

Fast facts

Prescribing

Prescribing is the most common patient-level intervention in the NHS, and covers all sectors of care: primary, hospital, public and community health. It is the second highest area of spending in the NHS, after staffing costs.

Our Prescribing team extracts and analyses prescribing data to identify trends and variation, and to support national policy.

The vast majority of prescriptions dispensed in the community are written by GPs, however prescriptions written by dentists, nurses, pharmacists and in hospitals are also included, provided they were dispensed by a community pharmacist

Key facts for England

Prescriptions dispensed in the community

Latest available figures from HSCIC data and reports show:

- In 2013, over **1.0 billion prescription items** were dispensed in the community in England.
 - This gives an average of **2.7 million items dispensed** every day
- The Net Ingredient Cost (NIC) in 2013 was **£8.6 billion**, an increase of 1 per cent (£102 million) on the NIC in 2012.
- **The average NIC per item in 2013 was £8.37**, a decrease of 2 per cent (15 pence) on the average NIC per item in 2012.
- Prescriptions to treat diabetes accounted for the biggest NIC by treatment area for the sixth year running at £767.9 million.
- After diabetes prescriptions, the next three biggest NIC by treatment areas in 2013 were respiratory corticosteroids, painkillers and anti-epileptic drugs.
- On average 18.7 items were dispensed per head of population in England.

Data on free prescriptions show:

- Nine out of 10 prescription items were dispensed free to the patient in 2012.
- 60 per cent were to people aged 60 and over, about five per cent were for young people (under 16 or aged 16-18 and in full-time education).
- Other than certain items that are free to all (such as contraceptives), the remainder were for people in receipt of benefits, pregnant women and those with certain medical conditions.

The HSCIC statistics are derived from a system primarily designed for reimbursement of the costs of medicines supplied to patients. This means that our data can tell you:

- how many prescription items and the costs of each formulation of all medicines have been dispensed,
- where they were prescribed and where dispensed
- the number of prescriptions written by GPs, dentists and other healthcare professionals (including nurses and, pharmacists)

However, it does not include any clinical information about or the number of patients treated.

More Information

Access HSCIC information on:

Prescriptions dispensed in the community:

- [Cost of prescriptions](#)
- [Hospital prescribing](#)
- [Prescribing by dentists](#)
- [Use of NICE appraised medicines in the NHS in England](#)
- [Open data](#)

Related links:

- [Scotland PCA on the National Services](#)
- [Northern Ireland PCA on the HSC Business Services Organisation website](#)
- [Wales PCA on the Welsh Assembly Government](#)

*Last updated: June 2014