

14 November 2022

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

Dear Chancellor,

We are writing to you ahead of the Autumn Statement to highlight the impact of the ongoing cost of living crisis on people living with ill health and disability and to reaffirm the importance of a fully funded health and care system.

May we start by welcoming you to your new post and congratulating you on your appointment at this critical time. We hope that your significant experience as Health and Social Care Secretary and as Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee will mean that you are well placed to respond to the needs of people experiencing ill health and disabilities within your work at the Treasury.

National Voices is the leading coalition of health and social care charities in England. We have more than 200 members covering a diverse range of health conditions and communities, connecting us with the experiences of millions of people.

We are deeply concerned about the impact the cost of living crisis is having and will have on people living with ill health and disability, and their carers. These risks are particularly acute for groups who already experience health inequalities.

Many people living with ill health already face unavoidable additional costs, such as for treatments and prescriptions, transport, parking, greater domestic bills and insurance, as well as the knock on effects of not being able to work. Every day we hear new insights from the people we work with and support highlighting how they are impacted by the cost of living crisis. For example:

- Many people who rely on medical devices, report that the energy costs to run these are becoming increasingly unaffordable.
- Research by Versus Arthritisⁱ found that nearly two thirds of people with arthritis or a musculoskeletal condition, whose surgery had been delayed or cancelled due to COVID-19, said they were living in pain because they can't afford the treatments they need.
- A recent study MS Societyⁱⁱ showed that 1 in 4 (23%) people with MS were worried about affording medication, therapies or treatments.
- Research from Co-op and mental health charities including Mindⁱⁱⁱ highlighted that a fifth (22%) of UK adults are seeing their support network less due to the cost of living crisis and a quarter (24%) expect this will soon be the case.

- Many people on low incomes will struggle to eat a healthy and balanced diet because of rising food costs, especially those with specific dietary needs.

Poverty and health are closely linked. People living in poverty are more likely to be living in poor health. The opposite is also true – lack of support for people living with ill health and disability can make people poor. The impacts of childhood malnutrition, the mental health burden of increased isolation and the health and wellbeing impacts of living in a cold home will be felt for years to come unless the Government act now.

With this in mind, we ask you to commit to **invest in urgent targeted support for those at the sharpest end of the cost of living crisis**, for example, through increasing benefits to match inflation and ensuring support for housing costs increases in line with rents.

We also ask you to invest more in **targeted support for disabled people and people living with ill health affected by the cost of living crisis**, for example, by introducing longer term capped energy tariffs for those with medical treatment needs, by pausing all prescription charges, by making sure anyone who uses a medical device is fully reimbursed for the cost of utilities and by investing funding in the voluntary sector to organise affordable activities that prevent loneliness and support connection.

Finally, as former Health and Social Care Secretary and as former Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, you will be aware of the big challenges facing NHS and social care – the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, the significant workforce shortage, longstanding health inequalities and more. We ask that in this Autumn Statement and your future fiscal planning, you **ensure health and care services are fully funded so that they can meet all our health and care needs**.

This is a critical moment for many in our society and decisions taken now will have a significant impact now and for years to come. We hope you will use this opportunity to support those who need it most.

With kind regards

Sarah Sweeney
Interim Chief Executive
National Voices

With the support of 63 National Voices member charities, as follows:

Action for Pulmonary Fibrosis
Addison's Disease Self Help Group
Alex, The Leukodystrophy Charity
Arthritis Action
Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance
Behçet's UK
Birthrights
Borderline Support UK CIC
British Dupuytren's Society
British Geriatrics Society
British Heart Foundation
British Medical Association

Children's Liver Disease Foundation
Covid Aid
Crohn's & Colitis UK
Cyclical Vomiting Syndrome Association UK
Diabetes UK
Dystonia UK
Endometriosis UK
Epilepsy Action
FND Hope
Friends and Families – Empowering Families with Disabled Children
Furness Mental Health Trust (FMHT)
Future Care Capital
Groundswell
Guillain-Barré & Associated Inflammatory Neuropathies
Help2Change CIC
Hounslow Borough Respiratory Support Group
ICUsteps Peer Support Charity
Independent Age
Kidney Care UK
Long Covid Kids
Long Covid SOS
Long Covid Support
LUPUS UK
Lymphoedema Support Network
Marie Curie
Mind
MS Society
National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)
National Survivor User Network
Out with Prostate Cancer
Pain UK CIO
Parkinson's UK
Positively UK
Prostate Cancer UK
Pseudomyxoma Survivor
Rare Autoinflammatory Conditions' Community-UK (RACC-UK)
Rethink Mental Illness
Royal Pharmaceutical Society
Shine Cancer Support
Shopmobility South Gloucestershire
Stripy Lightbulb CIC
Sue Ryder
The Hibbs Lupus Trust
The Neurological Alliance
The Point of Care Foundation
The Thyroid Trust
Thyroid UK
Time to Talk Mental Health UK
Turning Point
United Kingdom Acquired Brain Injury Forum
VoiceAbility



ⁱ <https://www.versusarthritis.org/news/2021/september/hidden-cost-of-covid-19-bbc-panorama-nhs-wait-or-pay/>

ⁱⁱ https://www.mssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/MS_REPORT2022_84pp_DIGITAL.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/a-fifth-of-uk-adults-are-seeing-members-of-their-support-network-less-due-to-the-cost-of-living-crisis/>