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Keir Starmer axing winter fuel allowance is so cruel - I'd be better off dead

Widow Carole Janet would rather die than face a harsh winter struggling to stay warm. The 86-year-old says the decision by Labour last week to axe pensioners' £300 winter fuel payment will push her to the brink.

By **GILES SHELDRIK**

18:50, Sun, Aug 4, 2024 | UPDATED: 19:15, Sun, Aug 4, 2024



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Life's a genuine struggle for Carole Janet, 86, from Christchurch, Bournemouth (Image: Carole Janet)



The benefit purge has reinforced her opinion that she and millions like her are “a burden rather than a resource”. She said: “To be honest, I just think it would be better if I died soon – then I would be out of it. I’m absolutely serious.

“I am advanced in age, how much longer have I got? What is there to live for? I feel completely let down. I think we’ve all been let down.”

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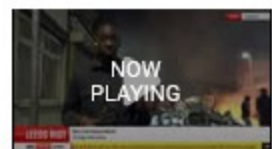
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Labour has vowed to means test the annual payment, which until now has been a universal tax-free bonus. The plan is intended to target supposedly well-off retirees but will see the perk snatched from 10 million older people.

It means wheelchair-bound Carole, from Christchurch, Dorset, and many like her will be unable to heat their homes this winter. Carole, who pays £928 a month for a flat in council-run sheltered housing, is housebound and gets a significantly reduced **state pension** after 30 years of living and working in America.





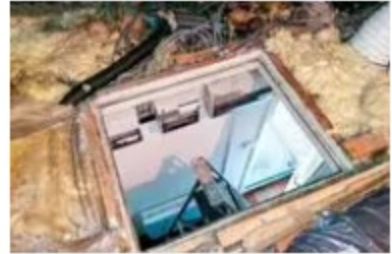
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Her **attendance allowance** is used to pay a £20-an-hour carer to wash and dress her three times a week.



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by Taboola

Without the fuel allowance she will have to cut this down to once a week and rely on food parcels from friends. She said: "I don't want to think about what might happen. I've already had the heating on the lowest mark, a blanket over my knees and a sweater."

Carole returned to the UK in 2004 after her husband died. She has two retired sons who live overseas. She said: "Life is a genuine struggle for me and £300 made a huge difference.

"I thought I would be looked after by the Government but this is penalising old people pure and simple."

Changes will see only those in receipt of Pension Credit or certain other benefits receive the allowance.

Payment remains unchanged at £200 for those aged 66 to 79 and £300 for over-80s. Meanwhile the fuel price cap is set to rise 10% in the autumn, cost-of-living payments have stopped and the household support fund has closed.

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Experts dismiss the claim that means-testing fuel payments is fair because older people who need it the most will still be protected.

Age UK estimates at least two million people will be "seriously hit". They include those on low incomes who just miss out on pension credit, people with high energy needs because of disability or illness, and the 800,000-plus who are eligible for pension credit but do not receive it.

Labour's plan will affect England and Wales. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, where decisions are devolved, the situation is unclear.

Last night an Age UK petition to "protect struggling pensioners this winter" and urging a rethink was approaching 200,000 signatures. The charity's director Caroline Abrahams said: "The fact so many people have taken the trouble to sign our petition shows the strength of feeling."

Former pensions minister Ros Altmann said: "There is already a stark cliff-edge that leaves those just above the means-test cut-off losing thousands of pounds a year."

Is the scrap a sign of what's to come?



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Means-testing the **winter fuel payment** this winter, with little notice and no compensatory measures to protect the poor and vulnerable pensioners who will miss out, is wrong and will cause hardship and distress.

Almost 200,000 people have signed Age UK's petition calling on the Government to halt their proposed change to the payment and think again.

This amazing show of public support shows the depth of feeling about this wrong-headed policy.

This winter, Age UK estimates around two million struggling pensioners won't receive up to £300 they rely on to help pay their energy bills if **winter fuel payment** is means-tested.

We are especially worried about three groups: those who just miss out on pension credit because their low incomes are slightly above the eligibility line, another group with big energy bills due to disability or illness and/or whose homes cost a lot to heat, and one million who don't receive the pension credit they are due because they do not claim it.

Low take-up of pension credit is a long term problem, with about one third of all those entitled failing to claim over many years.

They don't claim for a variety of reasons, including lack of awareness, difficulty making a claim and discomfort about needing help.

Our biggest fear is that many in these groups will be unable to afford to stay adequately warm this winter, which will be very bad for their health and the cause of anxiety and distress.

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Some say means-testing is fair because all the people who need it the most will still be protected – but as you can see, they won't be.

That's why Age UK has launched this campaign, to persuade the Government to think again.