

SPEAKING OUT!

Newsletter of the National Pensioners Convention
Minority Elders' Committee
Winter 2021

We're back to keep you informed

Welcome to our First Speaking Out since lockdown. During the last 18 months all of us have shared the constraints, uncertainties, disruptions, and stresses that the pandemic has brought. Sadly, some of us have succumbed to the virus.

The challenges of pensioner and fuel poverty, health inequalities, the crisis in social care, non-decent housing, digital exclusion, and structural racism have impacted heavily on all of us, and on some groups more heavily than on others. Inequalities and disadvantages are endemic and have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Uncertain

It is well researched and reported that the pandemic has impacted differently on different groups. It has had a disproportionate impact on some BAME communities who have seen exponential deaths and bereavements, and experienced feelings of loss and desperation. Decades of underfunding health, social care and public services have resulted in the older generation feeling undervalued worthless and at times without hope. **We are living in uncertain times where our health, welfare and financial security are slowly being eroded.** For example, where the Government has broken its pledge to fund the over 75s TV licence. Also where the Health and Social Care Bill funding proposals go nowhere in dealing with the crisis in the sector and ensure that we all get the care that we deserve. Pensioner and Fuel Poverty is on the increase at a time when there are plans to change the Government's long-standing commitment to

retain the pensions triple lock. At the end of what has been an unseasonable summer and at the onset of colder temperatures the Ofgem

Energy Regulator has raised the energy prices by £139. This will plunge even more impoverished and vulnerable pensioners into difficulties. Cold-weather related illnesses and deaths will rise putting further pressure on an already strained NHS. Food prices are on the rise and fears of empty shelves looming. **Access also plays an important part in making informed choices.** The future is digital and thousands of older people do not use, or do not have access to IT equipment. Members of BAME groups with language constraints and lack of equipment are further disadvantaged. It is important that everybody has access to information whether they choose to go online or not. We need strategies to promote digital inclusion. We have the opportunity to resume highlighting issues of concern, importance and interest to pensioners, and BAME groups in particular - and to respond to them through a prism of their impact across gender, races, age, culture, ethnicity and sexuality. It is important that we take the equality, diversity, and inclusion agenda forward.



The next Minority Elders Meeting will be held online on Monday, 6th December at 2.30pm—email: info@npcuk.org for joining details.



Lawrence Review on Covid reports

The Lawrence Review into the impact of coronavirus on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities has made 20 recommendations to prevent such a tragedy happening again. Baroness Doreen Lawrence was asked to conduct the review, which received over 200 submissions, by Labour Leader Keir Starmer. It calls for an urgent plan to tackle the impact of Covid on ethnic minorities this winter, and a national strategy to tackle health inequalities. To read the report in full visit: www.lawrencereview.co.uk

Black History Month Meeting 18 October

London Pensioners Action Group are meeting to celebrate Age & Black History Month on Monday, 18 October. Florence Eshalomi, MP for Vauxhall will attend, and the speaker is Sonia Winifred, Cabinet Councillor for Equalities & Culture. The meeting from 12.00 pm - 2.30 pm, is in Room 16, at Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill SW2 1RW.

Want a free copy of Speaking Out?

Contact: NPC, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, WC1N 1AB or email us at: info@npcuk.org

Hard winter for BAME elders as food and fuel prices sky rocket



October marks the start of the period where we use the most energy. So the news that energy prices would rise by £139 on the 1st of the month came as a shock to the 15million households who face a real dilemma over heating their homes and putting food on the table.

By Ellen Lebethe, Chair, NPC Minority Elders

There are approximately 2.5million households considered to be in fuel poverty, according to the Fuel Poverty Statistics latest figures. The price of energy has skyrocketed since the start of the year, which means almost half a million additional households may be unable to pay their bills.

At the same time that this energy price hike is happening, millions will see a reduction in their incomes as furlough winds down, the uplift in Universal Credit is taken away and NI increased. Prices are going up across a wide range of products including food. This combination of higher prices and reduced incomes will mean spiralling debt and more distress among the poor, vulnerable and oldest.

It is well known that people from B.A.M.E. communities are amongst the poorest in the country, and are more likely to live in cold, damp, poorly insulated, overcrowded homes.as well as struggle to make ends meet and keep warm. Lowered incomes and increased expenditure will create even more anxiety will impact further on their physical and mental health. When the price cap was introduced three years ago, it was hailed as a shield for customers against unscrupulous energy companies charging sky high prices, yet the average fuel bill has doubled since 2004. **The main reason for the energy price hike is the rising cost of gas as well as the shortage in fuel supplies.** Brexit is also having a knock-on effect. Another factor behind rising energy bills is the profiteering of the Big Six Energy Companies. In fact the Big Six have increased their profit margins by a whopping 700%. Government cuts to the Fuel Allowance which provides vital help to pensioners under and over 80' have exacerbated the burden of paying winter fuel bills. With climate change, the coming winter is predicted to be one of the coldest in years. This spells even more misery for the homeless. Keeping warm and healthy is a human right. Unfortunately, this is not a right for all. Low in-

comes, health ine-qualities, poorly insulated, indecent homes blight the lives of many older people. Struggling to keep warm in one of the richest countries in the developed world is not right. **There are groups calling**

for an end to fuel poverty and for warm, decent homes and a greener world. We support these calls. An end to fuel poverty needs to be treated seriously, along with an end to policies and practices which drive it. What we need is immediate support for

What we need is immediate support for households who are struggling the most'

households who are struggling. In the long term, issues around pensioner and fuel poverty needs to be tackled. The government needs to act and provide more protection against profiteering and invest more in energy efficient programmes. It needs to bring an end to the injustices wrought upon older people in rental accommodation by landlords who fail to meet their obligations. A safe, warm, affordable home is a human right.

Apply for your Warm Homes Discount from 18 October and save pounds

You could get £140 off your electricity bill this winter under the Warm Home Discount Scheme which opens on 18 October 2021.

The advice is to apply as soon as the scheme opens as each energy supplier has limited funds available for the scheme, The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between October and March. You may be able to get the discount on your gas bill if your supplier provides you with both gas and electricity. Contact your supplier to find out. The discount will not affect your Cold Weather Payment or Winter Fuel Payment. How you apply for the Discount Scheme depends on how you qualify. Either you get the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit, known as the 'core group;' or if you're on a low income and meet your supplier's criteria for the scheme, known as the 'broader group. You can still qualify if you use a pre-pay or pay-as-you-go electricity meter. Your supplier can tell you how If you live in a park home, you apply in a different way. Your park managers should have details.