

Parliamentary Briefing

Rising energy prices and supporting older people this winter

December 2021

Background

In England, nearly 1 million older households are living in fuel poverty. With energy prices increasing, tens of thousands more are likely to join them this winter. At Age UK, we know many older people will be choosing whether they can afford to eat or heat. Older people often have a greater need for energy compared to other age groups – they feel the cold more, often have health conditions made worse by the cold and many live in homes that are hard to heat. We are urging the Government to provide a £50 one-off payment to those eligible for Cold Weather Payment and to double fund the Household Support Fund this winter, and to introduce an energy social tariff for the future.

What Age UK wants to see

- **Everyone eligible for Cold Weather Payment (CWP) should receive a one-off payment of £50 to help with their energy bills this winter.**
- **Existing CWP payments should also be expedited to ensure that payments in arrears arrive no later than seven working days after a period of cold weather.**
- **The Household Support Fund should be doubled to provide £1billion of funding so fewer vulnerable households are forced to make the difficult choice between heating and eating this winter.**
- **The Government must also do everything possible to ensure that everyone who is eligible for Pension Credit receives it, as it's the passport to a package of support that can protect an older person from entering fuel poverty.**
- **Longer term, the Government and Ofgem must introduce improved social tariffs into the energy market.**

Fuel Poverty and older people

High energy prices, poor housing and ill health can make colder periods a dangerous time for many older people. This year poses a particular challenge, with the price cap rise, inflation expected to hit 4%, and an unprecedented number of energy suppliers going bust. The end of furlough and the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift will also affect many families.

Older people are at high risk from the health and wellbeing impact of fuel poverty and account for a higher proportion of excess winter deaths. The cold can exacerbate health conditions, particularly for older people, including respiratory illnesses which put people at greater risk of Covid. With significant pressure on the NHS this winter, it is more vital than ever that older people feel able to keep their heating on and do not ration their energy use.

Older people spend more time at home. Retired households have the highest median fuel costs and the highest fuel poverty gap compared to households of other employment statuses. This means the amount of money which needs to come off energy bills to lift people out of fuel poverty is highest for retired consumers. Many older people also spend longer at home and are more likely to live with health conditions which require more heating or energy use, such as for dialysis or oxygen. These factors can make older households more vulnerable to the impacts of rising energy costs and fuel poverty.

The reality older people face this winter is far more challenging than predicted. Without additional support we run the risk that the fuel poverty rate for older people will increase for the first time since 2015.

Around 1.4 million older people in England are already fuel poor, with price increases expected to push tens of thousands more into fuel poverty this spring.

Older people have told us

We regularly hear from older people who will be impacted by rises in their energy bills.

Anita: *"I will have to ration how often I can afford to have the heating on. When it was cold recently, I put extra clothes on and put the central heating on for one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening."*

Litsa: *"Being on a pension and with escalating costs of energy and general price rises I am concerned that I will not be able to afford to heat my home adequately and eat healthily."*

John: *"I will cancel my carer, I prefer to be warm and dirty than clean and cold."*

Sylvia: *"I am so worried. I will have to cut down on the everyday items I need to afford to keep my house warm. I am 90 years old and feel the cold terribly and need to have the heating on constantly. I fear I may not be able to have it on because I am worried about the amount it's going to cost me once I receive my next bill."*

Get in touch with us

If you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss how you can help older people who are in fuel poverty please contact Roshni Mistry, Senior Public Affairs Officer, at roshni.mistry@ageuk.org.uk.