

# THE MIDLAND PENSIONER

#COVIDINQUIRYNOW

## AUTUMN 2020



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## **28,300 EXCESS WINTER DEATHS**



The estimated number of Excess Winter Deaths in 2019-20, according to figures released by Office for National Statistics (ONS), have increased by almost 20% on the previous winter with 28,300 excess winter deaths compared to 23,670 in 2018-19.

The number of excess winter deaths in England and Wales have been formally recorded since the early 1950s and are an important comparator between the number of deaths between December and March each year to average number of deaths in the preceding August to November and following April to July.

The charity National Energy Action (NEA) estimates that of the 28,300 Excess Winter Deaths 8,500 were directly related to people living in cold homes. Adam Scorer, the Managing Director of NEA said “Low incomes, high energy bills and poor heating and insulation have left many older people and families from poorer households in conditions that are not suitable for surviving the cold weather.”

Significantly, the ONS have said of the comparatively low number of Excess Winter Deaths “it can be explained by comparing it to the large number of Covid-19 deaths, which occurred mainly in the non-winter months of April through July.” adding that “Respiratory disease accounting for 39.6% of all excess winter deaths in England and 40.0% in Wales. The head of the Health Advisory Services at Asthma UK, Emma Rubach said “Today’s numbers are a tragic reminder that the colder months can be deadly for people with respiratory problems, even without the threat of Covid-19.”

The General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention, Jan Shortt said of the latest Excess Winter Deaths figures “These figures are a demonstration that older people are being failed by a government that ignores the reasons why winter deaths are so prevalent.”

Notes on the Winter Fuel Payment: You must have born on or before 5 October 1954 and in receipt of the State Pension. If you are not already receiving this Winter Fuel Payment automatically, the deadline for claiming payments for the winter 20/21 is 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.



After denying tv licences to the over 75s and failing to protect thousands in care homes from the covid 19 virus, it is now clear that they are contemplating abandoning their manifesto to maintain the pensions Triple Lock. Introduced in 2010, the triple lock is a legal guarantee that the basic state pension will rise in line with the highest of earnings, inflation or 2.5%. Since that time the Triple Lock has helped to increase the value of the pension although it hardly allows people to live in the lap of luxury. The new state pension for those who retired after 2016 is just £9.110 a year.

Now influential people such as the Think Tank, the Social Market Foundation and leading conservative figures such as Ken Clarke are suggesting that, because the young are bearing the economic brunt of the fight against the covid 19 pandemic, the Government should make older people pay for the recovery by abandoning the Triple Lock.

To abandon the triple lock would be an attack on the principle of collective security in retirement and would be divisive. It would not just damage the present generation of older people; it would undermine the income of future pensioners. So, the very people Ken Clarke and the Social Market Foundation claim they are being fair to would suffer as well. This is not about fairness, it's about ideology. Instead of cutting the state pension, the Government's priority should be to fix the failing system and protect the poorest pensioners.

Nearly four million older people today have an income that does not even reach basic levels so they qualify for extra support in the form of Pension Credit. But they do not automatically receive the money they need- they are required to make a claim. As a result, it is estimated that about 1.6 million of the 4 million, two out of every five of those over 66 who are entitled to Pension Credit, do not apply. This means that huge numbers of older in Britain end up scratching out a living, going without or afraid to turn on the heating because they do not have enough to live on. Pension Credit is called a safety net – but the net is full of holes. If the Government is serious about eradicating poverty in retirement, they should ensure that every pensioner has at least a basic level of income as of right. But I am not holding my breath.

In the absence of effective Government action to improve the system, I urge older people to claim what is rightfully theirs.

For help in making a claim you can ring the Age UK advice line on 0800 678 1602. The line is open from 8.00 am to 7.00 pm every week day.

Or visit the Age UK Information and Advice service website: [ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)

This is an edited version of a "Personally Speaking" column by Andy Day, featured in the Stoke-on-Trent regional newspaper "The Stoke Sentinel".

Andy is the Co-Ordinator of the North Staffordshire Pensioners Convention.



# NHS AND PRIMARY CARE

## QUESTIONNAIRE

The West Midland Pensioners Convention and UNISON Retired Members Sections across the region are asking you to support this survey as a response to the growing number of our members expressing concern, frustration and anxiety over the difficulties they are facing in accessing NHS and Primary Care services, during the ongoing covid -19 pandemic. The aim of the survey is to collect firm evidence, publicise the results, share concerns and raise awareness with the appropriate bodies across the West Midlands Region I.e. Clinical Commissioning Groups and Local Medical Committees.

