

Cost of living: current awareness bulletin (February & March 2023)

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Scotland: reports by Scottish organisations or by other bodies about Scotland

Nourish Scotland (2023) [Our Right to Food: Affording to eat well in a Good Food Nation](#). See also comments in the Guardian newspaper - [Cost of living crisis causes 'dignity gap' for Scotland's poorest families](#) which notes "The first study to use real shopping lists to track the impact of the cost of living crisis on family budgets in Scotland has uncovered a "dignity gap" between the cheapest products and what families actually want to eat. Nourish Scotland's report ... tracks the affordability and accessibility of a weekly shop for different-sized families who are at highest risk of food insecurity, including a single-parent family and a larger family unit with three children. Dr Chelsea Marshall, the report author, said: "We wanted to measure the cost of a diet that balanced people's healthy aspirations with enjoyment and the realities of everyday life." Researchers highlight a significant difference between the cost of selecting only the cheapest food and drink available and the items the advisers thought the case study families would find acceptable – what it describes as the "dignity gap", which increases the cost of a weekly shop by 34%."

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2023) [Half of Scots are concerned about the impact the cost of living crisis is having on their mental health](#)

A YouGov poll (commissioned by the College) of "more than 1,063 adults in Scotland revealed **52% were concerned about the impact [of the cost of living crisis];** while eight in 10 (82%) thought demand for mental health services will increase in the future." The survey also showed the issues that people are most concerned about impacting on their mental health – with 85% saying rising energy costs, 79% rising food costs while 31% cited increasing debt. Dr Jane Morris, vice-chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland, said: "From relationship breakdowns to worries about crippling debt and wondering how you'll pay for the next energy bill or feed your children – these situations are tough and can have an enormous effect on anybody's mental health. There is already plenty of evidence that financial stress is associated with worse physical and mental health."

UK Government, Parliament, Office for National Statistics

Office for National Statistics (2023) [Characteristics of adults experiencing energy and food insecurity in Great Britain](#)

Notes that **adults who reported moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms had higher odds of experiencing some form of energy (2.3 higher odds) and food insecurity (3.1 higher odds)** than those with no-to-mild depressive symptoms. Adults aged 30 to 64 years had between 1.5 and 1.8 higher odds of experiencing some form of energy insecurity than those aged 65 years and over; while adults aged 16 to 64 years had between 2.0 and 4.6 higher odds of experiencing some form of food insecurity than those aged 65 years and over.

Office for National Statistics (2023) [Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain](#)

Notes that those more likely to report using less gas or electricity in their home included: around 7 in 10 adults aged 55 to 64 years (72%) and 65 to 74 years (70%), compared with 40% of those aged 16 to 24 years; homeowners and those paying off a mortgage

(66% and 64% respectively), compared with 55% of renters; two-thirds (66%) of parents living with dependent children aged 5 years and over, compared with 61% of non-parents or parents not living with dependent children; two-thirds (66%) of adults who do not pay for their gas or electricity through a prepayment meter, compared with 54% of those who pay for their energy through such means.

Office for National Statistics (2023) [Cost of living and higher education students, England](#)

Experimental statistics from the Student Cost of Living Insights Study (SCoLIS) in England. Includes information on the behaviours, plans, opinions and well-being of higher education students in the context of the increases in cost-of-living. **Around 46% of students reported their mental health and well-being had worsened since the start of the autumn term 2022**; this is similar to students in early November 2022 (45%).

UK, England, Wales: reports by other organisations

Barnardos (2023) [A crisis on our doorstep](#)

The report includes YouGov polling of a representative group of 1000 parents in Great Britain and new findings from a survey of 316 children and young people supported by Barnardo's, aged 11 to 25. A focus group of young people was also conducted and case studies were collected from across Barnardos services in the UK. Findings included – 30% of parents said their child's mental health had worsened (up from 26% in October 2022); 49% of parents worry their children are missing out on normal childhood experiences because of cutbacks; 23% of parents said they struggled to provide sufficient food (up 3% from October 2022).

