

Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister
The Scottish Government
St Andrews House
2 Regent Road
Edinburgh, EH1 3DG

19th November 2021

Dear First Minister,

Please help low-income pensioners turn up the heat this winter – protecting the NHS, social care and saving lives

As domestic energy prices, cost of living, and inflation have risen considerably in recent months, pensioners on low and fixed incomes face a particularly challenging winter period. Inflation surged in October to the highest rate in almost 10 years at 4.2% - outstripping a future rise the State Pension.

Ensuring that those older people in Scotland on the lowest income have enough money to meet the increasing cost of heating their homes to a safe level will mean that illnesses such as pneumonia, influenza, stroke and heart attack could be avoided.

With our NHS and social care services under unprecedented strain, keeping people out of hospital by preventing illnesses should be a focus of the Scottish Government this winter.

On average, it costs more than £8,000 to treat a patient in hospital when admitted in an emergency. This does not include the extra costs which might be incurred by health and social care after discharge to support the patient with their recovery.

We believe that in order to protect the NHS, social care and save lives this winter, the Scottish Government should give every low-income pensioner in Scotland an extra £50 to help with the increased cost of heating their home.

This one-off preventative measure would work similarly to the devolved Cold Spell Heating Assistance which you will be administering from next year, but in this instance, it could be implemented in the same way as October's Low Income Pandemic Payment linked to Council Tax Reduction.

This would mean that many of the pensioners on the lowest income or living in poverty, of which there are 150,000 in Scotland, can better afford to heat their homes to a safe level, help to manage the medical conditions they live with, and be in better health – preventing the need for medical or hospital treatment.

We estimate that this measure would cost £6.65 million based on the number of older people in Scotland who receive Council Tax Reduction linked to Pension Credit.

When you consider the cost of medical treatment, if this preventative measure kept just 831 people out of hospital, less than 1% of the potential recipients, then it would pay for itself and result in better health outcomes.

A direct payment would have greater impact than people needing to apply to a fund, such as with the Winter Support Fund, as it removes the barriers, accessibility, and stigma we know only too well are linked with poverty and low income.

Enclosed is our briefing on this initiative with further information about this ask, background, why it is important, its cost and how it could be implemented, and how current spending commitments from the Scottish and UK Governments may not go as far as needed this winter.

For this to have the desired impact, we feel that low-income older people should be informed of such a measure in early December with payment in early January. This would give older people on the lowest incomes reassurance that they can turn up their heating when it is cold in the knowledge that the extra cost can be met.

I would be grateful for an early opportunity to discuss this measure. It is clear that further action is needed to protect the NHS and save lives this winter, and a modest investment which could prevent ill health in some of society's most vulnerable is one worth taking.

Yours sincerely



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CC: Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government; Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy; Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care; Minister for Equalities and Older People; Minister for Social Security and Local Government