PGEU
European Community Pharmacists



PGEU Position Paper on Cardiovascular Health

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Executive Summary

Community pharmacists play an **essential role in protecting cardiovascular health across Europe**. As the **most trusted and accessible healthcare providers**, they are often the **first, and sometimes only, point of contact for people at risk** of, or living with, **cardiovascular disease** (CVD). This Position Paper offers a clear picture of how community pharmacies contribute to **CVD prevention, early detection, treatment, and ongoing care**, and sets out practical policy actions to unlock their full potential.

Building on the trusted foundation of safe dispensing, pharmacy services now deliver an **expanding set of CVD-focused interventions**: lifestyle counselling and smoking cessation; blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes risk screening; vaccination that reduces CVD risk linked to infection; structured medication reviews and adherence support; anticoagulation counselling and dose titration; referral and care coordination; and digital health tools that enable monitoring, follow-up and patient empowerment. These services **improve** outcomes, **prevent** avoidable hospitalizations and complications, **strengthen** therapeutic adherence, and **relieve pressure on overstretched health systems**.

Recent crises have emphasized **pharmacies' resilience and system value**, from **maintaining continuity of care** to **mitigating medicine shortages** that disrupt cardiovascular treatment. Yet **progress remains uneven**. Outdated legal frameworks, inconsistent remuneration, fragmented care pathways, limited read/write access to health data, and recurring medicine shortages continue to hinder wider implementation and recognition. Addressing these barriers will allow ph**armacists to deliver earlier prevention, safer treatment and better long-term care for patients** with, or at risk of, cardiovascular disease. This can be achieved by **formally integrating community pharmacy into public health policies**, funding **pharmacy services**, securing CVD **medicine supply**, enabling **interoperable data access** and **responsible use of digital tools and AI**.

PGEU recommends policy actions to:

- **Fully integrate community pharmacists into national and European health programs** on cardiovascular health, ensuring their role is reflected in the upcoming European Commission Plan on Cardiovascular Health and in the European Parliament's own-initiative report.
- **Formally promote, recognize and remunerate pharmacy services** that contribute to CVD prevention, screening, and management.
- **Expand pharmacists' scope of practice** across Europe to ensure more equitable access to preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic services.
- **Guarantee the security of supply** of essential cardiovascular medicines and strengthen EU coordination mechanisms to prevent and mitigate shortages.
- **Enable pharmacists' integration in the European Health Data Space (EHDS)**, ensuring pharmacists' access to and contribution of relevant patient health data.
- **Support responsible use of AI and digital tools** in pharmacy practice contributing to enhanced screening, early detection, and personalized support for cardiovascular patients.

Introduction

Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are the leading cause of death and disability in the EU, costing over **1.7 million lives every year**. CVD includes a group of disorders of the heart and blood vessels which include coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, rheumatic heart disease and other conditions. They account for nearly **one third of all deaths in the EU**, with a high impact on quality of life, productivity and healthcare costs.

Despite the high burden for healthcare systems, little progress in mitigating these diseases has been achieved. There is a clear understanding between researchers and policymakers that **more needs to be done on health promotion and prevention of CVD** to effectively curb this global epidemic. CVD prevalence and mortality are projected to significantly increase by 2050, mainly due to the ageing population and other societal trends, which include lifestyle and unhealthy habits.

Beyond being the culprit of too many lives, CVD also has a substantial social and economic impact. They contribute to disability, lower the quality of life, and lead to early retirement, absenteeism and decreased productivity. According to official sources, **cardiovascular diseases cost the EU around €282 billion annually**, of which €155 billion stems from direct healthcare and long-term care, €48 billion from productivity losses due to early retirement and absenteeism, and €79 billion from informal care provided by families and friends. Given their preventable nature in many cases, and the fact that risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes, smoking, obesity and sedentary lifestyles are widespread, CVD represents not only a health challenge but also a societal and economic imperative for action.

Community pharmacists play a central role in preventing CVD, detecting risk factors, ensuring safe and continuous use of cardiovascular medicines, and supporting adherence, provided they are properly integrated, recognized, and resourced in EU health systems.



