

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Review and Future Direction of the Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) Service

1. What is the Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) service?

Since launching in 2016/2017, the Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) service has offered patients an alternative way to request repeat prescriptions - by phone, email, or online. As of 2024, it supports around 70% of GP practices across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin (also known as the local Integrated Care Board or NHS STW) is responsible for commissioning this service.

While POD has helped improve access and reduced prescribing costs for the local healthcare system, a recent review found that the current model is no longer sustainable. Rising staffing costs, ongoing access issues, and a national shift toward digital tools have prompted a re-think of the service.

2. Why is the POD service being wound down?

NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin (NHS STW) is responsible for commissioning this service. As part of a wider review, NHS STW has assessed whether POD still meets local needs, offers value for money, and aligns with current priorities.

The Case for Change document for this piece of work outlines why re-evaluation of the current POD service has taken place; mainly to understand if the service is still delivering against the objectives for which it was set up - to cut down medicines waste and save money so that this can go back into other parts of the local NHS.

While the service initially helped reduce medicines waste, the review shows that it no longer offers value for money, has access issues, and duplicates services already available through GP practices and the NHS App. Staffing challenges and rising costs, now exceeding £1 million annually, have also made the current model unsustainable.

3. Is this a cost-cutting exercise?

While it's our responsibility as local NHS commissioners to ensure public funds are used wisely, this is not just a cost-cutting exercise. The POD service was originally set up as a temporary solution to tackle medicine waste, but times have changed, and more sustainable options are now available.

As the service is no longer meeting its original aims or operating sustainably, we have a duty to

review whether it should continue in its current form. Any savings made will be reinvested into other patient services, and this is only one factor behind the decision to review and wind down the service.

4. Why is this not a consultation process?

Although the change will impact some people within the county, this does not represent a substantial service change. The POD service duplicates existing provision, as prescription ordering remains a core responsibility under the General Medical Services (GMS) contract which is delivered by GP practices. Originally introduced as a temporary measure to reduce medicines waste and deliver cost savings, the POD service is no longer achieving these objectives effectively.

As the outcome of the POD review is not open to public influence - being a decision led by NHS STW, aligned with national priorities and consistent with changes across ICBs - formal consultation is not required.

However, meaningful engagement remains a priority. We are committed to a robust and targeted engagement process, focusing on those most affected, to ensure appropriate mitigations are identified and in place, and that patient and stakeholder feedback informs the transition planning and next steps.

5. Will this impact patient safety?

We recognise that changes to the POD service may affect some patients - particularly those who are not digitally enabled, live in rural or deprived areas, or lack access to smartphones or the internet.

To address this, we've carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and are working closely with local partners to minimise any risks. This includes offering support to help patients use the NHS App, advice and guidance through GP practices, community pharmacies, training staff, and promoting community-based digital support services.

We're also working with GP practices and community pharmacies to ensure our most vulnerable patients continue to get the help they need. Patient safety remains our top priority, and we are doing everything we can to protect it.

6. How do I get my prescription now?

Our priority is to support patients in using the NHS App or other digital tools to manage their prescriptions. However, we will also be maintaining non-digital options for those who need them - such as the ability to contact GP practices directly.

Key actions will include:

- Promoting the NHS App and offering support to patients who are most likely to be impacted.
- Working with GP practices to ensure alternative ways to order repeat prescriptions (online, phone, or in-person).
- Encouraging the use of electronic repeat dispensing for eligible patients.

- Engaging with patients, carers, and community partners to ensure a smooth and inclusive transition, as well as digital support options (i.e. opportunities to learn more about using the NHS App).

Although this process will mark a change for our patients, we would like to reassure that the transition will be carefully managed to ensure continued access to medication. Patients will be provided with information to support them through this change, across a number of different channels, including GP practices and community pharmacies.

7. Will my GP practice be able to help me?

Yes. GP practices will be supported to help manage this change and assist patients through the transition. While the approach may vary between practices, it remains a core responsibility of GP practices to manage prescription requests - POD was always intended as a supplementary service.

Support may include dedicated help from practice staff, involvement from Patient Participation Group (PPG) members and NHS App Champions, access to information about local digital training sessions, and alternative options such as repeat dispensing or contacting the practice directly.

8. What if I don't have an internet connection or a smartphone?

We understand that not everyone has access to the internet or a smartphone. If you're unable to use the NHS App, there will still be other ways to request your repeat prescriptions.

GP practices will continue to support patients who are digitally excluded. This may include help from practice staff, alternative ordering options like repeat dispensing, or placing requests directly through the practice.

We're also working with community partners to make sure support is available for those who need it, and to ensure that all patients - regardless of digital access - can continue to get their medication safely and reliably.

9. I don't know how to use the NHS App, what do I do?

If you're unsure how to use the NHS App, there is help available. GP practices will be offering support - this may include guidance from practice staff, Patient Participation Group (PPG) members, or NHS App Champions.

There will also be information available on local digital training sessions to help you get started. If you prefer not to use the NHS App, your practice can advise on alternative ways to order repeat prescriptions, such as repeat dispensing or contacting the practice directly.

You're not expected to manage this change alone - support will be in place to help you find the best option for you. For further information about the NHS App and its features, [please click here](#).

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