

# winter warmth services

Impact report  
2011–2014



# The effect of cold weather on the health of older people

**Exposure to the cold can have a devastating impact on the health of older people. Every winter 25,000<sup>i</sup> older people die needlessly, as a result of cold weather in the UK.**

The UK's excess winter death rate is much higher than other colder countries. Research suggests that cold weather morbidity is preventable and a result of thermally inefficient houses that are difficult to keep warm.<sup>ii</sup>

Cold weather causes a massive spike in associated health problems; it increases the incidence of heart attacks, strokes, respiratory disease, pneumonia and depression. It also worsens older people's arthritis and increases the risk of falls and injuries.<sup>iii</sup> GP consultations for respiratory infections can increase by as much as 19 per cent for every 1°C drop in mean temperature below 5°C.<sup>iv</sup> Age UK has estimated that the cost of the cold to the NHS in England is £1.36 billion per year.<sup>v</sup>

For the 4.5 million older people who are said to be in fuel poverty,<sup>vi</sup> winter months also bring anxiety about escalating energy bills and the struggle to keep their homes warm. Yet many older people are largely unaware of the link between poor heating conditions, exposure to cold and the potentially devastating effects on their health.<sup>vii</sup>

Excess winter deaths are an important public health issue in the UK. The Public Health Outcomes Framework<sup>viii</sup> proposed reducing excess winter mortality as one of the outlined outcomes for 'preventing premature mortality.' One of the key recommendations recently published by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence<sup>ix</sup> as part of their guidelines on reducing excess winter deaths, is that a one-stop referral service should be in place for people living in a cold home and that health and social care professionals need to play a key role in identifying older people at risk.

## Our winter warmth services



MORE MONEY



BETTER HOUSING



SMARTER BEHAVIOUR

'We have spoken with numerous people for whom heating vs. eating is still a reality in 21st century Britain.'

Age UK Coventry

## Age UK's winter warmth services

### Problem

- **25,000** excess winter deaths every year
- **4.5 million** older people in fuel poverty
- **£1.36bn** cost of cold homes to NHS
- UK housing stock energy inefficient
- **£5 billion** benefits go unclaimed every year

### Interventions

1. Benefit entitlement checks to maximise older people's income
2. Home energy checks to help older people stay warm in their homes

### Outcomes

- Older people have enough income to afford to heat their homes
- Older people take steps to save energy and keep warm and well
- Older people are less likely to experience cold-related illness

### Long-term aim

- Older people lifted out of fuel poverty
- Reduced number of excess winter deaths
- Reduction to hospital admissions/readmissions
- Reduced cost to NHS



**25,000** older people die each year as a result of the cold weather



Cold homes cost the NHS **£1.36 billion** per year

### Who the report is for

*This report highlights the positive outcomes and value of Age UK's winter warmth services which help older people to stay warm and well in winter. It is aimed at commissioners, health and social care practitioners, voluntary organisations and housing and energy suppliers, all of whom may be able to contribute towards preventing older people from suffering from cold weather.*

## Age UK's winter warmth services at a glance



**£6.3 million**

funding received between July 2011 and March 2014



**71,433**

older people supported to stay warm and well in winter



**£26.31**

identified for older people for every £1 invested<sup>1</sup>



**63,513**

benefit entitlement sessions delivered



**£71,997,693**

extra benefits identified



**£2,659.80**

extra benefits identified per client<sup>2</sup>



**15,969**

households supported with energy efficiency equipment and advice



**76,454**

pieces of energy efficiency equipment installed



**£920,227**

savings made in fuel bills per year, an average of £56 per household<sup>3</sup>

'I was relieved that my problems were solved so quickly. The extra money has made life a bit easier and I am now employing a cleaner to help me.'



1. Figures based on services delivered between September 2013 and March 2014.

2. As note 1.

3. As note 1.

# 1. Benefit entitlement sessions to maximise older people's income

An estimated £5 billion of means tested benefits goes unclaimed every year.<sup>x</sup> At a time of increasing household bills, older people are prioritising their money over their health. Increasing older people's income gives them more money to spend on heating their homes, without the fear of getting into debt.

