

Volume is only half the medicines story.

A descriptive view of community dispensing in England, 2016/17 to 2025/26. Public evidence, with a local question in mind.

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1.298bn

reported community items
2025/26; 1,297,516,707 items

£11.642bn

reported net ingredient cost
2025/26; £11,641,873,550.60

4.4% / 2.9%

NIC growth / item growth
Reported change from 2024/25

Source: NHSBSA (2026a), Table A1. Items and NIC are different measures; neither is a count of patients.

The reported decade

Common index: 2016/17 = 100

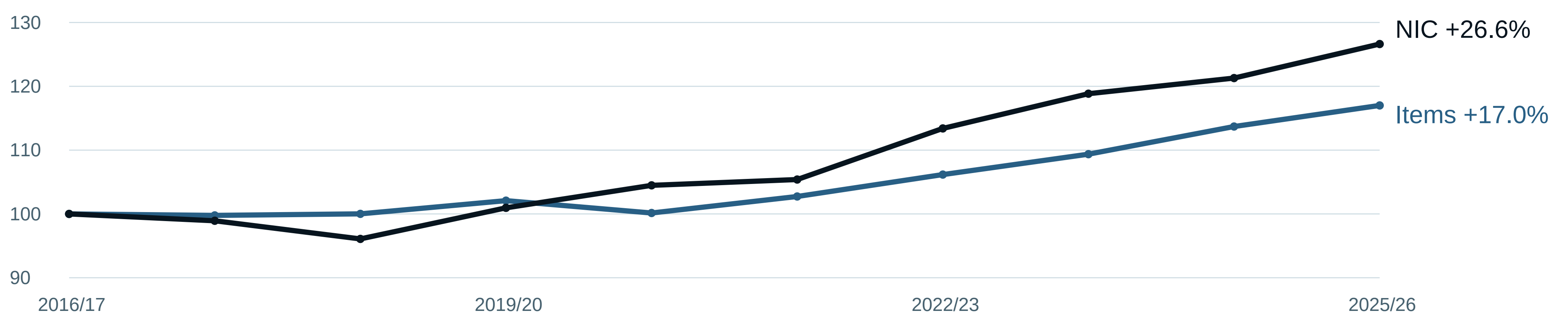


Figure 1. Reported growth, not like-for-like demand or a price index. The index axis runs from 90 to 130; costs are nominal. Seasonal flu vaccination reporting is newly included in 2025/26 (NHSBSA, 2026a; 2026c).

The busiest chapter is not the costliest.

Six highest-NIC chapters in 2025/26, compared against all national items and NIC.

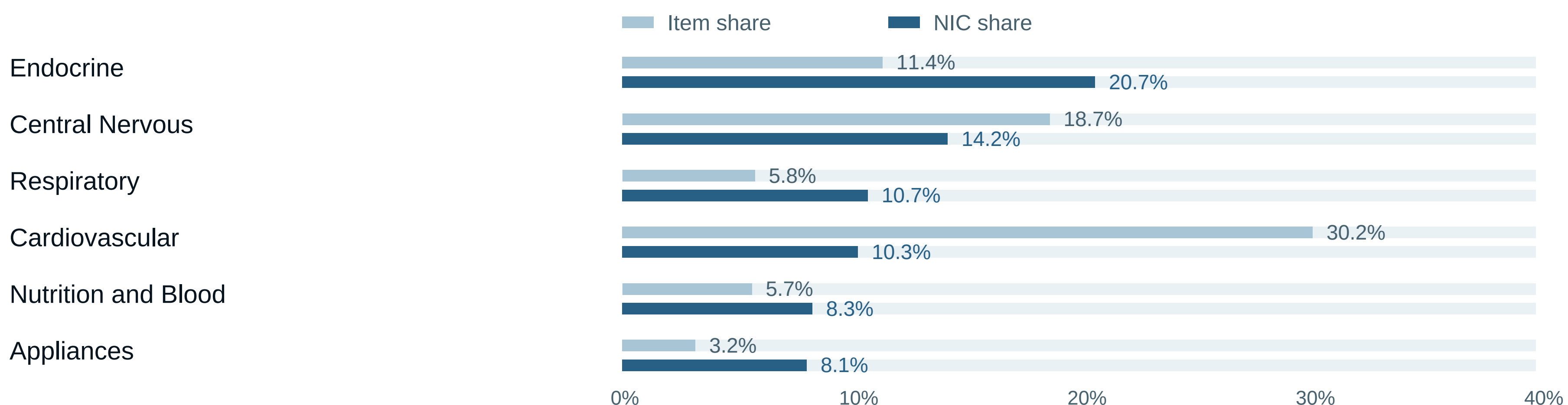


Figure 2. Both bars use the same 0-40% scale and the complete national denominator. All 21 chapters reconcile exactly to national items and NIC. BNF chapters describe product groupings, not patient diagnoses (NHSBSA, 2026b; 2026c).

Cardiovascular

30.2% of items. 10.3% of NIC.
High activity does not imply the largest ingredient cost.

Endocrine

11.4% of items. 20.7% of NIC.
A different mix changes the question worth investigating.

Method and interpretation

Ten annual rows and 21 chapters were re-read from primary workbooks. Growth = (later / earlier - 1) × 100. Shares use full national totals; chapter pence reconcile exactly.

Community data only. NIC is before discounts and excludes fees: it does not measure acquisition cost, margin or final net NHS expenditure. Mix and coverage changes apply. No causal or savings claim.

A useful pilot starts here

Pharmacy: test a local question using acquisition costs, stock and workflow evidence.

GPs and commissioners: review local clinical context, population and prescribing data.

Hospital teams: use a separate hospital dataset; these community totals do not describe hospital spending.

Proposed next step: agree one local question, an owner and a checkable result.

References and reproducibility

NHSBSA (2026a). Prescription Cost Analysis England 2025/26: additional tables, Table A1.

NHSBSA (2026b). National financial-year summary: BNF_Chapters, 2025/26.

NHSBSA (2026c). Background information and methodology, June 2026.

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