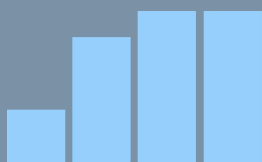




# Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2023



Hertfordshire Public Health  
Evidence & Intelligence  
JSNA



Hertfordshire

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# Preface



“Welcome to my Annual Report for 2023, highlighting the impacts of the cost of living crisis on the health and wellbeing of Hertfordshire’s population.

Since late 2021, we have seen substantial increases in the cost of everyday essentials needed to maintain a minimum standard of living, including food and fuel. Rising inflation has also led to increases in rent and mortgage payments, further exacerbating the financial pressures that our residents are experiencing.

This report looks at the causes of the cost of living crisis and casts a spotlight on some of the work happening locally to help people who may be struggling.

At the end of the report, you will find signposts to more local information on this topic.”

**Prof. Jim McManus, Executive Director of Public Health, Hertfordshire County Council**

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# Contents

Preface.....	2
Contents.....	3
Introduction .....	4
Cost of living definition.....	4
Cost of living crisis .....	5
Impact on health .....	7
Life expectancy.....	7
Children and young people.....	7
Fuel/food poverty .....	8
Mental health.....	8
Wider Impacts of the cost of living crisis.....	12
Who is most affected .....	15
Impact of service demand & services.....	21
Responding to the cost of living locally.....	22
Final Thoughts.....	25
Where to find out more.....	26
References .....	27

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# Introduction

## Cost of living definition

Cost of living refers to the monetary cost of accessing and maintaining a particular standard of living. It is usually measured by calculating the average cost of a selection of items or services required by particular population groups. This measurement is essential for the Government to determine things such as Universal Credit payments, disability or family allowances, tax exemptions, and minimum wages. However, it may be difficult to make more precise comparisons of cost of living over time due to changes in consumer tastes and overall availability of products.<sup>1</sup>

A key component used to gauge cost of living is the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of living costs based on fluctuations in retail prices. The index is based on the price of commonly purchased goods or services within a sample population. These prices are documented periodically and this, combined with the relative importance of those goods, can be compared over time to assess changes in the cost of living.<sup>2</sup>



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## Cost of living crisis

The cost of living crisis relates to the fall in individuals' tangible disposable incomes, after being adjusted for inflation, taxation, and benefits.<sup>3</sup> This crisis is thought to have started towards the end of 2021, with a steady increase in the number of adults reporting a rise in the cost of living. Recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) data has suggested that around 87% of adults reported an increase in their cost of living over the previous month in March 2022, an increase of 25 percentage points compared with around 62% adults in November 2021 (3<sup>rd</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> November 2021).<sup>4</sup>

The reason for this is predominantly due to a rise in inflation which has not been matched by rises in wages or benefits payments. There are a few contributing factors that have been driving this increase over the past 18 months, with the main issues arising from a combination of disruptions to global supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> This has served to push up the prices of energy, food, and product imports, which has a trickle-down effect on the end consumer.<sup>5</sup>

While the UK only imports 13% of its fuel from Russia directly, it is vulnerable to disturbances in European supply chains, causing energy prices to increase significantly.<sup>3,6</sup> Rising energy costs have a knock-on effect on the cost of food production.<sup>5</sup> In conjunction, global shipping costs have increased as a direct result of capacity reduction due to the pandemic, increasing the price of other commodities such as timber or larger imported products.<sup>3,7</sup> Finally, Ukraine is a big exporter of agricultural products, such as grain and sunflower oil, and the war has meant continued disruption of this supply chain, further putting pressure on global food prices.<sup>3</sup>

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## Case Study: Household Support Fund



Over the past 12 months, Hertfordshire County Council has distributed the Household Support Fund across the county, worth approximately £12m, to provide critical support to those in most need with the cost of living crisis. The Council has worked in partnership with Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise partners across the County, NHS and District and Borough colleagues to support many cohorts through different schemes, providing food, energy and crisis support amongst others.

Examples of the key support provided throughout the year include Free School Meals, distribution of the Welfare Assistance Scheme for those in need of urgent financial payments and at risk of crisis, voucher payments to pensioners and a range of grant programmes to community groups. There are also many additional projects and services delivered by organisations like HertsHelp, Citizens Advice, Money Advice Unit and Age UK.