## How Age UK can help

Age UK delivers high-quality information and advice sessions on benefit entitlements that older people may be entitled to, and helps them to complete and submit application forms.

Checks are delivered on a one-to-one basis by advisors who assess the financial situation and specific needs of each older person.

Advice can be delivered over the telephone, but a large proportion is delivered face-to-face, and often in the security of their own homes. Having a trusted advisor to assist with completing forms makes the process smoother, less stressful and leads to a higher success rate.

Our research shows that the top three items older people spent their additional income on were:

- Utility bills (50%).
- Keeping their home adequately warm (48%).
- Practical help at home (44%).

After receiving help from Age UK:

- 70% felt less stressed and/or anxious.
- 65% are now better able to pay bills.
- 63% felt happier and more contented.

Once an older person has made contact with Age UK, they can then be made aware of the range of services that are available. Last year, a wide range of referrals were made to a variety of services depending on the individual needs of the older person including: help at home, gardening, befriending, falls awareness, community transport and digital inclusion.

'Without the help and support of Age UK, we would have lost the house. We did not know who to turn to.'

**63,513**

benefit entitlement checks

**£71,997,693**

extra benefits identified

**£2,659.80**

average amount of extra benefits identified per person<sup>4</sup>

**40,517**

older people helped

**£50 per hour**

cost of service

(This covers up to 1 hour 30 minutes including time for advisors to write up the case notes)

**£34.88**

identified for older people for every £1 invested<sup>5</sup>

## Benefits advisor, Age UK Coventry

*'The lady was feeling very anxious and depressed, suffering from panic attacks and fearing she would have to go into a home.'*

## Mrs Brookbank, Age UK Nottingham



### Mrs Brookbank's situation

Mrs Brookbank is 76, and lives alone following the recent death of her husband. Mr Brookbank had always managed their finances, so when he passed away, she was struggling to make ends meet as she had lost her husband's income and just remained on a State Pension of £54.00

per week. She was stressed and anxious and whilst visiting her GP, a fellow patient advised her to contact Age UK Nottingham.

### How Age UK were able to help

Age UK Nottingham contacted The Pension Service on her behalf, which led to an immediate increase in income to £180.22 per week. They then contacted her late husband's ex-employer, which resulted in her being awarded an extra £143.88 per week of Occupational Pension. Mrs Brookbank was also referred to a specialist counselling service to support her through her grieving process, as she was feeling socially isolated and had lost a purpose in life.

She now feels confident and empowered to manage her affairs and has since joined a social group, which she looks forward to each week.

4. Figures based on services delivered between September 2013 and March 2014.

5. As note 4.



## 2. Home energy checks to help older people stay warm in their homes

**15,969**

older households supported

**£920,227**

estimated fuel bill savings per year

**£56**

average fuel bill savings per household<sup>6</sup>

**76,454**

energy efficiency measures installed

**55kg**

estimated reduction in CO2 per household<sup>7</sup>

**£110 for 2 hours**

cost of service  
(this includes labour and equipment)

Many older people live in old properties that are cold, damp and draughty. Academic research has shown that interventions to improve the energy efficiency of households result in a diverse range of positive health impacts.<sup>xi</sup>

### How Age UK can help

Age UK is able to offer bespoke home energy checks through the existing local handyman services. The check supports older people who are struggling to keep their homes warm or pay their energy bills, by installing energy saving equipment and providing advice on appropriate and reasonable usage of energy, without compromising on health.

The energy efficiency equipment includes: cylinder jackets, insulation foam, draught excluders, door and letterbox seals, heat reflecting radiator panels, a range of low energy light bulbs, cold alarms, socket timers and night lights.

To build on the advice given, two Age UK information guides are given to each household, relating to energy efficiency and income maximisation, *Save Energy, Pay Less* and *Winter Wrapped Up*.

