

Free prescriptions for people with long term conditions are a good investment

FOR PEOPLE WITH
LONG TERM CONDITIONS

JOIN THE FIGHT
#KeepUsWell

SUPPORT FREE
PRESCRIPTIONS

PRESCRIPTION



DOSAGE: *More than 1 in 3 people*

DIAGNOSIS:

Living with a long term condition

Keep Us
Well



British Heart
Foundation

NORTHERN
IRELAND

MS

Multiple
Sclerosis
Society

The Keep Us Well campaign is led by British Heart Foundation NI and MS Society and supported by the Prescription Charges Coalition and the Long Term Conditions Alliance (NI) – a coalition of over 50 local charities.

More than one in three people in Northern Ireland live with one or more long term conditions¹

Mental Health
Cancer
Parkinson's
Crohn's
Asthma
Heart Disease
Multiple Sclerosis
Diabetes
Arthritis
Alzheimer's
Stroke



My name is Karen Rennie and I am a mother of four from Randalstown. I was 29 years old, had two young children and had a busy career working as a nurse in A&E when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. I wasn't able to return to work because I had some cognitive problems and working in such a busy and responsible role in A&E I didn't feel safe staying in my job.

In 2013 I was about to start a new medication for my MS and before I did I had to have my heart monitored. I discovered then that I had a left ventricle branch block, a problem with my heart. Soon after that I became pregnant with my twin girls who were born nine weeks early.

My four girls had their hearts checked and doctors discovered my six year old and my twins all have holes in their hearts.

If prescription charges were to be introduced it would be devastating for us. I would have to move household budget around to account for it and money is tight as it is with four children, my health would suffer because of it and I wouldn't want my family to suffer too.

It is families like ours who have things tight as it is. We would struggle to pay for prescriptions if a charge was introduced. I need my tablets to look after my health so I can care for my family.

There should be no barrier between a patient and the medicines they need

Free prescriptions for people make sense

People with long term conditions shouldn't pay the price. Free prescriptions for people with long term conditions make sense and evidence from around the UK confirms that charges place a barrier between people and treatment.

“Three years on from their introduction, they are making a real difference to thousands of people's lives and remain one of the Assembly Government's most popular and recognised policies.”

[Welsh Assembly Government, March 2010]

Prescription charges have been abolished in Wales (2007), in Northern Ireland (2010) and in Scotland (2011). In Wales,² which has the longest experience of this policy, there has not been a significant overall increase in prescriptions dispensed since its introduction.

In order to get a better understanding of the impact of charges, we need to look at the impact of prescription charges in England.

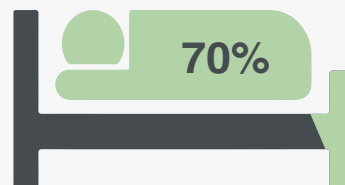
What is the impact of prescription charges?

The Paying the Price reports by the Prescription Charges Coalition found that prescription charges had a significant negative effect on medicine adherence, self management, quality of life and health outcomes.³ They also indicated significant knock-on societal impacts in terms of employment and productivity and additional costs to the NHS – for example through emergency hospital admissions.

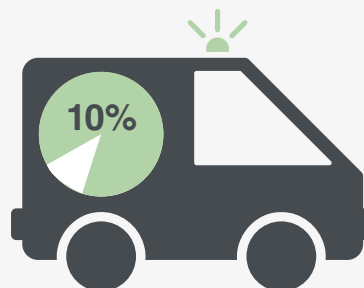
Surveys by the Prescription Charges Coalition in England of people with a range of long term conditions, found:²



Over 1/3 said the cost of medication had prevented them from collecting or taking it as prescribed.³



3/4 said this had affected their ability to work including 70% who said they had to take time off work as a result of not taking their medication.⁴



10% experienced hospital admission because cost had prevented them from collecting their prescription.³

“There is a significant danger that, if people cannot afford their necessary medication, a ticking time bomb for the future will be created as their illness and secondary conditions worsen over time”
Survey Respondent

² Helping to Improve Wales Health: Free Prescriptions Three Years On <http://wales.nhs.uk/documents/prescriptions-report-three-years.pdf>

³ Prescription Charges Coalition, Paying the Price - Prescription Charges and People with Long-Term Conditions, 2013. More than 2,000 people responded to this survey

⁴ Prescription Charges Coalition, Paying the Price – Prescription Charges and Employment, 2014. More than 5,000 people of working age responded to this survey.

