

# Private pharmacies' contribution to the COVID-19 response: how can it be maximized?

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## Priority actions

- Facilitate closer collaboration between private pharmacies and the ministry of health (particularly the Department of Preventive and Promotive Health) in order to facilitate safe and effective delivery of COVID-19 and other public health services.
- Consider plans to include pharmacies in the provision of pharmacy-based COVID-19 testing in a safe and efficient manner.

## Key findings

- Private pharmacies in Kenya are providing COVID-19-related services such as: preventive materials and therapies, educating clients on prevention measures, and referring suspect cases.
- The majority of pharmacies (55% [95% CI 45-65%]) reported receiving a client asking for COVID-19 testing and a similar proportion supported pharmacy-based testing.
- Pharmacies expressed great readiness and motivation to make further contributions to the pandemic response such as vaccine delivery.
- Pharmacies require more deliberate engagement and support from the Ministry of health in order to maximize their contribution to the prevention and management of COVID-19.

## Community pharmacies play a role in COVID-19 response

Private retail pharmacies (also known as community pharmacies) are an important healthcare provider as they are often the first or only point of contact with the healthcare system. As such, they provide a unique channel through which COVID-19 and other public health interventions can be delivered. As the government responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to include this sector in plans for scaling up and sustaining preventative and therapeutic COVID-19 interventions. However, it was not clear how prepared Kenyan pharmacies are, how they are responding to the pandemic, what their needs are, and how their response can be maximized. The KEMRI-Wellcome trust carried out a study in three Kenyan counties (Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu) to explore this. We found that private pharmacies in Kenya were already actively contributing to the COVID-19 response by providing clients with preventive materials and therapies; educating them on prevention measures; counselling them; and identifying and referring suspect cases. However, a general feeling of disconnection from the national program prevailed, highlighting the need for more engagement and support from the Ministry of health in order to maximize the contribution of the sector in the COVID-19 response.

## Implications

Greater involvement of the private pharmacy sector in provision of COVID-19 services will enhance the national pandemic response in terms of coverage and efficiency of COVID-19 prevention and treatment interventions. However, to prevent the emergence of uncoordinated and unregulated services, the Ministry of Health will need to develop clear policy guidelines for the provision of pharmacy-based COVID-19 services. In addition, increased engagement, support, and linkages between the ministry of health and the private pharmacy sector will be beneficial in ensuring safe and effective delivery of COVID-19 services.

## References

1. Mugo PM, Mumbi AN, Munene D, Nzinga J, Molyneux S, Barasa E: Response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic at private retail pharmacies in Kenya: a mixed methods study. medRxiv 2021.