Visiting the older person in their home provides a unique opportunity to assess the client's general wellbeing and refer them onto other Age UK services and external organisations. Many referrals have been made to trusted traders to carry out jobs like double glazing, or to health care professionals including occupational therapists and physiotherapists, and also to organisations that deal with health and safety issues, such as the Fire Brigade and Safe Home service. This holistic approach means that problems which could have gone unnoticed can be identified early to help older people remain safe, well and independent in their own homes.

### Handyperson, Age UK Wolverhampton

*'Whilst in the house I identified a number of other things that needed sorting out. The house was very messy, there were large objects that were a major falls hazards, and there was a broken tap and peeling plaster. I was able to fix the tap and sort out the plaster, I also contacted the council to get him help with general cleaning of the home which he was no longer able to do for himself.'*

'I have noticed a significant difference in my home. No longer can I hear the wind whistling through the door and it does feel warmer.'



6. Figures based on services delivered between September 2013 and March 2014.

7. As note 6.



## Our model of delivery for the home energy check



### Assessment

Carrying out a thorough and bespoke assessment of their insulation, heating and hot water system, and usage of appliances.



### Equipment

Installing small practical energy efficiency equipment free of charge.



### Advice

Giving bespoke advice and disseminating information guides relating to energy efficiency and income maximisation, and driving behaviour change.

### Meet Mr Watson, Age UK West Cumbria



*'The place is keeping lovely and warm with what you've done. I am really grateful for the interest all the people at Age UK took.'*

#### Mr Watson's situation

Mr Watson is 70 and lives alone. He suffers from arthritis in his hands and particularly feels the cold, some every day tasks can be difficult due to his condition.

#### How Age UK were able to help

The handyman identified a number of issues on the first visit, his heating and water controls were wrongly set and he could not close several doors because of the stiff handles. He also had no shower attachment which meant he struggled to wash properly.

The handyman adjusted the water and heating controls, installed new door handles to enable easier closing, and also fitted reflective radiator foils, a shower head and shower riser.

Mr Watson now appears more confident in his ability to manage alone. Everyday tasks such as getting in and out of his house and washing have become much easier, his house is warmer and his energy bills are reduced.

## Notes

- i Total figure of 24,430 excess winter deaths in 2010/11, Age UK figures based on aggregated excess winter mortality data from England and Wales (ONS, November 2011), Scotland (GROS, October 2011) and Northern Ireland (NISRA, November 2011).
- ii Rudge et al (2005) Excess winter morbidity among older people at risk of cold homes: a population-based study in a London borough. *Journal of Public Health*.
- iii Chief Medical Officer (2009) Annual Report.
- iv Gascoigne, C., Morgan, K., Gross, H. & Goodwin, J. (2010) Reducing the Health Risks of Severe Winter Weather among Older People in the United Kingdom: An evidence-based intervention', *Ageing and Society*, 30(2): 275-297.
- v Age UK (2012) *The Cost of Cold*, London.
- vi As note v.
- vii Lloyd, J. (2013), Cold Enough: Excess Winter Deaths, Winter Fuel Payments and the UK's problem with the cold, Strategic Society Centre, London.
- viii Department of Health (2012) Healthy lives, healthy people: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency'. Public Health Outcomes Paper.
- ix National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2014) Public Health draft guidance. Excess winter deaths and morbidity and the health risks associated with cold homes.
- x Department of Work and Pensions (2012) *Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-up in 2009/10*.
- xi Maidment, C., Jones, C., Webb, T., Hathway, E., Gilbertson, J. (2013) The impact of household energy efficiency measures on health: A meta-analysis. The University of Sheffield, Energy Policy.

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# Age UK supports a network of 170 local Age UK's across England.

The Age UK network also includes Age Cymru, Age NI and Age Scotland. Each Age UK is an independent charity. Over the last three years, the winter warmth services have been delivered by Age UK and Age Cymru partners.

**If you would like more information**  
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