



**Help to turn up the heat**

**The impact of rapidly rising  
energy bills on older people  
in Scotland**

**#TurnUpTheHeat**

**As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve people's lives and promote their rights and interests.**

We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

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**Our policy, communications and campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland. Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.**

**To discuss this report, or for more information, you can contact Age Scotland's policy team at [policy@agescotland.org.uk](mailto:policy@agescotland.org.uk) or 0333 323 2400.**

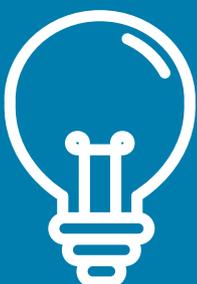


## Introduction

As energy prices spiral, most older people are worried about paying their energy bills now and in the months to come. Even before energy prices rose considerably last year, Age Scotland research found that these bills were cited as the biggest concern for older people who identified as feeling financially squeezed.<sup>[1]</sup>

Due to rising costs, more and more older people will be unable to afford to keep their homes warm and will be faced with making difficult choices to balance their household budgets. The situation is already urgent for many households, including the 218,000 older Scottish households estimated to be in fuel poverty, and it looks set to get worse as a result of the 54% rise in the energy price cap due from April.<sup>[2]</sup>

Without major interventions, rising energy bills, surging inflation and increased costs of living will push many more older households into fuel poverty, poorer health and financial insecurity.



**218,000**

older households  
live in fuel  
poverty

**116,000**

older households live  
in extreme fuel  
poverty

**150,000**

Scottish  
pensioners live  
in poverty

# Overview of our research

**In January 2022, Age Scotland carried out a snap survey of older people to find out more about how the energy crisis will impact them. Of the 331 people who responded, 94% reported that they were worried about the cost of their energy bills.**

There were 223 older people who shared further detailed information about their experiences and set out in their own words how the rise in prices will affect their daily lives and their worries for the future.

By sharing their words in this report, we hope that the Scottish and UK governments and local authorities gain a deeper understanding of the scale of the crisis facing people over 50 in Scotland.

## **Of the 223 people who shared further insights with us:**

- 10.4% were under 60, 14% were aged 60-65, 46.4% were aged 66-74 and 29.3% were over 75.
- 95% agreed with our proposal for a £50 payment to the lowest income pensioners to help with energy bills.
- Gas was by far the most commonly used main source of heating for respondents, at 76.2%. Electricity was the next most common at 15.7%, followed by oil (3.6%), LPG (1.3%), Air Source Heat Pump (1.8%) and Solid Fuel (1.3%).



## **Older people worried about the cost of their energy bills**

**Age Scotland Snap Energy Survey January 2022**



## Key Facts

- An estimated 218,000 older households live in fuel poverty – the equivalent of one third of Scotland’s older households.<sup>[3]</sup>
- 116,000 older households are living in extreme fuel poverty.<sup>[4]</sup>
- 55% of over 55s surveyed in Age Scotland’s National Housing Survey 2020 were unaware of the three Scottish Government schemes to assist with energy efficiency.<sup>[5]</sup>
- 63% of older households live in homes rated EPC Band D or below.<sup>[6]</sup>
- After housing costs, 150,000 pensioners in Scotland live in relative poverty – this is the equivalent of 14% of all pensioners.<sup>[7]</sup>

## What is fuel poverty?

In essence, fuel poverty is when a household cannot afford to pay its energy bills or must modify its energy usage to afford them. Under the legal definition in Scotland, a household is considered fuel poor if:

1) after housing costs are deducted, more than 10% of its net income is required to pay for reasonable fuel needs. If more than 20% of net income is required, the household is classed as being extremely fuel poor

2) after further adjustments are made to deduct childcare costs and any benefits received for a disability or care need, its remaining income is insufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living

# Recommendations

We're calling for the Scottish, UK, and local governments to take action to help older people, particularly those on the lowest incomes or with health conditions, afford their household energy bills and stay warm.

They should be proactive in exploring what more they can do to help, and not just rely on what has been done in the past or what is most straightforward to deliver.

