



**Warrington Local Involvement Network**

# Report on Prescription Charges

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## **Prescription charges – Abolish them altogether?**

### **Aim**

The LINK wanted to ask the community what they thought about prescription charges, do they think prescription charges should be abolished altogether? The aim was to seek their views and recommendations.

### **Background**

Last year Gordon Brown announced the abolition of prescription charges for cancer patients from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. A review on plans to abolish charges for patients with long term conditions in England will report in the summer. The review has brought responses from a wide range of organisations– who want charges abolished altogether. The Socialist Health Association argues: "We do not think the way forward is for a list of deserving and undeserving illnesses. We think the time has come to abolish prescription charges in England. The principle that health care should be free at the point of delivery is a very sound one, and governments repeatedly pledge their support to it. But for many poor people, these pledges are not reflected in their experience." Their view is shared by doctors from the British Medical Association whose response to the review says: "The current exemption categories are often illogical and unfair; extending these categories to include those with long term conditions would simply add to the inequities in the system and invariably create a new set of arbitrary 'winners' and 'losers'. The BMA's position is that the Department of Health should abolish prescription charges in England altogether, as has already happened in Wales and will happen shortly in Northern Ireland and Scotland."

From April 2009 the cost of a Prescription was £7.20. A Pre Payment Certificate (PPC) is also available; this covers the costs of all NHS prescriptions, no matter how many items are needed. The PPC costs £28.25 for three months or £104 for 12 months. <sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 for more information on how to claim.

### **Who is currently exempt?**

For a list of current exemptions from paying prescriptions charges please see Appendix 3. These include certain medical conditions, including Cancer.

### **People on a low income**

If you have difficulties paying NHS charges, you may qualify for help under the NHS Low Income Scheme. This is an income related scheme which looks at your (and your partner's) weekly requirements and income to work out how much, if anything, you should pay towards your health costs. See Appendix 2 for more information on how to claim.

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<sup>1</sup> Information sourced from Department of Health visit <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/1127.aspx> for more information



### **Review on Long Term Conditions**

Over the next few years charges will also be abolished for patients with long-term conditions. The Prescription Charges Review will consider how to implement the Government's commitment to exempt patients with long term conditions from prescription charges over the next few years following the exemption for cancer patients, introduced in 2009. The Review will consider:

- how to define the range of long term conditions affecting patients that should be exempted from prescription charges
- how exemption from charging can best be phased in, with due regard to:
  - what is in the best interests of patients
  - the potential impact on the wider health care system
  - implications for existing policies on management of long term conditions
  - implications for public expenditure.

The review will report to the Minister for Public Health and the Secretary of State for Health in Summer 2009. The LINK will keep people informed.

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was produced (Appendix 1) it was then disseminated to all LINK contacts, for them to fill in and to take to their groups, clients, service users etc for their views. The questionnaire was also uploaded onto the LINK website, promoted through the Warrington LINK Facebook Group and put onto the Warrington and Halton NHS Foundation Trust Website. The questionnaire was also sent to community centres, including the Gateway. The questionnaire ran over a 2 month period.



## Results

A total of 172 questionnaires were returned. This includes individual responses and also responses from groups/ organisations such as Action for the Blind and Warrington Pensioners. The results are shown below.

n= total respondents for that question

Respondents were asked:

Q1 Do you currently pay for your prescriptions?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>Absolute</b>	65	107	0
<b>Percentage</b>	38%	62%	0

n=172

Q2 Has the cost of prescriptions ever prevented you obtaining your medicine/ treatment?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>Absolute</b>	50	114	8
<b>Percentage</b>	29%	66%	5%

n=172

Q3 Do you feel the prescription charges in England should be abolished for everyone?

171 respondents to this question

	Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>Absolute</b>	132	24	15
<b>Percentage</b>	77%	14%	9%

n=171

Q4 Do you have any further comments about the issues of prescription charges?

A total of 64 additional comments were received. For ease of analysis the comments have been grouped into common themes. See appendix 4 for the full list of comments.