Carers UK (2023) [Being a young carer is not a choice](#)

The Carers Trust has conducted its latest annual survey of 1,109 young carers and young adult carers from across the UK. Young carers and young adult carers have been experiencing an intensification of their caring role for some years, with many having to spend more time on their caring role as well as having to care for more people. This year's findings show **the stress experienced by many young carers and young adult carers as a result of their caring role is now being exacerbated by widespread anxieties about household finances as a result of the cost-of-living crisis**. 56% of respondents to Carers Trust survey say the cost-of-living crisis is always or usually hitting them and their family, 32% say they always or usually face additional costs because they are a carer, 56% say the time they spend caring has increased in the past year, 47% are now caring for more people than they used to 40% either 'never' or 'not often' get help in school, college or university to balance caring and education work. The findings suggest these pressures are having a devastating effect on **mental health**. Many struggle with emotional wellbeing and feel **stressed, overwhelmed or drained**. The survey revealed that 44% 'always' or 'usually' feel stressed.

Food Foundation (2023) [From purse to plate: implications of the cost of living crisis on health](#)

This briefing explores some of the ways in which financial pressures make it more challenging for low income families to eat in a way that benefits their health, the strategies that people are forced to adopt to deal with financial insecurity, and how these strategies may have unintended consequences for the health of the nation and pressures on the NHS.

Food Foundation (2023) [Retailers must do more to prevent the cost of living crisis negatively impacting on our children's health](#)

The Foundation's [most recent survey tracking UK food insecurity levels](#) has found that food insecurity levels in households with children remain unacceptably high with almost one in four (24.4%) households with children reporting experiencing food insecurity in

January 2023. There has been no substantial improvement over the winter “showing current measures are not sufficient to protect children from the impact of the cost of living crisis on their diets ... high levels of food insecurity in the face of the continuing cost of living crisis and high food prices will likely be impacting on UK diets with a number of severe long term health consequences – particularly for low income families who bear the brunt of price rises. Early signs of the impact on diets are apparent in The Food Foundation’s most recent survey. Data released today shows that food insecure households are more likely to be cutting down on buying healthy foods such as fruit (57% vs 11% of food secure households), vegetables (42% vs 6%) and fish (54% vs 14%). Lower income households already consume less of these foods due to their lack of affordability and this is therefore highly likely to further exacerbate these dietary inequalities and the subsequent health consequences”.

Money & Pensions Service (2023). [The intersecting impacts of mental ill-health and money problems on the financial wellbeing of people from ethnic minority communities.](#)

The Money & Pensions Service commissioned the University of Bristol and the University of Southampton to complete 21 semi-structured interviews with a range of organisations who support those from minoritised ethnic communities with financial difficulties and/or mental health problems. These explored the way in which members of certain minoritised ethnic communities may experience financial issues and mental health challenges differently. The research highlights a range of financial problems that those from minoritised ethnic groups can face, including: living on lower incomes due to difficulties finding good quality employment; incurring additional costs; difficulties with the benefits system; difficulty accessing or using the right financial services products. **The research also found that a ‘vicious cycle’ between money and mental health problems exists regardless of ethnic background.** However certain key factors emerged across minoritised ethnic communities: many members of minoritised communities face a ‘double stigma’ where it is particularly difficult to discuss either money or mental wellbeing, so discussing the two together may be especially challenging; there is concern about the long-term impacts on children of using them as translators when talking about financial difficulties and/or mental health problems; people with limited English language skills may experience additional stress or anxiety about dealing with finances; issues such as no recourse to public funds can cause additional challenges for those from minoritised ethnic communities who are experiencing domestic or economic abuse; a lack of trust in the system can result in fears over being penalised or sanctioned when seeking help for financial matters.

