a pharmacy at least once a month. As many as 22% do so fortnightly and 11% of the full adult population, or 426,000 adults, do so weekly.

Conversely, regular experience of a doctor or GP is much lower, with just 1% seeing a doctor weekly, as many as 4% fortnightly and 17% going to the doctor at least once a month.

### Frequency of interacting with healthcare professionals NATIONAL SURVEY

Base: All Adults - 1,000

About how often do you do the following these days?



NB: Figures in brackets are in thousands

Thus, it is apparent that although substantial numbers may be living with a continuing or enduring medical condition, they are still much more likely to interact regularly with the pharmacist than they are with the GP.

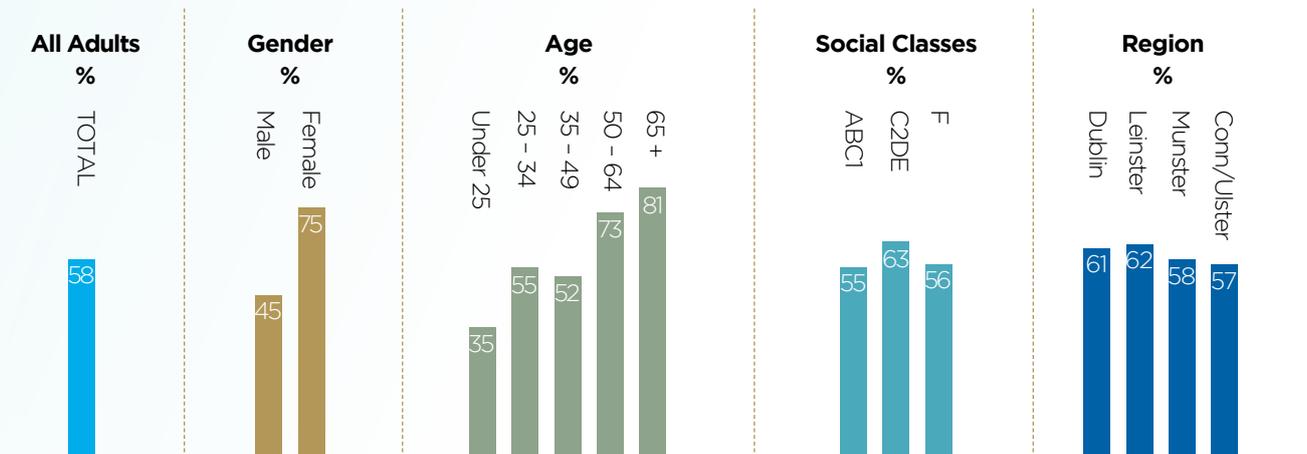
The number attending or visiting a pharmacy monthly is more than three times larger than the group visiting a doctor monthly: 2,210,000 visit a pharmacy versus 667,000 who go to the GP.

A substantial proportion of younger adults are regular pharmacy visitors, although they may apparently have much lower medical 'need'. That is to say, they don't suffer from an enduring or significant medical condition, but nonetheless they still visit the pharmacy for other reasons. It is logical to assume therefore that they either go to the pharmacy to make non-medical purchases, or potentially for other reasons such as self care or self medication.

## Monthly visit to pharmacy

NATIONAL SURVEY

Base: All Adults



[Women and those aged over 50 tend to visit most often.]

Many also have a strong preference to browse in the pharmacy and to try products and remedies that will prevent them having to go to the doctor.

Of those with a medical condition, 83% are in the pharmacy at least once a month, in comparison with just a third (34%) visiting the GP at least once a month. Interestingly, about 15% of those with a medical condition see another healthcare professional at least monthly too (a consultant, an occupational therapist or a physio etc.) with a similar proportion, one in six, or 17%, looking up healthcare-related aspects online at least monthly.

## ATTITUDES TO PHARMACIES

Customer perceptions of the human interaction they had in store are critical in terms of influencing their experience of the pharmacy itself. Customers who made visits were asked to indicate how important a variety of facets were in the context of the choices they made in the pharmacy.

