



# How to lobby your MP on prescription charges.

With your help we can win the fight to secure an exemption from prescription charges for everyone with a long-term condition in England.

Through lobbying your Member of Parliament (MP), you have the power to influence Government policy and make real change. It may seem daunting, but this guide will tell you everything you need to know about lobbying so you can effectively engage with your MP on the issue of prescription charges.

## WHAT IS LOBBYING AND WHY DO IT?

'Lobbying' means trying to influence the views of a decision maker on a particular issue, whether that's an MP, civil servant, local councillor or manager of a company. It's not just done by paid professionals – members of the public can get involved too.

Successful lobbying involves three key elements:

1. Highlighting a problem.
2. Ideally proposing a solution.
3. Securing the agreement of the decision maker to take action on the issue.

Lobbying your MP is a great way to raise their awareness of a particular issue, influence their thinking and secure their help in advancing your cause. As your elected representative they should listen to your concerns and will want to secure your future vote, so you have the opportunity to really make a difference. If you get them on side, your MP could influence their party, put pressure on the Government and raise the public profile of your issue significantly.

You can lobby your MP in writing, by phone or face-to-face (as well as through organised protests and rallies). Discussing issues face-to-face with constituents can have a big impact on MPs, so this guide focuses on face-to-face meetings. However, telephone lobbying is also an effective form of lobbying so don't worry if you're not able to do it in person – there are some tips for telephone lobbying later in the guide.

This guide will give you an overview of the key issues around prescription charges and a step-by-step guide to the lobbying process. If you have any questions or want more support, get in touch at

[prescriptionchargescoalition@gmail.com](mailto:prescriptionchargescoalition@gmail.com)

### KEY POINTS:

- 📢 Find out as much as you can about your MP before getting in touch.
- 📢 Be polite but persistent about arranging a meeting.
- 📢 Get clear on the issues and prepare exactly what you're going to say.
- 📢 Think about what your MP might say and prepare your responses.
- 📢 Talk about your own experience and why the issue is important to you.
- 📢 Ask your MP to do something specific, and always follow up in writing.
- 📢 Keep in touch with the Prescription Charges Coalition and let us know how it goes.

# PRESCRIPTION CHARGES: THE ISSUES






## SOME CONTEXT

- England is now the **only part of the UK that charges for prescriptions** – charges were abolished in Wales in 2007, Northern Ireland in 2010 and Scotland in 2011.
- Prescription charges currently stand at £8.60 per item (as of 1 April 2017), having **risen almost every year since 1979**.
- There are a range of exemptions (eg relating to age, pregnancy and income), but for **many working age people, a medical exemption certificate is required** for free prescriptions.
- Medical exemption certificates are **only available for a very limited range of conditions**, based on a list that was produced in 1968 and is largely unchanged.
- It's possible to buy a prescription prepayment certificate to reduce the cost of prescription charges if you need multiple medications – these cost £29.10 for three months or £104 for one year. However, this is still a significant amount on top of other costs that come with having a long-term condition. They are also not an ideal solution for people living with conditions that fluctuate or go into remission.
- The Prescription Charges Coalition is **campaigning for everyone with a long-term condition to be exempt from prescription charges**.

## OUT OF DATE AND UNFAIR

- The medical exemption criteria have **barely changed since June 1968** – as a result they **don't make sense and are unfair to many working-age adults**.
- **Many prevalent long-term conditions requiring multiple medications are not on the exemption list**, either because they didn't exist 50 years ago or because people who had them then didn't live to adulthood.
- Someone with a long-term condition who is just above the threshold for a low-income exemption **may have to pay continuously for prescriptions from age 18 to 60**, on top of the other costs of having a long-term condition.

### 1968 IN MEDICINE:

-  The UK's first heart transplant was performed.
-  Electro-convulsive therapy was still widely used to treat depression.
-  Most people with cystic fibrosis didn't survive to adulthood.
-  It would be another 15 years before HIV was discovered.
-  The medical exemption list for prescription charges that we still use today was produced.

## A BARRIER TO ACCESSING MEDICINES

- **Research** conducted by the Prescription Charges Coalition in 2017 found that, of people with long-term conditions who pay for their prescriptions:
  - a third have **failed to collect a prescription due to the cost** and 30% **reduce or skip recommended doses** of their prescription medication
  - 43% of those who take less medication than they are prescribed said this was due to the cost of their prescription
  - 57% of those who take less medication than they are prescribed felt their **health had deteriorated**, with over a third (34%) **requiring a GP or hospital appointment** as a result
- Other research has estimated that:
  1. of the NHS' annual spend on medicines in primary care, **£500million is wasted due to the ineffective use of medicines<sup>1</sup>** (eg skipping a dose), and
  2. **5-8% of hospital admissions are related to ineffective or inappropriate use of medicine<sup>2</sup>**

## BEFORE YOUR MEETING

### DOING YOUR RESEARCH

- You can find the name, party and contact details of your MP by entering your postcode at <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk> If you can, use their local constituency contact details (rather than their London parliamentary ones).
- You can also find out if they're a Minister or a member of any relevant House of Commons Select Committees (eg Health) at <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk>
- An MP's personal website will usually tell you what issues they're interested in and whether they're a member of any All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs).
- Check whether your MP pledged to support a review of prescription charges in our [June 2017 general election campaign](#).

#### TOP TIP:

If your MP is a member of a relevant APPG such as HIV and AIDS, Mental Health, Motor Neurone Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) or Parkinson's, then they should be interested in prescription charges. You can ask them to raise the issue with their colleagues in the APPG.