### PRIMARY CARE

- (1) Have you had difficulty accessing your General Practitioner (G.P.)? Yes No
- (2). How long have you waited for an appointment with your G.P.
1. week      2 weeks      3 weeks      4 weeks      Longer
- (3). Did you have a face to face consultation with your G.P. Yes No
- (4). If not, was your consultation by phone or virtually (smart phone, laptop, desktop).
- Yes No

### NHS

- (1). If you have been referred by your G.P. to see an NHS consultant, how long have you waited for the appointment.
- 1-week    2 weeks    3 weeks    4 weeks    2 months    3 months    Longer
- (2). If you required hospital treatment as an out- patient, how long have you waited for that treatment.
- 1-week    2 weeks    3 weeks    4 weeks    2 months    3 months    Longer
- (3). If you have had a diagnosis of cancer or heart condition, how long have you waited to begin your treatment.
- 1-week    2 weeks    3 weeks    4 weeks    2 months    3 months    Longer

(4). If you required a diagnostic test (scans, blood tests, ECG etc.), how long have you waited.

1-week    2 weeks    3 weeks    4 weeks    2 months    3 months    Longer

(5). If you were a hospital inpatient, are you satisfied that, on being discharged from hospital, your needs were adequately assessed.    Yes    No

### MEDICAL PROCEDURES

(1) Have you had an ongoing medical procedure cancelled or postponed since the start of the covid- 19 pandemic?    Yes    No

(2) Have you been able to access flu jabs during the covid- 19 pandemic    Yes    No?

(3) Have you been able to obtain prescribed medication during the covid -19 pandemic?    Yes    No

This questionnaire is anonymous and we will always respect your privacy. The objective of the questionnaire is to gather as many of your personal experiences as possible; to back up our concerns about the impact of covid -19 on the provision of NHS and Primary Care services in your area.

A personal statement of your treatment by the NHS and Primary Care services during the covid- 19 pandemic. Please also indicate if you would be prepared to consent to your statement being included in any future press or media coverage, we may think is appropriate.

Please include the first half of your Post Code in this box.

Return the completed Questionnaire either by e mail to:

or post to:



We must never forget the 650 NHS and Social Care workers who have lost their lives to covid 19

### NHS TEST AND TRACE- AN INTERGENERATIONAL BETRAYAL

When Boris Johnson and Mat Hancock refer to NHS Test and Trace, this “world beating system”, they are really praising not our National Health Service but private sector companies handed huge Government contracts to provide vital national covid -19 Test and Trace systems ; such as Deloitte contracted to manage the logistics of the national drive- in testing centres and super-labs and Serco given multimillion pound contracts to run the national tracing programme. Government contracts worth over £12 billion to private sector companies to provide covid- 19 test and trace systems that have clearly manifestly failed.

Nearly nine months after the first covid -19 infection cases in the UK thousands of our students have contracted the virus and many tens of thousands have been forced to socially isolate in university dormitories, in many cases hundreds of miles away from their friends and family. The National Education Union are calling on the government to \* improve the availability of testing and the efficiency of the track and tracing programme along with regular asymptomatic testing of school, college and university staff and students.

The betrayal of the older generation by the failure of an effective covid-19 test, track and trace system is both stark and heart breaking with Amnesty International now estimating that in the first three months of the first lockdown 18,562 people living in Care Homes died with covid-19 and leaked statistics from the Department of Health now showing a fourfold increase in the infection rate of covid- 19 across care homes. With once again vulnerable care home residence, many with dementia, being denied access to their nearest and dearest. With care homes across the country once again closing their doors, the Alzheimer’s Society are “urging the Government to prioritise providing PPE and repeated, regular testing for both care home staff and for family carers. The West Midland Pensioners Convention repeat our demand for “an urgent, transparent and independent inquiry into the handling of this covid-19 pandemic by the UK Government.” (Birmingham Mail: Talk Back August 2020)

But Johnson and Hancock must now use this four-week lockdown to fix the failing test and trace system, by bringing covid- 19 test track and trace under the control of our local authorities, public health, primary care and NHS Trusts and labs. This letter first appeared in the “Talk Back “section of the “Birmingham Mail”



## THE STATE OF AGEING IN 2020

COVID-19 -19 has laid bare the urgency of improving the State of Ageing.

The pervasiveness of poor health, unsafe and low-quality housing and a lack of social connectiveness- particularly among the poorest in our society- has exaggerated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on those who already

faced the most challenging prospects in later life. People currently in their 50s and 60s who lose their jobs now are at risk of falling out of the jobs market for good.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic progress in improving life expectancy was stalling and disability free life expectancy, especially of women, was going backward. Rates of increase in life expectancy seen in previous decades has stalled and people are living longer in poor health than in the past.

More than two million people aged 55 and older are living in a home that endangers their health or wellbeing. During the covid-19 pandemic many of us are spending more time in our own homes than ever before. For some, this has had a positive implication, but for far too many people their home is actively damaging to their health and wellbeing.