Of greatest claimed influence are the dual factors of *staff attitude* and trust in the *pharmacist* themselves. Of marginally less importance was *interaction with staff* (not the pharmacist) and indeed whether they had had a past relationship with the pharmacy or not.

Within the exit study, Behaviour & Attitudes was able to interrelate the categories or items that customers purchased by the perceived importance of various facets in terms of the purchases they made in the pharmacy.

Focusing on those who made an OTC medicines purchase, arguably the group most focused on self care, the research highlights that they were much more likely to assess the following facets as being important contributors to their decision on what to buy: *staff attitude*, *interaction with staff*, *past relationship with the pharmacy* and *advice from the counter staff or pharmacy assistants*. All of these elements were more contributory for this group than they were for others.

Trust of the pharmacist was considered to be very important to 84% of patients in purchasing OTC medicines.

This would strongly support the perspective that trust and relationship with the pharmacist is a fundamental driver of satisfaction, leading to patients making self-care-purchases which address their own medical needs and requirements.

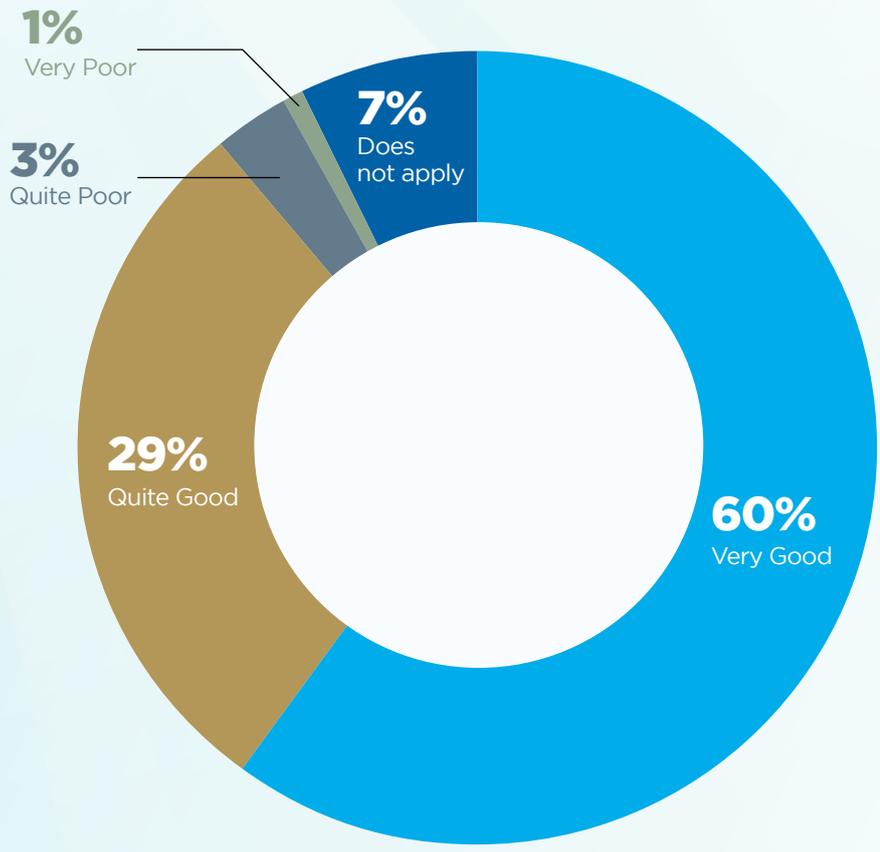
Almost nine out of 10 pharmacy customers indicate that the quality of medical advice they get at their regular pharmacy is either very good (60%) or good (29%). As such, pharmacy customers have very high regard for the standard of interaction with the pharmacist themselves.

Notably, very few are negative in this regard: about 7% say they don't know or that it does not apply to them.

