

## Pharmacists and pharmacies

Pharmacists are highly trained healthcare professionals whose key role is managing the distribution of medicines to consumers/patients and supporting their safe and efficacious use. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of practising pharmacists per capita increased in OECD countries by 20% on average, to 85 pharmacists per 100 000 inhabitants (Figure 9.4). However, the density of pharmacists varied widely across OECD countries, ranging from a low of 19 per 100 000 in Colombia to 199 per 100 000 in Japan. Among OECD countries, the highest growth rates in pharmacist density between 2011 and 2021 were observed in Chile and Colombia.

Most pharmacists work in community retail pharmacies, but many also work in hospitals and industry, as well as in research and academic settings. In Canada, for example, in 2021 more than 75% of practising pharmacists worked in community pharmacies, while 20% worked in hospitals and other healthcare facilities (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). In Japan, around 59% of pharmacists worked in community pharmacies in 2020 while around 19% worked in hospitals or clinics, and the remaining 22% in other settings (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>).

In 2021, the number of community pharmacies per 100 000 people ranged from 9 in Denmark to 97 in Greece, with an average of 28 across OECD countries with comparable data (Figure 9.5). For most countries there has not been much change over time, although one exception is Denmark, where the community pharmacy density almost doubled between 2011 and 2021. The variation in community pharmacy density across countries can be explained in part by differences in common distribution channels. For example, some countries rely more on hospital pharmacies to dispense medicines to outpatients. Denmark has fewer community pharmacies, but these are often large, and include branch pharmacies and subsidiary pharmacy units attached to a principal pharmacy. In Australia, with an average of around 23 community pharmacies per 100 000 people, the minimum distance between pharmacies is regulated. The range of products and services provided by pharmacies also varies between countries. In most European countries, for example, pharmacies also sell cosmetics, food supplements, medical devices and homeopathic products.

The role of the community pharmacist has expanded in recent years. In addition to dispensing medications, pharmacists are increasingly providing direct care to patients (such as vaccinations, medicine adherence and chronic disease management support, and home medication review), both in community pharmacies and as part of integrated healthcare provider teams. In countries such as Belgium, Finland, Italy, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, pharmacists also play an enhanced role in health promotion and disease prevention, including in rural areas (OECD, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). In many OECD countries, the scope of practice of community pharmacists has been further expanded in response to COVID-19 (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>).

### Definition and comparability

Practising pharmacists are defined as pharmacists who are licensed to practise and provide direct services to clients/patients. They can be either salaried or self-employed, and work in community pharmacies, hospitals or other settings. Assistant pharmacists and other employees of pharmacies are normally excluded.

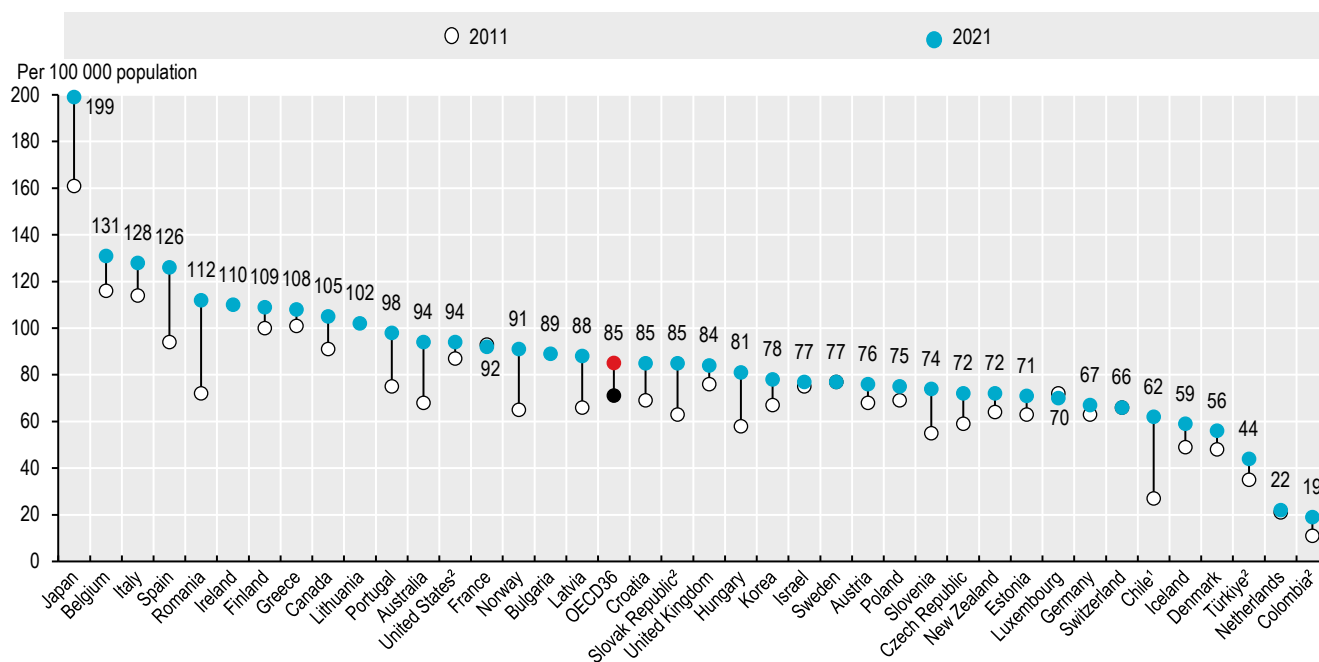
In Ireland, the figures include all pharmacists registered with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, possibly including some pharmacists who are not working actively. Assistant pharmacists are included in Latvia.