## Scottish Government

- Develop further one-off payments to support people on the lowest incomes to mitigate against the drastic increase in energy bills and cost of living. Avoid using Council Tax bands for eligibility assessment as they are not an accurate measure of someone's financial situation.
- Improve public awareness of sources of support and funding for energy efficiency measures such as Home Energy Scotland.
- Implement a programme to identify, target and engage the least energy efficient homes, and those in fuel poverty, to help reduce future costs and mitigate the need for financial assistance. This could also be linked to the devolution of Low Income Winter Heating Assistance and ensuring the homes of recipients are assessed.
- Undertake nationwide promotion of the social security available to older people and support for people to make claims so that they can maximise their incomes. Ensure that the next national benefits uptake strategy includes substantial actions to support older people.
- Review the value of devolved social security payments to ensure they keep in line with inflation and the cost of living, increases in which are felt most by people on the lowest incomes or in poverty.

## UK Government

- Introduce a package of support which mitigates the whole price cap rise this April for lower income households. In its current form, the Chancellor's package does not provide sufficient targeted support. This can be best achieved by providing direct payments totalling £500 to people on the lowest incomes who are eligible for the Cold Weather Payment.

# Recommendations (continued)

## UK Government

- Do everything possible to ensure that everyone who is eligible for Pension Credit receives it. This benefit is the passport to a package of financial assistance that can help protect older people from rises in the cost of living.
- Longer term, work with Ofgem to consult on a new energy social tariff and legislate to extend the price cap beyond 2023.
- Consider redirecting its increased tax receipts from rising energy prices into better funding household energy efficiency and heating system improvements for those on the lowest incomes.
- Consider implementing a price cap or alternative protection for those off the gas grid. There are 417,000 households in Scotland who are not connected to mains gas and often rely on heating sources which are not protected by Ofgem's price cap such as liquified petroleum gas, coal and oil heating systems. These homes are disproportionately reflected in Scotland's rural and island communities, which already experience some of the highest rates of fuel poverty in the UK. Of the homes in Scotland not on mains gas, 112,000 are in fuel poverty, of which 80,000 experience extreme fuel poverty.

## Local Government

- Widely promote established local government support funds, including discretionary payments, to support people on low income and ensure that this includes non-digital formats and a variety of languages.
- Offer people a choice about how they receive financial support which is paid by or through councils, so they have better control over their own finances and budgeting. People on the lowest incomes are likely to prefer cash payments to credit and may only pay little to no Council Tax due to the social security entitlement they have.



## Older people and keeping warm

It's important for older people to be able to heat their homes not only for their health and wellbeing but for the upkeep and maintenance of their home.

Living in cold or damp conditions can put older people at increased risk of flu and other respiratory illness. It can also lead to raised blood pressure, which increases the likelihood of heart disease and stroke. Worrying about bills can also have a negative impact on mental wellbeing.

Having a home which is consistently cold can lead to degradation of the standard of building and could lead to problems such as damp developing. Unfortunately, many older people currently live in homes which are not energy efficient and can be hard to heat.

It is recommended that older people should keep their homes heated to between 18-21 degrees. If you are living with dementia you may need it to be even warmer.



**Find out more in our Warm and Well information guide. It is available for free at [www.age.scot/energy](http://www.age.scot/energy) or on 0800 12 44 222**



## What older people told us

In a snap survey of our supporters, over 300 older people told us how they felt about their energy bills this winter and what future increases would mean for them. We asked how rising energy prices will affect them, and how they would cope if their bills rose by 50% this year.

We have highlighted some of these responses and grouped them under a number of themes throughout this report.

## How rising energy bills affect them

Many older people reported that they would have to resort to turning off their heating or rationing its use – for instance by heating only one room or spending more time in bed – or cutting back on other essential purchases to afford their bills.

A large number of respondents said they were already seeing their monthly or quarterly bills rise, resulting in less disposable income. Others were worried about how they would manage health conditions and medical equipment. Of the people who filled in the survey, many said they were just above the income threshold for extra assistance such as Pension Credit.



## Cutting back on essentials

“...I will have to look for areas of spending where I can cut back even further even though as carer for my husband and sole wage earner, we already live on a very modest income and have little extra left over when the bills are paid.” – [Linda, Under 60](#)

“Difficult choice to be made between keeping warm and daily necessities.” – [Mary, 66-74](#)

“I am going to struggle to pay a lot more on energy...I eat as cheaply as possible, in order to have enough money for the energy bill!” – [Janice, 66-74](#)

