

What older people are looking for from the Emergency budget

Age UK Parliamentary Briefing

September 2022

Age UK's position

Age UK is pleased and relieved by the announcement of the Energy Price Guarantee (EPG), which will provide valuable assistance to older people worried about their fuel bills. However, it is essential that there is additional targeted support for those on low incomes or who are otherwise vulnerable; robust plans to ensure no one misses out on the support from the EPG and Energy Bill Support Scheme (as some older people currently are); and a commitment to support charities for longer than just 6 months.

Winter is on the horizon and brings with it even greater demands that threaten to push the health and care system to breaking point. Immediate certainty about further short and medium-term funding is urgently needed.

Summary

A funding package is needed now to shore up social care services, in particular homecare and increase the supply of services that enable older people to leave hospital and be cared for at home. This won't be achieved without more support to tackle the workforce crisis in social care. Care homes need longer term certainty and support with energy costs – this could be achieved by giving them domestic status so the EPG can protect them. At a minimum, care homes should be considered a vulnerable industry requiring support after the six month period expires.

We also need to stabilise and expand the sort of services and support that help people who are vulnerable in winter to stay safe and well. Older people are at particular risk of avoidable hospital admissions through, falls, common infections like UTIs and seasonal illnesses – a lot of this is preventable if we can support people to stay well nourished, well hydrated, warm, physically active and socially connected through the winter months

Cost of Living

While the Government's proposed price cap freeze comes as welcome relief to many, from October the typical annual energy bill will still rise by over a quarter 27% to £2,500. Even with the cap freeze, 29% (2.8m) of older households in England will be in fuel stress from October, compared to just 10% only a year ago. That is an additional 1.8 million older households spending a tenth or more of their post-tax income on energy to maintain an adequate standard of warmth.

What is needed from the emergency budget?

- Provide a package of targeted support to comprehensively mitigate October's 27% price cap rise for the most vulnerable households.
- Deliver equivalent provision to the price cap freeze to households relying on alternative heating fuels not protected by the cap (e.g. oil, coal, bottled gas).
- Ensure comparable provision is provided for all residential households regardless of how they pay for their energy – including households relying on a commercial supply contract (e.g. park homes) and businesses which operate as residential dwellings (e.g. care homes).
- Work quickly to deliver equivalent benefits of the price cap freeze to Northern Ireland.

- Introduce a social tariff which discounts energy bills for those most in need, automatically enrolls eligible households, is mandatory for all suppliers, and complements, rather than replaces, existing consumer protections.
- Provide a radical increase in household energy efficiency grants for those on the lowest incomes to insulate them against spiralling prices.
- Protect frontline charity services by delivering ongoing focused support after the business support element of the price cap freeze expires after six months.
- Extend domestic status to care homes so the EPG can protect them. At a minimum, care homes should be considered a vulnerable industry requiring support after the six month period expires.

Social care

The struggles to access social care, difficulties sourcing appropriate care close to home, funding challenges and long delays in receiving assessments and reviews are now common if not universal experiences of people with care needs. Delayed discharge from hospital is leaving many older people languishing in hospital for weeks or even months after they are fit to leave, often resulting in irreversible deconditioning. Urgent action is needed from the new Government to shore up social care services, as rising costs pile further pressure on a sector already grappling with a major workforce crisis.

[Figures for 2021/22](#) show that the assessment for a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard (DoLS) backlog has grown by 4% to an estimated 124,145 uncompleted cases. Only 20% of standard applications were completed within the statutory timeframe of 21 days, with the average time to complete an application being 153 days. The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) procedure is designed to protect your rights if the care or treatment you receive in a hospital or care home means you are, or may become, deprived of your liberty, and you lack mental capacity to consent to those arrangements. The delays are leaving thousands unlawfully detained.

What is needed from the emergency budget?

- An urgent rescue package and support plan to see social care through the winter. While the support offered to cap bills for businesses will certainly help, the short-term nature of this support will be a concern for providers and commissioners. Rapidly rising energy bills represent a major threat to provider sustainability, but they are far from the only pressure that the care sector faces. Any package must also be significant enough to help with increased workforce recruitment and retention costs and other cost pressures such as food, fuel and medical supplies.
- Additional funding is urgently needed to address the DoLS backlog and assessment delays, in advance of the implementation of the new Liberty Protection Safeguards.

Unprecedented pressures on the NHS

The NHS is facing unprecedented challenges this winter. There are now millions of older people waiting for treatment, struggling to see their GPs, access community or mental health services or fearing they can no longer rely on a timely response in an emergency. There is a real danger that older people will be left to cope with deteriorating health just as we head into the most difficult time of year. We know frailer older people and those living with multiple health conditions are at particular risk of preventable hospital admissions – the Government must act now to help older people stay safe and well this winter, avoiding unnecessary admissions wherever possible.

What is needed from the emergency budget?

- Targeted extra support for the NHS to enable it to sustain essential services over the course of the winter. This must include a major ramping up of services that support vulnerable older people and other high intensity service users to stay safe and well at home, and urgently reinstating the discharge fund to improve flow through hospitals.

Triple Lock

The State Pension is the largest source of income for most older people but, on average, yearly payments are less than £9000. Last year the Government suspended the earnings element of the triple lock for one year due to the impact of the pandemic which would have resulted in the State Pension rising by 8.3% in April 2022. Instead, the State Pension was increased by 3.1% in line with September's rise in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI).

However, since then, inflation has risen markedly, and an increase in 8.3% would have still fallen short of the rises in bills older people currently face. Older people will be anxiously listening to the emergency budget/fiscal statement for reassurance that the triple lock will be reinstated and that other benefits linked to inflation will also be uprated in line with September's CPI in the normal way.

What is needed from the emergency budget?

- It is imperative that the Government keeps the 2019 Manifesto commitment to the triple lock and it is reinstated next year to help restore the value of the State Pension.

Longer term, keeping the triple lock in place will ensure that the value of the State Pension is maintained, and in some years improved, providing vital support for current and future pensioners on low and modest incomes.

Older People have told us

"I cared 24/7 for the last 3 years for my husband with advanced dementia and for 3 years have been unable to see a GP. I am not a nurse or a doctor, just a loving wife who would have appreciated a face-to-face appointment." Carol

"Older people are not all wealthy and some of us are struggling to keep up with bills as well as feed ourselves. This is almost like going back to January 1940 for some of us, when rationing was introduced during WW2." Christine

"I worry about how I'm going to pay for the utility bills. I don't turn lights on, I've cut down on watching TV, don't turn the heating on unless I'm desperate. I can't afford the petrol to visit my husband in his nursing home." Rosy

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 this difficult position in your constituency please contact Roshni Mistry, Senior Public Affairs Officer, at roshni.mistry@ageuk.org.uk