

Government 'must intervene on energy or risk economic and mental health crisis'

The [Government](#) must urgently intervene to help struggling households with ballooning energy costs – or risk a “full-blown economic crisis” and mental health emergency, charities and think tanks have warned.

Friday's energy price cap rise will plunge many households into destitution and put children, disabled and older people at serious risk this winter, several bodies said.

Many pensioners will be feeling “utterly bewildered” and “badly let down”, they said, while disabled people already “feel like they are being punished for using more energy”.

The groups said it is “simply unthinkable” that the price rise can go ahead without significant Government intervention, and that “a growing feeling of powerlessness will not subside” until it sets out concrete plans to help.

They are urging the Government to respond in similar scale to how it handled the coronavirus pandemic.

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The Government is working to develop more options to support households, with civil service officials working to ensure any additional cost-of-living commitments can be delivered “as quickly as possible” when the new [Prime Minister](#) is in place.

Becca Lyon, head of child poverty at Save The [Children](#), called the price cap rise “a full-blown economic crisis for thousands of families”.

She said: “Children are at serious risk from today’s announcement and could spend this winter in cold homes, with fewer hot meals, despite the best efforts of their parents and carers. Our children deserve better.”

She added that “debt and hardship are the only likely outcome” from the rise.

There is a growing feeling of powerlessness which will not subside until we see concrete plans from the government about how they will provide targeted support through the difficult months ahead.

Rethink Mental Illness called the news a “hammer blow” to households across the country.

Alexa Knight, associate director for policy and practice, said: “Mental health and money worries are intrinsically linked, and we urgently need a clear response from Government to an economic crisis that has the potential to fuel a mental health emergency.

“There is a growing feeling of powerlessness which will not subside until we see concrete plans from the Government about how they will provide targeted support through the difficult months ahead.”

Katie Schmuecker, principal policy adviser for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said households are “crying out for certainty and security”.

(PA Graphics) / PA Graphics

She said: “It is simply unthinkable that the price rises announced today can go ahead without further Government intervention on a significant scale.

“To force the burden of rising wholesale energy prices onto households will plunge many into destitution.

“Millions more will face the threat of bills they simply cannot pay, homes they cannot heat, and stomachs they cannot fill.”

She said the next Prime Minister will be remembered for who they protect, and must ensure “energy doesn’t become a luxury only the wealthy can afford”.

[Age UK](#) said getting through the autumn and winter is a “truly frightening prospect” for older people who have very little flex in their fixed incomes.

Charity director Caroline Abrahams said: “We are fast approaching a national emergency which will leave a significant proportion of the population unable to afford even a basic standard of living.

“Every day older people are telling us how scared they are; they need urgent reassurance from the Government that they will not abandon them.”

Tom Marsland, policy manager disability equality charity Scope, said the cost of charging a wheelchair or using a breathing machine will have almost trebled in a year.

He said: “We’ve been inundated with calls from disabled people who don’t know which way to turn and feel like they are being punished for using more energy.

“The Government must intervene now.”

Thomas Lawson, chief executive of national poverty Turn2us, said the “meteoric rise” will be crippling.

He said: “This is no longer a choice between heating and eating, but not being able to afford either.

“This is as big an emergency as the impact of Covid and needs a similarly confident Government response.”

A spokesman said the Government recognised that people are “incredibly worried”, and support will continue to reach those who need it most.

He said: “The civil service is also making the appropriate preparations in order to ensure that any additional support or commitments on cost of living can be delivered as quickly as possible when the new Prime Minister is in place.”