National Energy Action (NEA) and Energy Action Scotland (EAS) (2023) [The hardest hit: Impact of the energy crisis: UK Fuel Poverty Monitor 2021-2022](#)

The report has been informed by a Call for Evidence (CfE), which gained responses from 119 respondents covering the breadth of the UK, as well as drawing on wider engagement with stakeholders through one-on-one meetings and the direct experience of people who are living through the crisis. **Comments on the physical health and mental health impacts of fuel poverty including comments on social isolation, self-harm and suicide.** Polling for the report “suggests that 81% will ration energy this winter, while 55% are already rationing hot water, and **13% are reducing use of medical equipment.**”

Obesity Health Alliance (2023) [Dietary and Health inequalities: Obesity Health Alliance position statement](#)

The OHA is a coalition of 50 health organisations including the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Diabetes UK, the British Medical Association and medical royal colleges. This document outlines the known evidence base for the relationship between overweight and obesity and health inequalities, and the recommendations supported by the OHA to address health inequalities through action to reduce the prevalence of

obesity. Notes that current rises in energy costs further limit the ability of people on lower incomes to cook increasing their reliance on convenience foods.

Wise Group (2023) [The Wise Group Fuel Poverty Report 2023: Lifting people out of fuel poverty in the United Kingdom](#)

The Wise Group is the UK's "leading relational mentoring social enterprise" [which] "every year supports over 65,000 households to break the cycle of poverty, at home, at work and in the community". The group conducted over 300 interviews and found that over **2/3rds of interviewees on prepayment meters felt their physical health had been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis or preferred not to say**, compared to less than 50% on other payment types; nearly 50% of families in work had visited a foodbank; **over 80% of disabled people said their physical health had deteriorated as a result of rising bills**; 43% of retired people said they first ration food when bills are tight, compared to 27% of working-age households; 4 in 5 single parents said their mental health had been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis or preferred not to say, double the rate of couples with children. **In focus groups they found that parents and children are being hospitalised due to issues with heating**, with many children being confused about the deterioration in living conditions. Some households are foregoing food to hoard several hundred pounds on pre-payment meters.

Articles (contact lyn.mair@nhs.scot for full-text)

Broadbent, P., Thomson, R., Kopasker, D., McCartney, G., Meier, P., Richiardi, M., et al. (2023). The public health implications of the cost-of-living crisis: Outlining mechanisms and modelling consequences. *The Lancet Regional Health-Europe*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2023.100585>.

The UK, and other high-income countries, are experiencing substantial increases in living costs. Several overlapping and intersecting economic crises threaten physical and mental health in the immediate and longer term. Policy responses may buffer against the worst effects (e.g. welfare support) or further undermine health (e.g. austerity). We explore fundamental causes underpinning the cost-of-living crisis, **examine potential pathways by which the crisis could impact population health and use a case study to model potential impacts of one aspect of the crisis on a specific health outcome**. Our modelling illustrates how policy approaches can substantially protect health and avoid exacerbating health inequalities. Targeting support at vulnerable households is likely to protect health most effectively. The current crisis is likely to be the first of many in era of political and climate uncertainty. More refined integrated economic and health modelling has the potential to inform policy integration, or 'health in all policies'.

Burlinson, A., Davillas, A., & Law, C. (2022). Pay (for it) as you go: Prepaid energy meters and the heat-or-eat dilemma. *Social Science & Medicine*, 315, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115498>

The "heat-or-eat" dilemma, a trade-off typically between food consumption and heating, may elevate public health concerns during the 2022 energy-price crisis. Our paper contributes to the literature by **exploring the role of domestic energy prepayment meters (PPMs) in the heat-or-eat dilemma, focusing on the association between PPM use and fruit and vegetable consumption**. Using a representative sample of 24,811 individuals residing in Great Britain (January 2019-May 2021), we find robust evidence of lower fruit and vegetable consumption amongst individuals using PPMs, compared to those using post-payment energy bill payment methods. On average, our point estimates suggest that individuals using a PPM consume 2.7 fewer portions of fruit and vegetables per week. Our findings hold when bounding analysis is employed to account for omitted variable bias. Using a suite of IV approaches to further alleviate endogeneity concerns we found that our ordinary least squares results are consistent as opposed to IV models. Further robustness analyses highlight **the deleterious impact of**

