

Nova SBE study highlights the strategic role of the pharmacy network in the country's health and economy

Sector accounts for 1.12% of national GDP and supports around 53,000 jobs

The community pharmacy network has become one of the country's key pillars of local services, ensuring fast and convenient access to qualified healthcare for millions of people and helping to alleviate pressure on emergency departments and primary care centres. The sector also stands out as a significant economic driver, with a total impact representing 1.12% of GDP and supporting around 53,000 jobs nationwide.

These are among the main conclusions of the new "The Value of the Pharmacy Network in Portugal" study, presented today at the 15th National Congress of Pharmacies and coordinated by Nova SBE researchers Pedro Brinca and João Duarte. According to the President of the National Association of Pharmacies, Ema Paulino, the study "demonstrates the strategic potential of pharmacies, through their reach, proximity and the trust they enjoy among communities, reinforcing their role as an agent of territorial cohesion and development, and as a partner of the NHS in delivering more efficient and accessible healthcare".

Pharmacies are the closest healthcare service. For 82% of people in Portugal, a pharmacy is located within five kilometres of where they live. When faced with a minor symptom, 57.2% first turn to a pharmacy.

According to the Nova SBE study, the country's 2,920 community pharmacies and around 200 pharmacy extensions, present across all 308 municipalities, are already the main point of contact with the healthcare system for many people. Eighty-two per cent of the population lives within five kilometres of a pharmacy, 41% travel on foot, compared with 53% for primary care centres and just 13.7% for hospitals. Even in rural areas, pharmacies have the shortest average travel times, between 7 and 11 minutes, whereas access to a hospital can exceed 40 minutes.

Public trust in pharmacists remains among the highest in the healthcare sector: three in four people report high or complete trust in pharmacists. Pharmacies also record the highest satisfaction levels among the healthcare services assessed, with an average rating of 4.51 out of 5.

In 2025, pharmacies recorded 174.3 million interactions, more than 550,000 per working day. Two out of three users always use the same pharmacy. Portugal has one of the highest densities of community pharmacists in the European Union, with around 10.8 professionals per 10,000 inhabitants, about 25% above the European average, and with each pharmacy employing, on average, four pharmacists, compared with an EU average of 2.6.

When faced with minor symptoms, 57.2% of citizens first seek help from a pharmacy, while only 16.5% initially contact primary care services. This proximity complements the NHS response, reducing travel and easing the burden on appointments and emergency services, and is trusted more than digital or telephone solutions such as the NHS 24 phone line. The study also concludes that pharmaceutical services delivered in pharmacies generate significant savings for the NHS,

which could increase further if scaled up, as is the case with seasonal vaccination, with an estimated annual net saving of around €34 million.

The study also highlights the pharmacy network's environmental and social impact. In 2024/25, services provided by pharmacies, — such as seasonal vaccination, management of minor conditions and renewal of chronic prescriptions, — prevented more than 1,500 tonnes of CO₂e emissions, largely by reducing travel to NHS facilities. To these results is added the contribution of the VALORMED system, which collected 1,262 tonnes of medicinal waste and packaging, preventing a further 436 tonnes of CO₂e. On the social front, community outreach programmes delivered through pharmacies generate over 150,000 annual interactions with the public, including the abem: programme, which supported more than 16,000 vulnerable beneficiaries in 2025.

Every €1 generated by the pharmacy sector produces €3.21 across the wider economy.

In addition to its healthcare impact, the sector makes a significant contribution to the national economy and acts as a driver of regional development, particularly in inland areas. The network also helps to reduce NHS expenditure and returns 7.8% of the NHS budget to the State in tax revenue.

Community pharmacies are directly responsible for 21,632 jobs, with a particularly strong share of total employment in inland districts. Each job in a pharmacy generates a further 1.45 jobs in the wider economy.

In 2024, pharmacies generated approximately €3.985 billion in turnover, on a scale comparable to Autoeuropa, though instead of being concentrated in a single location, this activity is distributed across micro and small enterprises present in all 308 municipalities and the islands. In 2024, pharmacies generated approximately €3.985 billion in turnover, on a scale comparable to Autoeuropa Factory, though instead of being concentrated in a single location, this activity is distributed across micro and small enterprises present in all 308 municipalities and the islands. ~

The sector's activity also accounted for €1,066.6 million in direct gross value added (GVA) and €478 million in wages.

The total economic impact of the sector was estimated by the Nova SBE study at €3.23 billion in GDP, equivalent to 1.12% of national GDP. According to the Portuguese National Statistics Institute's input-output analysis, the sector is responsible for €2.496 billion in gross value added and for 53,000 jobs supported across the country.

For every euro of output generated by pharmacies, €3.21 of total output is created in the Portuguese economy. Annual fiscal impact amounts to €1.214 billion in State revenue, through VAT, personal income tax, social security contributions and corporate tax — equivalent to 7.8% of the NHS budget in 2024.

Access the [Executive Summary](#).

For more informations:

Marta Roquette | Head of Communication - Tel. +351 910 239 193

Associação Nacional das Farmácias

Rua Marechal Saldanha, 1 | 1249-069 Lisboa
Tel. +351 213 400 600 | Tel. +351 933 450 455