

For immediate release

## **Pharmacy crucial to overcoming public health challenges - say leading MPs**

11 November 2010: Following a public meeting in October, the All Party Pharmacy Group's is calling for pharmacy's role in tackling public health challenges to be recognised and accelerated in the forthcoming White Paper, and to be reflected in future commissioning arrangements.

In a letter to Health Minister Earl Howe, Chair of the APPG Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP cites examples of successful pharmacy-led public health initiatives as evidence of how pharmacy can be harnessed and utilised for the benefit of the NHS and the public. However, due to the variability of commissioning and funding across England, best practice is often inconsistent. The Group is calling for future commissioning arrangements to take into account the vital role pharmacy can play in tackling the major public health challenges as demonstrated by speakers at the recent APPG meeting.

Kevin Barron said:

"Pharmacy plays a crucial role in delivering primary care and public health services in local communities across the country. The profession has come a long way in demonstrating how it is capable of building on medicine dispensing, and providing a range of effective and invaluable services. I am pleased that there is cross-party consensus on the important role pharmacy can and should play in delivering public health services.

I and my colleagues in the APPG hope that the Department of Health's White Paper recognises and draws on pharmacists' expertise in this field, to facilitate NHS efficiency savings and ensure the public have access to the best possible public health services. Commissioning arrangements present a real barrier. In future we need to see GP consortia, local authorities and the National Commissioning Board working in partnership with pharmacy to capitalise fully on its capability in public health.

I hope the Minister will carefully consider the Group's recommendation of a commissioning support pack on pharmacy. We would like to see that developed in collaboration with the profession."

**END**

For further information, please contact Toby Pellew or Natalie Bateman at Luther Pendragon on 0207 618 9100 or [appg@luther.co.uk](mailto:appg@luther.co.uk)

### **Notes to editors**

Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP wrote to Earl Howe on 08 November – extracts from the letter are below:

"What we need now is for the cross-party consensus about pharmacy's importance in public health to be translated into policy, and for the forthcoming White Paper to reflect some of the examples we heard at the APPG meeting, of pharmacists' currently delivering major public health benefits to the communities in which they operate.

However while some...examples demonstrate just what pharmacy can achieve, it remains the case – as it has for too long – that these are the exception rather than the norm. This is not for want of trying by pharmacy elsewhere in England. The principal barrier in our view is the variability in commissioning and funding. In Birmingham for example, pharmacies provide a total of 15 local enhanced services, including minor ailments schemes, a weight management service and alcohol dependency support. However the city's three PCTs each take a different approach – services are not commissioned consistently across the city, let alone across the country. While variation for local need is always necessary, the services we heard about are needed in virtually all communities and therefore should be available more consistently.

We are encouraged and pleased to see the Department recognise the importance of providing commissioning support to emerging GP consortia (and other commissioners) through the commissioning support pack on heart disease. We strongly recommend that this approach is extended and that a commissioning support pack for pharmacy public health services is developed as a matter of priority. We are confident that consortia, local authorities and indeed the prospective National Commissioning Board would welcome such a step. We would hope that this could be developed in a collaborative manner, involving pharmacists, and that it would capture evidence of successful services.

In the context of the financial constraints faced by the NHS, evidence of efficiency and outcomes is vitally important. At our meeting we heard compelling evidence but we want to see a more coherent approach to evidence-gathering and management. It is for pharmacy as well as the NHS to ensure such evidence is gathered and used in commissioning and evaluation. We want to see the pharmacy profession play its part in gathering evidence and ensuring outcomes can be measured, but it cannot do that alone. We believe that much evidence already exists from the patchwork of locally commissioned services that have been and are in place. We see a role here for PCTs during the transition phase to the new NHS structure. We hope you will join in calling on PCTs to work with pharmacy locally to collate the evidence concerning pharmacy public health services that already exists and ensure it is retained beyond the extinction of PCTs for the benefit of future commissioners.”