

**British Geriatrics Society**  
Improving healthcare for older people

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Lord Bethell of Romford  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

16 August 2021

Dear Lord Bethell,

**Proposal to increase the age of free prescription eligibility in line with the pension age**

The British Geriatrics Society (BGS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on Government plans to increase the age of eligibility for free prescriptions to 65, to bring it in line with the national pension age.

The BGS is the membership association for healthcare professionals working with older people. Founded in 1947, we have over 4,500 members, and we are the only society in the UK offering specialist expertise in the wide range of healthcare needs of older people. Geriatricians, nurses, GPs, old age psychiatrists, allied healthcare professionals, pharmacists and researchers provide high quality care for older people as part of a multidisciplinary team during acute illness, chronic illness, rehabilitation and at the end of life, both in hospital and community settings.

We believe the plan to introduce prescriptions charges for adults aged 60-65 is short-sighted and will, in the long term, cost more money than it will save. Many people aged between 60 and 65 are prescribed medications for long-term conditions that they will take for many years. We know that many people in this age group struggle to take their medications as prescribed and we believe that introducing prescription charges only serves to introduce additional barriers, thus preventing older people from getting the maximum benefit from their medication. Lack of adherence to medication at an early stage of disease is likely to result in complications or disease progression which the medication might have prevented and this is likely to cost the NHS more in the long term.

The healthy life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived parts of the UK is 19 years. It is shocking that this should be the case today in one of the wealthiest countries in the world and should be a priority for Government policy action. Introducing prescription charges to those aged 60-65 is likely to increase existing inequalities and widen this gap.

England is the only nation in the UK that has prescription charges for any population group – prescriptions are free to all residents of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This move by the Government to introduce prescription charges to a group currently eligible for free prescriptions is a backwards step and we urge you to reconsider.

If you wish to discuss this further, please contact our Policy Manager, Sally Greenbrook, at [s.greenbrook@bgs.org.uk](mailto:s.greenbrook@bgs.org.uk) to arrange a time.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jennifer Burns  
President

Sarah Mistry  
Chief Executive