Pharmacists' role in CVD prevention, early detection and screening, treatment, care management and rehabilitation

Community pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare professionals in Europe. Over 400.000 pharmacists work in more than 160.000 community pharmacies across the EU, providing direct care to over 46 million citizens every day. This widespread network ensures that even citizens in rural or underserved areas, where access to specialist services may be limited, can benefit from preventive care, early detection, and continuous management of cardiovascular conditions. Pharmacists play a key preventive role in CVD through:

- **Lifestyle counselling** on diet, smoking cessation, weight management, alcohol reduction, and physical activity. As cardiovascular diseases are largely preventable through managing modifiable risk factors (diet, exercise, smoking, hypertension, lipids), community pharmacists play a strategic role as accessible points for preventive interventions and health education.
- **Screening and early detection** of risk factors such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, and diabetes through pharmacy-based testing and monitoring. Pharmacists meaningfully contribute to cardiovascular health, as they offer expanded roles and increased opportunities for health interventions, provided that they are formally recognized and supported (through remuneration, regulation, and integration into care pathways). Blood pressure measurement, cholesterol testing, and cardiovascular risk assessment services are now integrated into routine pharmacy practice, with community pharmacists developing health checks for cardiovascular diseases to help identify people at risk. Pharmacists across Europe utilize several validated cardiovascular risk assessment tools.
- **Referral and care coordination services**, where pharmacists actively identify patients at risk and refer them to physicians or specialists, ensuring faster diagnosis and treatment.
- **Vaccination services**, contributing to the reduction of CVD risk linked with infections such as influenza. Pharmacists use digital tools and data interoperability to strengthen cardiovascular care, through linking pharmacies into digital health infrastructures so that prescription data, health records and alerts can flow, improving safety, care, and monitoring of cardiovascular therapies.
- **Adherence support and patient education** to ensure long-term commitment to cardiovascular therapies, including clinical follow-up that ensures cardiovascular medicines are used safely and effectively. Because many cardiovascular conditions rely on long-term pharmacotherapy, pharmacists actively contribute to preventing medicine shortages, ensuring consistent supply, enhancing patient safety, and improving patient adherence.

These pharmacist-led services are established in Europe and shown to be impactful and cost-effective.

Pharmacy services

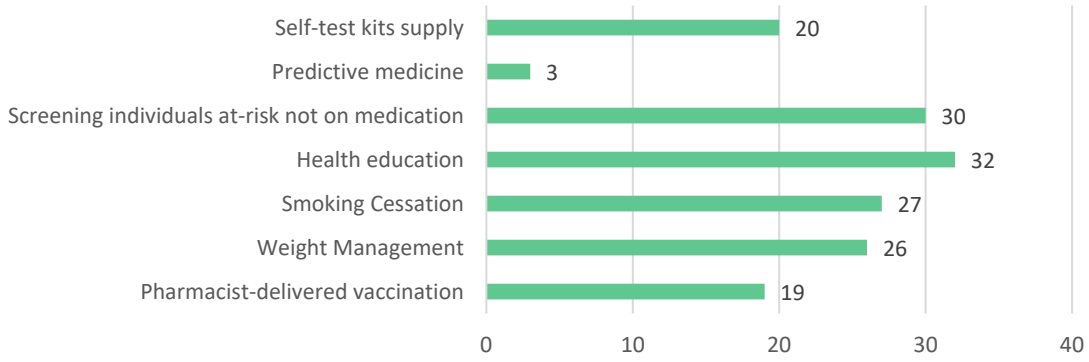
Pharmacy services are **professional healthcare activities provided by community pharmacists**, with the safe dispensing of medicines at their core and complemented with an **ever-expanding range** of additional healthcare interventions.

They are designed to **optimise the safe and effective use of medicines**, **improve health outcomes**, and **support patients in their day-to-day healthcare journeys**. Pharmacy services across Europe already demonstrate tangible contributions to CVD prevention and management.

Prevention and early detection

Weight management, lifestyle counselling, alcohol reduction and diet consultation **services** are **integrated into routine pharmacy practice**, as important tools to **prevent** chronic diseases from manifesting in the first place. This highlights pharmacists' contribution in **early detection and screening** of preventable diseases, which contributes to better patient outcomes.