PPMs on people's healthy eating habits relevant to the consumption of enough fruit and vegetables. Our results suggest that targeted support for PPM users may have beneficial effects on people's fruit and vegetable consumption patterns. (PsycInfo Database Record (c) 2023 APA, all rights reserved)

Carter, R. (2023). How the cost-of-living crisis is affecting general practice. *Pulse*, 14-15.

The article discusses how the rising cost of living is impacting the health of patients and GP practices in the UK including **more patients with health problems caused or exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, including mental health issues**, and are having to find ways to help their patients cope. It also mentions that many practices are also struggling to make ends meet, with some taking drastic action to reduce costs.

Ford, M. (2023). Mental health at perilous low, warn nursing staff. *Nursing Times*, 119(2), 6-8. <https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/nurse-wellbeing/exclusive-mental-health-at-perilous-low-warn-nursing-staff-01-02-2023/>

Two in five nursing staff say their mental health is worse now than it was during the peaks of the Covid-19 pandemic, with concerns about staffing levels, patient safety and personal finances cited as key issues negatively affecting their wellbeing, reveals an exclusive survey by *Nursing Times*.

Hancock, S. (2023). Child dental health and the cost-of-living crisis. *BDJ In Practice* 36, 12–15 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41404-023-1916-y>

Overview of current issues. While numbers remain well below pre-COVID levels for now, tooth decay remains the most common reason for hospital admissions in children aged between six and ten years.

Iacobucci, G. (2023). Doctors back move to offer free school meals to every primary pupil in London. *BMJ*, 380, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.p415>

Paediatricians have welcomed the decision to offer every primary school pupil in London free school meals, hailing the move as a major boost to tackling child health inequalities during the cost of living crisis. The scheme, announced by the mayor of London Sadiq Khan on 20 February, will be implemented in September and run during term time for the next academic year (2023-24). The mayor's office estimates that the £130m of one-off funding could help more than 270 000 children and save families about £440 per child over the course of the year.

Lawler, C., Sherriff, G., Brown, P., Butler, D., Gibbons, A., Martin, P., et al. (2023). Homes and health in the Outer Hebrides: a social prescribing framework for addressing fuel poverty and the social determinants of health. *Health & Place*, 79, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2022.102926>.

Health services are increasingly being reshaped with reference to addressing social determinants of health (SDoH), with social prescribing a prominent example. We examine a project in the Outer Hebrides that reshaped and widened the local health service, **framing fuel poverty as a social determinant of health and mobilising a cross-sector support pathway to make meaningful and substantive improvements to islanders' living conditions**. The 'Moving Together' project provided support to almost 200 households, ranging from giving advice on home energy, finances and other services, to improving the energy efficiency of their homes. In so doing, the **project represents an expansion of the remit of social prescribing**, in comparison with the majority of services currently provided under this banner, and can be seen as a more systemic approach that engages with the underlying conditions of a population's health. We present a framework through which to understand and shape initiatives to address fuel poverty through a social prescribing approach.

