

National Good Food Nations Plan Consultation

Independent Age response

April 2024

About Independent Age

Independent Age is the national charity for older people in poverty.

Our helpline and expert advisers offer free, practical support and expert advice to older people without enough money to live on. Through our grants programme, we support hundreds of local organisations across the UK.

We use knowledge and insight from our services and partnerships to highlight the issues experienced by older people in poverty and campaign for change.

We believe no one should face poverty in later life.

Response

1. Does each individual Good Food Nation Outcome describe the kind of Scottish food system you would like to see?

Outcome 1

- Everybody in Scotland eats well with reliable access to safe, nutritious, affordable, sustainable, and age and culturally appropriate food.
(mostly agree)

Outcome 3

- Scotland's food system encourages a physically and mentally healthy population, leading to a reduction in diet-related conditions.
(mostly agree)

2. What, if anything, would you change about the Good Food Nation Outcomes and why?

As the national charity for older people living in poverty, our focus for the purposes of this consultation response will be Outcomes 1 and 3.

Outcome 1

Independent Age agree that Outcome 1 is suitable as a high-level aspiration for Scotland's Good Food Nation. We believe that everybody in Scotland has the right to be able to eat well and access safe, nutritious, affordable, sustainable, and age and culturally appropriate food. **Independent Age recommend that Outcome 1 is strengthened by reflecting the right to food within the phrasing of the outcome.**

Currently, everyone in Scotland has the right to food under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Independent Age welcomed the recent Scottish Government Human Rights Bill consultation, which included the right to adequate food as a right that will be incorporated into domestic legislation through the Bill.

However, we know that at present many older people in Scotland are unable to realise their right to adequate food. Having access to affordable and nutritious food is not the reality for many older people in poverty in Scotland. Independent Age advisers hear from older people who often go without food, skip meals, don't buy fresh food, or buy

food that doesn't need to be cooked because their income is inadequate and does not cover the basics.

One in seven (15%) pensioners in Scotland live in poverty - a total of 150,000 older people.¹ YouGov polling commissioned by Independent Age - carried out between April and May 2023 - found that 44% of older people in Scotland living on a low-income were cutting back their spending on food and drink.²

At Independent Age, our helpline and advisers regularly hear from older people who are unable to afford food and the cost of energy required to cook it. Through our research we have heard from older people across Scotland who are experiencing food poverty. Linda, in her late 60s, who lives alone, doesn't heat her home so that she can afford to buy a small amount of food, but still often goes without. She told us:

*"If you go into a shop and you think oh, I like that, can I afford to buy that? Or if you go in to get bread and milk and you think oh, I'd like that for my supper, and you think no... I'll go for maybe a tin of soup rather than maybe having a bit of chicken or something like that... I tend to buy the cheaper brands or things that are reduced."*³

Linda often goes without a meal when her grandchildren visit, instead having a cup of coffee, because it is unaffordable for her to purchase enough food to make all of them dinner:

*"I love to have my grandchildren for supper and before I'd say they can come a couple of nights a week. Now I have to think, right maybe once a fortnight but I'd feed them and just have coffee myself."*⁴

We have also heard from older people who are being forced to use foodbanks to access food to sustain them. Eddie, who is in his late 60s and has ongoing health worries, is unable to afford the healthier foods recommended by his doctor. Eddie tries to find the cheapest healthier options in the supermarket, but despite this his income is insufficient and he has to access foodbank provision. Eddie said:

*"We don't like going [to the food bank] every week. Being honest, all my life I've never been someone to rely on somebody else. You never think when you're younger, that when you get older, things are going to change."*⁵

While older people on low incomes are struggling to afford the cost of food, they are often more likely to encounter additional expenses accessing food if they have reduced mobility. This includes costs of taxis to and from their local supermarket, home deliveries of groceries or ready-prepared meals (which often come with a delivery charge and minimum spend), and increased costs when buying food from local shops which are often more convenient and accessible from their home compared to larger supermarkets, but can have a higher price tag. Currently, under Attendance Allowance and the planned Pension Age Disability Payment, older adults do not receive any additional support for mobility costs – unlike with working-age disability social security elements. Independent Age recommend that the Scottish Government work towards establishing a mobility component of Pension Age Disability Payment – this payment would go some way to

¹ Scottish Government, Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23

² Annual household income of less than £15,000; YouGov plc survey on behalf of Independent Age. Total sample size was 565. Fieldwork was undertaken between undertaken 28 April - 2 May 2023

³ Independent Age, 'Not Enough to Live on: Pensioner Poverty in Scotland' report, Feb 2023

⁴ Independent Age, 'Not Enough to Live on: Pensioner Poverty in Scotland' report, Feb 2023

⁵ Independent Age, 'Not Enough to Live on: Pensioner Poverty in Scotland' report, Feb 2023

assisting older disabled people who have limited mobility in accessing basic goods, such as food.