“I have low income and live in a very remote isolated mountainous area. I can eat or keep semi warm. I am recently widowed, disabled and housebound.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“Need to consider what I will have to live without to pay them...Be more careful with buying food I need rather than treating myself from time to time. At a time when it is important to try and brighten one’s life I feel rising energy bills will result in life being worse for many elderly people as they are going to be even lonelier because they cannot afford to live comfortably.” – [Helen, 75+](#)

“...the price my energy company want me to pay is far too much to have to pay out each month so something has to go less food or less heat in the house.” – [Margaret, 75+](#)

“My husband is in a care home with fees rising yearly so I must be careful with expenses for necessities.” – [Anonymous, 75+](#)



## Concerns about affordability

“My house only has electricity and, currently, the bills are extremely high. Any increase will affect us. My husband is over 60 and retired, and I am disabled and work mostly from home, so it will be a real concern.” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

“I am in work on a good salary but they will still significantly erode my disposable income and they could become a major concern if I were to lose my job through the economic trials that lie ahead.” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

“I will struggle to pay as I'm at home all day and my children are too doing home learning college due to Covid.” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

“I have no extra money to pay for them.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)

“I live alone, so just the one income and I am just on a short-term contract and dread/am very concerned when unemployed again.” – [Lisa, under 60](#)

“The rising bills will definitely affect me because I do not have enough money coming in through my benefits to pay for them. I really don't know what to do.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)

“Will cause hardship as no extra money will be coming in to meet the energy rise.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)

“We have a Fixed income (Pensions) therefore price rises squeeze our small budget even more. If we can't afford the power costs then we can't heat the house.” – [Jean, 66-74](#)

“I am retired, live on my own in an all electric privately rented flat. I am on a fixed income. Maybe I'll need to go back to part time work at 68 years old !!!” – [Trevor, 66-74](#)

“It will bite into any savings we have.” – [Liz, 66-74](#)

“My last bill went from £99 for one month gas and electric to £198. This month I'm really scared and for the coming months which are generally colder.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“Been told direct debit will double after end of current agreement on 22 January.” – [Brian, 75+](#)

“Can't afford it costs too much already.” – [Anonymous, 75+](#)

“Dramatically increase costs beyond our means.” – [Lawson and Margaret, 75+](#)

“I pay a heating charge directly to my housing (Sheltered) provider by direct debit. Because of this I don't qualify for Warm Home Discount and have no control over how I manage the heating or lighting to my flat.” – [Mary, 75+](#)

“Very low income only small private pension and had 6 years added to state pension age with little notice to prepare so a rising energy bill will be a huge part of my limited income.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)



## Rationing energy use

“Will have to live without heating now.” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

“I only work part time so I will be financially worse off and am not turning my heating on much at all.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)

“Will need to turn heating thermostat down and wear more layers of clothing.” – [Doreen, 66-74](#)

“I am spending about £40 a week on electricity at the moment trying to keep warm. I am living in my living room because I cannot afford to heat the rest of the house.” – [Gerald, 66-74](#)

“It will mean turning the heat off more and showering every second day.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“Can’t afford to put my heating on, sit in the cold or go to bed really early, which doesn’t help my mobility.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“Makes me scared to heat my flat as I would like.” – [Anne, 66-74](#)

“I live alone and afraid to put heating up to increase bills.” – [Mary 75+](#)



## Managing health conditions

“Cannot heat the house and I have Asthma. We are already in severe arrears and worried sick! I suffer depression too and living in this cold house is making me feel very down. Things just seem to go from bad to worse! Need help if I can get any.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)

“I am capped due to supplier going bust. Moved to British Gas. Currently pay £180 pm as my husband and I have medical issues expecting another huge increase in April.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)

“My wife and I are on the basic pension I also receive Personal Independent Payment as I suffer from a Spinal Cord Injury I need the heating on most of the day, I dread what the energy prices could rise to this winter.” – [John, 66-74](#)

“It will have a serious effect on my quality of life. I have Long Covid and poor circulation.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“I’m on oxygen 24/7 and the concentrators are running day and night. I have 2 and they burn 3kw per hour each!” – [Anonymous, 75+](#)

“I have an uncle of 94, he has Alzheimer’s and is at home all day . His heating bills will increase considerably which concerns him and me!, despite getting a government payout annually. It doesn’t cover the increase.” – [Anonymous, 75+](#)



## How would you cope if your energy bills increased by 50% this year?

Even for people who said they were currently able to manage the cost of their energy bills, nearly all respondents were worried about coping with a possible 50% rise. Some respondents referred to future or alternative heating options and decarbonisation, highlighting barriers to this including expense and lack of awareness – something which previous Age Scotland research on housing has highlighted.<sup>[8]</sup>

Gas was the most commonly used source of energy among respondents, with 76.2% using it as their primary heating source. Only 1.8% of people used an Air Source Heat Pump as their primary heating source, and no one who responded used a Ground Source Heat Pump.