Themed Comments (With example)	Total Number
Unfair system in comparison to other countries in the UK <i>"I do feel that the charges should be abolished to bring us in line with the</i>	11



<i>rest of the British Isles</i>	
<p>Unfair system that people on benefits don't pay</p> <p><i>"I don't agree with paying for prescriptions because I work when people who don't get them free. The only people who benefit are those who don't work or with no savings!"</i></p>	2
<p>Long Term Conditions</p> <p><i>"I think that people who have a long term illness should not have to pay"</i></p>	14
<p>Prescriptions charges are to expensive, should be means tested/ reduced</p> <p><i>"I think they should be reduced/ subsidised rather than free for everyone"</i></p>	10
<p>Unfair charges on low income families</p> <p><i>"To expensive when you are on low income"</i></p>	6
<p>Prescriptions charges should be free</p> <p><i>"People can't help being ill shouldn't have to pay"</i></p>	5
<p>Can't afford to pay charges</p> <p><i>"I know people who just can't afford these charges and have gone without particular medication due to the cost"</i></p>	4
<p>Other comments are listed below</p> <p><i>"MPs should pay quadruple charges and all carry a sign saying "do not resuscitate" "</i></p> <p><i>"I believe that the monopolies on medications/ drugs by the Companies that produce them are stopping lots of people from gaining valuable treatments"</i></p> <p><i>"Everyone should be treated equally regards to their health conditions"</i></p> <p><i>"I now purchase a pre payment card as I am on permanent monthly medication"</i></p> <p>Comments received from the Action for Blind People, sometimes GPs assume that if a patient is registered blind they are exempt. This is not always the case. A letter has been produced for clients to give to their GP to ask them to sign Form FP92A to confirm that the patient needs</p>	



outdoor help on account of their disability and therefore are exempt from NHS prescription charges. See Appendix 5 for a copy of the letter.	
Some comments included other suggestions that can help with prescription charges. Please see the Recommendations sections and for the full list Appendix 4	6



## Conclusion

The first conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that while not the majority 29% of respondents have been prevented from obtaining their medications due to the prescription charges. This is a problem and the Governments review of people with Long Term Conditions not paying for their prescriptions may go some way to aid this problem. There does seem agreement from respondents that people with Long Term Conditions should get their prescriptions free, with several comments in support of this. However before the review is published it is impossible to know what will be classed as a Long Term Condition, some comments received refer to patients who are on daily medications but their condition may not be classed as a Long Term Condition. There needs to be clear definitions of which Long Term Conditions will be affected. Asthma, in particular, seems to be a major issue with the respondents.

There are also some conclusions regarding awareness of when people should be able to get their prescriptions free or not. Comments received, especially from the Action for the Blind, suggest that some GPs assume patients are automatically exempt from prescription charges. More promotion is needed to patients.

The main conclusion that can be argued is that, even though the majority of respondents do not pay for their prescriptions, the majority of respondents (77%) felt that prescription charges should be abolished for everyone. However, it is recognised that this could be costly and some respondents did feel that prescriptions charges should be means tested or reduced. There were also some suggestions to help people with the cost of prescriptions charges, (see page 8)

The LINK will continue to look into this issue. The LINK will also help to publicise the different exemptions from paying the prescription charges and the Pre Payment Certificate. The LINK will also keep people informed on the review of the abolition of prescription charges for people with Long Term Conditions.



## Recommendations

- The main recommendation from the report would be to abolish prescription charges for everyone. However it is recognised this would be costly so other recommendations are listed below:
- The cost of prescription charges should be reduced or means tested
- Several treatments/ medications should be able to be given on one prescription with one cost
- More than one months supply should be available on a repeat prescription.
- Regarding people with Long Term Conditions, there needs to be clear definitions of what Long Term Conditions these will be. Following this there needs to be awareness and promotion of this to the public.
- There also needs to be more awareness to patients if they qualify for free prescriptions or about the Pre Payment Certificate.



## Appendix 1

### Prescription Charges – Abolish them altogether?

Last year Gordon Brown announced the abolition of prescription charges for cancer patients from 1<sup>st</sup> April this year. A review on plans to abolish charges for patients with long term conditions for in England will report in the summer. The review has brought responses from a wide range of organisations– who want charges abolished altogether. The LINK wants to know what you think.

1. Do you currently pay for your prescriptions?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

2. Has the cost of prescriptions ever prevented you obtaining your medicine/ treatment?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

3. Do you feel the prescription charges in England should be abolished for everyone?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

4. Do you have any further comments about the issues of prescription charges?



## Appendix 2

### Information on Prescriptions

#### Prescription Prepayment Certificate

A Pre Payment Certificate (PPC) is also available; this covers the costs of all NHS prescriptions, no matter how many items are needed. The PPC costs £28.25 for three months or £104 for 12 months.

