

Fuel Poverty Campaign Briefing



Briefing for: **People interested in helping Macmillan campaign to end fuel poverty among cancer patients**

Purpose: **To outline Macmillan's position on tackling fuel poverty among cancer patients**

Contact: **Gus Baldwin, Public Affairs Manager**
ABaldwin@macmillan.org.uk, 020 7840 4625

Date: **20 August 2010**

The new Government's commitment to cancer patients

The new coalition Government has committed to protect the "poorest and most vulnerable in society". One of the Department of Energy and Climate Change's first priorities to help the poorest and most vulnerable is the Energy Act consultation on the mandatory social price support scheme. The consultation, expected in October, will determine who is included within the scheme which will give participants money off their electricity bill.

Macmillan welcomes the introduction of mandatory support for 'fuel poor' energy customers. We hope the new Government will recommend that cancer patients in particular need – those who are terminally ill, those who have had treatment in the last year and those on housing or council tax benefit – are included within the new scheme.

Julian, 43, London, diagnosed with intestinal cancer in 2008

"I've had to stop work because of my cancer so I'm at home a lot and that means trying to keep warm. Cancer treatment makes you feel the cold so badly. I'm already behind with my heating bill and owe a couple of hundred pounds. The fear of mounting debts is the last thing you need when you're so ill."

What problems do cancer patients face?

1. Cancer patients are struggling to pay their energy bills – Macmillan research found that among working age cancer patients (under 55s) seven out of 10 suffer a reduced household income, losing on average 50%. It is estimated that around four in 10 cancer patients of working age do not return to work after treatment. Higher utility bills are one of the major additional costs cancer patients face. A survey of people living with cancer found that, of those who were struggling financially, two thirds have had difficulty paying their energy bills since their cancer diagnosis. One in five people with cancer turned their heating off last winter even when they were cold. Over 40% of the people who received financial help from Macmillan in 2008 asked for assistance with their fuel bills.

2. Cancer patients have higher heating bills – in a recent survey for Macmillan, 59% of respondents said they had used more fuel since being diagnosed with cancer. Of these, three quarters (75%) said this was because they felt the cold more and a similar number (73%) said it was because they spent more time at home since being diagnosed. We also know that many cancer patients are unable to keep active.

3. The impact of the cold on recovery – in focus groups conducted by Macmillan in June 2009, people affected by cancer told us that feeling cold left them feeling depressed and

demotivated, increased pain associated with their cancer and its treatment, and resulted in them being more accident prone. A subsequent survey of health and social care professionals found that of those who responded, 85% thought the cold affected cancer patients' recovery. 92% thought the cold affected mental well-being and 77% thought the cold made pain worse.

Why doesn't the current support system meet the needs of cancer patients?

1. Poor access to Winter Fuel Payments (WFP) – approximately one in four patients diagnosed with cancer per year are aged under 60 and will therefore not qualify for the WFP. The WFP provides immediate relief to households in financial difficulty which is crucial for someone who is suddenly facing additional costs on a reduced income.

2. Energy companies aren't doing enough to help cancer patients – at present the energy companies are required to provide help through social tariffs to vulnerable customers but not enough cancer patients in need are eligible for such schemes. Those that are eligible are too often not told about the help available to them. Schemes are often also extremely confusing. Macmillan research has found that 93% of people with cancer in fuel poverty are not on a social tariff.

3. Energy efficiency schemes – cancer patients also have difficulty accessing energy efficiency schemes such as the Government's Warm Front Scheme because of difficulties in meeting the qualifying criteria.

Macmillan's commitment to tackling fuel poverty for cancer patients

Macmillan is working on a range of projects to reduce fuel poverty for cancer patients including:

- **Increasing income** – we offer a programme of grants to help people with cancer manage their bills. This has received some additional funding through a scheme whereby supporters donate the equivalent of their WFP.
- **Improving information and signposting** – our welfare rights services help cancer patients to access benefits. We have also produced a fact sheet outlining the help available to people affected by cancer.
- **Working with energy suppliers and health professionals** – Macmillan is working with one of our corporate partners, npower, to improve key areas of service to cancer patients and we are investigating an online training programme for health professionals.

How can you help Macmillan's campaign?

Please write to Gregory Barker MP, Fuel Poverty Minister, at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, and ask him to include vulnerable groups of cancer patients in the forthcoming consultation on the mandatory social price support scheme.

Further information

Please do not hesitate to contact Gus Baldwin, ABaldwin@macmillan.org.uk, 020 7840 4625