



Tackling Problematic Polypharmacy: A Shared Responsibility

PROBLEMATIC POLYPHARMACY

Problematic polypharmacy has been identified as a significant concern in the National Overprescribing Review. In February 2025, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (C&M) was ranked:



- **3rd highest** in England for the average number of unique medicines prescribed per patient,
- **2nd highest** for the proportion of patients prescribed 10 or more medicines,
- **1st highest** for those prescribed 15–20 or more medicines.



C&M also ranked **6th highest** nationally for the rate of falls in people aged 65 and over—many of which may be preventable with better medicines optimisation.

The safe and effective use of medicines is a shared responsibility across the healthcare system. The Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) has adopted a strategic, system-wide programme to reduce harm from medicines, improve outcomes, and promote safer prescribing practices.

WHAT IS PROBLEMATIC POLYPHARMACY?

Problematic polypharmacy occurs when the risks of taking multiple medicines outweigh the benefits for an individual. Key features include:

Medicines that are no longer clinically indicated, appropriate, or optimised for the individual



Combinations of medicines that may be causing or have the potential to cause harm



Medication regimens that are unmanageable or causing physical or emotional distress



With some of the highest levels of polypharmacy in the country, C&M is taking coordinated action to address this challenge.

CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE APPROACH

While tackling problematic polypharmacy is complex, the benefits for patients and the health and care system are considerable. The ICB has prioritised this issue through a dedicated programme of work for 2025/26, which includes:



RISK STRATIFICATION

To identify patients most at risk of harm from polypharmacy, aligned with national priorities



SUPPORTING DECISION MAKING

Exploring the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meeting approach to enhance medication reviews across the system.



DEDICATED COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AND CLINICAL MASTERCLASS PROGRAMME

To bring the system together to raise awareness, learn and to share best practice.



TARGETED MEDICATION REVIEWS FOR HOSPITAL PATIENTS

Using every patient contact as an opportunity to optimise medicines, reduce harm and promote health.