Local people's concerns

Charging for treatment will place an unfair burden on the sick and disabled, and it won't save the health service money in the long term.

In short, we believe introducing prescription charges could lead to more hospital admissions, longer waiting lists, poorer quality of life or even premature death.

Our Local Survey found:

In response to a Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety's (DHSSPS) consultation on the Individual Funding Request process, which proposed the reintroduction of prescription charges to pay for a Specialist Medicines Fund, the Prescription Charges Coalition conducted a survey of people with long term conditions in Northern Ireland.

Over 850 local people completed the survey. A wide range of long term conditions were represented, with a high proportion of respondents having more than one condition. 97% of respondents are currently prescribed medication for their condition. Around one third have collected more than 60 items in the past 12 months.

Respondents were asked about:

1. Their experience of paying for prescriptions before charges were abolished in 2010.
2. The impact, if any, of receiving free prescriptions on the effective management of their condition.
3. Views on the potential reintroduction of prescription charges.

Key Findings



More than 1 in 4 said that the cost of prescriptions had prevented them from collecting or taking their medication as prescribed before charges were abolished in Northern Ireland.



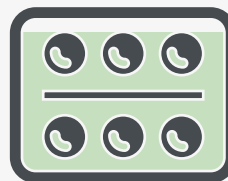
Over half of these said they thought this had affected their health, with the majority requiring additional treatment, including hospital admission.



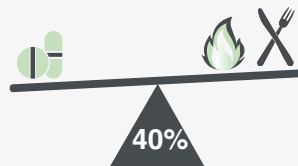
More than half of those who were paying for their prescriptions before they were abolished said that not having to pay has made managing their condition easier.



Just under half said they would worry about the cost if prescription charges were reintroduced.



97% of respondents are currently prescribed medication for their condition. Around one third have collected more than 60 items in the past 12 months.



Around 40% said they might sometimes prioritise other costs before their medication.



61% said they thought prescription charges would affect their ability to manage their condition.

Free prescriptions are a good investment

They...Keep Us Well

Medicines play a key role in the management of long term conditions. There is significant evidence that prescription charges present a barrier to effective and optimal use of medicines by people with long term conditions.

Our Local Survey found:

- More than 1 in 4 said that the cost of prescriptions had prevented them from collecting or taking their medication as prescribed before charges were abolished in Northern Ireland.
- Over half of these said they thought this had affected their health with the majority requiring additional treatment, including hospital admission.
- 61% said they thought if charges were reintroduced it would affect their negatively impact on their ability to manage their condition.

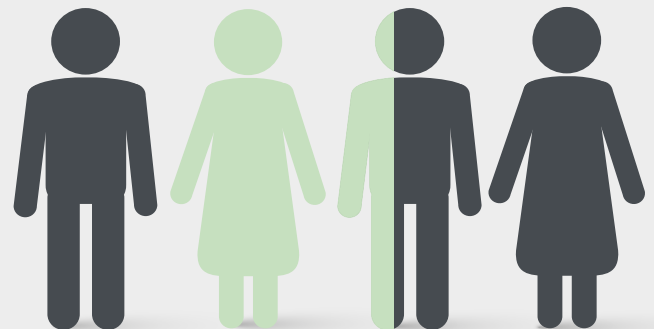
“I’m terrified of this happening. The reintroduction of prescription charges and plans to cut my Employment Support Allowance will push me over the edge, either through homelessness or a flare up of my already life-threatening condition. I really do fear for my future.”

“It would increase financial stress. Stress exacerbates MS symptoms. I cannot work at this stage of my MS.”

“Please, please, please don’t reintroduce prescription charges. Life is hard enough for someone with a disability and a long term medical condition. I can’t afford heat in my home most times or food, so another expense is terrible.”

Respondents focused on the impact of **STRESS** resulting from concern over being able to pay for their medication.

More than 1 in 4 said that the cost of prescriptions had prevented them from collecting or taking their medication as prescribed before charges were abolished in Northern Ireland.



Key Message

Free prescriptions for people with long term conditions are a good investment because they help people to manage their condition effectively, helping to keep them well and out of hospital.

Free prescriptions are a good investment

They...Keep Us Safe

Not only do prescription charges place an unfair burden on people living with long term conditions, but their introduction is a false economy. Failure to take preventative medication (such as statins) and to manage existing conditions well is likely to lead to far greater costs for the health service and the public purse in the longer term.

