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By Narrowing the Gaps, we are aiming to see a reduction in

- **Number of excess winter deaths**
- **Number of admissions to hospital related to exposure to cold conditions**
- **Number of people experiencing fuel poverty**

Every winter, we see a significant increase in the number of people dying or becoming seriously ill as a result of cold weather over and above the figures for the summer months.

These "Excess Winter Deaths" and related illnesses tend to affect the older and more vulnerable people living in our communities and in many cases these deaths and illnesses are avoidable.



Older People: Reducing excess winter deaths and fuel poverty

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The Evidence

A recent survey by Age Concern revealed that 4.5 million pensioners planned to spend the winter living in one room in their house or flat because they felt they couldn't afford to pay their fuel bills.

In Warwickshire alone the number of older people will increase by over 17,000 between the baseline year of 2001 and 2011 with a further 24,000 by 2021.

Nationally the cost to the NHS of cold related health issues is estimated to be £1bn a year. Although they fluctuate from year to year, excess winter deaths in Warwickshire run at around 300. However, many suffer illness as a result of the cold rather than death.

Factors contributing towards fuel poverty include

- The energy efficiency and heating sources of people's homes
- Occupancy level related to the size of people's homes
- Household income
- The cost of domestic fuels
- The external environment

By focusing NtG resources, this issue can be tackled from a preventative perspective in order to free up resources in the future that are currently being used for treatment and support.

Partnership activity so far

A group has been established, led by the Head of Local Commissioning, to address this issue and to identify steps to be taken on a partnership basis

- Identifying a lead officer from each of the three councils: Warwickshire, Solihull and Coventry, who will be responsible for co-ordinating efforts.
- Establish an annual 'Winter deaths and Fuel Poverty Summit'
- Co-ordinate a winter warmth and fuel poverty campaign for the subsequent winter
- Setting differential targets to address those areas with the greatest need.

Other partners include: PCT, district and borough councils, energy providers, and voluntary sector organisations.

Partnership activity could include

- An exploration of ways in which the voluntary sector can be supported in its work around this issue.
- Opportunities for use of the media to relay key messages
- The need for GPs and pharmacies to recognise their potential contribution in disseminating advice and early identification of potential victims.
- Nutrition
- Ways to encourage higher take-up of Flu jabs by the over 65s.
- How to increase take-up of benefits and grants

focus area: older people : reducing excess winter deaths and fuel poverty

Timescale for the delivery of outcomes?

It would be anticipated that an initial impact would be seen during the current financial year with increased impact and reductions in future years.

However, this could be affected by the potential for a significant outbreak of variant flu which would be exacerbated by fuel poverty and could result in data for this year being disproportionate to previous years.

What are we aiming to achieve during 2009/10?

Year 1 - reduction of 20% on base year (60 people estimated)

Year 2 - reduction of 30% on base year (90 people estimated)

Year 3 - reduction of 35% on base year (100 people estimated)

Year 4 - reduction of 40% on base year (110 people estimated)

Related Issues

Good Quality Housing (Accommodation for Older People),

WCC's AHCS directorate has recently held a Stakeholder Day to look at future housing needs of older people. Addressing the impact that poor quality housing has on physical and mental wellbeing, but, recognising the need for Care & Choice : to maintain the independence and social inclusion of people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged as a result of their age, ill health, disability or circumstance. Over the next 15 years there will be a 65% increase in the over 80's population in Warwickshire to 43,000. This will impact on both housing need & demand in future years.

Lifetime Homes Standard

Considers the modernisation of homes as part of any improvement works (Decent Homes works or otherwise) to help meet the needs of people with disabilities, enabling them to remain in their own homes for as long as they wish.

Decent homes standard

A decent home should be warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities' (Dept of Communities and Local Government)

The criterion for the standard requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating, sufficient to provide heat to two or more rooms of the home. A landlord must be sure that the home is warm enough for the occupant.

The Home Improvement Agency provides a service to the elderly, disabled and vulnerable people to help them remain living independently in their own home for as long as they wish. Specific Schemes are also in place to tackle fuel poverty among vulnerable households in the private rented and owner-occupier sectors. See www.defra.gov.uk, for more information

Financial Inclusion & Financial Capability

Mark Ryder, Head of Trading Standards, Regulation and Emergency Management is co-ordinating a new steering group looking at financial inclusion and capability in Warwickshire. Older people will have specific needs as part of this agenda.

As part of the financial capability work through the Citizens Advice Bureau, the 'Energy Best Deal Campaign' aims to raise awareness among low-income consumers of the savings that can be made by switching fuel/energy supplier, or payment method.

Next issue

This is a monthly publication, if you have any ideas to contribute to the next or future issues please contact:

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