

FAO

Claire Menzies
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament

Date: 21st April 2023

Dear Claire,

Thank you again for your time this week to discuss the upcoming evidence session on disabled people and the cost of living.

As I mentioned, Consumer Scotland has evidence relevant to the Committee's consideration of the impact of increased energy costs on disabled people. We will be publishing our initial report in the next few weeks and will ensure you receive a copy.

In our research, disabled people, and those with a health condition, were more likely to report affordability challenges related to their energy costs. Case study evidence highlighted that can make it difficult to meet essential needs, such as charging medical equipment, maintaining a safe body temperature or storing medication.

Our recent regular tracker surveyed 1621 adults in Scotland, of which 544 reported a disability and 827 reported a health condition¹. The winter 2022 wave of the tracker found that:

- Forty-seven per cent of all disabled people reporting that they were not managing well financially compared with 26% of non-disabled people. This rose to 55% of those who were limited a lot by their disability – with 21% of those most limited by their disability reporting they were not managing well at all
- Forty-seven per cent of disabled people said they are finding it more difficult to keep up with energy bills compared with 29% of non-disabled people. This rose to 57% for those who are limited a lot by disability – with 41% of those who are limited a lot reporting they are finding it a lot more difficult
- Seventy-three per cent of disabled people report they are rationing energy use due to financial concerns compared with 65% of non-disabled people

¹ Please note, disability and health conditions were both self-reported by those surveyed. The online, quantitative survey was undertaken by YouGov Plc on behalf of Consumer Scotland.

- Fifty-two per cent of disabled people report that they cannot heat their home to a comfortable level compared with 36% of non-disabled people. This figure rose to 60% of those limited a lot by disability agreeing that they were unable to heat their home to a comfortable level
- Forty-seven per cent of disabled people reported cutting back on food to afford their energy bills. The analysis also showed:
 - Fifty-two per cent of those who are limited a lot by their disability reporting that they were cutting back on food
 - These figures compared with 32% of non-disabled people
 - Among those with a health condition, 41% reported cutting back compared with 31% without a health condition
- Overall, 54% of percent of disabled people reported that the energy crisis was impacting their mental health a lot/a fair amount, compared with 31% of non-disabled people. Seventy-one per cent of those who are 'limited a lot by disability' say their mental health is limited a lot/a fair amount and 44% of those limited a little
- Forty-five per cent of disabled people reported that the energy crisis was impacting their physical health compared with 18% of non-disabled people. Sixty-two per cent of those who are limited a lot by disability report impact of high bills – with 27% reporting a high impact

Our case studies, collected from frontline and disabled people's organisations, showed that some disabled people are finding it difficult to afford electricity costs for medical equipment, such as breathing and mobility equipment². They also reported cutting back on mobility equipment and feeding pumps due to affordability of charging. These case studies also showed that some disabled people were reporting choosing between food and charging their medical equipment.

These are our initial findings and we will be undertaking further analysis to look at the data in more detail and at more specific recommendations on how to address these issues. Further analysis will help to better understand the factors that might lead to disabled people, and those with health conditions, reporting greater affordability concerns. Further evidence on these factors will help to inform potential pathways to improving affordability for disabled people and those with a self-reported health condition.

I hope this information is useful and please do not hesitate to get in touch if it would be helpful to discuss further.

Warm Regards,

Grace Remmington
Energy Policy Manager, Consumer Scotland

² Case studies were submitted by Euan's Guide, Changeworks, Inclusion Scotland and Enable Scotland