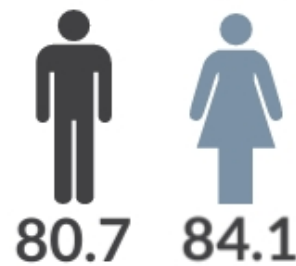
Both generalised and targeted support has been delivered to those in most need, with an estimated 650,000 individuals supported during this period. A further Household Support Fund allocation has been received for the next financial year to sustain the positive work and support underway.

# Impact on health

## Life expectancy

Although the long-term health consequences of the cost of living crisis will not be evident for years to come, health professionals have warned that it could shorten life expectancy.<sup>8</sup> There is a clear link between life expectancy and poverty in England, with current life expectancy for those in the most deprived areas being around 9 years shorter for males and 7 years shorter for females compared to those in the least deprived areas.<sup>9</sup> The cost of living crisis is likely to increase poverty, with an increasing proportion of people being unable to afford basics, such as heating or adequate nutrition, which could cause simple health problems to become more life-threatening.<sup>8</sup>

Life expectancy at birth for males and females in Hertfordshire



Source: OHID, Office for National Statistics, 2021

## Children and young people

Prior to the cost of living crisis, 1 in 3 children in the UK were already living in poverty, and this is set to get worse as households struggle to afford the basic necessities to keep their children healthy.<sup>20</sup> Poverty in childhood is linked to a range of adverse educational, psychological and health outcomes, leading to poorer health and life chances in adulthood.<sup>21</sup> Currently, there are 2.6 million children nationally without access to a healthy diet, posing a particular concern as malnutrition in childhood can lead to the development of chronic non-communicable diseases such

Did you know?



**1 in 9**

children (aged 0-15) in Hertfordshire were considered to be living in poverty

Source: IDACI, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019

as obesity, type 2 diabetes and chronic heart disease.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, a survey by Childhood Trust found that the cost of living crisis has affected children's mental health, with 30% of parents saying their children felt stressed and 17% reporting that their children have started self-harming.<sup>23</sup>

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## Fuel/food poverty

It is estimated that up to 40% of households could fall into fuel poverty due to the cost of living crisis.<sup>10</sup> Cold homes are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, respiratory illnesses and falls, particularly among older people.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the increase in the number of people experiencing food insecurity due to the rising cost of food in the UK will likely to affect health outcomes.<sup>12</sup> Data from April 2022 shows that 8% of British households had not eaten despite being hungry within the past month because they could not afford or access food, contributing to a 57% increase in the proportion of households cutting back on food or missing meals since January 2022.<sup>13</sup>



Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial strategy, 2020

## Mental health

The cost of living crisis has been declared as a 'threat of pandemic proportions' to the nation's overall mental health by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.<sup>14</sup> Research shows that mental health among people claiming Universal Credit has already been negatively impacted in recent years due to reforms to the UK social security system.<sup>15</sup>

The cost of living crisis will serve to exacerbate this, with millions of people facing food insecurity, fuel poverty and debt, all of which are known risk factors for poor mental health.<sup>14,16</sup> Recent data shows that 59% of UK adults report that the cost of living crisis is having a negative impact on their mental health, leaving them feeling anxious, depressed or hopeless, with 11 million people saying they have felt 'unable to cope'.<sup>17</sup>



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According to the [Healthwatch Hertfordshire Cost of Living Crisis Survey](#), 63% of the Hertfordshire residents surveyed stated that their mental health was affected by the cost of living crisis and 45% worried about their future. Additionally, 90% of those surveyed reported that they have had to reduce their attendance at support or social groups.

