

The Policy Press press release
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Growing older in Britain today: a picture of stark inequality, finds new book

A century after the introduction of the state pension and despite predictions of the increase in the ageing population, around 2 million older people are living on incomes which prevent them from taking a full part in life around them. The gap between the richest and poorest pensioners has continued to widen and patterns of inequality are now increasing in the UK, while older people in other developed countries are doing much better.

These are some of the findings in a book published today (9 October) by The Policy Press at the University of Bristol. *Unequal ageing* paints a bleak picture of life in the UK for a substantial minority of older people whose lives are diminished by financial hardship. One individual interviewed in the book graphically illustrates the constant daily struggle for survival: "I've sat here, cried my eyes out and I thought 'Well, I've got tablets there I'll take them'."

Furthermore, the book confirms that the poorest older people are:

- Over five times more likely than the richest to have poor health
- Five times more likely to have difficulty walking
- Twice as likely to have diabetes

Leading contributors, including Malcolm Dean, Thomas Scharf, Anna Coote, Sue Adams, Julia Neuberger, Bryan Appleyard and Alan Walker, analyse the vital dimensions of money, health, place, quality of life and identity, and demonstrate the gaps in treatment and outcomes. They suggest that, in contrast to some progress on child poverty, older people's poverty has not had the same political impact and indicate that this may be a form of institutionalised age discrimination. The book calls for a significant increase in the universal state pension by 2015 and a redistribution of society's resources.

Speaking about the book, co-editor Paul Cann, said "For a shockingly high number of pensioners, growing older is a journey of loss: loss of work, income, health, well-being, status, social networks and companions. Yet the responses of communities and care systems are often inadequate and ageism abounds. A coherent strategy for the future, covering pensions, rights, technology, prevention, isolation, plus the expansion of the LinkAge Plus pilot schemes nationally, could drastically reduce the current losses and make immeasurable improvements to lives."

Facts and figures

- There are now more people aged 65 and over than there are children under 16
- 20,000 older people die each winter from low temperatures: many face the choice of heating or eating.

- 33-41% of older people fail to claim Pension Credit with a total of £5.1 billion going unclaimed.
- 1.3 million pensioners are with 10% of the official poverty line

5 things the book says we should do now:

1. Make a commitment to end pensioner poverty by 2030, supported by take-up targets
2. Set 2015 as the target date for raising basic state pension to level of Guarantee credit - extra money given to bring income up to the minimum amount the Government considers is necessary to live on.
3. Boost programmes with community groups to ensure that older people receive full state pension and benefit entitlements
4. Improve co-ordination of policy making and services for older people by rolling out LinkAge Plus pilot projects across England, which provide older people with access to a wide range of more integrated, joined-up services, including, housing, transport, health and social care, work and volunteering opportunities.
5. Simplify the claiming process for benefits and roll out to all pilot projects on automatic payment of benefits

Notes for Editors

1. *Unequal Ageing* is published by The Policy Press on 9 October 2009 price £17.99 pb (ISBN 9781847424112) £55.00 hb (ISBN 978 184742 008 4). It is available to buy from all good book shops or at 20% discount from www.policypress.co.uk. Alternatively, contact Marston Book Services, P O Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4YN (01235 465500) plus £2.75 p&p.

2. The book is being launched at [The Age Debate in Manchester](#) on 9 October 2009.

3. The co-editors are available for interview:

Paul Cann is former Director of Policy at Help the Aged and now Chief Executive of Age Concern, Oxfordshire and can be contacted on: tel 07967 366396, email: paulcann@ageconcernoxon.org.uk.

Malcolm Dean retired from The Guardian in 2006 to take up a fellowship at Nuffield College, Oxford where he is writing a book on the media's influence on social policy, and can be contacted on: tel: 07799 658058, email: Malcolm.Dean@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

4. For further information or a review copy, contact: **Kathryn King**, Marketing Manager, The Policy Press: Tel: 0117 331 4097 or email: Kathryn.king@bristol.ac.uk

5. The Policy Press (www.policypress.co.uk) is a leading social science publisher based at the University of Bristol and is committed to publishing books that make a difference.