To ensure that the Good Food Nation Plan works for everybody in Scotland, consideration must be given to the needs of older people and nutritious food must be affordable and accessible for older people who live on low incomes. The experiences and outcomes of older people in poverty must be adequately measured as part of the implementation of the Good Food Nation Plan – for more information see our response to Questions 5 and 6.

Independent Age recommend Outcome 1 is strengthened by explicitly including the right to adequate food.

Outcome 3

Independent Age agree that Outcome 3 is suitable as a high-level aspiration for Scotland's Good Food Nation Plan; Scotland's food system should enable a physically and mentally healthy population, leading to a reduction in diet-related conditions. But, we note that for Outcome 3 to be met, poverty and food insecurity must be adequately addressed. **Independent Age recommend a change in language from 'encourages' to 'enables' to ensure that the Outcomes are drafted in a way that places sufficient emphasis on the wider societal drivers rather than individual choice narratives.**

The number of pensioners living in poverty in Scotland has increased by 25% since 2012. Independent Age regularly hears from older people who do not have sufficient income to purchase adequate food, which has been compounded by the current high inflationary environment. The UK Malnutrition Taskforce estimates that 1 in 10 people across the UK are at risk of malnutrition.⁶ However, research by Eat Well to Age Well by the Food Train found these statistics to be widely underestimated and say that the real proportion of older people currently at risk of or suffering from malnutrition in Scotland is more likely to be up to 30%.⁷

Poverty and poor health are strongly interlinked, with the social determinants of health widely understood and accepted.⁸ Recent research from JRF and the King's Fund provides what they acknowledge as proof that "people living in poverty experience greater illness, find it harder to access treatment, and die earlier than the rest of the population".⁹

The most recent statistics from 2019-2021 show that in Scotland, male life expectancy in the most deprived areas was 13.7 years lower than the least deprived areas.¹⁰ For women, this gap was 10.5 years.¹¹

When looking at healthy life expectancy, in 2019-2021 for males, this was 46.3 years in the most deprived areas, compared to 72.1 years in the least deprived areas.¹² For

⁶ [PolicyStatement.pdf \(eatwellagewell.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ ['The Hidden Problem', Eat Well to Age Well Impact and Learning report, 2018-2020](#)

⁸ Michael Marmot, Social Determinants of Health [Social determinants of health inequalities - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

⁹ [Poverty's toll on the nation's health a "mounting catastrophe" in need of political attention | Joseph Rowntree Foundation \(jrf.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [Life Expectancy in Scotland, 2019-2021 | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [Life Expectancy in Scotland, 2019-2021 | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](#)

¹² [Headline indicator of Health Inequalities - Long-term Monitoring of Health Inequalities March 2023 report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

women, healthy life expectancy was 47.3 years in the most deprived areas, 25.7 years lower than those living in the least deprived areas (72.1 years).¹³

Poverty affects both physical and mental health, with adults living in the most deprived areas in Scotland twice as likely to experience anxiety or depression.¹⁴ Research carried out by Independent Age in 2020 found that older people on the lowest incomes have a higher risk of developing mental health issues.

Considering the impact of diet on health, Independent Age commissioned representative polling found that 15% of older people living on a low-income in Scotland skipped meals to save money over the winter of 2022/23 and one fifth (20%) had reduced meal portions over the winter as a way to save money.¹⁵ Our polling also found that 18% of older people living on a low-income in Scotland had reduced portion size of meals and nearly 2 in 5 (39%) changed their food shopping habits over the winter of 2022/23 as a way to save money – including buying less meat or buying less fresh food.¹⁶

In addition to older people in poverty skipping meals because they do not have sufficient income to meet the costs of food, Independent Age has also heard from some who are taking this decision because of the cost of running the household appliances needed to cook meals, which is having a negative impact on their health and well-being. Older people have told us:

"(I'm) scared to turn on heating or use kettle or cook too much."

"(I) never use oven and try not to use kettle or cooker."

"The cooker, I microwave up frozen stuff that I have so it's near enough and then I put it in the oven for a shorter time. And I've cut down on certain things I do, it's just what you do."

It is evident that it will be essential to tackle the wider drivers of dietary options - such as affordability - if the food system is to enable a physically and mentally healthy population, leading to a reduction in diet-related conditions and health inequalities.

