



# Campaign!

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### **WANT TO JOIN THE NPC?**

Do you care about issues affecting older people? Want to do something about them? Then why not join us, as an individual or as an affiliate group. We are the biggest campaign group run for and by older people. So contact us today and find out how to get involved. Details above.

## *Fighting for the rights of older people*

### **BDC returns with busy agenda for 2022**

The NPC will host its first post-pandemic Biennial Delegate Conference at the Yarnfield Park Conference Centre near Stalford on Tuesday and Wednesday, 15th and 16th March.

More than 120 delegates will gather for the most important event on our calendar – postponed from last year because of Covid-19 – to discuss policies, debate key issues facing older people, and importantly elect our Officer team for the next two years.

A packed agenda over the two days will see discussion of current campaigns covering everything from the pension triple lock suspension, rocketing prices of food and fuel,

and rising pensioner poverty, to concerns around health and

social care, the increase in prescription charges, poor and expensive bus and train services, lack of elder housing, human rights and digital exclusion.

President Ron Douglas paid tribute to the Officers, who like himself will be standing down at this BDC: “I would like to thank them for their hard work and support, which is at the heart of all that the NPC achieves.”



### **NPC leads winter protests as crises escalate**

NPC members and affiliates are set to join the latest in a series of winter protests—a mass nationwide NHS Action Day demo to try and stop the government’s controversial Health and Care Bill.

Organised by SOSNHS, together with KONP (Keep Our NHS Public), Health Campaigns Together, We Own It, health unions and other health campaign organisations and medical professionals, the demos are due to take place across the country on Saturday, 26 February 2022. It is the latest in a series of protests supported by the NPC this winter

over the ‘perfect storm’ behind rising pensioner poverty, and our failing health and care services. Our oldest and poorest, just emerging from a pandemic which hit us hardest, now face rocketing food and fuel prices. With the fuel price cap ending on 1st April, pensioners are already fearful of massive heating bills. The Bank of England pre-

dicts inflation is set to hit a record 7% or 8% by Easter, just as the annual pension rise is introduced

at a paltry 3.1%, thanks to the Chancellor’s suspension of the ‘triple lock.’ On top of all this, the worst crisis in the history of the NHS and social care sector has led to the NHS Day of Action calling for emergency funds to save lives now. They want: immediate NHS funding of £20 billion; investment in a fully publicly owned NHS-care sector guaranteeing free healthcare for future generations; and fair pay to attract and retain health and care staff. NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “The government must act now to save...



NPC fuel poverty demo on Feb 7

*Continued over...*

**Information on NHS Action Day protests near you: [www.sosnhs.org/events](http://www.sosnhs.org/events) – or contact the NPC office for details.**

Continued..

**NPC affiliates make their voices heard at demos**

..lives. Our heroic but exhausted has appealed to government for health and care staff are still dealing with the victims of Omicron, thank all members and affiliates while trying to catch up on hospital treatment waiting lists. The NPC protests this winter.”



NPC Winter mortality rates demo

**End of fuel price cap will add to worsening cost of living crisis**

**N**PC members demonstrated outside Downing Street on 7th February against a record 54% increase in energy bills which will follow the end of the fuel price cap on 1st April. The event, attended by Fuel Poverty Action, the TUC, Trade Unions affiliated to NPC and pensioners’ groups across the southeast, was to protest at the Chancellor’s ‘poor’ response to the rising fuel bills, which are contributing to a cost-of-living crisis that is leaving older people having to choose between eating and heating. Tony O’Brien, NPC Housing Working Party Chair who organised the demo, thanked everyone who supported it, and called on the government to

act quickly to avoid hardship and even deaths. He said: “We know that from April it will cost up to £700 more to heat the average home, and by October it will rise again by a



Protestors make their case

further £300. With OFGEM now saying they will review gas prices every three months this hike may be sooner. The Government’s response has been poor - handing out a loan of £200 that will be repaid. Yet in the last 10 years £120bn was paid in profits to fuel companies.”

