**[Ending the need for food banks: a draft national plan](https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/)**

Scottish Government

January 2022

**The consultation seeks views on the Scottish Government's vision and approach to ending the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity.**

1. **Do you think that the approach outlined is consistent with the vision to end poverty and the need for food banks? Is there anything else you think should be included?**

**Yes**

The Scottish Government’s outlined approach focusing initially on prevention and in cases of emergencies or crises, response, is welcome. We agree that inadequate income must be tackled as one of the causes of food insecurity.

The Scottish Government’s continued commitment to strengthen workers’ incomes by embedding Fair Work policies is welcome. Over 50s make up one third of Scotland’s workforce, and there are twice as many people over 65 in employment in Scotland today compared to 10 years ago. However, evidence shows that older workers who lose their jobs are less likely to find a new one, or one at a similar level, than those who are younger than them.[[1]](#footnote-2) Unemployment in later life has an immediate impact on earnings, National Insurance contributions, and pension savings, and risks contributing to levels of pensioner poverty. The Scottish Government must continue to ensure older workers can benefit from the Fair Work agenda and stay in work for as long as they wish to.

Social security for people of pension age is often overlooked in the context of the multiple inadequacies and complexities of working-age benefits and benefits for children. Across the board, we want to see more focus on pensioner poverty from the Scottish Government and efforts to maximise benefits uptake by over 50s. The Scottish Government has the opportunity with the devolution of new benefits to expand eligibility criteria so more people can benefit and be lifted out of poverty or increase the very low income they live on. For instance, it could expand the Scottish Carer’s Assistance eligibility criteria so more unpaid carers, many of whom are over 50, receive it, helping to boost this group’s financial situation. The Scottish Government also has a duty to promote the uptake of benefits which are administered by other agencies, and could look to explore automation, joining up, and other ways of increasing take-up across the social security landscape in Scotland. Furthermore, it is essential to go beyond the people we know are “in the system” and have identified themselves as needing support. The barriers people face to claiming what they are entitled to are well documented and stigma surrounding the use of foodbanks can also be difficult to overcome, so ensuring that there is a relentless effort to build awareness of the support available and making the way for people to engage with it as frictionless as possible will mean that more people who need support get it.

It is clear that food bank use is not a long-term solution to the issue of food insecurity caused by financial pressures. In terms of measures focused on responses to emergency and crisis situations, ensuring that joined-up, local, and holistic support and advice is available is vital – and in many cases, these forms of support exist already in communities dealing with food insecurity. Advice options must retain the social and holistic aspect provided by many food banks which allow older people to come in for a chat and enable support workers to pick up on other areas they may need assistance with and signpost to other services in the community. Households without access to the internet must also be able to access support services in a way which suits them – whether that be face to face, by telephone or paper and printed information. Translations, BSL, Braille, Large Print and Easy Read options should be available. Interventions that maintain dignity and cultural appropriateness are important, as is understanding the difference between urban and rural needs, and the importance of social interaction around the eating of food.

Finally, we welcome the acknowledgment that an intersectional approach is important because some households and individuals will experience a combination of barriers to accessing food and other essentials.

1. **Do you think that the actions underway will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?**

**Yes**

1. **Do you think that the suggestions for what more we plan to do will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?**

**Yes**

1. **Is there anything else that you think should be done with the powers we have at a national or local level to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?**

As the current cost of living crisis makes clear, many Scottish households are under sustained financial pressure. There is a risk that households worried about the adequacy of their budgets may cut back or go without heating, food, or other essentials which can contribute to and exacerbate poor physical and mental health. Age Scotland recently carried out a survey to find out about the impact of energy price rises on older people. Many respondents are reporting that they are cutting back on heating and other essentials such as food. Older people on low and fixed incomes have little protection against surging prices and if food price inflation outstrips general inflation levels, and an increase in income, then the challenges they face become greater. The Scottish Government must look to mitigate this and support people where it can. It has demonstrated that it can go beyond a rigid framework of set social security payments if it chooses to do so. The Low Income Pandemic Payment made in October 2021 to households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction demonstrated this. The Scottish Government can and should do much more to address the high levels of pensioner poverty in Scotland, but there is very little mention of it, or of substantial actions it proposes to reduce it.

1. **Is there anything else that you think should be considered in the development of this plan?**

It can be difficult to find data on the number of older people engaging with food bank services. As many food banks operate on the basis of formal referrals, people who are not in receipt of benefits but still on a low income can fall through the gaps. Additionally, research suggests many older people feel stigma, shame, and embarrassment at the thought of accepting “charity” from food banks. Others may self-exclude and decide to leave food for others who may be hungrier, such as children. On the other hand, some older people may be more likely to use the services of a food bank than ask friends or family for help if they are struggling, due to embarrassment. Anecdotally, it is likely that community-based food initiatives, such as community meals, community larders and food sharing programmes are likely more appealing to older people and less stigmatising, but there is comparatively less data on these than food banks.

While older people generally are at a lower risk of food insecurity compared to younger people, older people experiencing financial difficulties may face additional physical barriers to accessing essential supplies and services, especially those with limited support networks and digital literacy. Food insecurity experienced by older people can be driven by various factors in addition to financial pressures, including reduced mobility, social isolation, bereavement, dementia, and frailty – many of which have been laid bare by the pandemic. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, older people, their carers, and families told us they were concerned about access to food and struggling to get basic supplies. And in 2020, a woman in her 90s was the first person in Scotland to die of starvation in over 20 years. This is desperately sad.

A survey of older people conducted by Age Scotland in May 2020 found that 32% of respondents struggled to get food from a supermarket in person, and 39% struggled to get an online delivery. Although this was during an unprecedented national emergency, it demonstrates the practical and physical barriers many older people face to access food. As such, more practical forms of support to shop, cook and eat must be available for people who need this.

Malnutrition is closely linked to food insecurity and often overlooked, but it impacts on older peoples’ health, wellbeing, and quality of life. It is estimated that 1 in 10 people over 65 are at risk of or suffering from malnutrition. Older people can be at higher risk of malnutrition due to issues like a decreased sense of taste and smell, poor appetite, and dental problems. Other pressures in peoples’ lives, such as loneliness and isolation, can also affect how well they eat. As Scotland’s population ages, it’s important to view reducing food insecurity and improving older people’s health as interconnected issues, particularly when the health costs of malnutrition and other poor health outcomes are considered.

**Want to find out more?**

As Scotland’s national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older 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.

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.

**Further information**

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1. <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/factsheet/2017/06/partnership-action-for-continuing-employment-clients-over-50/documents/pace-services-experiences-clients-aged-50-pdf/pace-services-experiences-clients-aged-50-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/PACE%2BServices%2B-%2Bexperiences%2Bof%2Bclients%2Baged%2B50%252B.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)