



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, through social media, 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 effective, 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

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 £9.65 per item (as of 1 April 2023), having **risen almost every year since 1979** and at a pace that outstrips wage inflation.
- 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.
- A prescription prepayment certificate can reduce the cost of prescription charges if you need multiple medications. However, this is still a significant amount (**£31.25 for three months or £111.60 for one year**), 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 and also some people may not be able to afford the upfront costs.
- The Prescription Charges Coalition is **campaigning for a review of the charge so that everyone with a long-term condition gets the medicine they need for free.**

OUT OF DATE AND UNFAIR

- The medical exemption criteria have **barely changed since June 1968** – as a result they **don't make sense**.
- **Many prevalent long-term conditions are not on the exemption list**, either because they weren't identified 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.

IN 1968 IN MEDICINE

The UK's first heart transplant was performed.

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

[Earlier this year the Prescription Charges Coalition conducted a survey.](#) Over 4,000 people with long-term conditions responded.

The key findings from the survey were:

- Nearly 1 in 10 people have skipped medication in the past year due to the cost of prescription(s). Of this group:
 - 30% now have other physical health problems in addition to their original health condition.
 - 37% now have other mental health problems in addition to their original health condition.
 - And over half (53%) have had to take time off work as a result of worsening health.
- Additionally 1 in 10 (9%) report being unable to collect their prescription due to the cost in

the last 12 months.

- 38% of respondents became aware of the Prescription Prepayment Certificate more than a year after their diagnosis with a long term condition.
- Around a third (35%) have had the duration of their prescription changed, meaning they're paying more frequently for their medicines.

A FALSE ECONOMY

Research conducted by York Health Economic Consortium found that scrapping prescription charges for just two long-term conditions (inflammatory bowel disease and Parkinson's) would save the NHS over £20 million a year.

Saving the NHS:

- £93 per person with Parkinson's per year
- £180 per person with inflammatory bowel disease per year
- Over £20 million a year for both IBD and Parkinson's

And would result in:

- 9% fewer A&E visits for people with Parkinson's
- 11.4% less hospital admissions for people with Parkinson's
- 7,149 less flares for IBD
- 3,887 fewer GP visits for people with Crohn's Disease.

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).
- You can also find [specific research on the impact of prescription charges](#) on people with asthma. There is also research from Asthma UK that outlines [why professionals think the charges are harmful](#) for people with the condition.

TOP TIP

If your MP is a member of a relevant APPG such as HIV and AIDS, mental health, Motor Neurone Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Crohn's and Colitis 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 has 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 on our latest survey](#) and our [economic 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 of over £20 million a year (for just two conditions) 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.

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 share the picture on our social media channels.
- Remember the more you build an ongoing relationship with your MP, the more receptive they'll be to helping you in the future.

THINGS YOUR MP CAN DO:

- Write to the Chair of the Health Select Committee asking for an inquiry into the impact of prescription charges on people with long-term conditions.
- Write to the relevant minister, Neil O'Brien MP asking for a review of outdated medical exemption criteria.
- Contact the Prescription Charges Coalition to show their support for this issue and explore how they can work with other MPson this issue.

IF THEY SAY...

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

- If people stop rationing their medication, this could lead to fewer hospital admissions, inpatient days, GP appointments and A&E visits.
- Scrapping prescription charges for just two long-term conditions (Parkinson's and IBD) would save the NHS over £20 million a year.

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

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