**Time to reach out to new members!**

**T**he NPC wants to contact the many older people who would like to make their voices heard about issues that affect them. The Covid-19 lockdown meant our local groups could not meet as usual. So as we start to get together in person again we would like to suggest a few new ways for groups to contact people, particularly those who are not online. For example, local newspapers can often publish details of your next meeting. If you’d like help on writing to your paper—contact us at [info@npcuk.org](mailto:info@npcuk.org) for a template letter.

**Perfect Storm of policy decisions behind rising pensioner poverty**

**A**n NPC Dignity Action Day webinar\* heard how a tsunami of policy decisions is now converging to cause misery for millions.

Many older people feel they are being unfairly targeted by recent government changes. Our panel of experts—**Shadow Minister for Health and Social Care Karin Smyth MP; Lord Prem Sikka; AJ Bell Head of Retirement Policy Tom Selby; and Independent Age Head of Policy & Influencing Morgan Vine** discussed the implications of everything from the suspension of the triple lock on annual pension increases at a time of rocketing inflation, and rising pensioner poverty, to the worsening crisis in health and social care. As inflation hits a 30 year high of 5.4% the event chair, the NPC’s Jan Shortt, called for the government to at least reinstate the triple lock, which ensures pensions rise by the highest of either wages, inflation or 2.5%. It was suspended because wages hit an artificially

high 8.1% last autumn. The government judged it could not afford that, so pensioners are set to get a meagre 3.1% rise in April—even though the Bank of England says inflation will hit 7% or even 8% by then. Jan Shortt said: “Our members are already terrified of hefty bills for food and heating with worse to come.

**Squeezed**

It is a shameful way to treat our oldest and most vulnerable. Contrary to mistaken public perception, millions survive on basic pensions of either £137.60 (for those retiring before 2016) or £179.60 per week. Many who also have small occupational pensions are often just above qualifying for pension credit which means their finances are squeezed to the limit. **Jan said: “This is a disastrous situation, but the government can do something about it, starting with reinstating the pensions triple lock to give retirees a decent pension rise this April.”** \*[View webinar video at: www.npcuk.org](https://www.npcuk.org)

## Pension Age Review deadline 11 April

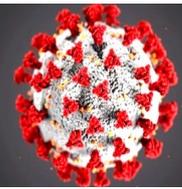
**T**he NPC is asking for you or 2022, so that we have time to your organisation to consider collate any responses received. the call for evidence on the state This is a really important consul- pension age review. Our own Pen- tation that will set the tone for sions & Income Working Party will other pension changes. Follow help the NPC respond, but we the link for information: would welcome your input to our <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/second-state-pension-age-review-independent-report-call-for-evidence> please forward them by 11th April

## PENSIONS DASHBOARD

**T**he Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is inviting feedback on its proposals for a Pensions Dashboard initiative which will enable consumers to find and view all their pension savings, including State, workplace and personal, in one place. The deadline is 8th April 2022. Find out more at [www.fca.org.uk](http://www.fca.org.uk)

## Quick end to Covid rules is ongoing worry for many

**T**he decision to end coronavirus self-isolation rules is likely to increase anxiety among old people and cause some to shield. The charity Independent Age said it is concerned about this “sudden change in direction of public safety.” The government has announced that it will no longer be a legal requirement to self-isolate after testing positive for Covid from February 24. Free testing for the public will also be scrapped in England from April 1. Morgan Vine, head of policy and Influencing at the charity, said: “Our research revealed that the challenges faced by those in later life due to the pandemic have worsened many people’s mental health with many we spoke to expressing fear at catching the virus in public settings. If the requirement to isolate is removed at the same time as free lateral flow tests for most age groups stop, this fear is likely to increase as is the likelihood of coming into contact with someone who has Covid.” Recent polling showed that a majority (56%) thought isolating should always be a requirement for somebody who has tested positive, and a further 27% said it should be a requirement for the next few months.” NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said the findings chime with those of our members: “Many older people feel it is just too soon to dispense with all restrictions while the virus is still in circulation, and are still wary about going out.”



