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## CONSULTATION RESPONSE

### **NHS prescription charges and exemption arrangements in Scotland**

There are an estimated two million people living with long term conditions in Scotland, including 390,000 people with asthma, 900,000 with arthritis, 167,000 with diabetes, 40,000 with epilepsy, 700,000 with lung and respiratory problems.

A long-term condition can be defined as a condition of prolonged duration that may affect any aspect of the person's life. Symptoms may come and go. Usually there is no cure; but there are often things that can be done to maintain and improve quality of life.

Although Scotland's life expectancy is improving the evidence suggests that people are living longer with long-term conditions. Long-term conditions are now the most common cause of death in most industrialised nations and in many developing countries and are strongly associated with social deprivation.

The Long Term Conditions Alliance Scotland (LTCAS) aims to bring together hundreds of voluntary and community organizations from across Scotland to help meet the needs of people living with long term conditions. The Alliance will be formally launched in Edinburgh on 16 May 2006. This submission is from the Shadow Board of LTCAS.

The Board welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Executive's consultation document. There is a clear need to establish a fairer system for charges and exemption. We recognize that the Wales Assembly is implementing a system of free prescriptions and believe that this will benefit people living with long term conditions in Wales. However, we also recognize that the Scottish Parliament's recent vote on the Abolition of NHS Prescription Charges (Scotland) Bill means that this is not a current option in Scotland.

Our comments are focused solely on **exemptions related to medical grounds**. Member organizations are making their own submissions related to specific conditions.

### **Exemptions based on conditions**

The existing exemption list is anachronistic and unfair. The exclusion of the majority of conditions which make up the membership of the LTCAS illustrates in itself that the review is overdue. We are looking for an outcome from this review which provides an effective remedy which is fair to all. The key principles of promoting health, supporting self care and tackling low income and poverty are central to the formation of a new system.

However, as an Alliance, we see the following basic principles as equally important in any reformed system:

- Support effective self-care
- Focuses on individual need

- Simple to understand and to administer
- Based on holistic approach to health
- Optimizes quality of life
- Recognizes that long term conditions are often complex
- Acknowledges people often have more than one long term condition
- Should not disadvantage particular groups

The prospect of exemption based on a list of drugs is likely to be complex and difficult to administer. It could also promote a quango-based approach predicated on the costly involvement of medical professionals.

Developing the list of exempt conditions is likely to be fairer, incorporating all long term conditions. The issue of exemption relating only to condition-specific treatments should only be dealt with on the understanding that long term conditions are often complex and condition-specific medication is only part of the equation to protect long term health and wellbeing.

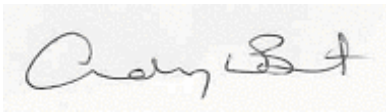
## **Conclusion**

The Alliance recommends that the list of exempt conditions is extended to include all long term conditions and that the exemption is not limited to condition specific treatments as this would not reflect complexity of the conditions and would not invest in longer term prevention of complications.

## **Follow-up to consultation**

We are aware that any changes to the current system can be made through secondary legislation by means of regulations. We would like to see any proposals being subject to affirmative resolution and also that the resolutions are put out for consultation prior to their approval in the same way as was the case with the ban on smoking in public places.

**Audrey Birt**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Audrey Birt', is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

**Chair of the Shadow Board for the Long Term Conditions Alliance Scotland**