To ensure that Outcome 3 can be met, it will be essential that the Scottish Government address the social determinants of health - income adequacy, housing affordability, quality and security of tenure, alongside access to basic amenities – as far as possible within devolved powers to tackle poverty across Scotland.

5. If you have other comments on the suggested Good Food Nation targets, please comment:

Regarding Outcomes 1 and 3, Independent Age is concerned that at present the targets are unsatisfactory for pensioners in poverty across Scotland. Currently, the 'targets/other measures' section of the Plan does not include pensioner poverty levels.

Whilst it is welcome that child poverty statistics are noted in the indicators and measures, it is essential that poverty levels across all age groups are considered when monitoring progress towards, and the actions required to meet, the Outcomes of the Good Food Nation Plan. There are no specific targets relating to older people living in poverty within the Plan and whilst older people will be included within the targets

¹³ [Headline indicator of Health Inequalities - Long-term Monitoring of Health Inequalities March 2023 report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/health-inequalities-report-2023/pages/11.aspx)

¹⁴ [Tackling poverty for good mental health - The Poverty Alliance](https://www.povertyalliance.org.uk/news/2020/06/24/tackling-poverty-for-good-mental-health/)

¹⁵ Annual household income of less than £15,000; YouGov plc survey on behalf of Independent Age. Total sample size was 565. Fieldwork was undertaken between 28 April - 2 May 2023

¹⁶ Annual household income of less than £15,000; YouGov plc survey on behalf of Independent Age. Total sample size was 565. Fieldwork was undertaken between 28 April - 2 May 2023

focusing on adults, Independent Age believe that is necessary to have specific targets (and indicators) for older people, to both enable measurement of the Plan and to ensure older people are considered in policy solutions.

Independent Age strongly recommend the Scottish Government set detailed measures and targets for all age groups, including pensioners. The DWP's Households Below Average Income series provides data on poverty levels among adults, both below and above State Pension Age. Independent Age believe this data can be used by the Scottish Government as part of the assessment of progress towards Outcome 1 of the Good Food Nation Plan. We suggest other measures could include measuring food affordability, access to food and malnutrition among older people.

Independent Age agree that reducing adult diet-related health inequalities, reducing the number of households facing food insecurity and reducing the reported number of households accessing emergency food provisions should be measured within Outcome 1. As drafted these measures are vague and lack a clearly defined 'target'. It is not clear from the Plan what level is required for these targets to be met and the details of how they will be measured remain unclear. Where new measures are to be introduced, once baseline data has been collected, the Scottish Government should set specific, time-based targets.

At present, to measure food insecurity the Scottish Government use results from the Scottish Health Survey. The survey asks respondents if they were concerned about running out of food due to lack of finances or other resources. The latest data from 2021 found that 1% of adults aged 65+ were worried they would run out of food, 1% ate less and that no adults in this age group ran out of food.¹⁷ The Scottish Government have noted the sensitive nature of the questions on food insecurity within the Scottish Health Survey and the potential for these figures to be an underestimation. We would also argue there are questions of interpretation, for example someone may say they are unlikely to run out of food but this could be because they are significantly limiting what they eat.

In the 2020 Scottish Health Survey, which was carried out by telephone, 1% of adults aged 65-74 and 2% of adults aged 75+ were worried they would run out of food, the Scottish Government said, "self-completion formats may illicit a more accurate response from some participants who feel more comfortable answering sensitive questions privately", and that the results "may underestimate true prevalence".¹⁸

Independent Age believe these findings grossly underestimate the issue of food insecurity amongst pensioners in Scotland when compared to our own research. Our research has found that many older people in Scotland live with feelings of anxiety around being able to afford the food they will need in future, with almost half (45%) of older people living on a low-income worried about not being able to afford the cost of food and drink over the next 6 months.¹⁹

The Scottish Health Survey food insecurity data does not include an income breakdown of the statistics, meaning the data does not provide insight into the level of food insecurity faced by those living on the lowest incomes. The Good Food Nation Plan targets for Outcome 1 includes 'reducing the number of households facing moderate to severe food insecurity.' At present, it is not clear where this data will be drawn from (the

¹⁷ The Scottish Health Survey 2022, chapter 4, table 10.

¹⁸ [Chapter 4: Diet, Obesity & Food Insecurity - Scottish Health Survey – telephone survey – August/September 2020: main report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

¹⁹ YouGov plc survey on behalf of Independent Age. Total sample size was 565. Fieldwork was undertaken between undertaken 28 April - 2 May 2023

current question within the Scottish Health Survey does not use 'moderate' or 'severe'), or whether this data will be collected as part of a new data collection exercise.