- Visit <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/healthcosts>. You can choose to pay: using a debit or credit card; or by 10 monthly direct debit instalments for a 12month prescription prepayment certificate.
- By post using Form FP95 available from your local pharmacy. You can choose to pay: using a cheque, postal order, debit or credit card; or by 10 monthly direct debit instalments for a 12 month prescription prepayment certificate.
- By calling **0845 850 0030**. You can choose to pay: using a debit or credit card; or by 10 monthly direct debit instalments for a 12month prescription prepayment certificate.
- At a pharmacy registered to sell prescription prepayment certificates. Visit <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/healthcosts> for a list of registered pharmacies. If you buy a prescription prepayment certificate from a registered pharmacy, you cannot pay for it by the direct debit instalment option.

#### Low Income Scheme

Form 'HC1 Claim for help with health costs' is available at local dentists, opticians or GP surgeries. The form, help with filling it in, or information and general advice can also be obtained by calling the Department of Health helpline on **0845 850 1166**.

To apply for a medical exemption certificate, ask your doctor for Form FP92A. The form tells you what to do. Your GP, hospital or service doctor (or, if the GP chooses, a member of the GP's practice who can access your medical records) will sign the form to confirm your statement.

To apply for an NHS maternity exemption certificate ask your doctor, nurse, midwife or health visitor for Form FW8. The form tells you what to do. Your doctor, nurse, midwife or health visitor will sign the form to confirm your statement.



## Appendix 3

### Current Exemptions

You do not have to pay for prescriptions if you:

- are under 16 years old;
- are 16, 17 or 18 and in fulltime education;
- are 60 years of age or over;
- have a valid medical exemption certificate,
- have a valid maternity exemption certificate,
- have a valid war pension exemption certificate and the treatment is for your accepted disablement;
- have a valid prescription prepayment certificate,
- are included in the award of someone getting Pension Credit Guarantee Credit;
- get or are included in an award of someone getting:
  - Income Support;
  - Income based Jobseeker's Allowance;
  - Income related Employment and Support Allowance;
- are entitled to, or are named on, a valid NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate;
- are named on a valid HC2 certificate; or
- are an NHS inpatient.

The items below are always free:

- medication given to you to take at a hospital or an NHS Walk-In Centre;
- prescribed contraceptives;
- medication administered to you personally by a GP;
- medication given to you at a hospital or PCT clinic to treat a sexually transmissible infection (STI);
- medication supplied by a PCT or Trust or by a Patient Group Direction for the treatment of Tuberculosis;
- medication supplied by a PCT or Trust or by a Patient Group Direction to a person subject to a supervised community treatment order for the treatment of a mental disorder.

#### **People with certain medical conditions**

If you have one of the following medical conditions, you can apply for an NHS medical exemption certificate that will entitle you to receive NHS prescriptions free of charge.

- A permanent fistula (for example, caecostomy, colostomy, laryngostomy or ileostomy) which needs continuous surgical dressing or an appliance.
- A form of hypoadrenalism (for example, Addison's Disease) for which specific substitution therapy is essential.



- Diabetes insipidus and other forms of hypopituitarism (where the body does not produce enough of one or more pituitary hormones).
- Diabetes mellitus, except where treatment is by diet alone.
- Hypoparathyroidism (where the body does not produce enough parathyroid hormone).
- Myasthenia gravis (a rare muscle weakness disorder).
- Myxoedema (that is, hypothyroidism which needs thyroid hormone replacement).
- Epilepsy which needs continuous anticonvulsive therapy.
- A continuing physical disability which means you cannot go out without the help of another person.
- Undergoing treatment for cancer. Including for the effects of cancer or the effects of previous or current cancer treatment. Exemption for this condition applies from 1 April 2009.



## Appendix 4 Full list of Additional Comments

“Total health inequality for patients living in England. Will not vote Gordon Brown/ Labour if they refuse to put right this injustice”

“We should be the same as Scotland and Wales”

“Why free in Scotland but not in England?”