There is real concern that this crisis may continue to detrimentally affect mental health and subsequently may affect suicide rates. Comprehensive research shows that economic crisis increases suicide attempts, particularly among males, with debt and loss of control cited as key risk factors.<sup>18,19</sup>

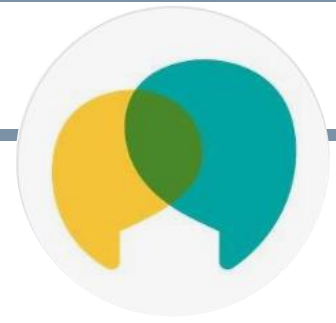


## Case Study: Mental health support in Warm Spaces

As a response to the cost of living crisis, the mental health and suicide prevention team worked closely with Hertsmere Borough to plan and fund mental health awareness and mental health first aid training to those working with the Warm Space initiative.

This has been rolled out to all Warm Spaces venues in Hertfordshire. In addition, foodbank staff and volunteers across Hertfordshire have been offered this free mental health awareness and first aid training.

This recognises the demand placed on foodbank staff to whom residents have spoken of increased anxiety and depression due to financial and other pressures. Further work is taking place with partners to address this need and ensure support services are available to people in crisis



## Case Study: Togetherall

In May 2022, Hertfordshire Public Health Team launched its offer of Togetherall to Hertfordshire residents. Providing 24/7 anonymous mental health support to residents, and helping to ease the demand on overstretched services, Togetherall is an online mental health peer support service and, because it is anonymous, people can express themselves freely and openly. Professionally trained Wall guides (similar to moderators) monitor the community to ensure the safety and anonymity of all members.

Togetherall provides information and courses on a range of mental health issues and associated concerns, from depression and stress to grief, disability, alcohol use, pregnancy and sleep amongst others.

The round the clock availability of the service is a key element for those who may be experiencing anxiety or low mood in the early hours. Data shows that 25% of logins are between 5pm and midnight; and 18% of logins are between midnight and 9am. The age of those who register on the site is greatest amongst those aged 25-54 years, with more women than men accessing the service so far.

Take up of the service was slow and steady over the year but has started to increase rapidly in recent months as more people hear of it and potentially because of extra stressors such as the cost of living crisis over the winter.

It provides a service both for those waiting for referral into the mental health system but also those who may not have experienced mental health problems before but difficult circumstances presented by the cost of living crisis means they may feel the need for this kind of anonymous digital support. It has also reached out to specific groups with protected characteristics such as our racially diverse and transgender communities. The online platform has also recorded self-reporting of suicide ideation and suicide attempts that may not be captured in other data sources. Digital mental health platforms are not new and becoming an important feature of self-managed mental health care for those who want it, when they want it, at times convenient to them, offering choice and working alongside existing mental health services.



## Case Study: We're here for you this winter

Hertfordshire County Council's public information assurance campaign, 'We're here for you this winter', was designed to raise residents' awareness of the help and support available locally to help them throughout the winter months.

The campaign signposted residents to support and advice to help them to manage the cost of living and stay safe and well. A campaign webpage on the council's website provided a single source to access information, and posters and booklets were targeted through council services and other organisations in touch with residents who don't have internet access.

There can be a stigma associated with using support or asking for help, so it was important to reduce this by using supportive and positive language. The council's communications team worked closely with the Behaviour Change and Money Advice Units to identify key audiences and to ensure they got the tone and language of messages right.

The council worked with other organisations to help deliver the public campaign by designing bespoke toolkits for district/borough council colleagues, NHS partners, schools and care providers, with ready-made content that they could download and easily share on their own channels.

Advertising was targeted in areas where uptake of support and services was lower than comparable areas. Posters were displayed across Hertfordshire on buses, at supermarkets and shopping malls, featuring the HertsHelp telephone number, to reach residents without internet access.

A 'Winter Health' booklet was delivered to over half a million homes and locations including homeless shelters, day services, supported living settings, job centres and women's refuges. It included key information on how to receive the flu and COVID vaccines, access to financial support through the cost of living crisis, how to keep yourself & others safe.

