

Save Free TV Licences for the over 75s

May 2019

Introduction

Since 2000 any individual aged 75 or over has been entitled to a concessionary TV licence. In 2015 the UK Government decided to transfer the costs of the concessionary licence to the BBC as part of a wider agreement regarding the licence fee. The current concession arrangement will cease in 2020 and Parliament has given the BBC the duty to consult on the future arrangements of the concession which will be funded by the BBC rather than the government.

This is despite the fact maintaining free TV licences for over-75s was a 2017 Conservative manifesto commitment.

The BBC launched a 12 week consultation on the future of the licence fee which closed on 12th February 2019. The BBC is expected to make a decision on the future of the licence fee in summer 2019.

Age Scotland's position

Alongside our sister charity Age UK, who has led the 'Switched Off' campaign, we believe free TV licences for over 75s is a form of welfare policy that the BBC should never have agreed to take responsibility for. By removing or changing the benefit eligibility in any way will negatively impact the lives of many older people, especially those on low and fixed incomes.

The agreement made by the BBC and the UK Government was done with no public

Key Points

Over 75s in Scotland

There are more than 442,000 over 75s in Scotland. By 2041 there will be a 79% increase in the number of people in this age group.

Conservative Manifesto

Maintaining free TV licences for over-75s was a 2017 commitment in the Conservative's manifesto.

Pensioner Poverty

Our research has found that **four in ten** people over 50 feel financially squeezed, and that six in ten pensioners who live alone find it difficult to pay their fuel bill.

Loneliness

Age Scotland found that **100,000 older people in Scotland** feel lonely all or most of the time, and that **about half of over 75s say that their main form of company is the TV or a pet.**

Digital Exclusion

More than half of over 75's do not use the internet and rely far more heavily on television for news and as source of information than younger groups.

consultation and **we believe they should take back responsibility for funding the licence for those aged 75 and over.**

It is not appropriate for a public broadcaster to be making decisions about who should be entitled to concessions which in reality is part of the country's welfare state.

Many thousands of pensioners already struggle to make ends meet. Age Scotland's Money Matters Project found that many older people in Scotland are financially struggling, with **four in ten people over the age of fifty reporting that they feel financially squeezed**, and Age Scotland's survey on the housing needs of older people found that **six in ten pensioners who live alone reporting they have difficulty paying their fuel bill**. Having another new bill to pay could put many below the poverty line or further into poverty. Older people over 75 who may very well have paid into the system all their adult life shouldn't have to make the choice between their TV or another utility bill.

This financial strain can also be further exasperated by any disability or long term health conditions that they may be living with. The proportion of adults with a long-term limiting health condition or disability is increasing, as the population ages –more than four fifths of people aged 85 years and over have reported that their daily lives are limited by a long-term health problem of disability.¹ This is important as there are numerous extra costs associated with having a disability or long-term condition such as taxis to medical appointments, specialist equipment and receiving support and care.

We know that about **half of over 75s say that their main form of company is the TV or a pet**. Our research has found that **100,000 older people in Scotland feel lonely all or most of the time, and with nearly 7 out of 10 people over 75 not using the Internet, TV helps them stay connected**.² For older people who may live on their own, struggle to leave their homes due to mobility or who have limited support systems, a friendly face on the TV can brighten their day and improve their quality of life.

We demand that the UK Government takes back the funding and administration of the free TV licences scheme - and lets the BBC focus on its job of being a national broadcaster.

What can you do?

Whilst we are waiting to hear the results of the BBC's short consultation, we need to continue to clearly and urgently make the case for the importance of the continuation of the concession to the BBC and the Government. You can help us to do this by:

- Raising the issue in Parliament, speaking in the opposition day debate on 8th May, through a PQ, Westminster Hall Debate or Adjournment Debate.

¹ <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/People/Equality/Equalities/DataGrid/Disability/DisabPopMig>

² <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2016-scottish-household-survey/pages/7/>

- Tweet your support for this campaign, using the hashtag #SwitchedOff, saying that you agree with @agescotland and believe over 75s should keep the free TV licence.

Get in touch with us

If you have any questions or would like future information please contact Adam Stachura, Head of Policy and Communications, at adam.stachura@agescotland.org.uk or 0333 323 2400

Want to find out more about our work?

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

Contact the Age Scotland Policy, Communications and Campaigns team:

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