

## Petitions Committee: prescription charges for over 60s

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### Activity

The Petitions Committee ran an online survey to ask petitioners for their views on the Government's proposal to align the age of entitlement to free prescriptions with the state pension age, currently 66.

The survey was sent to people who signed the following petition:

[Protect free NHS prescriptions for over 60s](#)

We have summarised the key themes below and illustrated them with quotes from respondents.

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### Response

There were **1,863** responses to the Committee's survey

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### Methodology

Survey questions which produced statistical results have been analysed. Committee have also staff manually reviewed hundreds of individual comments and answers, using both subject searches and randomised selection.

### Respondents

1,163 respondents told us they were aged 60-65 and would have to start paying for prescriptions if the age of entitlement to free prescriptions was increased to 66. The statistical results presented below relate to these respondents.

### Key themes

#### **People were concerned about being able to afford prescriptions if they lose their exemption from prescription charges**

- **88%** of respondents said they were 'moderately' or 'extremely' concerned about being able to afford prescriptions if they lost their entitlement to free prescriptions.

#### **Quotes from survey respondents:**

- "In the economic climate with prices rising, I and people in my age group couldn't afford any further financial setbacks."
- "I had to retire early due to ill health. I won't get state pension for ages. I need quite a few items of medication on repeat prescription, I don't get free travel on public transport yet. I feel my generation is being cheated out of everything we have worked for, paying into the system so we are entitled to free prescriptions in old age. [...] I just feel that the goal posts keep getting moved. A lot of people my age will not be able to afford the medicines they deserve, will become ill, and then the NHS will bear the brunt."

## **Respondents who have caring responsibilities said that they would struggle to pay for prescriptions**

### **Quotes from survey respondents:**

- “I can't work as I am my husband's full time unpaid carer. If I claim carer's allowance it will be deducted from his support allowance. Money is tight. [...] I think it's unreasonable to start charging for prescriptions for those already over 60 who have been in receipt of them for some time free”.
- “I am an unpaid carer for my daughter, so it would be a significant extra cost.”
- “I have had to retire early as I am a carer for two members of my household and on a very tight budget due to this.”
- “It unacceptable to force me to pay again having paid all my life. I am a carer on a low income but do not qualify for any help and yet I help my family but get penalised for my own health. I have chronic asthma and need my drugs and should not have to pay anymore to try to stay well.”

## **Some respondents said they would cut back on spending in other areas to ensure they could afford their prescriptions. Others said that they would reduce their medication if they had to start paying for prescriptions**

- **35%** of respondents said they would cut back on other areas of spending so they could afford their prescriptions.
- **29%** of respondents said they would stop collecting some of their prescribed medication or medical appliances (e.g., an inhaler).
- **22%** of respondents said they would take less than their prescribed amount of medication.

## **The majority of respondents said their spending on other areas would be affected if they had to start paying for prescriptions**

- **73%** of respondents said that there would be a 'significant' or 'moderate' effect on their spending on food.
- **67%** of respondents said that there would be a 'significant' or 'moderate' effect on spending on energy bills.
- **76%** of respondents said that there would be a 'significant' or 'moderate' effect on their spending on leisure and recreation activities.
- **61%** of respondents said that there would be a 'significant' or 'moderate' effect on their spending on phone and internet.
- **69%** of respondents said that there would be a 'significant' or 'moderate' effect on their spending on transport, including fuel.
- **70%** of respondents said that there would be a 'significant' or 'moderate' effect on their spending on clothing.

### **Quotes from survey respondents:**

- “I am struggling enough financially whilst waiting for my 66th birthday, a charge for my medication now would bring serious financial problems, especially in conjunction with the rise of energy, food and water costs we are all suffering at present.”
  - “In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis and enormous electricity bills which rise again in April, this would cause a lot of extra hardship.”
  - “A family member who won't get their state pension until 66 years of age is already struggling financially on a small private pension & will have to choose between paying for essential prescriptions or food.”
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## Many respondents did not think that they would benefit from schemes to help with the cost of prescriptions

- **55%** of respondents receive 11 or more prescriptions per year, and would save money if they bought an annual Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC), but only **26%** of respondents said that they would buy a PPC if they had to start paying for prescriptions.
- **45%** of respondents were aware of the NHS Low Income Scheme, but only **3%** of respondents said that they thought they were eligible for the scheme.