## Over 80s still make up two thirds of Covid deaths

**D**espite the ending of Covid restrictions over 80s still make up two thirds of all those who are dying from the virus. In the week ending January 21, over-80s made up 63.2% of deaths in England and Wales with coronavirus on the death certificate, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). **While deaths overall have fallen, the proportion in the over-80s age group is the highest since December 2020. And people aged 60 to 79 accounted for a further 30.7 % of deaths in the week to January 21,** the ONS found. (In the week to December 18 2020, the deaths rate for over-80s was 64%). The proportion of Covid-19 deaths among over-80s fell to 37.9% in the week up to July 2 2021. The NPC says the figures are unacceptable given government pledges to protect older people. General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “We will contact the Department for Health & Social Care with some critical questions in regard to the breakdown of these figures – such as underlying ill health and whether the death took place in a care home, hospital or a person’s own home. It is worrying that it’s still hard to get a GP appointment if you can’t book online.”

## Care staff must still self-isolate

**S**ocial care staff in England should continue to test for coronavirus and self-isolate if they receive a positive result. The Department of Health and Social Care provided the guidance after confusion among providers over the government’s new ‘Living with COVID-19’ plan which sets out a timetable to replace legal regulations. The Homecare Association received clarification from the director general of DHSC Adult Social Care, who said that while the legal requirement to self-isolate ends on Thursday, staff who test positive are still advised to stay at home and avoid contact with people. Staff should continue to test, as set out in published guidance. Currently, home care staff are required to test daily using lateral flow tests.

## Will current plans to switch landlines to digital affect older people’s human rights?



**T**he UK’s big changeover to an all-digital telephone system by 2025 may breach older people’s human rights if it goes ahead as currently planned.

The NPC met with BT officials this month to discuss our serious concerns that the switch from or the traditional landline system we currently use, to an all-digital system has flaws that could leave older people vulnerable and isolated.

The deadline for a full changeover is 2025 but some areas are currently being switched to digital, and it has already caused problems. The digital system requires the installation of new wiring to people’s homes, and a new digital handset if you don’t have one already.

### **Power cuts**

But that requires mains electricity to stay charged – which meant that when whole areas lost power for days during the recent storms, they were often left without phone coverage, because even mobiles need charging. BT provide emergency batteries for these situations, but they only have power for hours not days. NPC also told BT about a case of an lady in her 80s who had her landline switched to digital before Christmas, but the installation engineer neglected to say her old phone wouldn’t now work, and she had no digital phone.

She was left without any means of communication over the festive period, causing huge anxiety for both the lady and her relatives at a distance. Jan Shortt said, “BT finally acknowledged their error, and thanks to us raising the issue have paid the lady £100 compensation. But that’s nothing compared to the anxiety she endured. At our meeting, BT executives promised to look into this and other cases raised and said they were ‘taking on board’ our views. However we are concerned that BT – and OpenReach and the dozens of other phone companies in the UK – are not taking the pitfalls seriously enough. So we are raising it with the Equality and Human Rights Commission as a matter of urgency.”

### **Next stage of Connections For All**

**T**he NPC’s Digital Working Party are looking at the next stage of the Connections For All campaign to help more digitally excluded older people get online and stay connected. Age UK estimate 2 million are not online in England alone, which crucially excludes them for many services—from contacting GPs to power suppliers—that are moving to digital-only communications.

## Questions for Royal Mail over new style stamps

**I**f you buy stamps as a means of saving or investment—or just like having a stock—then you may find they are worthless from next year.

The NPC has asked the Royal Mail to clarify reports that the current issue of stamps will be changed with effect from January 2023 and whether people can ‘swap’ their stock of old stamps for the new bar coded version (pictured right) by simply going to the Post Office.

**The general public are largely unaware of the changeover, and the NPC believes they should be publicising the situation more widely.**

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “Royal Mail has access to every household in the country through their letter box and should send out a public information leaflet describing the change in easy to understand terms. For example, if there is to be a surcharge for swapping old stamps for

new, we need to know what it is for and how much? Plus will there be a limit to how many stamps you can exchange? If you have more than the limit, what happens? As most older people are not online, many understand that you will have to ring the Royal Mail for a form, or go to a Royal Mail Delivery Office rather than a Post Office. It seems the place where the public buy the majority of their stamps is excluded from carrying the form required to ‘swap’ stamps for the new version.” A lot of older people and charities save stamps to sell to interested buyers and the money raised goes towards funding the work of voluntary groups and local organisations. This may now end once the new stamps are introduced.”

