



Rt. Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health
House of Commons
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

28th April 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

CONSERVATIVE PARTY MANIFESTO - REFORM OF PRESCRIPTION CHARGE EXEMPTIONS

We are writing to you as charities that are members of the Prescription Charges Coalition, to call on the Conservative Party to commit to reviewing the current prescription charge medical exemption list in England within your manifesto for the 2017 General Election. Please see attached a more detailed briefing for your information.

The medical exemption list will be 50 years old in 2018, and has hardly changed since it was first established in June 1968. In fact, the only update has been the welcome addition of cancer patients introduced by the last Labour Government in 2009, despite the fact that the 2009 Gilmore review recommended exempting all people with long-term conditions.

Many of the conditions represented by the Prescription Charges Coalition either had not been discovered 50 years ago or resulted in death before adulthood. In other cases, advances in technology and medication have had a huge impact on the wellbeing of people living with long-term conditions and the treatments available to them. The fact that the medical exemption list has not been updated to take account of these changes means that it is now outdated, arbitrary and deeply unfair. The list is also rife with inconsistencies. For example, people with cystic fibrosis are not exempt unless they develop cystic fibrosis-related diabetes, whilst those with Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis are only exempt if they have a colostomy or ileostomy.

Under the current system, the majority of working age people with long-term conditions still pay for the prescriptions they need to keep them alive and well, contributing the bulk of the £550 million that the Government receives in prescription charges revenue. The long-term (often lifelong) nature of their conditions means that they are disproportionately affected by prescription charges, whilst also facing the extra costs associated with managing a long-term condition and lower than average incomes due to the impact of their condition on their ability to work

The Prescription Charges Coalition's report *Paying the Price* found that 35% of survey respondents who paid for each prescription had not collected at least one item due to the cost, with three quarters of this group reporting that their health got worse as a result. 10% said that they were hospitalised as a direct consequence of not taking their medication. This reaffirmed similar findings from surveys undertaken previously by Citizens Advice, the British Heart Foundation and Asthma UK.

We therefore believe that the financial consequences for the NHS and wider economy in England of people not being able to afford their prescribed drugs, is far greater than the £350-450 million (less than 0.5% of the NHS budget in 2015/16) it is estimated free prescriptions for people of working age with long-term conditions would cost.

The 10th June this year will be exactly one year before the medical exemption list hits its 50th anniversary, so now is the time for decisive action. NHS England is already looking at the prescribing of some low cost and over the counter medications, but what is needed is a root and branch review of prescription charges exemptions to ensure that we have a fair and sustainable system that supports people to stay well and avoids further costs down the line.

We are therefore calling on the Conservative Party to include within your General Election manifesto a clear commitment to undertaking a review of the current medical exemption list.

Please respond to Prescription Charges Coalition, CO: Andy McGuinness, Crohn's and Colitis UK, 45 Grosvenor Road, St Albans, AL1 3AW, via email on prescriptionchargescoalition@gmail.com or phone 01727 734 467.

We would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this matter and very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Crohn's and Colitis UK



Parkinson's UK



National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)



MS Society



Disability Rights UK



Royal Pharmaceutical Society



National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society



Arthritis Care



Asthma UK



Rethink Mental Illness



Lupus UK



British Liver Trust



The Hibbs Lupus Trust



Scleroderma & Raynaud's UK



Multiple System Atrophy Trust



St Thomas' Lupus Trust



Allergy UK



APS Support UK



Behcet's Syndrome Society



Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis Support



Children's Liver Disease Foundation



The National Eczema Society



Turner Syndrome Support Society UK



Klinefelter's Syndrome Association