“I do not think it is right that we in England should pay prescription charges when Wales and Scotland get them free”

“If Wales has free prescriptions all of us should have them free”

“The whole of British Isles should be treated the same”

“5% correctly paying England. No one in Wales – Why?”

“Patients in Wales do not pay, why should this not be the case in England?”

“They are free in other parts of the UK and this seems some what inequitable”

“I do feel that the charges should be abolished to bring us in line with the rest of the British Isles”

“Feel that England should be brought in line with the rest of the UK and that treatment and medication should not rely on a post code lottery!”

“I don’t agree with paying for prescriptions because I work when people who don’t get them free. The only people who benefit are those who don’t work or with no savings!”

“I think it is unfair that people on benefits don’t have to pay and people like me who has to pay for a repeat prescription every month”

“As an Asthmatic since being an infant, this condition will never go, so therefore I think that there are many conditions that should be free when obtaining medication through health professionals. Why is Thyroxine available free when Sulbutomal and Becotide is chargeable?”

“Prescription Charges should be abolished for all with regard to long term conditions and certainly for anyone over the age of 60yrs. Charges for medicines now can be costly particularly if more than one item is required – perhaps a scale of earnings would prevent the least able from considering not taking medicines because it is too costly.“



“I did when I was younger and working having to pay when I had Asthma and other people that took drugs and things got free treatment”

“If you have a chronic illness ie Asthma prescriptions should be free, at times I cannot afford to get inhalers

“In times past I have not took my full medication because of cost (asthma) this in the long term led to a hospital admission”

“I am prescribed several medicines for life, this should mean that they are free. Although I work the medication enables this without it I would not be contributing tax and national insurance and would be claiming benefits. ”

“I think that people who have a long term illness should not have to pay”

“I would imagine that if I had a long term condition prescription charges would be problematic”

“All essential to life medication should be free of prescription charges”

“Some medications are vital e.g. Warfarin for a person with a mechanical heart valve. Without the Warfarin the patient would die. So why must this be paid for? It is unfair, when a medication is this vital to have to pay.”

“People on long term illness should have their prescriptions delivered to their door”

“I am on regular blood pressure medication for the rest of my life. At the age of 41, this will have a huge financial burden. People with long term conditions should have free prescriptions.”

“I feel that if a patient needs ongoing medication it should be free of charge whether they are on benefits or not”

“Why only one month if on long term medications”

“I think they should be reduced/ subsidised rather than free for everyone”

“Should be based on ability to pay”

“I think that prescriptions charges help prevent waste as they have a ‘cost’ and people value them more if they were free. Cancer and terminal patients should have free prescriptions – maybe means tested?”

“People who can afford to pay should pay”

“I believe that prescriptions charges should be means tested, though those with a long term illness should be given them free”



“Too much”

“I think people should be made aware of how much medication costs. People get repeat prescriptions because they are “free” and waste the medication. I can’t afford prescription charges. Maybe a reduced rate would be good.”

“As from conversations I have had regarding this, I feel that the cost of prescriptions are far too expensive for a lot of people especially if they are on multiple treatments.”

“Everyone’s health could improve by ‘affording’ to take the medication prescribed”

“Very expensive for those who have to pay, including life saving daily medications”

“The cost is very expensive for families on the minimum wage”

“I feel that there are many aspects of the payments of prescription that cause issues with the current climate being as it is, this causes more problems for the elderly & low income families who are possibly more at risk this would go hand in hand with lack of funds that would possibly be used to pay for the day to day living cost. This would mean it was their own health that would come the forefront, and by this time the original problem could have been worsened.”

“Low income level for free health benefits should increase substantially”

“University student should be exempt from prescription charges”

“Free health costs should be available for all individuals in receipt of Incapacity and not just Income Support, income based JSA etc”

“Too expensive when you are on low income”

“Why are all drugs not free”

“Medication is important and people shouldn’t have to pay”

“People can’t help being ill shouldn’t have to pay”

“Prescriptions are generally random and usually not all the time so they should be free”

“I feel they should be free as I do know people who do not get prescriptions because of the cost”



“It’s only due to being on tax credit at the moment I get prescriptions exemptions, but once I have to pay for my medications which is essential I have to take, I don’t know how I am going to pay for these. I am on 7 tablets a day due to various medical conditions. This medication keeps me well enough to hold a full time job down”

“I know people who just can’t afford these charges and have gone without particular medication due to the cost”