Number of countries that provide pharmacy services focused on prevention of cardiovascular diseases

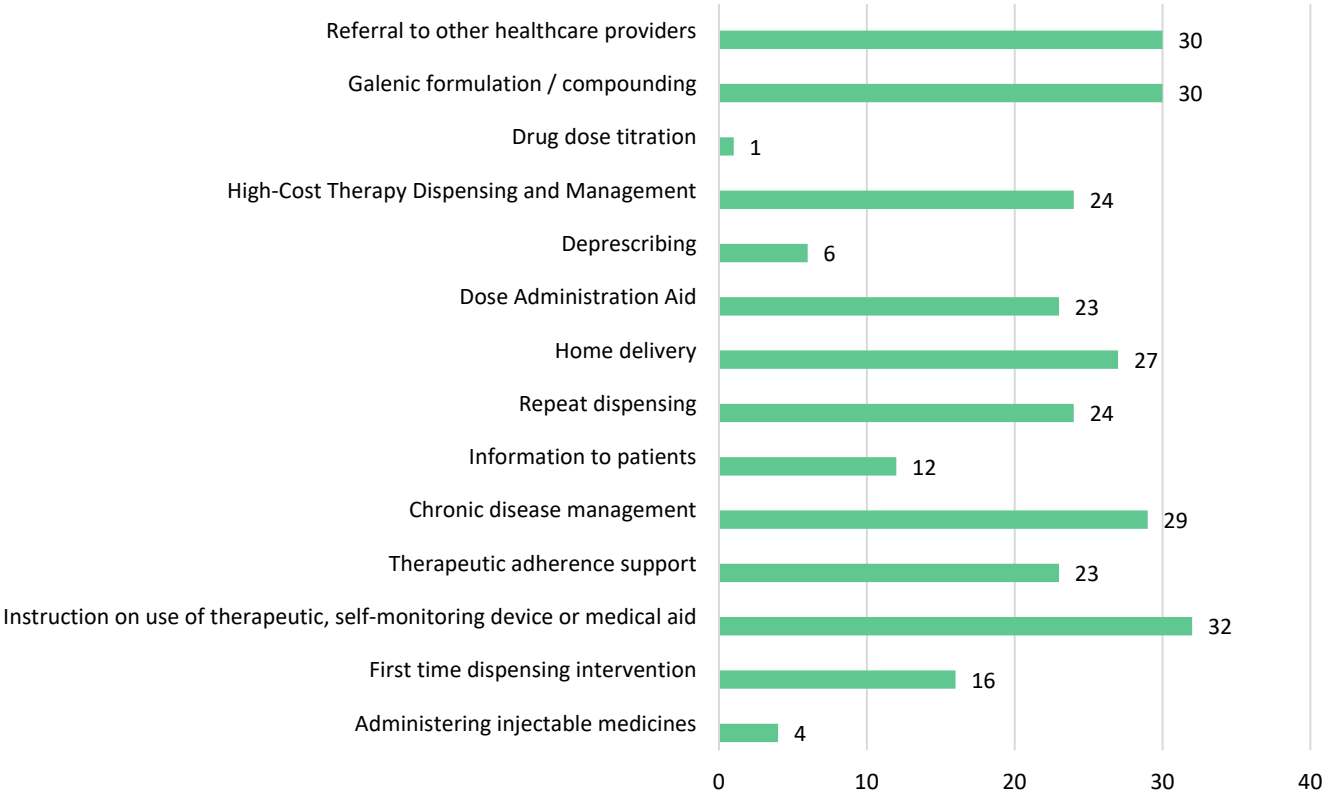




Management of cardiovascular diseases

Structured medication reviews and polypharmacy medicine management are particularly relevant for elderly patients with multiple cardiovascular conditions. **Adherence programs**, including digital reminders, follow-up consultations, and dose administration aids can be powerful supportive tools to empower patients in managing their health conditions. **Referral and care coordination**, through which pharmacists actively identify patients at risk and refer them to physicians or specialists, ensure faster diagnosis and treatment. Empowering patients to understand their cardiovascular condition, monitor key parameters, and take an active role in managing their treatment is a crucial component of effective CVD management. Pharmacists provide health literacy promotion and patient self-management support. Finally, **pharmacist-led anticoagulation management services** support the safe use of medicines such as warfarin and direct oral anticoagulants.