Independent Age recommend for both the food insecurity and emergency provision targets/measurements that the data collected on households/adults can and is published with a disaggregated breakdown by age (to include pensioners) and income.

While many older people in poverty do not have a sufficient income to meet the rising cost of food, they are also more likely to encounter additional expenses accessing food if they have reduced mobility. This includes costs of taxis to and from their local supermarket, home deliveries of groceries or ready-prepared meals, and increased costs when buying food from local shops which are convenient and more accessible from their home compared to larger supermarkets.

Older people have shared with us the increased costs they face when accessing food, due to reduced mobility:

"(I) have to take taxis with shopping as public transport incurs a walk up hill"

"(I'm) unable to shop, so forced to shop online"

"(I) have to pay for delivery of groceries because of inability to shop for long enough and unable to carry shopping."

"Increased purchase of home delivery of meals because of energy levels for standing preparing and cooking food."

"Even going to the van for milk and bread, you know, it's costing £3.50, which is a big chunk of my money."

Independent Age have also heard from older people who have health conditions which require them to adhere to specific diets, often resulting in additional costs to their food bill. They told us:

"Specialist foods requires are significantly higher than 'normal' food"

"Dietary restrictions elevate food shopping costs significantly"

The Scottish Government has previously noted a commitment to the United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. This includes the goal of ending hunger by 2030. The Scottish Government should consider reflecting this goal with the targets related to Outcome 1 and consider how this could be measured for all age groups.

At present the Scottish Government has set targets for reducing child poverty, which are reflected within the targets for Outcome 1. Independent Age have been calling on the Scottish Government to introduce a pensioner poverty strategy for Scotland that contains targets for pensioner poverty reduction. Whilst no such strategy or targets for pensioner poverty currently exist in Scotland, Independent Age believe that to meet the Outcomes of the Good Food Nation Plan it will be essential to tackle pensioner poverty.

Independent Age therefore recommend that targets for the reduction of pensioner poverty are introduced in Outcome 1. More broadly, Independent Age recommend the Scottish Government introduce a pensioner poverty strategy for Scotland.

Independent Age recommend that pensioner poverty statistics are included in the targets for meeting the Good Food Nation Plan.

Question 6

Do you think these indicators will be useful for measuring progress towards the Good Food Nation Outcomes?

As currently drafted, Independent Age has significant concerns that the indicators do not sufficiently cover the experiences of older people, particularly for those in poverty, and therefore risk not being useful for measuring progress towards the Good Food Nation Outcomes. **Independent Age recommend that pensioner poverty is included as an indicator for Outcome 1 and that all indicators related to adults are disaggregated by age and income, to include the figures for pensioners.**

Question 7

What other indicators, if any, would you like to see included?

While Independent Age agree that relative, absolute and other measures of child poverty are relevant indicators for measuring Outcome 1 in relation to children. It is surprising and concerning that the Plan does not currently include poverty indicators in relation to other age groups, including pensioners. The Plan must include poverty indicators for people of all ages, if everybody in Scotland is to be considered when implementing the policy developments required to meet the Outcomes and represented in the indicators related to the Plan.

Independent Age recommend that pensioner poverty levels are included as an indicator for Outcome 1.

Question 10

Snapshot Box: As an adult in a Good Food Nation

- *"I can easily access food that I enjoy and that keeps me healthy and well*
- *I know where to go if I experience financial difficulties, and the response is fast, coordinated and meets my needs with dignity and respect*
- *Healthy and sustainable options are easy to find wherever I eat and buy food*
- *I can easily access information about the environmental, social, and nutritional impacts of my food and its provenance that helps me to make informed decisions"*

Does this reflect what you would like your life to look like, as an adult in a Good Food Nation?

What changes, if any, would you make?

Independent Age believe that there needs to be more focus on the affordability of food and the sufficiency of income within the snapshot statements. In the first statement, '*I can easily access food that I enjoy and that keeps me healthy and well*', **Independent Age recommend that this is adapted to include 'food that I can afford' to reflect the key component of affordability when it comes to food options.**

In reference to the second statement - '*I know where to go if I experience financial difficulties, and the response is fast, coordinated and meets my needs with dignity and respect*' - we note that even if somebody has the information of where they can access financial advice or support, there are many reasons why someone may not necessarily be able to access this support. These include stigma, lack of access and digital barriers. We also highlight that the tone of individual financial difficulties detracts from wider systemic issues of having insufficient income, often through inadequate social security payment levels.

In addition, one way to ensure people experience a fast and coordinated response when they experience financial difficulties is by ensuring the social security systems is as simple, responsive and accessible as possible for older people.