

Joint sector letter to the Chancellor

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
Westminster
London SW1A 2HQ

Sent by email

15 November 2023

Dear Chancellor of the Exchequer,

Joint letter from the disability sector calling for urgent support with the cost of living for disabled people

We are a group of 75 national and regional disability and sight loss charities united in our mission to support disabled people, and people with long term conditions.

We are writing to you to call for urgent action in the Autumn Statement to support disabled households through the ongoing cost of living crisis, in recognition that disabled people have been disproportionately affected by the cost of living.

We are acutely aware that the cost of living crisis has not gone away. As we approach a second winter, the situation will only get worse. Disabled people continue to be at the sharpest end, facing the double blow of low incomes and unavoidable higher costs for heating, eating, transport and other essentials.

Too many disabled people and their families are already at breaking point.

Scope research has found that on average disabled households face extra costs of £975 per month, including the cost of specialist equipment and higher energy use. Meanwhile half of blind and partially sighted people are using their disability benefits to pay for every day living costs, rather than the additional costs associated with their sight loss.

It's vital that benefits are set at a level that means disabled people can afford the essentials. This means being able to put food on the table, heat their home, and charge vital equipment. Too often we hear that benefits, including disability benefits, fall woefully short.

Sense research found that 68 per cent of disabled people are worried they'll have to skip meals to cope this winter, and 58 per cent fear they'll be forced to take out loans.

Laura, who has MS and two sons with autism, explains:

'Because of the MS, I can't get too cold or I get ill. Having the heating on during the winter is a total non-negotiable for me. Otherwise, my symptoms get so bad that I can't move, I'm slower and I'm at much higher risk of falling.'

We are alarmed and deeply concerned the 2022 Autumn Statement commitment to make energy support more targeted to those who most need it has not been delivered for disabled people. Meanwhile the warmer months have not provided enough respite for disabled household budgets. Equipment and services are needed throughout the year, and debt and worry has continued to build up for many.

As a sector we feel let down that the UK Government has not launched a consultation on an energy social tariff. A discounted energy tariff would protect disabled households struggling with their energy bills from price increases.

We write to you today to call for:

1. All benefits to be updated at least in line with inflation in the Autumn Statement, as is the norm.
2. A UK Government review of how benefits are set and increased, so people can always afford the essentials, and manage the extra costs that come with disability.
3. Additional Winter financial support targeted at disabled households with higher energy costs.
4. Consultation on an energy social tariff under the UK Government's commitment to develop a new approach to consumer protection in energy markets.
5. All support to be promoted and communicated in accessible formats, including in BSL and easy read, and compatible with screen reading and magnification software, and to be available at the same time as mainstream formats.

Yours sincerely,

4 Sight Vision Support
Action for Kids (AFK)
Affinity Trust
Aspens
Berkshire Vision
Blind Veterans UK
Brainkind
BucksVision
Bury Society for Blind and Partially Sighted People
Camphill Village Trust
Certitude
Choice Support
Chrysalis Housing
Community Integrated Care
Croydon Mencap
David Lewis
Devon in Sight
Dimensions UK
East Cheshire Eye Society
Fight for Sight / Vision Foundation
FitzRoy
Forth Valley Sensory Centre
Glaucoma UK
Golden Lane Housing
Grace Eyre
Guide Dogs
Headway East London
Henshaws
Imagine Act and Succeed
Imagine Independence
Jewish Blind & Disabled
Kent Association for the Blind
Kids
Learning Disability England
Learning Disability London
Leonard Cheshire
Macular Society
Making Space
Mencap
Mind

MySight York
MyVision Oxfordshire
NAS
New Prospects Association
One Fylde
Outlookers
Papworth Trust
PSS
Retina UK
RNIB
Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC)
Scope
SeeAbility
Sense
Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey
Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind
Sight Loss Shropshire
Sight Support Derbyshire
Sight Support West of England
St Anne's
St Elizabeth's
Sutton Vision
The Northam Care Trust
Thomas Pocklington Trust
Together Trust
Turning Point
United Response
VICTA
Vision Support
Vision Support Barrow and District
Visionary
Vista
VoiceAbility
Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG)
Your Support Matters CIC