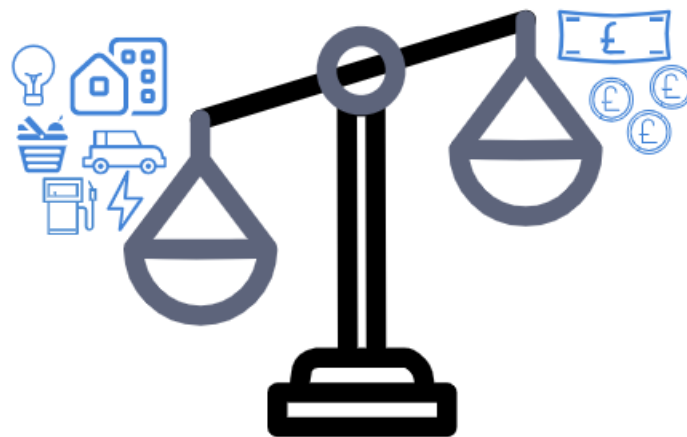
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## Wider Impacts of the cost of living crisis

There is a lack of current evidence regarding the cost of living crisis on health behaviours; however, evidence from past financial crises shows a shift towards less healthy behaviours, including increased smoking and less healthy dietary behaviours.<sup>24</sup>

- **Smoking:** Smoking prevalence in the UK is strongly associated with socioeconomic deprivation and poor mental health, both of which are factors likely to be exacerbated by the cost of living crisis.<sup>25</sup> Given that smoking is also a cause of financial deprivation, there have been calls on the government to accelerate the adoption of safer smoking alternatives among poorer communities to help people quit smoking, which could help the average smoker boost their annual disposable income by approximately 10%.<sup>26</sup>
- **Diet:** Prior research demonstrates that economic crisis increases the probability of poor diet quality and obesity.<sup>27</sup> Rising food prices in the UK will likely mean that people become reliant on lower cost foods, which tend to be higher calorie and nutrient-poor, further increasing national obesity rates.<sup>13</sup>
- **Physical activity:** A 2022 survey by London Sport found that over 25% of adults in the UK are doing less sport or exercise due to rising costs, with this figure being highest among adults aged 18-44. Half (50%) of UK adults aged 18-44 agreed that the cost of living has limited their ability to afford sport and leisure equipment, with 49% also agreeing that this has discouraged them from using local leisure facilities.<sup>28</sup>
- **Drug and alcohol consumption:** Evidence suggests that economic crisis can have mixed impacts on drug and alcohol consumption. On one hand, tighter budget constraints mean less money is spent on alcohol and/or drugs, but on the other hand, psychological distress triggered by financial pressures may drive people to consume more.<sup>29,30</sup> The link between stress and substance use is well-documented, with research showing that people often increase their alcohol consumption to cope with financial problems or stress.<sup>31,32</sup>

- **Crime:** According to the Office for National Statistics, in the year ending March 2022 there was a 37% increase in fraud and computer misuse offences, but a 20% decrease in theft. The increases in computer misuse and fraud offences are thought to be potentially linked to the cost of living crisis, as people try to make quick money with scams and bank fraud.<sup>33</sup> Despite the overall rates of theft decreasing, the rates of countryside crime have increased. According to the National Farmers Union Mutual, in the first quarter of 2022 there was a huge increase in theft of Land Rover Defenders (34% increase), trailer theft (5% cost increase) and livestock rustling (3.7% cost increase), with fuel theft becoming the largest concern among farmers as fuel prices continue to rise.<sup>34</sup>
- **Housing affordability:** There is evidence that suggests an association between housing affordability and poor mental health. One Australian study found that private renters consistently had poorer mental health when housing became unaffordable when compared with homeowners.<sup>35</sup> In addition, a 2017 Shelter report demonstrated that 3 in 10 of those who said they had a housing problem or worry in the last five years said that it had had a negative mental impact and that they had no issue with their mental health previously. Housing affordability was the most common housing problem for those who said that housing issues had a negative effect on their mental health.<sup>36</sup>



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## Case Study: Cost of Living Dashboard



The wide-ranging impact of the cost of living can make it a challenge to identify the communities being impacted the most and the geographical areas local authorities need to prioritise when providing support.

Hertfordshire County Council Adult Care Services' Community and People Wellbeing team developed a dashboard to provide professionals with data to support the development of services.

The dashboard data comes from key providers, such as Citizens Advice, the Money Advice Unit and HertsHelp, as well as information on service locations and feedback from the cost of living service developed by Healthwatch.