In England, the 2013 Paying the Price report highlighted that 35% of respondents who pay for each prescription have not collected at least one item due to cost, with three quarters of this group reporting that their health got worse as a result. 10% said that they ended up in hospital as a direct consequence of not taking their medication.

Our local survey found that prior to free prescriptions in Northern Ireland in 2010, 1 in 4 respondents said that the cost had prevented them from collecting or taking their medication as prescribed. The majority (67%) stated they required additional treatment including hospital admission as a result.

“On two occasions I ended up going back to the GP as well as one hospital admission with an overnight stay.”

“We order multiple items twice monthly at least, with additional items as needed. My daughter would die without these items.”

FALSE £ ECONOMY



Key Message

Free prescriptions for people with long term conditions are a good investment because they will help reduce costs to the NHS and the public purse.

Free prescriptions are a good investment

They...Keep Us Connected

While many people with long term conditions can and do work, it is well documented that long term conditions can have a negative impact on educational attainment and working life, including career opportunities and premature retirement.⁴

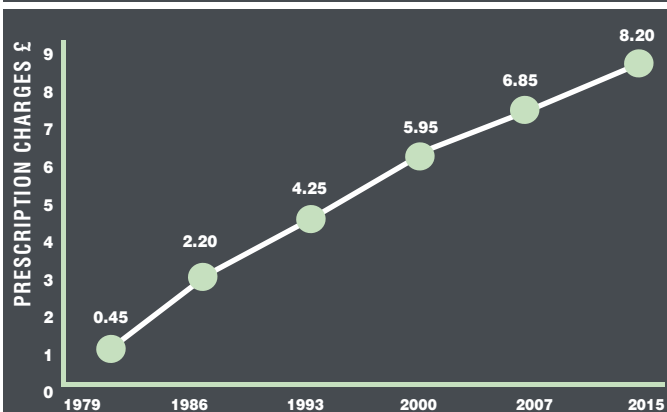
Many people with long term conditions such as MS⁵ are of working age, but they may find themselves unable to gain employment and if successful they tend to be on lower incomes due to the impact of their condition on their lives.

In England, the 2013 Paying the Price report found that the majority of people receiving prescriptions do not claim any benefits whatsoever with 73% of those who pay for their prescriptions reporting that they received no financial support.

The reintroduction of prescription charges in NI may force many people with long term conditions, including lower income families and the elderly, to choose between **eating, heating and treating**. If prescription charges were introduced, there is no guarantee the cost will stay the same.

The cost - it will increase

For 35 out of the last 36 years – prescription charges in England have risen every year between 1979 to 2010



PRESCRIPTION CHARGES = MEDICINES POVERTY

Our Local Survey Found:

- Just under half said they would worry about the cost if prescription charges were reintroduced.
- Around 40% said they might sometimes prioritise other costs before their medication .



“This has the potential to impact significantly, especially if my condition deteriorates as during a flare up, I can go from taking 6 tablets a day to 26 in less than a week – and if it’s a really bad flare up I can be off work for over 3 months.”

“I want to stay in work but it’s hard. My medications help me to manage my MS symptoms so that I can work but if charges were introduced, I’d have to reduce my meds and I would have to resign. I just couldn’t cope with the pain.”

Key Message

Free prescriptions for people with long term conditions are a good investment because they support people to stay in work and stay connected with their family and their local community.

⁴ Prescription Charges Coalition, Paying the Price – Prescription Charges and Employment, 2014. More than 5,000 people of working age responded to this survey.

⁵ MS Society, MS Enough – Make welfare make sense (2015)

Take Action



The Keep Us Well campaign strongly believes there should be no barriers to accessing life-saving and life-enhancing medication.

We are calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- End confusion and fear concerning the possible reintroduction of prescription charges, and
- Make a long term commitment to free prescriptions for people with long term conditions in the next Programme for Government.

Having access to free prescriptions helps people with long term conditions to manage their condition, keep well for longer and stay in employment.

Take action today to support free prescriptions for people with long term conditions: Sign up at www.keepuswell.org
Tweet using #KeepUsWell

Share your story by contacting British Heart Foundation NI by emailing Gemma Burns burnsg@bhf.org.uk

The campaign is being led by British Heart Foundation NI and MS Society, and supported by over 50 charities represented by the Long Term Conditions Alliance and the Prescriptions Charges Coalition.

Show your support for the Keep Us Well campaign using #KeepUsWell

www.keepuswell.org

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