

OnHOME Alliance Launch Event

Brussels, 29 October 2024

Introduction

On 29 October 2024, the [Online Order and Home Delivery of Medicines Alliance \(OnHOME\)](#) — a newly established partnership of patient organisations and other active stakeholders in the healthcare community — was officially launched in Brussels. The Alliance’s mission is to advocate for safe online access to prescription medicines across the EU, calling on Member States to allow their patients the option to obtain prescription medicines online and get them delivered at home by registered pharmacies. The event brought together EU policymakers, digital health experts, and patient advocates, supporting the Alliance’s initiatives which focus on improving the availability and affordability of medicines through the digitalisation of healthcare services.

Keynote speech

Mike Isles, Executive Director of Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacy in the EU (ASOP EU), introduced the OnHOME Alliance, emphasising its role to advance the safe online dispensing of prescription medicines, to address unequal access to medicines across the EU, and to combat the threat of falsified medicines. Mr Isles underscored the critical need to raise public awareness about reliable online sources for medicines as a means to fight falsified products. He referenced the [Falsified Medicines Directive](#), noting that the EU passed legislation in 2011 to safeguard the supply chain by ensuring every prescription pack is uniquely identifiable by a date matrix bar code which is authenticated, digitally at point of dispensing by the pharmacist. The directive obligated all Member States to allow the online sales of OTC medicines and ruled that any pharmacy selling a medicine needs to carry an [EU Common Logo](#) that when clicked routes to an in-country register of pharmacies. While 8 Member States also allow the sale of prescription medicines, 19 Member States currently only allow OTC medicines to be transacted online. Mr Isles stressed the inequality of the situation and how this greatly impacts the well-being of patients. Mr Isles further stressed the importance of education in raising awareness of falsified medicines, specifically the EU common logo – a safety marker identifying registered and legitimate online pharmacies. He also presented insights from the Copenhagen Economics report, [“Unlocking the Benefits of Online Access to Prescription Medicines Across the EU”](#), which highlights the benefits of online access, especially for rural populations, individuals with chronic conditions, and carers, enhancing convenience, adherence and resilience against medicine shortages. In particular, the report revealed that respondents felt online availability of prescriptions would enhance their ability to adhere to their treatment’s regimes. This is a vital finding considering that 200,000 deaths are attributable annually to a lack of treatment adherence.

Vytenis Andriukaitis, MEP (S&D, LT), in a video message, voiced his strong support for equitable access to medicines online for all patients in Europe. **He stressed the urgent need to amend EU and national legislation to enable digital access to prescription medicines, calling on the remaining 19 Member States to update their legal frameworks to allow home delivery of medicines by registered pharmacies.** MEP Andriukaitis noted that digital solutions are vital for enhancing healthcare access,

especially for patients with chronic conditions or those in rural areas and emphasised the importance of preparedness for future health threats — a need underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated the critical value of home-delivered medicines. With the start of the new EU mandate, he called for harmonising legal frameworks across the EU to ensure equal access to medicines for all.

Key highlights from panel discussions

A panel discussion provided further insights on the importance of the OnHOME Alliance and the role of online access to prescription medicines in enhancing medicine availability for several categories of patients across Europe. Key points included:

- **Charlotte Van Velthoven (Public Affairs Director, Redcare Pharmacy), moderator**, highlighted the advancements in digital healthcare technologies, stressing that while these developments have made online pharmacies viable, legislative barriers remain. She noted that evolving regulations are essential to fully realise the potential of these technologies in healthcare.
- **Mike Isles (Executive Director, ASOP EU)** reiterated the OnHOME Alliance’s mission to raise awareness of the risks associated with falsified medicines and the pressing need for widespread education around safe online purchasing. He pointed out that overcoming these issues requires a collective effort beyond regulatory bodies, involving healthcare providers, pharmacists, and patients. Additionally, he argued that integrating online services could benefit small pharmacies, provided they are equipped with tools to adapt. He further called on the need to leverage the current negotiations within the Council on the [EU General Pharmaceutical Legislation](#) to amend Article 172 of the [Pharmaceutical Directive](#), enabling the safe online sales of medicinal products directly to the public.
- **Russel Patten (Director General, Parkinson’s Europe)** called for a broader membership base within the OnHOME Alliance, including more disease-specific organisations, to ensure a greater impact. He advocated for a multistakeholder approach to engaging with policymakers, especially in the 19 Member States where online prescription sales remain prohibited. Mr Patten outlined that it is fundamental to understand the economic and regulatory barriers of online access to prescription medicines, and, thus, urged the need for a nuanced approach. Mr Patten also underlined that online pharmacies complement traditional brick-and-mortar pharmacies rather than act as a replacement.
- **Josephine Mosset (Policy Officer, Cancer Patients Europe)** shared that the goals of the OnHOME Alliance aligns with Cancer Patients Europe’s vision of promoting better access to care, stating that *“where you live should not determine whether you live”*. Ms Mosset cited the [European Health Data Space](#) (EHDS) as a key example of new EU legislation supporting broader access, and called for increased dissemination of information on the safety and quality of medicines sold online.
- **Robert Hejzak (Chairman, Czech National Association of Patient Organizations - NAPO)** provided insights into Czech Republic’s ongoing efforts to enable online sale of prescription medicines. He shared that previous attempt in Czechia failed due to a lack of patient

involvement. However, **recent data shows strong public support, with 87% of respondents supporting online pharmacy services, 72% highlighted that they would use the services and 45% said they would use it to compare co-payment fees in different pharmacies.** He mentioned that as a result of a parliamentary hearing in June 2024, a technical paper with tangible recommendations will be published by the end of November. By joining the OnHOME Alliance, NAPO hopes to extend its advocacy from the national to the EU level, emphasising the need for coordinated action and encouraging other patient organisations to recognise this as an essential advocacy issue.

Exchange with the audience

The event also provided a valuable opportunity for audience engagement, with questions from representatives across sectors, including:

- **Patient and advocacy groups** such as the International Diabetes Federation Europe (IDF), European Patients' Forum (EPF), European Healthcare Distribution Association (GIRP), Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Patient Group and All Policies for a Healthy Europe (an intersectoral initiative);
- **Pharmacists and pharmacy representatives;**
- **Academics and researchers** from institutions like KU Leuven and Copenhagen Economics;
- **Online pharmacy representatives.**

A key challenge remains that Member States have **not sufficiently promoted awareness of the EU Common Logo**, which is intended to help patients identify authorised online pharmacies. The Copenhagen Economics report highlights that a significant percentage of respondents in all surveyed countries (France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Sweden) are still unaware of the mandatory EU Common Logo designed for patients to identify authorised online pharmacies.

The discussion also touched on the limitations of health remaining a national competence, as stated in the [Treaty of the Functioning of the EU](#), along with the diverse pharmacy structures across Member States. Additionally, while community pharmacists have been central to discussions, speakers urged the inclusion of hospital pharmacists who face unique challenges, particularly when prescription are written that means the patient will hold up to 6 months stock, as in rare cancer treatments.

The launch of the OnHOME Alliance represents a major step toward expanding online access to prescription medicines for citizens across the EU, reinforcing the need for patients' voices to be heard in this important multistakeholder dialogue. Going forward, the OnHOME Alliance's priority will be to promote public awareness of the benefits of online access to medicines, as well as identifying authenticated secure online pharmacies through EU logo accreditation. Speakers further emphasised the need for increased public engagement to build support for online access, potentially encouraging traditional pharmacies to innovate and adapt. Additionally, it will be essential to address granular details and operational barriers, particularly in the 19 Member States where the online sale of prescription medicines is currently prohibited.