Robinson, E. (2023). Obesity and the cost of living crisis. *International Journal of Obesity*, 47(2), 93-94. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41366-022-01242-9>

The cost of living crisis may also create the perfect storm for driving global obesity prevalence further upwards. Families already have to choose between cheap and readily available energy-dense foods vs. more costly healthier food options, often financially and also in terms of preparation time. As financial hardship hits, choosing the latter will become more difficult. **Households with the lowest incomes are less able to place long-term health at the top of their considerations when buying, choosing and cooking food.** Recent research suggests that this is one likely reason why lower socioeconomic status is associated with higher BMI. **If left unchecked, the cost of living crisis has the potential to further widen socioeconomic inequalities in obesity by disproportionately affecting disadvantaged families and communities already at risk of obesity.**

Stubbs, T., Kentikelenis, A., Gabor, D., Ghosh, J., & McKee, M. (2023). The return of austerity imperils global health. *BMJ Global Health*, 8(2), e011620. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9944267/>

Recognising the world's lack of preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic, international organisations like the World Health Organization, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund are calling for extensive additional funding to strengthen pandemic preparedness and response systems in low-income and middle-income countries, including through domestic resource mobilisation. This article examines the prospects of national health budgets increasing in such a context, drawing on new International Monetary Fund projections on public spending around the world. We show that by 2024 public spending will be lower than the 2010s average for almost half of all low-income and middle-income countries. A key driver of this new wave of austerity is the dramatic increase in public spending dedicated to repaying external debt—underpinned by growing debt stocks, US interest rates rises, and commodity price hikes. As in earlier crises, the stage is set for a situation where population health deteriorates—via compound effects of the pandemic and widespread economic hardship—while public health services required to tackle increased need are facing steep cuts. We conclude by considering what can be done to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

Teachers are buying pupils toothbrushes and toothpaste in cost-of-living crisis. (2023) *British Dental Journal*, 234,207 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-023-5612-4>

A survey of secondary teachers by grassroots hygiene poverty charity Beauty Banks in partnership with the British Dental Association (BDA) revealed: Four in five teachers (83%) say they or their school have given students toothbrushes and toothpaste. **Eighty-one percent said there are children in their school who don't have regular access to toothpaste.** Forty percent said this leads to students being socially excluded by their peers because of oral hygiene issues. Half report children isolating themselves. One-third have witnessed bullying directly. Twenty-five percent say children miss school because of poor oral hygiene. Three-quarters (74%) said children who don't have regular access to oral health products have discoloured teeth. Half said children had noticeable tooth decay. Thirty percent noted children in dental pain or suffering from halitosis. Nearly a third (31%) of teachers who witness poverty in the classroom said it affected their mental health. One in four are kept awake at night worrying about their students' wellbeing. Thirty-eight percent report feeling helpless.

Woodward, A., Davies, N., Walters, K., Nimmons, D., Stevenson, F., Protheroe, J., et al. (2023). Self-management of multiple long-term conditions: A systematic review of the barriers and facilitators amongst people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation. *PLoS One*, 18(2), e0282036.

Background Multiple long-term conditions are rising across all groups but people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation are found to have a higher prevalence. Self-

management strategies are a vital part of healthcare for people with long-term conditions and effective strategies are associated with improved health outcomes in a variety of health conditions. The management of multiple long-term conditions are, however, less effective in people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation, leaving them more at risk of health inequalities. The purpose of this review is to identify and synthesise qualitative evidence on the barriers and facilitators of self-management on long-term conditions in those experiencing socioeconomic deprivation. Methods MEDLINE, EMBASE, AMED, PsycINFO and CINAHL Plus were searched for qualitative studies concerning self-management of multiple long-term conditions among socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. Data were coded and thematically synthesised using NVivo. Findings From the search results, 79 relevant qualitative studies were identified after the full text screening and 11 studies were included in the final thematic synthesis. Three overarching analytical themes were identified alongside a set of sub-themes: (1) Challenges of having multiple long-term conditions; prioritisation of conditions, impact of multiple long-term conditions on mental health and wellbeing, polypharmacy, (2) **Socioeconomic barriers to self-management; financial, health literacy, compounding impact of multiple long-term conditions and socioeconomic deprivation, (3) Facilitators of self-management in people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation; maintaining independence, 'meaningful' activities, support networks.** Discussion Self-management of multiple long-term conditions is challenging for people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation due to barriers around financial constraints and health literacy, which can lead to poor mental health and wellbeing. To support targeted interventions, greater awareness is needed among health professionals of the barriers/challenges of self-management among these populations.