### Quotes from survey respondents:

- “I am greatly worried as to how I would cope if the number of my prescribed medications were to increase. A prepayment certificate would represent a huge expenditure for me.”
- “People will stop meds because they cannot afford it or find the money for a prepayment cert. Therefore, illnesses getting worse, more pressure on NHS, possibly even leading to death.”
- “Many people who are on lower incomes (including myself) are still not eligible for the NHS Low Income scheme. In addition, despite the fact that we have medical conditions which require us to take medication for life (as our GPs have instructed that we would be at risk of heart attacks, strokes, etc if we did not take them) we still do not qualify to be exempted from paying for prescriptions. “

## Respondents expressed concern that the proposed changes might have long-term negative effects on the NHS

### Quotes from survey respondents:

- “If people stop using their medication because of cost, this will increase demand for the NHS and lead to further delays in A&E. For example, more staff and facilities would be needed to cope. Surely, for many people who reach 60 and have worked for over 40 years and paid National Insurance contributions during that time, a free prescription has been earned?”
- “I think, overall & long term, it will cost the country more (than any income gained) to treat people who become ill or whose conditions worsen due to effect of raising the age of entitlement to 66.”
- “If you want your lower paid workforce to continue working into their seventies, then free prescriptions at 60 is an excellent investment, and long term may reduce the strain on the NHS. It is also a bit of an offset to raising the pension age.”

**Some respondents argued that it was important for those aged 60 and over to be entitled to free prescriptions, as older people were more likely to have multiple illnesses that required medication or medical appliances**

**Quotes from survey respondents:**

- “People over the age of 60 tend to be by on various medications such as statins and blood pressure medication. There are various illnesses that people over the age of 60 suffer with and if made to pay for prescriptions you would find that the cost of changing the age from 60 to 66 would be negated by the number of people needing medical care because they can't afford their medication. The amount of money that would be saved is negligible and really will not make much difference to the cost to the NHS.”
- “My husband takes 10+ medications a day as a post-transplant patient. I couldn't afford his medications if they change the exemption age.”
- “If you increase the prescriptions for over 60s making them pay, they will like myself reduce the amount of stop medications that they are taking because they cannot afford them.”
- “I believe that those people between 60 and 66 who don't qualify for free prescriptions will try to reduce costs by taking less medication and /or making do with out-of-date items, to the detriment of their health.”

**Respondents felt that having paid taxes throughout their working lives meant that those aged 60 and over should be entitled to free prescriptions**

**Quotes from survey respondents:**

- “I think it's terrible that I've paid into the system for nearly 50 years, and still the government want more of my money, as people get older, they have more health issues, so why should we be penalised?”
- “At our age we have been through many challenges and have paid our National Insurance for many years let's be fair about getting older and help us live a healthy retirement.”

**Respondents expressed concern about previous increases in the state pension age and felt that the alignment of entitlement to free prescriptions with this was unfair**

**Quotes from survey respondents:**

- “You have already increased the pension age for women by 7 years so getting free prescriptions after working since aged 16 was very welcome indeed. I live on a small pension taken at 55 and care for my elderly mother. I'm sick of being one of those people who have always worked, claim nothing, get penalised for having savings and have to wait 7 years for a state pension. So yes, I would be furious if this 'perk' is taken away.”



- “The Government has rapidly increased the state pension age to 66. Many people cannot continue working in difficult professions until 66 and therefore will, if they continue to work until this pension age, need to move to light working if they are able to achieve it and that is difficult as in many areas of the country this is not available therefore their income is very reduced and limited while their health requires more regular medication.”
- “I had to retire early due to ill health. I won't get state pension for ages. I need quite a few items of medication on repeat prescription, I don't get free travel on public transport yet. I feel my generation is being cheated out of everything we have worked for, paying in to the system so we are entitled to free prescriptions in old age”

- “I have already been penalised as a woman born in the 50s (WASPI) at having to wait an extra 6 years for my state pension, this would just be a further outrageous blow.”
- “Women now have to work until over 65 before getting their pensions. I am one of the poor WASPI women who were robbed of years of their pension! You now want to also burden them with having to pay hundreds of pounds for their prescription medication. This is an absolutely disgusting way to treat the lifelong hardworking people of this country.”

**Respondents argued that increasing the age of entitlement to free prescriptions in England was particularly unfair when people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not have pay for prescriptions**

**Quotes from survey respondents:**

**Some respondents felt that proposals to align the age of entitlement to free prescriptions with state pension age was particularly unfair following the equalisation of the State Pension age for men and women**

**Quotes from survey respondents:**

- “This is a further example of penalising WASPI women. I continue to work although feel exhausted & my GP has suggested retirement, but I cannot afford to. The elderly I work with I feel confident will choose not to take important medications that will result in illness & disability. We may be living longer but it doesn't mean our bodies are not aging. As GB we should have comparable systems as Wales/Scotland.”

- “Very unfair as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland don't pay. I feel I'm being discriminated against for living in England.”
- “It would be really unfair, considering no prescription charges are payable in Scotland and Wales.”
- “It is unjust. We have paid our contributions all our working life, the pension age keeps going up. Scotland and Wales don't even have to pay for prescriptions so why do English people have to?”