“When I do have to pay for my prescriptions, when my child tax credit ceases, then I will not be able to afford to take my prescription medications as I have to take numerous medicines a day. These enable me to work and run my family life. I’m a single parent. I know that without the medication that my life would be severely hampered due to various health problems. I feel especially being asthmatic I shouldn’t have to pay for medical prescriptions”

“If prescription charges keep rising people who need to pay for their prescriptions will not be able to get the medication they need this could have an impact on how the person copes with his or her condition”

“MPs should pay quadruple charges and all carry a sign saying “do not resuscitate” “

“I believe that the monopolies on medications/ drugs by the Companies that produce them are stopping lots of people from gaining valuable treatments”

“Everyone should be treated equally regards to their health conditions”

“I now purchase a pre payment card as I am on permanent monthly medication”

Comments received from the Action for Blind People, sometimes GPs assume that if a patient is registered blind they are exempt. This is not always the case. A letter has been produced for clients to give to their GP to ask them to sign Form FP92A to confirm that the patient needs outdoor help on account of their disability and therefore are exempt from NHS prescription charges. See Appendix 5 for a copy of the letter.

“I think that you should be able to get more than one months supply on a prescription as I have to pay a prescription charge every month which is unfair”



“I don’t feel that should be abolished but I do think you should if need be have several amounts on one prescription for one cost”

“I feel the purchase of the Pre Payment Certificate should be available on a monthly basis rather than as an upfront payment”

“The government should produced it’s own drugs for medication with the NHS therefore providing income from sales to private practices and other countries as well as making them either cheaper for patients if prescription charges had to remain. Prescription charges should at least be free for any long term/ life threatening patient”

“Warrington Pensioners members whom with appreciation of paying no Prescription charge themselves, in the main, that as Scotland and Wales prescription charges should be abolished. It is appreciated this will place a massive cost on the NHS, but believe a small increase in National Insurance along with saving that would be made in reducing necessary administration of the present system, would harm no-one but would benefit all.”

“Individuals not made aware when they qualify for free prescriptions (relating to health issue). Hospitals/ GPs should make patients aware in diagnosis”



## Appendix 5

Dear Doctor

### Re: Exemption from NHS Prescription Charges

As you may be aware, people who have a “*continuing physical disability which prevents them from leaving home without the help of another person*” are exempt from NHS prescription charges. **Action for Blind People** believes that all blind and partially sighted people will require some form of outdoor assistance and should therefore qualify.

Whether someone is registered partially sighted or blind they will encounter a variety of hazards when they leave their home. Negotiating everyday outdoor obstacles, in both familiar and unfamiliar locations is an ever-present problem. The most common obstacles are pillars, posts, parked cars, dustbins, gates left open, overhanging branches and other pedestrians. Equally problematic are loose or uneven paving and kerb stones, holes in the roads, roadworks, steps, stairs, and wet road surfaces. Even if someone is proficient in using a long cane or has a guide dog they will never be able to anticipate all these hazards. Thus, in order to ensure the safety of a visually impaired person, outdoor guidance and supervision is required.

Blind and partially sighted people will usually encounter difficulties crossing roads unassisted. Busy roads are particularly dangerous. It is often difficult to identify oncoming traffic, especially cyclists. It is also quite difficult for a blind or partially sighted person to judge the speed of approaching vehicles and assess whether traffic has stopped to let them cross.

Another problem is following directions. All blind and partially sighted people will experience problems finding their way from one place to another on their own. Common difficulties are reading maps, bus or train numbers and destinations, public notice boards, timetables, street or shop signs and door numbers.

Different lighting conditions will considerably affect the ability of blind and partially sighted people to operate independently. Most partially sighted people will have their mobility substantially restricted in the dark. Other lighting conditions which are normally problematic are rainy or overcast conditions, dim artificial light and bright sunlight or glare.

The problems I have described are fairly common to all blind and partially sighted people. In effect, therefore, people with visual impairments will usually need another person to provide guidance or supervision both in unfamiliar areas and in the dark or poor light. Even in familiar routes no-one can ensure that the streets are free from potential hazards and obstacles. I would therefore request that you sign Form FP92A to confirm that your client needs outdoor help on account of their disability.



Yours faithfully

Mike Gerrard  
Action Co-ordinator  
Action for Blind People.