

PRESS RELEASE

19 July 2023

9 in 10 Herts residents told us they have been affected by Cost of Living

Our latest report, **Cost of Living Crisis: The Impact on Hertfordshire Residents**, reveals 6500 Hertfordshire residents have felt the impact of rising costs.

The Report is one of the first to explore the real-life stories and impact of this crisis on local people, who have told us about the difficult daily challenges they are facing and the toll this is taking on their physical and mental health.

Working in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, we captured the experiences of 7,043 Hertfordshire residents in our survey that ran between December 2022 and March 2023. The Council, NHS and local services have welcomed the research and are already using the findings to take action to help those struggling.

What were the findings from those surveyed?

(NB: Anonymised quotes from respondents can be found at the end of this release)

- **9 in 10 (93%) have been impacted by rising costs** – **69%** stating it had affected them a bit but they were managing and a further **24%** saying they had been affected a lot and were struggling.
- **4 in 10** have just enough, or not enough money for basic necessities.
- **8 in 10** have used less heating or made other choices to reduce their energy bills.
- **6 in 10** have reduced the amount of food they eat and/or bought cheaper types of food.
- **3 in 10** said their physical health has been affected by rising costs and **5 in 10** said their mental health has been affected by rising costs.
 - **45%** said their access to healthcare has been affected by rising costs. Many have not visited the dentist/optician, can't travel to medical appointments, buy prescriptions or medication, or buy mobility/hearing aids/equipment to help with their health.

In addition, we found:

- **7 in 10** single parents had been seriously impacted by the rising cost of living – the hardest hit group according to our findings.
- Other groups disproportionately affected included those **under the age of 54, carers, those from an Asian or Black ethnic background, disabled/people with a long-term condition**.
- Awareness of local provisions and support was relatively good, however the actual use of these services was low.
- In terms of health, only **12%** of respondents had accessed support for their physical and/or mental health.

What is being done to help people?

Since December 2022, we have provided local public services with bi-weekly data and findings as the information came to hand from our Cost of Living research, so they could understand the impact of the crisis on residents. This has helped local providers decide where their support services were most needed and which groups were missing out.

- **Hertfordshire County Council** has distributed the Household Support Fund across the County, worth approximately £12 million, providing critical support to those in most need.
 - Council's Money Advice Unit has provided advice, assistance and advocacy on benefits for over 5000 local residents, resulting in benefit gains of over £22 million.
 - Council's Building Life Chances Programme has grown to help communities with food, health inequalities, crisis support and employment.
 - Council has used our findings to increase awareness and uptake of services created to help those struggling, such as the Warm Spaces scheme.
- **Local NHS providers** have also taken action to help communities, patients and staff.
 - For patients, warm hubs have been created within services. Staff have been trained on how to appropriately signpost patients, carers and relatives who have financial concerns to find help. Some NHS services have also created a Cost of Living page on their website with a list of local resources.
 - For staff, initiatives have included access to food bank vouchers, free counselling, psychological support and physiotherapy, as well as financial wellbeing leaflets, webinars and signposting information.

All these efforts are just the start of a long, ongoing process that will undoubtedly expand further to meet ever-growing demand.

Neil Tester, Healthwatch Hertfordshire Vice Chair said:

"Rising costs are hurting people across Hertfordshire and there has been a particular rise in the number of people who have normally managed, but are now struggling in ways that are damaging their physical and mental health and their ability to access health services.

Sadly, there are no simple solutions to this crisis and it has been our role to gather and share this enormous wealth of information with Hertfordshire County Council, the NHS and local organisations so they can better help people.

Cost of Living will continue to be at the centre of our inequalities agenda and we will be monitoring what the Council, the NHS and other organisations are doing, to ensure the voices of the 7,000 people who spoke to us are valued, heard and acted upon."

If you're struggling with rising costs, please visit the [Hertfordshire County Council](#) website, which offers a range of resources including money advice, energy/heating support and food support, or phone the Council on 0300 123 4040.

You can also visit [HertsHelp](#) or call 0300 123 4044 to access support.

Note to Editors:

A full copy of the **Cost of Living Crisis: The Impact on Hertfordshire Residents Report** is available at [Cost of Living Report](#)

Healthwatch Hertfordshire is the independent consumer voice for Health and Social Care in Hertfordshire. The National Body is Healthwatch England and there are 152 local Healthwatch across the National Network.
www.healthwatchhertfordshire.co.uk

For more information about the report, please contact **Michelle Edgar, Communications Officer** by email: michelle.edgar@healthwatchhertfordshire.co.uk or call: 07436 407214.

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Quotes from our Report

"I have to scrape by every single day. The mortgage rates keep going up and I don't know how much longer I can hang on to my house. I will be homeless."

"I cannot afford to rent, I cannot afford to get a mortgage and the Council refuse to put me on the housing register. I am 52 years old, I've worked all my life and have nothing but an extremely bleak future ahead."

"Live in a house that I can no longer afford to heat. I live in two rooms (bedroom and kitchen) wrapped in blankets, slippers and an old ski jacket."

"We're stuck in the "middle" not "poor" enough (on paper!) to qualify for all the help and referrals – we're the working poor on single income (due to disability) and getting into severe debt as a result of not qualifying for any help whatsoever."

"Can't afford to put heating on as much and have had to use community fridge/pantry and going to a food bank tomorrow for the first time, it's degrading, shouldn't have to rely on hand outs."

"Unable to retire (I am 80) as I can't exist only on a state pension. I have no savings."

"Despite having several missing fillings and often in pain due to rotting teeth, I simply have no money for any kind of dental treatment so I just live with a constant toothache."

"I have bought myself a pair of £1 glasses as I can't see to read but I can't afford to go to the opticians for an eye test."

"Had to cancel hospital appointments as couldn't afford petrol or car parking."

"My twin boys will take themselves to bed early to keep warm which should never happen."

"I would like to see a counsellor to talk about my feelings of struggling, but there are no NHS counsellors available unless you wait for 12 months – what's the point in that when I'm struggling now?"

"I work as a nurse and I choose not to eat on work days to save money."

"We have no financial support, I work 5 days a week and can barely afford food for me and my kids."

"I am selling my belongings in an attempt to raise money."

"Some days I sit and cry. I have reached 80, have run a house and brought up children as a single mother, sold anything valuable I had to keep going without any financial help and now when I should be relaxing and enjoying my retirement I am skeletally disabled, still working and feel sick when I think about the future."

"I try hard not to charge my portable oxygen or my mobility scooter. Stay in, saves money."

"Being a carer for someone who suffers with dementia and incontinence, it's impossible to save on energy especially heating and washing and drying of clothes and bedding regularly."

"I have to travel on buses to get to and care for my father, this costs £21.50 a week which is a big chunk of money. I've been having to make less trips."

"I'm feeling crushed by the cost of living and there is not a lot of help available."

"Help for mental health only seems available if your situation is very, very bad. I'd like help before I get there."

"I've been in contact with Carers in Herts – really helpful but they can't pay my bills can they. I don't feel as stressed as I did before though."

"Looked online but I fall outside most of the help because I work."

"It doesn't help when costs are ever increasing and wages aren't."