This system-wide overview of the services available related to the cost of living enabled the identification of possible gaps in service provision. Professionals were able to delve deeper into areas where the greatest need for support was identified and make commissioning decisions to support with the cost of living based on local evidence.

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## Who is most affected

- **Poverty:** The cost of living crisis disproportionately affects poorer households.<sup>4</sup> Households in the bottom income decile spend 23% of their total expenditure on necessities such as food products and energy bills, meaning that inflation will have a much more significant proportional impact on their household budgets.<sup>37</sup> This is further exacerbated by the fact that these households tend to live in older, less energy efficient houses and often rely on traditionally lower-priced food items that are experiencing a higher rate of inflation.<sup>37,38</sup> The cost of living crisis may also push many households into poverty and even some into destitution, especially in more deprived areas.<sup>37</sup>
- State pensions and benefits income has also risen at a much slower pace than inflation in the past year, causing families who are in receipt of social security to be unequally impacted and have far less spending power.<sup>39</sup>



## Case Study:

# Money Advice Unit



Joe (a pseudonym), a 55-year old single male, was referred by his Community Psychiatric Nurse to an Money Advice Unit (MAU) adviser attached to a Community Mental Health Team. Joe's mental and physical health were deteriorating (weight loss, poor skin condition, suicidal ideation and self-harm). Joe was worried about eviction from his 2-bedroom flat for rent arrears. There was a summons for non-payment of council tax. His gas supply depended on a pre-payment meter.

Until 2018, Joe had been in regular employment but spells in hospital and absences from work cost him his job. His GP supplied medical evidence that he was unfit for work, so he got universal credit of £334 a month to cover food, bills, clothing etc. and part of his rent.

Joe was concerned that if he was seen as 'failing' he would lose his independence and be hospitalised again. However, once reassured, progress was possible on his financial issues.

Following a reconsideration lodged by the adviser, his UC increased to £688 a month. A claim for Personal Independence Payment led to an extra £61.85 a week. Evidence from the CPN and other medical staff was crucial to both outcomes.

The adviser arranged for the district council to award a discretionary housing payment to cover the part of his rent that Universal Credit was not meeting because of his 'spare' bedroom. A claim for council tax reduction removed the threat of court action. A British Gas Energy Trust grant cleared the arrears on his gas bill. He now pays via direct debit. As a short-term measure, the adviser arranged £150 of supermarket vouchers from the County Council's Household Support Fund.

Joe's well-being, health and outlook have all improved significantly. He is now going out to social activities and buying quite mundane treats for himself such as a KFC or fresh fruit.

The MAU are now extending their advice work into the Enhanced Primary Care Mental Health Teams as a result of the cost of living crisis.



- **Food poverty:** A household can be defined as experiencing food poverty or ‘household food insecurity’ if they cannot (or are uncertain about whether they can) acquire “an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways”.<sup>40</sup> The increase in the cost of living has affected household food insecurity. During June and July 2022, of the 91% of adults in Great Britain who reported an increase in their cost of living, 95% reported the price of their food shopping go up, and 44% reported that they spent less on essentials such as food.<sup>41</sup>

## Case Study:

# Food Insecurity in Hertfordshire

The Food Insecurity workstream is funded by the Building Life Chances Programme and delivered by the Public Health Whole Systems Obesity and Food Insecurity Team.

The Public Health Team at Hertfordshire County Council carried out a Food Poverty Needs Assessment in November 2021 to review the available evidence for food insecurity and its effect on the population in Hertfordshire.

One in 10 Hertfordshire residents were found to be at high risk for food insecurity, which can negatively impact their physical and mental health and lead to wider health and income inequalities.

The assessment identified four key recommendations:

1. Establish Leadership on Food Insecurity
2. Form a Hertfordshire Food Aid Network
3. Establish a Hertfordshire Food Alliance
4. Develop a Hertfordshire Food Insecurity Action Plan

**Hertfordshire Food Steering Group** was set up in March 2022 to provide the necessary leadership and governance to support and develop an Action Plan. **Hertfordshire Food Aid Network** was formed in April 2022 to connect foodbanks, food pantries and food rescue hubs. **Hertfordshire Food Alliance** was established in May 2022 to bring together local organisations and community groups.