**Regular Pharmacy Rating** **2017**

Base: All entered a pharmacy - 1,006- 3,522,000

**Quality of Medical Advice Rating**



## CONSULTATION AREA

The private consultation area in the pharmacy is of interest for 86% of those surveyed and strongly so for 56%. However, only 17% have used it to date, and just 8% in the past six months. This provides an opportunity to facilitate patient advice.

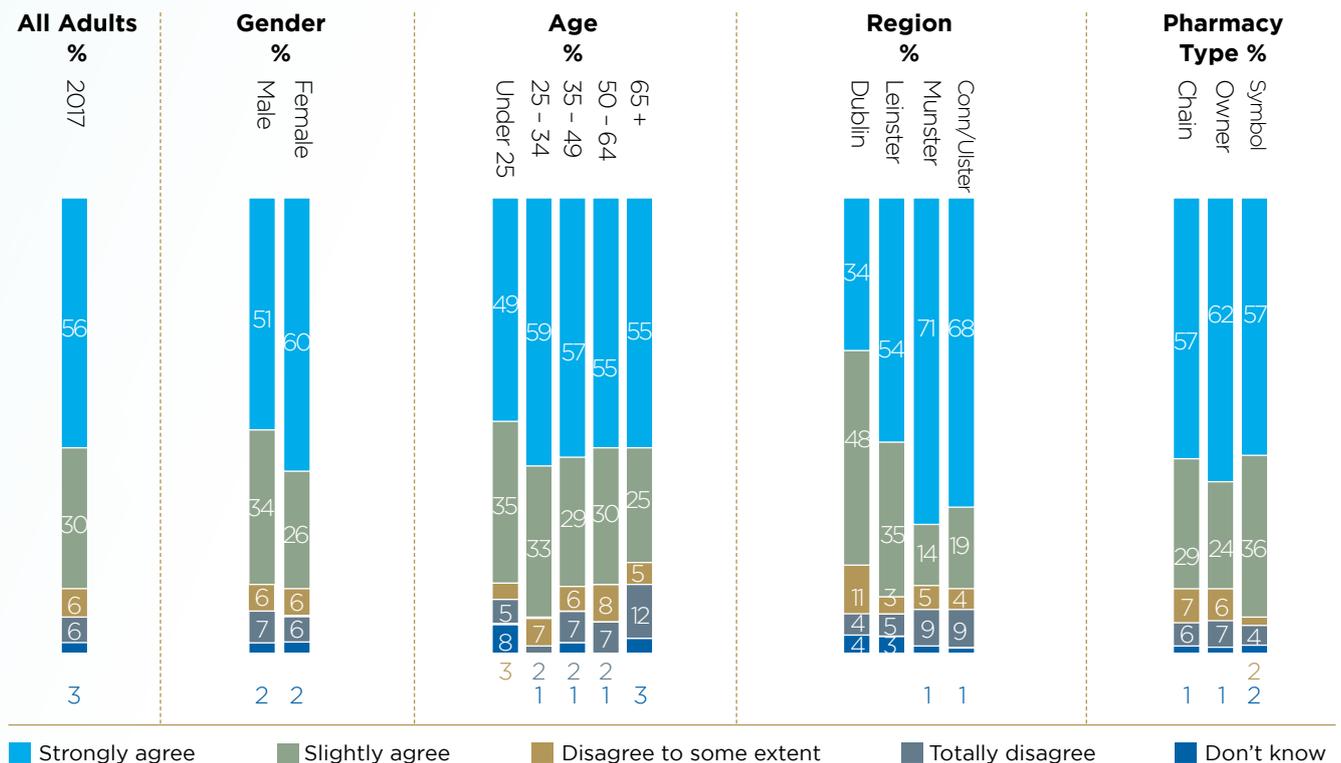
The opportunity provided by the consultation area is clear given that as many as 86% of pharmacy visitors suggest that they would be happy to talk to the pharmacist about a personal matter in their consultation area. This is true across all age groups and indeed greatest enthusiasm is apparent at the pre or early family life stage, 25 – 34 year old.

The consultation area provides a ready means of facilitating and easing access to the pharmacist, enrolling their assistance in a self care context.