Yeung, C. A., & Dickson, K. (2023). Cost of living crisis is a threat to good health. *Bmj*, 380 <https://www.bmj.com/content/380/bmj.p265>

Camilla Kingdon, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, says that toothbrushes and toothpaste for children have become "luxury" items for some families. **Research by the Oral Health Foundation found that around 82% of adults in the UK were being forced into making sacrifices in their spending habits, with 25% cutting back on oral health products such as toothpaste, mouthwash, and interdental brushes.**

Selected news items

BBC News (2023) [Cancer patients worried about costs while receiving treatment - charity](#) A cancer charity has said patients are increasingly worried about how they are going to feed themselves due to the financial threat faced while having treatment. Rodrigo Fenick, from Macmillan, said he was witnessing people going through hardship on a scale he had not seen in his 25-year career. The charity's benefits case worker said some were really panicking about money. "Their heating bill will go up tremendously," he said. "We are not talking about a couple of hundred, but over a couple of hundred pounds." Other unexpected costs include wigs or post-surgery clothing. He added: "I've never seen the amount of concern from people in terms of 'how am I going to survive? How am I going to feed myself? How am I going to feed my kids?' "Then there's the priority, 'do I keep the heating on or do I put the heating off? Do I buy enough basic food to go through the week? What do I go without?'"

BBC News (2023) [Cost of living: GP concerns over rise in signs of malnutrition](#) **More cases of malnutrition are being seen in Scotland**, according to doctors working in some of the most deprived communities. A group called GPs at the Deep End is concerned the cost-of-living crisis is making people more reliant on cheaper, processed foods. Dr Jen Dooley told the BBC people were choosing the wrong foods to 'fill up'. She said she often saw **patients lacking in basic vitamins and minerals.** GPs

at the Deep End is a network representing doctors working in surgeries in the 100 most deprived populations in the country. Dr Dooley, who is based in Port Glasgow in Inverclyde, said: "We're seeing a lot of cases where people come to us feeling a whole diverse range of presentation - fatigue, tiredness - and when we're investigating, we're finding signs of malnutrition."

**BBC News (2023) [Cost of living crisis sees some people considering suicide](#)
More people are contemplating suicide as they "cannot cope" as a result of rising costs, charities have said. Charities supporting those with chronic diseases or disabilities have called for an overhaul of the benefits system. One woman who has multiple sclerosis (MS) said her costs had almost trebled.**

**Family Fund (2023) [The cost of caring](#)
Research by the Fund shows that **"UK families raising disabled, or seriously ill, children and young people are now facing serious financial jeopardy and struggling to survive**, due to the scale of the cost-of-living crisis.**

**iNews (2023) [Cost of living has harmed mental and physical health of hundreds of thousands of children, parents' poll says](#)
A YouGov survey of parents for Save The Children UK suggests hundreds of thousands of children could be suffering mental and physical health issues due to the cost of living crisis, a poll suggests. **A quarter (24 per cent) of parents with children under 11 said they were worried soaring living costs driven by double-digit inflation were causing mental health issues for their offspring. Nearly a fifth (17 per cent) of parents meanwhile said their children were suffering physical health problems.****

**Mind (2023) [Almost 20 million adults never speak about mental health – and it's set to get worse due to the cost-of-living crisis](#)
A poll of more than 5,000 people was conducted as part of Time to Talk Day, the nation's biggest conversation about mental health. More than one in three UK adults surveyed (36 per cent) never make space in their day or the time to speak about their mental health – the equivalent of 19.6 million people aged 16 and over. Nearly a fifth (18 per cent) are also reporting the cost-of-living crisis is decreasing how often they are able to make space to have a conversation about mental health. Almost half (46%) of respondents said that their reason for fewer conversations is that everyone is struggling right now and they don't want to burden others.**