A **Hertfordshire Food Insecurity Action Plan** was developed with cross-sector agreement. While this is currently in draft form, the WSO & FI Team are using it as a working document and are hoping to share more widely by Summer 2023.

- **Fuel poverty:** A household is considered to be in fuel poverty if their property has an energy rating of Band D or less, and their household income is below the poverty line. The latest UK government figures from 2020 showed that 13.2% or 3.16 million households were living in fuel poverty, the lowest proportion since 2010.<sup>42</sup> More recent estimates, however, suggest that this has increased further following the spike in energy prices to approximately 6.7 million UK households.<sup>43</sup>



## Case Study: Warm Spaces

Hertfordshire's Warm Spaces initiative and Warm Herts grants were launched in October 2022 in partnership with the county's ten district and borough councils as part of its Cost of Living response, to provide a range of warm spaces that are free and accessible to all Hertfordshire's residents.

These Warm Spaces are hosted by libraries, community groups, family centres, and faith groups across Hertfordshire, opening their doors and welcoming residents into their space. A new transport scheme, developed in partnership with Community Help Hertfordshire, provides free transport for residents to get to a Warm Space.

So far, over 30,000 hours have been spent in warm spaces, saving residents over £10,000 in energy bill savings\*. This is based on data we have received from approximately 25% of the warm spaces we have registered. Warm Spaces provide safe, warm spaces for residents to use this winter, in which they can join in various activities and in some cases also have a hot meal. In addition, £96,182 worth of grants have been awarded through the Warm Herts Fund, with 58 Warm Spaces receiving funding.

\*Data up until Early January

- **Low-income households with children:** The number of UK households on Universal Credit as of August 2022 was 4.8 million, with half of these households including children (0-19 years).<sup>44</sup> According to the Department for Work and Pensions, in 2021/22, there were an estimated 2.92 million children in families in ‘relative’ low-income and 2.37 million children in ‘absolute’ low-income families.<sup>45</sup> With the cost of living crisis remaining a major issue for families, more children are at risk of going hungry, cold or without essential items.<sup>46</sup> In May 2022, 7 million low-income households were going without at least one essential (a warm home, enough food, appropriate clothing, or basic toiletries) and over 2 million families were neither eating properly nor heating their home adequately.<sup>47</sup>



## Case Study: Building Life Chances

The Building Life Chances (BLC) programme started in September 2021, as part of Hertfordshire County Council’s Covid-19 recovery strategy and was allocated £2.32m to help support communities to recover from the pandemic and address inequalities that have further been exacerbated by the Cost of Living Crisis.

The programme is delivered by Hertfordshire County Council’s Children’s Services, Adult Community Service and Public Health departments, alongside the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector (VCFSE), NHS, district and borough councils, and schools.

The BLC Programme addresses 6 themes: Food Insecurity; Employment & Skills; Good Start in Life; Education & Skills; Health Inequalities; and Crisis Support.

Several projects are managed by HCC working with partners, including:

- Youth activities
- Healthy start
- Parent Drop-in sessions at Family Centres
- Additional staff training in benefits advice
- Children with disability
- HERT Extension
- Food vouchers
- Winter Essential Fund