Community pharmacies are premises that, in accordance with local regulations and definitions, may operate as a facility for the provision of pharmacy services in community settings. The number of community pharmacies reported is the number of premises where medicines are dispensed under the supervision of a pharmacist.

### References

- Canadian Institute for Health Information (2021), *Pharmacists in Canada, 2021 — Data Tables*, Ottawa, ON: CIHI, <https://www.cihi.ca/en/pharmacists> (accessed on 14 July 2023). [1]
- Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2020), *Summary of 2020 Survey of Physicians, Dentists and Pharmacists*, Health Statistics Office, Director-General for Statistics and Information Policy, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/ishi/20/index.html>. [2]
- OECD (2021), “Strengthening the frontline: How primary health care helps health systems adapt during the COVID 19 pandemic”, *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a5ae6da-en>. [4]
- OECD (2020), *Realising the Potential of Primary Health Care*, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a92adee4-en>. [3]

Figure 9.4. Practising pharmacists, 2011 and 2021 (or nearest years)



1. Refers to all pharmacists licensed to practise. 2. Also includes pharmacists working in the health sector as researchers, for pharmaceutical companies, etc.  
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2023.


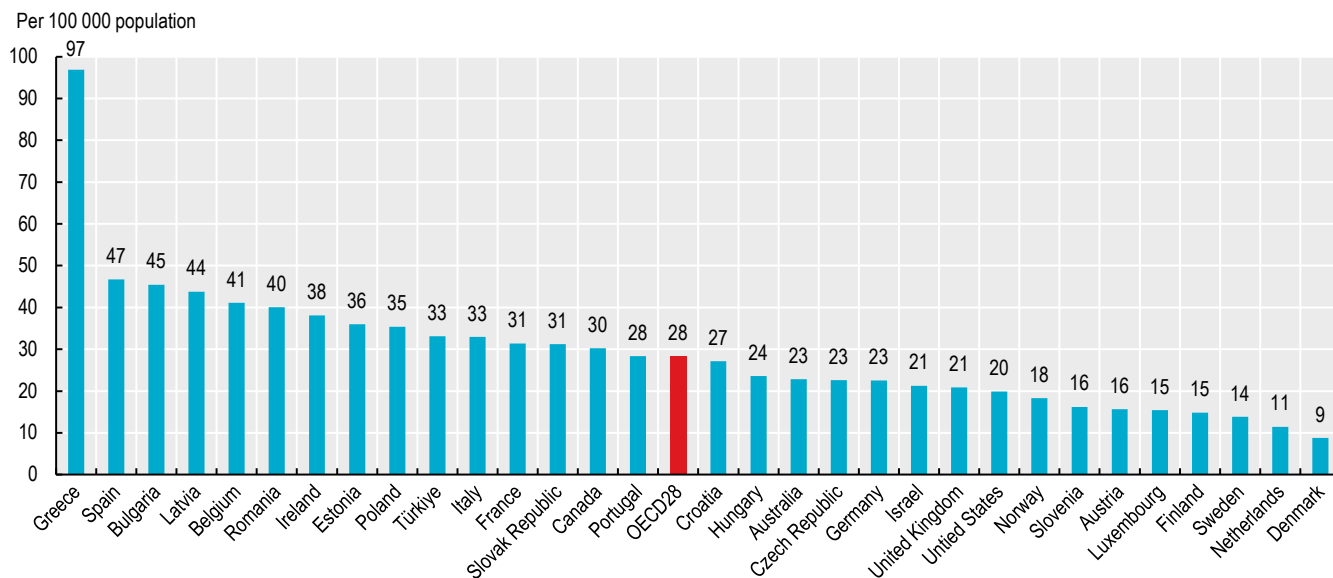
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Figure 9.5. Community pharmacies, 2021 (or nearest year)



Source: Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union database, or IQVIA or national sources for non-European countries.

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