Overall, the research provided further evidence to indicate that the Irish population is very receptive to the concept of self care and sees the pharmacist as an important and trusted partner in the management of their health.

### Would be happy to talk to pharmacist about personal matter in their consultation area

Base: All ever visit pharmacy – 1,006 - 3,522,000



## PHARMACY CAN SUPPORT THE IRISH POPULATION TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN HEALTH

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following initiatives have been identified to increase the level of awareness of self care among the public and the role the pharmacist can play in promoting and advising on self care.

#### 1. Expand the Role of the Pharmacist

Pharmacists could play a key role in providing sufficient information and support to enable patients to make an informed choice.

Pharmacists could undertake stronger advisory positions in their community including the possible actions outlined below:

- i. The development of a Minor Ailment Scheme that would enable medical card (GMS) patients to receive treatment of common illnesses free of charge, direct from their community pharmacist;
- ii. The provision of evidence-based prevention and health promotion activities, as recommended by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland's *Pharmacy Ireland 2020 - Working Group Interim Report* and the *Future Pharmacy Practice in Ireland- Meeting Patients Needs' Report 2016*; and
- iii. The enhancement of the pharmacist's advisory role to support compliance and in ensuring that the right medicine is recommended to patients for the right purpose.

##### a. Minor Ailment Scheme

The development of a Minor Ailment Scheme that would enable medical card patients to receive treatment for common illnesses free of charge, directly from their community pharmacy, would be an important step in promoting self care. The basis of the GMS Scheme is to provide full pharmaceutical services for persons who are unable, without undue hardship, to provide such

services for themselves and their dependants. This raises an issue of parity of access to such medicines.

Many non-prescription medicines are available to those who can afford them over the counter without having to visit a GP to obtain a prescription. However, in order to receive these medicines free of charge, medical card patients must visit their GP to get a prescription for these medicines. GMS-eligible patients should not have to go to their GP to receive treatment for specified minor ailments that can be treated by pharmacists from the agreed List of GMS Reimbursable Items, which are exempt from prescription supply.

Public opinion research, carried out on behalf of the IPU, indicates overwhelming public support for such a scheme. When asked, "Would you be in favour of the pharmacists being able to prescribe some medicines for minor ailments?", 96% of respondents agreed<sup>7</sup>.

Pharmacists are in an ideal position to treat routine ailments. Such a scheme would facilitate more prompt treatment of ailments, thereby improving the quality of life for patients, alleviating pressures on GP surgeries, facilitating patients during out-of-surgery-hours and also preventing unnecessary use of Accident & Emergency and out-of-hours GP services.

In the UK, the Royal College of General Practice and the College of Emergency Medicine have estimated that one in seven GP consultations and one in 12 A&E attendances could have been dealt with by a visit to a pharmacy.

Furthermore, research published in the British Journal of General Practice in July 2013 concluded that "minor ailments are being dealt with appropriately by Pharmacy Minor Ailment Schemes. Pharmacy minor ailment consultations are less expensive than consultations with GPs" and concluded that "evidence suggests that Pharmacy Minor

<sup>7</sup> Pharmacy Usage & Attitudes Survey, May 2017

Ailment Schemes provide a suitable alternative to general practice consultations”.

A Minor Ailment Scheme is an internationally recognised extended pharmacy service, which demonstrates how pharmacists can improve public health access, shape future services and broaden pharmacy roles to deliver quality patient care and improve health outcomes.

### **b. Healthcare Promotions**

The provision of evidence-based prevention and health promotion activities is essential to promoting self care. The pharmacist has an important role to play in health promotion, both as a source of education to patients and as a means to improving lifestyle.

The pharmacist, as the most accessible part of the healthcare system and the extensive pharmacy network, is ideal for spreading the message in collaboration with other groups who have a similar interest in promoting self care.

The introduction of consultation areas in pharmacies provides an ideal opportunity to promote engagement between the patient and the pharmacist, which can assist in improving healthcare in the community.