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- **Ethnicity:** A recent report suggests that ethnic minority workers will be disproportionately affected by the cost of living crisis, with 34% of workers from ethnic minority backgrounds being unable to afford their bills, rent or mortgage each month compared to 27% of the general population.<sup>48</sup> Projections suggest that households of South Asian, Caribbean and Black African heritage will experience the largest incidence of destitution directly as a result of higher inflation on essential items.<sup>37</sup>
  - **Disability:** Disabled people typically have less disposable income than non-disabled people, due to their requirement to spend more on essential goods and services like heating, insurance, equipment and therapies.<sup>49</sup> A survey of adults in England and Wales in January 2022 found that disabled people are more than twice as likely to have a cold house and three times as likely not to be able to afford food.<sup>50</sup> Continued inflation is therefore likely to severely affect disabled people and their families, unless Personal Independence Payment (PIP) benefits increase to match inflation.<sup>49</sup>
  - **Age:** In early 2022, a greater proportion of older adults reported that their cost of living has increased compared with younger adults, with the highest proportion of those reporting increases being aged 55-64 (82%), 65-74 (81%) and 75 and over (79%).<sup>51</sup> Rising food and energy bills are likely to negatively affect the health of older people in the UK, many of whom are vulnerable to malnutrition and the winter cold, with 92% of excess winter deaths being among people aged 65+ in 2017/18.<sup>52</sup> More than a million older people on low incomes are unaware that they qualify for Pension Credit and are subsequently missing out on vital support such as Cold Weather Payments and the Warm Home Discount Scheme.<sup>53</sup>
  - **COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic has served to amplify the cost of living crisis in numerous ways, putting more people at risk of negative health outcomes. It is widely documented that the pandemic placed many families under economic strain due to widespread job losses and financial instability, as well as negatively impacting people's mental and physical health.<sup>16</sup> COVID-19 worsened pre-existing economic and health inequalities in the UK, and evidence currently indicates that it is those people and areas who were most affected by the pandemic who will also be hit hardest by the rising cost of living.<sup>54,55</sup>

## Impact of service demand & services

According to the ‘NHS Providers’ survey carried out in August/September 2022, NHS trust leaders reported a rise in NHS demand during the cost of living crisis, with the majority (72%) saying they have seen an increase in mental health presentations due to stress, debt and poverty. They also described an increase in patients experiencing new difficulties in managing existing conditions due to the cost of equipment and medication, and a rise in the prevalence of conditions related to food and fuel poverty.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst the NHS demand appears to be increasing, the number of people using private healthcare has plateaued after previously increasing between 2020 and 2021. The latest report (April to June 2022) from the Private Healthcare Information Network showed similar levels of private patient admissions (197,000) to the previous two quarters.<sup>57</sup>

The increase in demand on the NHS is further exacerbated by the impact of the cost of living crisis on the lives of the NHS staff. The majority (61%) of respondents reported a rise in mental health sickness absence across the staff. They also reported that the rising cost of living is causing staff to look for roles elsewhere, with two thirds (68%) of respondents reporting a significant or severe impact from staff leaving the trust for other sectors, further increasing the demand on the remaining workers.<sup>56</sup>



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# Responding to the cost of living locally

For more information on what support is available locally for those struggling with the cost of living crisis, Hertfordshire County Council runs a website providing [Help to manage the cost of living](#).

## Local Services

- **[Citizens Advice](#)**: Promotes and develops the provision of advice-giving services, by securing funding, forging strategic county-wide alliances and facilitating cooperation and collaboration between the 10 Citizens Advice Hertfordshire services.
- **Council Tax**: Residents can contact [district and borough councils](#) for help with Council Tax discounts, benefits, exemptions and for information on the £150 rebate scheme for some households.
- **Food Insecurity Action Plan**: There is a draft 'Food Insecurity Action Plan' for Hertfordshire following the recommendations listed in the [Food Poverty Needs Assessment](#). The action plan is not yet published and is under development.
- **Food Support**: There are many food aid providers located across Hertfordshire. Some providers are part of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network which require the applicant to have a voucher, while others are classified as independent foodbanks, food pantries and food rescue organisations. A list of food aid providers can be found in the [Hertfordshire Directory](#).
- **Grants for community groups and organisations**: Community groups, organisations and charities who work to reduce or improve food and energy poverty locally, can apply for grants from this partnership with [Hertfordshire Community Foundation](#).
- **[HAPpy camps](#)**: Helps local families who are in receipt of benefits-related free school meals during the summer holidays.
- **Here for you this winter**: Winter health, wellbeing and cost of living campaign run by the Public Health team at Hertfordshire County Council. This campaign includes:
  - [Warm Spaces Directory](#): a network of warm spaces people can use.