There are 4.3 million homes in England that do not meet basic standards set by government. They are excessively cold and damp and contain hazards that put the occupant at risk of tripping and falling. At least half of these homes are headed by someone aged 55 and older (and a million have at least one child). In England one fifth of excess winter deaths are attributed to cold housing. COVID-19 will only accelerate health inequalities if we don't take action. With the greater burden of ill -health on the poorest in society, it is the poorest who will suffer most from diagnosis and treatment of conditions.

The current crisis has galvanised public and political support for changes that can create a society where we can all live healthier, fuller, more connected lives- whether that's changes to the economy, our environment, or becoming more actively involved in our communities. To make the most of this moment we need bold, optimistic leadership that understands that growing up and growing old with disadvantage, or finding yourself suddenly out of a job at 50, need not condemn you to a later life of poverty, disability and without contact from society.

On November 19<sup>th</sup> the Centre for Ageing Better published their report "The State of Ageing in 2020". The full report is available to download at [www.ageing-better.org.uk](http://www.ageing-better.org.uk)



## *YOU ARE OLD FATHER WILLIAM*

“You are old, Father William,” the young man said.

“And your hair has become very white;  
And yet you incessantly stand on your head—  
Do you think, at your age, it is right?”

“In my youth,” Father William replied to his son,  
“I feared it might injure the brain;  
But now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,  
Why, I do it again.”

“You are old,” said the youth, “as I mentioned before,  
And have grown most uncommonly fat;  
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door—  
Pray, what is the reason of that?”

“In my youth,” said the sage, as he shook his great locks,  
“I kept all my limbs very supple  
By the use of this ointment—one shilling the box—  
Allow me to sell you a couple.”

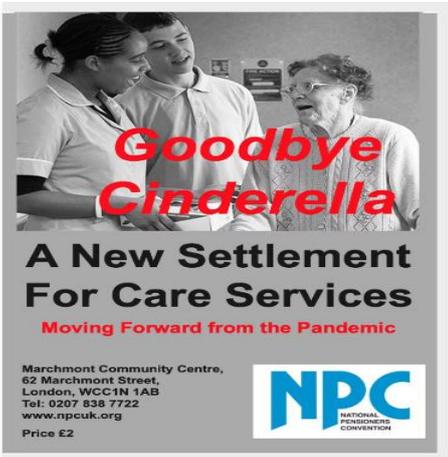
“You are old,” said the youth, “and your jaws are too weak  
For anything tougher than suet;  
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak—  
Pray, how did you manage to do it?”

“In my youth,” said his father, “I took to the law,  
And argued each case with my wife;  
And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw,  
Has lasted the rest of my life.”

“You are old,” said the youth, “one would hardly suppose  
That your eye was as steady as ever;  
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose--  
What made you so awfully clever?”

“I have answered three questions, and that is enough,”  
Said his father, “don’t give yourself airs!  
Do you think I listen all day to such stuff?”  
Be off, or I’ll kick you down stairs!”

A Footnote from John O “All those elephants years ago, as children one of the first books we would have read and enjoyed were by Lewis Carroll.”



The National Pensioners Convention have published this important contribution to the, now vital debate, on the need for fundamental reform of the way we fund and deliver social care. Hard copies of “Goodbye Cinderella” can be ordered from the NPC at £2.00 + postage. The WMPC have a limited number of copies. e mail: - [wmpconvention@gmx.com](mailto:wmpconvention@gmx.com)

or phone 07342264482

For information about our branches/affiliates/individual membership

Trevor Eames our Membership Secretary either by phone on: 0121 733 8081 or e mail: [solihullratepayers@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:solihullratepayers@hotmail.co.uk)

Regional Secretary:  
Sandra Durkin: 07860576701  
Press and Campaign Officer:  
Owen Sloss: 07582115742

FOR GENERAL ENQUIRIES ABOUT THE WEST MIDLAND PENSIONERS CONVENTION  
E MAIL: [wmpconvention@gmx.com](mailto:wmpconvention@gmx.com)

OR CALL: 07342264482

PLEASE ALSO VISIT OUR WEBSITE:  
at: [wmpconvention.weebly.com](http://wmpconvention.weebly.com)

We also welcome new friends on our WMPC Facebook site.

### LOCAL BRANCHES

Walsall: Andrea Stanton: 01922448331

Halesowen: Tony Whitehouse: 07715314608

North Staffs: Owen Sloss 07582115742  
David Hampton 01782 201724

kingstanding: Ken Smith: 0121 624 6981

East Birmingham: Stan Simpson: 0121 783 0734

Northfield: Richard Phillips: 0121 477 3594

Solihull: Alan Thomas : 0121 705 3342

Sandwell & West Birmingham:

Valerie Hickinbottom: 0121 532 0970