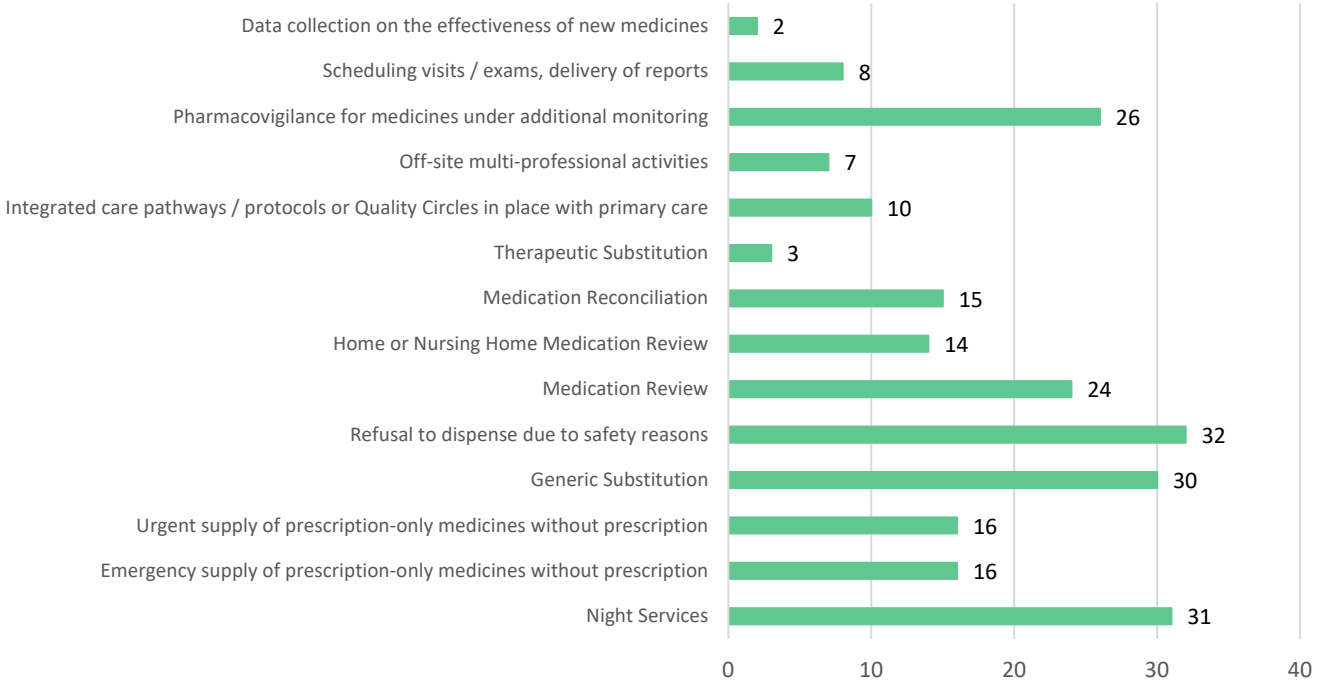
Number of countries that provide pharmacy services focused on management of cardiovascular diseases



System-level and safety

Extended medicines dispensing and pharmacovigilance are essential pharmacy services that play a strategic role in continuous access to medicines and ensuring its safety.

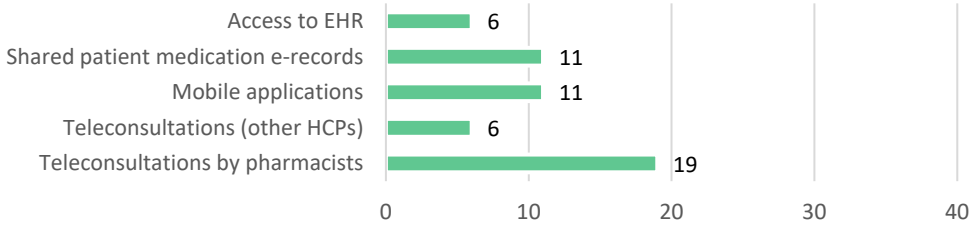
Number of countries that provide pharmacy services focused on system-level and safety



Digital health integration

Digital health integration, including access to electronic health records, patient medication records, and mobile health apps, support patient empowerment and continuity of care. These services not only **relieve pressure on other parts of the healthcare system** but also ensure that prevention and management of cardiovascular risk is closer to citizens, embedded in their daily life.

Number of countries that provide pharmacy services focused on digital health integration



Shortages of cardiovascular medication

PGEU's annual surveys on medicine shortages consistently report that medicines used for the cardiovascular system are among the most frequently in short supply across Europe.

Interruptions in access to antihypertensives, statins, anticoagulants, or heart failure therapies can have a severe negative impact on patient outcomes, leading to avoidable hospitalizations, complications, and even mortality. **Securing the supply of cardiovascular medicines must therefore be a strategic priority in EU and national health policies**. Pharmacists, as the professionals closest to patients, play a vital role in mitigating the impact of shortages by identifying therapeutic alternatives, counselling patients, and ensuring continuity of treatment.

