

For years, many people have thought of the NHS mainly in terms of hospitals and GP surgeries. But now in 2026, the direction of travel is becoming much clearer: more care is expected to happen in communities, on local high streets and in people's homes, rather than always through hospital outpatient departments.

This change sits at the heart of the NHS 10 Year Health Plan, published in 2025, which set out three major shifts for the NHS: from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention. A year on, that first shift is no longer just a policy idea. In March 2026, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England published a Neighbourhood Health Framework, describing how services are meant to be organised more locally and confirming that implementation begins in 2026/27.

For patients, this does not mean hospitals are disappearing. It means that more of the care people use regularly, especially support for long-term conditions, prevention, monitoring and some urgent treatment, is intended to be available closer to where they live. That includes community clinics, neighbourhood health centres, home-based services, virtual wards and, importantly, high-street pharmacies.

High-street pharmacies are one of the clearest examples of this shift already happening in everyday life. Community pharmacy has long dispensed prescriptions and offered advice, but its role is widening further as the NHS tries to make care easier to reach without always relying on a GP or hospital visit. In recent years, pharmacies have expanded their role in treating common conditions, checking blood pressure, supporting new medicines use and helping with prevention and self-care.

That role is still evolving in 2026. Negotiations on the 2026/27 Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework have been underway, and updated settlement information was published in June 2026. At the same time, legislative changes that came into force in January 2026 allow pharmacists to authorise pharmacy teams to hand out checked and bagged prescriptions, a practical change intended to free pharmacists for more clinical work. Together, these developments show how pharmacy is being positioned not just as a dispensing point, but as a more active part of neighbourhood care.

For people living with long-term conditions such as psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis, this shift could matter in several ways. A local pharmacy may increasingly be the place where blood pressure is checked, medicines

are reviewed, side effects are discussed, or minor infections are treated more quickly. Alongside this, some treatments may continue to move into the home through clinical homecare, while follow-up support and monitoring may be provided through more local teams rather than always through hospital clinics.

The neighbourhood model also matters because it aims to join up services better. The 2026 framework describes local systems in which NHS organisations, councils and community partners work together around local populations, rather than expecting patients to navigate lots of separate silos. Over time, this is meant to lead to fuller neighbourhood health plans and the building or upgrading of 250 Neighbourhood Health Centres across England.

There are clear opportunities here. Care closer to home can mean less travel, less disruption to work or family life, and faster access to help for common or ongoing problems. But there are also understandable concerns. Community services, general practice and pharmacy are already under pressure, and any move away from hospital-based care will only succeed if these local services are properly staffed, funded coordinated, and expanded.

So, where are we in 2026? Not at the end of the journey, but beyond the stage of broad promises. The national direction has been set, the neighbourhood framework is in place, and early implementation is underway. For patients, that means the familiar parts of the NHS already on the doorstep, especially high-street pharmacy, are likely to become even more important in the years ahead, as more care is designed to happen closer to home.



If you would like to read the full national plan behind these changes, the government's **"Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England"** is available on GOV.UK:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future