### ARRANGING THE MEETING

- MPs have regular surgeries to meet their constituents (usually on Fridays). Find out from their website whether they have a first-come-first-served drop-in system (you'll need to arrive as early as possible on the day) or pre-arranged appointments (you may need to schedule it weeks in advance).
- It's quicker and easier to call the constituency office to arrange an appointment – you could wait weeks for a response to a letter. If you have information you want to send in advance, you can always send a letter once the appointment's been made.
- Include your full address and postcode in any correspondence (including when leaving a voicemail) – an MP's office will usually prioritise responding to constituents.

### PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

- Think about how the issue of prescription charges relates to both your MP's interests (see above) and your own experiences, and use this to shape your arguments.
- Make sure you know what you're going to say and have rehearsed the key points. If you're going in a group (ideally no more than three people), make sure you know who's saying what.
- Write notes of your key points, important questions and your main ask, and take them with you so you don't forget anything.
- Remember to prepare copies of any materials you want to leave with your MP – we recommend a copy of our [Briefing Paper](#) and our [latest research report](#).

#### KEY ISSUES:

- 📢 Prescription charges can cause working-age people with long-term conditions to ration their medicines and take them incorrectly, leading to poor health outcomes and additional costs to the NHS through emergency visits to hospital or extra visits to the GP or nurse.
- 📢 The medical exemption list is out-of-date and unfair – it needs to be urgently reviewed in light of current medical knowledge, and extended to all those with long-term conditions.

# AT YOUR MEETING

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS




- Arrive early – MPs are extremely busy and first impressions count.
- Thank them for meeting you, introduce yourself and explain why you're there.
- Ask them how much time you have to talk so you can make sure you cover everything.

## PRESENTING THE ISSUE

- Give an overview of the issue and the key campaign ask: we want everyone with a long-term condition to be exempt from prescription charges.
- Make clear how prescription charges affect you personally. Are you, or someone you care for, paying for prescriptions that should be exempt? How much does it cost you and what is the impact on your life?
- Be specific about what you want from them, and push for a firm commitment to take action.
- If your MP goes off topic, gently steer them back – time will be limited and you need to make it count.

### WHAT TO ASK FOR:

Key things your MP can do for the campaign:




-  Write to the Secretary of State for Health asking for a review of outdated medical exemption criteria.
-  Sign Early Day Motion No.82 (this is a petition to Government that most, though not all, MPs can sign).
-  Contact the Prescription Charges Coalition to join a new cross-party group of MPs working on this issue.

## WRAPPING UP




- Ask them to keep in touch and update you on the actions they've agreed to take.
- If the meeting's gone well, ask to take a picture with them (and offer to send them a copy) – you can tweet it to [@prescriptionCC](#) with a brief message.
- Remember the more you build an ongoing relationship with your MP, the more receptive they'll be to helping you in the future.

### IF THEY SAY...

**“The NHS can't afford it!”, remind them that:**

-  90% of prescription items are already dispensed free, so the additional cost is minimal. Yet the remaining 10% comes almost entirely from people with long-term conditions.
-  If people can stop rationing their medication, this could lead to fewer hospital admissions, as well as keeping them well enough to stay in work.
-  Ineffective use of medicines has been estimated to cost the NHS around £500million – an equivalent sum to that raised through prescription charges.

**“People with long-term conditions can use prepayment certificates”, tell them that:**

-  This is still an unfair additional cost for those people whose long-term conditions are not on the medical exemption list.
-  Prepayment certificates are still unaffordable for some, especially as people with long-term health conditions often face other additional costs and lost income.
-  People living with conditions that fluctuate or go into remission find it difficult to predict whether a prepayment certificate will save them money.

## AFTER YOUR MEETING

- Write them a letter or email to thank them, summarise your discussion and confirm the actions you've both agreed to take.
- Let us know how it went! You can forward us a copy of the letter or email you send to your MP, and also tell us about anything interesting they said. This really helps us to focus our own lobbying efforts in the future.
- If, after a reasonable amount of time, they haven't done what they agreed, get in touch to ask if they still intend to and whether you can be of any help.

## TELEPHONE LOBBYING

- Don't worry if you can't attend a meeting in person, you can still lobby your MP by phone.
- Call your MP's constituency office and explain that you can't attend a surgery – you may be able to make a telephone appointment to speak to your MP, or at least speak to their researcher or assistant.
- You can follow all the other steps in this guide for preparing for the call, talking about the issues and following up afterwards. The only difference is that you may need to be even more concise and prioritise your key points on the call.

We really appreciate your help with this campaign and want to support you as much as you need. If you have questions about anything in this guide or want further information, get in touch with us at [prescriptionchargescoalition@gmail.com](mailto:prescriptionchargescoalition@gmail.com)

With your help we can win the fight to end prescription charges for people with long-term conditions.



### References

<sup>1</sup>Evaluation of the Scale, Causes and Costs of Waste Medicines, York Health Economics Consortium, University of York and The School of Pharmacy, University of London, November 2010, ISBN 978 090 293 620 1, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/111804.pdf?repositoryId=90>

<sup>2</sup>Concordance, adherence and compliance in medicine taking. Report for the National Co-ordinating Centre for NHS Service Delivery and Organisation R&D (NCCSDO), December 2005 [http://www.netscc.ac.uk/hsdr/files/project/SDO\\_FR\\_08-1412-076\\_V01.pdf](http://www.netscc.ac.uk/hsdr/files/project/SDO_FR_08-1412-076_V01.pdf)