Despite being one of the most ubiquitous classes of medicines used in chronic diseases, pharmacists' ability to guarantee continuity of therapy is under significant strain. In 2024, shortages of cardiovascular medicines were reported in approximately 96% of the 28 countries surveyed. **Pharmacists spent an average of 11 hours per week mitigating shortages**, time that could otherwise be dedicated to direct patient care. This highlights the critical role pharmacists play in protecting patients against therapy disruption and the urgent need to strengthen system resilience.

Figure 1 - Medicine classes that have been in short supply in community pharmacy over the last 12 months (ATC Level 1, multiple answers per country, % of responding countries)

Medicines	Responding countries (%)
Cardiovascular system	**96%**
Anti-infectives for systemic use (antibiotics)	96%
Alimentary tract and metabolism	86%
Nervous system	86%
Respiratory system	82%
Systemic hormonal preparations (excl. sex hormones/insulins)	75%
Antineoplastic and immunomodulating agents	75%
Genito-urinary system and sex hormones	71%
Musculo-skeletal system	71%
Dermatologicals	68%
Sensory organs	68%
Blood and blood forming organs	68%
Various	64%
Vaccines	61%
Antiparasitic products, insecticides and repellents	50%

Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence

Pharmacists collect real-world data and generate valuable real-world evidence that can directly support an EU Cardiovascular strategy. Through patient dispensing records, clinical checks, and follow-up, **pharmacists already collect high-quality data** that can be anonymised, aggregated, and linked with e-Prescription systems and the European Health Data Space (EHDS). These data points provide **unique insights** into **patient adherence**, **treatment effectiveness**, and **equity of access**.

PGEU supports the use of digital tools and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a **complement** to the **human interaction** that is the **foundation of pharmacists' relationships with their patients**. AI must **support**, and **never replace**, pharmacists. Applied responsibly, AI can enhance pharmacists' role in cardiovascular health by **improving medication safety and interaction checking**, providing **risk-stratified adherence support**, enabling **targeted prevention outreach** and offering **decision support** in hypertension and lipid management.

With **human oversight**, these tools can extend pharmacists' reach and further improve quality of care.



Policy Recommendations

To improve the health of millions of citizens through prevention, early detection and treatment, PGEU calls on EU institutions and national authorities to:

1. **Fully integrate community pharmacists into national and European health programs** on cardiovascular health, ensuring their role is reflected in the upcoming European Commission Plan on Cardiovascular Health and in the European Parliament's own-initiative report.
2. **Formally promote, recognize and remunerate pharmacy services** that contribute to CVD prevention, screening, and management.
3. **Expand pharmacists' scope of practice** across Europe to ensure more equitable access to preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic services.
4. **Guarantee the security of supply** of essential cardiovascular medicines and strengthen EU coordination mechanisms to prevent and mitigate shortages.
5. **Enable pharmacists' integration in the European Health Data Space (EHDS)**, ensuring pharmacists' access to and contribution of relevant patient health data.
6. **Support responsible use of AI and digital tools** in pharmacy practice contributing to enhanced screening, early detection, and personalised support for cardiovascular patients.

Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to strengthen cardiovascular health in Europe. By leveraging their accessibility, expertise, and data, the EU can achieve earlier prevention, better treatment adherence, and more resilient access to medicines, ultimately saving lives.



Annex: National experiences from PGEU members



Austria: Community pharmacies can identify cardiovascular risk factors.

Click here



Denmark: Pharmacies run adherence support programs for patients on statins and antihypertensive medicines, improving treatment outcomes.

Click here



France: Pharmacies deliver flu vaccination and support patients under anticoagulants.

Click here



Germany: Community pharmacies provide blood pressure control services for patients with diagnosed hypertension to support treatment adherence and refer them to their GP if elevated readings are detected.

Click here





Italy: Pharmacy-based programs on telemedicine contribute to early detection of cardiovascular risk factors in local communities.

Click here



Netherlands: Multidisciplinary initiatives led by pharmacists to improve care for patients with chronic heart failure.

Click here



Portugal: Community pharmacies provide structured hypertension management programs, combining blood pressure monitoring with adherence support and lifestyle counselling.

Click here



Spain: Spanish community pharmacies play a central role in the prevention and management of cardiovascular diseases.

Click here

About Us

The Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU) is the association representing community pharmacists in 33 European countries. In Europe over 400.000 community pharmacists provide services throughout a network of more than 160.000 pharmacies, to an estimated 46 million European citizens daily.

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