## **2. The range of medicines made available to patients should be expanded through switching**

For self care to be fully effective, the range of medicines made available to patients should be expanded. Many barriers to reclassifying medicines from prescription-only to non-prescription, also known as ‘switching’, have been removed but we need to look for innovative ways to increase the number of products being reclassified.

The empowerment of individuals to manage their own health will become increasingly important as better self care is essential to prevent the coming global epidemic of chronic diseases. More switches will ease the pressure on our already over-burdened health system as patients will be

able to treat everyday health conditions without the costs associated with going to the GP and getting a prescription. More switches can enable doctors to spend more of their time on more complicated illnesses and pharmacists can utilise their clinical knowledge to help patients choose the appropriate self-medication.

The pharmacist has a key role in providing advice on appropriate self-medication, including the provision of product information, advice on product selection, advice on side-effects and interactions, and, crucially, advice on the appropriateness of beginning or continuing self care; this is sometimes referred to as the ‘sign-posting’ function of the pharmacist – advising patients to seek specialist treatment in cases where self care may be ineffective or inappropriate. The best way to help ensure patient safety for non-prescription medicines is to ensure they are dispensed under a pharmacist’s supervision within a pharmacy.

For self care to be fully effective, the range of medicines made available to patients should be expanded.

## **3. The concept of self care should be actively encouraged and promoted among healthcare professionals**

This could consist of a joint declaration of commitment by the various organisations of healthcare professionals and allied healthcare professionals to coordinate their work more closely in order to ensure that patients access treatment at the lowest appropriate level rather than, as too often happens, seeking treatment at a higher level than required.

The Government should place Self Care at the centre of their “Healthy Ireland” strategy, promote and support it accordingly.

**4. Patients should have access to good quality trustworthy information so that they can seek care at the appropriate level and, thus, enhance their independence within the healthcare system**

Currently, there are few educational campaigns centred around the benefits of self care to entice the public to be more proactively involved in self care. It is essential, therefore, that all stakeholders, including the Health Service Executive (HSE), relevant patient and consumer organisations, professional medical and pharmacy organisations, regulators and industry should work together on health promotion campaigns centred around self care to communicate the following key messages to the public:

- i. Stay healthy through illness prevention and wellness; and
- ii. Seek advice from a pharmacist when using OTC medicines in order to ensure safe use, particularly for products whose method of supply has recently been changed from prescription-only to OTC.

The pharmaceutical industry plays an important role in providing trustworthy information to patients and is already offering quality information through the **www.medicines.ie** web portal, through patient information leaflets which accompany all medicines, through disease awareness campaigns and through consumer advertising of some OTC medicines.

It is also important to ensure consistent messaging about self care across the healthcare sector. It is crucial that the public receive consistent information that the pharmacy is the first port of call for self-treatable conditions and that there is increased awareness of the expertise of pharmacists.

**5. Patients should know self care means access to high-quality, safe and effective products.**

Millions of consumers rely on OTC medicinal products every day to address an assortment of ailments and, in the same way as prescription medicines, OTC products are formulated and manufactured with the highest quality standards and in compliance with Irish regulations to ensure safety and efficacy for the marketplace in Ireland. Also, pharmaceutical companies that manufacture and market these type of products are being permanently evaluated and inspected by local and regional authorities to prove quality and safety standards, given the wide public exposure and access to these products.



## CONCLUSION

**The importance of self care is growing, driven by more health-literate and demanding patients and supported by Government policy. Self care can help to reduce the potential future burden of some of the future health system challenges such as an ageing population and growing health expenditure.**

Community pharmacy is the key to the successful development of a self-care policy and its evolution in the future due to:

- The availability and accessibility of pharmacies where no prior appointment is required;
- The provision of professional advice to ensure self care is practiced safely and effectively; and
- The pharmacist's in-depth knowledge on a broad range of health matters to support patients in self care.

The case for self care goes beyond its role in improving long-term sustainability of the healthcare system. The role self care plays in ensuring positive health outcomes for individuals and families is undoubtedly its greatest contribution.





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**SELF CARE**

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