There was a real sense many people would struggle to afford substantial increases in costs and would either be forced to use up savings, rely on credit cards, or go into debt (for some, for the first time). Many respondents were concerned about how the cost of living continues to rise while their income remained fixed.



## Debt and unaffordability

“We would go into debt (never ever been in debt).” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

“I could not, would have to eat less, go to food bank.” – [Lorraine, 60-65](#)

“I don't know, I'm worried thinking about it. I don't get my State Pension until I'm 66.” – [Audrey, 60-65](#)

“I am counted as disabled, and my wife my full time carer. We cannot increase our income. A 50% increase will be about £1600 pa making a total of about £4800 pa or £400 pm. Something will need to give.” – [Anonymous, 60-65](#)

“It will be very difficult to make ends meet since I'm retired.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“I do not know how I will cope...but I do know the worry will make my depression worse.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“Can't pay it. I have to be warm so I'd go into debt.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)

“I wouldn't, it's a death sentence.” – [Mary, 66-74](#)

“Not very well as I am now on my own as widowed last year so less money coming in but still the same amount of heat needed whether 2 or 1 persons in household.” – [Margaret, 75+](#)

“With great difficulty. As pensioners my wife and I are already on a very tight budget.” – [Brian, 66-74](#)

“Have to resort to credit cards.” – [Heather, 75+](#)



## Going without heating

“Probably have to go without, risking health complications.” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

“Stay in bed longer...Can't reduce heating much more than I'm doing.” – [Angela, 60-65](#)

“Would have to lower standard of living and hopefully not become unwell.” – [Patrick, 60-65](#)

“Will be monitoring heating usage and endeavour to use it less. I'm working so can afford to stay warm but I'm very concerned for older people on low and fixed income, particularly those who are not so mobile and are sitting a great deal and will feel the cold.” – [Anonymous under 60](#)

“I will have to decide what my priorities are – food or warmth.” – [Anonymous, 75+](#)



## Lifestyle changes and cutting back on spending

“I would have to look for areas where I can cut back on spending and maybe even consider working more hours which I know would be detrimental to my health and wellbeing.” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

“This is the worry as I may have to cut down on food.” – [Rose, 60-65](#)

“Will need to think of alternative meals...at times just having soup instead of a full cooked meal...cutting down on food shopping.” – [Doreen, 66-74](#)

“There would have to be major changes to the lives of my wife and myself: e.g. cut radiators in two rooms, shower every second day, reduce clothes washing by machine and more.” – [Patrick, 75+](#)

“I'd need to make some sacrifices on food, I hardly use the car and have remained shielded to avoid catching flu or Covid - I already put on extra layers to keep the heating bill as low as I can.” – [Anonymous, 66-74](#)



## Alternative heating options

“We would have to consider the costs of upgrading to a more efficient system, but are limited as we cannot get gas where we live, and alternative sources such as heat pumps are incredibly expensive.” – [Anonymous, under 60](#)

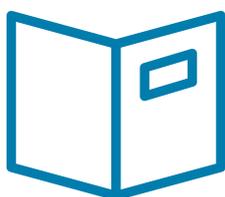
“We should be moving away from gas sooner and force them [energy providers] to fund retrofit insulation and energy efficiency and bring forward sustainable heating solutions using renewable electricity, green hydrogen or air /ground source heat pumps.” – [Tim, under 60](#)

# How Age Scotland can help

If you are concerned about your energy bills, or just want to know more about how to save money and reduce your costs, Age Scotland is here to help:



**Call the Age Scotland helpline for a benefit entitlement check or to speak to our energy rights advisor on 0800 12 44 222**



**Get a free copy of Age Scotland's Warm and Well information guide at [www.age.scot/energy](http://www.age.scot/energy) or by calling our helpline on 0800 12 44 222**



**Join one of our free online energy workshops to learn more about your home energy use, supporting you to stay warm and save money on your bills at [www.age.scot/energyworkshops](http://www.age.scot/energyworkshops)**

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**[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**

**Helpline: 0800 12 44 222**

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