

YOUR NAME
ADDRESS
EMAIL
PHONE NUMBER

FIRST NAME SURNAME
STREET ADDRESS

DATE

Dear MR/MS [SURNAME]

Re: access to gluten free food on prescription

I am writing to highlight the challenges facing people with coeliac disease and ask you as my MP to commit to ensuring people with coeliac disease are supported to access the food they need to treat their condition.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition, affecting around 1 in every 100 people. Symptoms are wide ranging but can include bloating, stomach cramps, vomiting, diarrhoea and tiredness. There is no cure for the condition and the only treatment is a strict gluten free diet for life, to prevent ongoing health issues and complications such as malnutrition, osteoporosis, a rare type of bowel cancer, and neurological conditions. In children, non-adherence can have additional consequences including faltering growth and delayed puberty. Complete replacement of gluten containing foods with gluten free is not easy. Gluten free staple substitute foods are important for both practical reasons and for their nutritional contribution to the diet. It is therefore critical that people with coeliac disease can access the gluten free food they need.

Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. Gluten free staple foods are significantly more expensive than gluten containing equivalents. Research shows that on average they are 2-4 times more expensive. In the case of bread, someone purchasing the cheapest gluten containing loaf of bread would have to pay more than 6 times as much for a gluten free loaf weight for weight. A weekly shop can cost as much as 35% more for someone on a medically prescribed gluten free diet. Read the full report: www.coeliac.org.uk/cost-gf-food.

We are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, spiralling energy costs and increasing uncertainty about the economy; many people are struggling. This is particularly true for people with coeliac disease who depend on access to gluten free staple products in order to treat their condition. It is critical that this is acknowledged, and the coeliac community is supported.

Historically gluten free staples have been available on prescription in recognition that the diet is the only treatment for the condition and is challenging to maintain for the reasons mentioned above. Whilst gluten free staple products are still available in line with national prescribing guidelines across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. **This is no longer the case across much of England including in my area.** Find out more here: Support on prescription, why it's needed: www.coeliac.org.uk/gf-food-prescriptions

In 2017 the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) carried out a review into the future of gluten free prescribing in England. The review was a substantial exercise that received an unprecedented number (almost 8,000) of responses from clinicians,

professional bodies and patients and resulted in the decision to retain access to gluten free bread and flour mixes on prescription. However crucially it left it to the discretion of local CCGs to set more restrictive policies. As a result, since July 2017, 31 areas limited prescriptions, many even citing the DHSC decision itself as justification. Not a single area has increased its provision as result of the review. Despite repeated reassurance that the impact of such policy change will be monitored, just one of the CCGs that undertook a policy change during this period has been able to evidence to Coeliac UK, any measures taken to monitor the impact on patient outcomes.

Today, in England, the ability of someone with coeliac disease to access much needed support is determined not by their need but by their postcode. This can't be right. With ~40% of ICBs potentially needing to standardise their areas gluten free prescribing policies in the future, it is crucial that the UK government offers clearer guidance on the importance of provision for the coeliac community, not least in the light of the current cost of living crisis.

With this in mind, please will you:

- *Call on the Department of Health & Social Care to remind local commissioners of the recognised ongoing importance of gluten free prescribing for people diagnosed with coeliac disease.*
- *Urge the local ICB to look again at gluten free prescribing in its area and ask what it's doing to support the coeliac community during the current cost of living crisis?*

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[MY NAME]

Further info on cost and importance of the gluten free diet:

- Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Complete replacement of gluten containing staple foods is not easy as these cereals are the main ingredients of many staple foods which constitute a significant proportion of the average UK diet.
- A gluten free loaf of bread is on average 4.3 times more expensive per 100g than a standard gluten containing loaf
- The cheapest gluten free loaf of bread is 7.2 times more expensive than the cheapest gluten containing loaf, weight for weight.
- You will pay on average double for gluten free staple substitutes like pasta, flour, bread rolls, cereals.
- A gluten free shopping basket can be as much as 20% more expensive than a standard food basket
- There are limited variety and budget options for all gluten free products which puts a disproportionate burden on those with the lowest incomes.
- To read Coeliac UK's full report 'The gluten free diet, what does it cost and why does it matter?' please visit: www.coeliac.org.uk/cost-gf-food