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- [Information Hub](#) and [Comms toolkit](#): contains a range of marketing materials and content to help promote the campaign across Hertfordshire such as a cost of living flashcard, which has been used across libraries, family centres and frontline social workers etc.
  - [Here For You Winter Health Guide](#): Has been sent to households and distributed through over 40 different partners across the county as well as a translated summary in 6 different languages.
  - **[Hertfordshire Employment Support](#)**: Provides employment-related support to individuals who are also accessing the Hertfordshire Wellbeing IAPT service
  - **[Hertfordshire Energy Advice Tool \(HEAT\) app](#)**: Gives virtual tour around the home and suggests quick and easy actions to help save money on bills.
  - **Hertfordshire Food Aid Network**: A partnership group established in April 2022 with the purpose of connecting Hertfordshire Food Aid Providers. Members of this group meet monthly to share updates and good practice, and where possible develop joint solutions.
  - **Hertfordshire Food Alliance**: In May 2022, a wide range of Hertfordshire organisations and community groups came together. This group meets every 12 weeks and intends to raise the profile of food insecurity, while also developing and delivering actions that address the causes of food insecurity. All actions developed are embedded within the below Food Insecurity Plan.
  - **[Hertfordshire Independent Living Service](#)**: The community meal provider for Hertfordshire County Council, supports adults through services such as meals on wheels, tea and breakfast packs and nutritional boosts.
  - **[Hertfordshire Money Advice Unit](#)**: Run by Adult Care Services, provides information on benefits and contact points if you need to talk to someone.
  - **[HertsHelp](#)**: Trained friendly advisors that offer confidential assistance and can put people in touch with helpful services and support locally surrounding financial stress. Also a point of contact to ask about **Government's Household Support Fund (HSF)**.

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- **Housing support:** Temporary housing provided by charities such as Dacorum Emergency Night Shelter (DENs); Catalyst or Group for The Rootless in Watford (GROW).
  - **Support for families eligible for free school meals:** HCC provides residents with supermarket vouchers for families receiving benefit-related free school meals during the summer holidays. The [NHS Health Start voucher](#) can be used on healthy food and milk is also available to parents in receipt of certain benefits.
  - **[Support for Pensioners](#):** As part of HSF, financial support to those in receipt of Pension credits.



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## Final Thoughts

“The links between people’s health and financial circumstances are well established, so it’s crucial that, as a system, we continue to invest in services that can help people in this difficult time and assist people in making improvements to their health and wellbeing. The ongoing cost of living crisis is a major challenge for the health of our population.

I hope you have found this report informative and that the case studies have given you a small – and by no means exhaustive – glimpse of the valuable work going on in the county by a range of partners to support our residents.

Although Hertfordshire is a relatively affluent place overall, simple comparisons with national statistics mask notable inequalities within the county.

The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis on those in society who are worst off shows that our efforts to tackle the underlying causes of disadvantage and poor health are more important than ever.”

**Prof. Jim McManus, Executive Director of Public Health, Hertfordshire County Council**

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## Where to find out more

For evidence, intelligence & evaluation visit: <http://www.hertshealthevidence.org.uk>

For JSNAs or literature reviews visit: <http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/jsna>

Cost of Living Crisis Survey Infographic: <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/about-the-council/cost-of-living-report.pdf>

### Cost of Living Lite Bite

Hertfordshire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) looks at the specific health and social care needs of our local population and highlights areas of inequality. It helps public bodies decide what type of local services to commission.

The report has been produced using evidence and statistics presented in the Hertfordshire Cost of Living JSNA Lite Bite. You can read the JSNA Lite Bite by going to [hertfordshire.gov.uk/jsna](http://hertfordshire.gov.uk/jsna) or scanning the QR code to the right.



Every JSNA going forward for the foreseeable future, where relevant, will include a section on cost of living exploring any relevant impact of the crisis on our local population and services.

### Supporting residents with the increased cost of living: Behavioural science recommendations for local authorities

A resource created to provide practical and evidence-based behavioural science recommendations that can help local authorities to support their residents with the significant pressures caused by the increased cost of living. This briefing helps:



- Identify the groups in society that are most likely to be affected and how the increased cost of living will impact on them, thus exacerbating societal and health inequalities.
- Provide evidence-based advice rooted in the behavioural and social sciences, highlighting what local authorities can do to support their residents. Key recommendations for action and next steps to support residents are presented.

You can read this report by going to [Behavioural science resources for professionals](#) or by scanning the QR code to the left.

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