



Factsheet

Extra help with essential costs if you're on a low income

If your income is low, it can be hard to meet unexpected essential costs. You might be eligible to get help with some of these expenses from your local council, the government's Social Fund or a charity grant.

This factsheet explains some of the options, who might qualify, and how to apply.

Call FREE on **0800 319 6789** Visit www.independentage.org

About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago,
we're independent so you can be.

The information in this factsheet applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru
(0800 022 3444, agecymru.org.uk)
for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland
(0800 12 44 222, agescotland.org.uk).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI
(0808 808 7575, ageni.org).

Contents

1. Extra help if you're on a low income	4
2. Local welfare assistance schemes – council help with unexpected costs	5
3. Short-term benefit advances	7
4. Budgeting Loans and Budgeting Advances	9
5. Help towards the cost of a funeral	12
6. Help with heating costs	15
7. Debt advice	17
8. Grants from charities	18

1. Extra help if you're on a low income

If you're living on a low income, it can be hard to budget for emergency or unexpected costs such as a broken down washing machine, home repairs or a funeral.

The good news is that you may be eligible for a one-off grant, loan or other type of help, depending on your income or what benefits you claim. This factsheet looks at what help you might be eligible for and how to apply for it.

Good to know



In addition, it's a good idea to check if you qualify for any benefits. You could be missing out on extra money you're owed. Try out online calculator at independentage.org/benefit-calculator or call our Helpline on 0800 319 6789 for a free benefits check.

2. Local welfare assistance schemes – council help with unexpected costs

If you need help in an emergency, ask your local council if they have a local welfare assistance scheme. These are designed to provide help with unexpected or emergency expenses to people on a low income.

Schemes vary from area to area and not all councils run them. Some councils use the money allocated for this to support local schemes such as food banks, credit unions and homelessness prevention schemes. In some areas you may be able to apply directly to the council for help, which is usually in the form of:

- vouchers
- food parcels
- pre-payment cards
- furniture
- white goods.

You can't usually get cash.

You're not automatically entitled to help, so contact your local council to find out what's available and if you're eligible.

Your council will also know what other help may be available in your area, such as:

- food banks
- community hubs that provide hot food
- vouchers for fuel
- places to get second-hand furniture.

How do I find out more?

To find out what help is available in your area, contact your local council. You can find their contact details in the telephone directory or on gov.uk/find-your-local-council.

The Children's Society website (childrenssociety.org.uk/use-our-map-find-your-local-welfare-assistance-scheme) and the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) website (cpag.org.uk/lwas) have interactive tools to help you find your local scheme, if there is one.

For help with applying for local welfare assistance, speak to an organisation like Citizens Advice ([03444 111 444](tel:03444111444), citizensadvice.org.uk) or your local Age UK ([0800 169 6565](tel:08001696565), ageuk.org.uk).

If you're turned down

If you've been turned down, get advice from an organisation like Citizens Advice ([03444 111 444](tel:03444111444), citizensadvice.org.uk). You can find local advice services through Shelter's online advice finder ([shelter.org.uk/get advice/advice services directory](http://shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_services_directory)).

The letter advising you of the decision should explain how to ask for the decision to be looked at again, and how long you have to do this. Ask your council what you need to do if the letter doesn't make this clear.

This scheme is discretionary so you cannot challenge the decision if you've been turned down because there is no more money available.

3. Short-term benefit advances

If you're waiting for your first payment of a benefit and you're in urgent financial need, you can apply for a short-term benefit advance. If you're eligible, you'll usually get the advance the same day or the next working day.

You can ask for an advance if you have recently applied for:

- Pension Credit
- State Pension
- Carer's Allowance
- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income Support
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit (in some cases).

How do I apply?

Depending on the benefit you've applied for, call:

- Pension Credit or State Pension – [0800 731 0469](tel:08007310469)
- Carer's Allowance – [0800 731 0297](tel:08007310297)
- Income Support, Employment & Support Allowance or Jobseeker's Allowance – [0800 169 0310](tel:08001690310)
- Universal Credit – 0800 328 5644 (if you're in a full service area) or [0800 328 9344](tel:08003289344) (if you're in a live service area).

How much money you get will depend on your circumstances. You'll have to repay the advance – usually a little money will be taken from your benefit each week until it is paid back. It usually has to be repaid within three months.

If you're turned down

You can ask for the decision to be looked at again. The decision letter should tell you how to do this, and how long you have. Contact the office that made the decision. You can't appeal against the refusal to award a short-term benefit advance.

To do



If you're on a low income or have a disability, there may be extra money you can claim. If you haven't already done so, check you're claiming all the benefits you're entitled to. Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange a benefits check or try our online benefits calculator (independenage.org/benefit-calculator).

4. Budgeting Loans and Budgeting Advances

A Budgeting Loan is an interest-free loan to help with essential one-off expenses which are difficult to budget for, including:

- furniture and household equipment
- clothes and footwear
- rent in advance
- moving costs
- essential travel expenses
- home improvements or maintenance
- funeral costs.

You can apply for a Budgeting Loan if you or your partner have been getting one of the following benefits for at least 26 weeks, either consecutively or with breaks of no more than 28 days:

- Pension Credit
- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

A Budgeting Advance is a loan for people receiving Universal Credit – if you get Universal Credit, you will have to apply for this instead of a Budgeting Loan.

Good to know



You will have to repay any Budgeting Loans, Budgeting Advances and short-term benefit advances (chapter 3) you receive. You don't have to repay Funeral Payments (chapter 5), Cold Weather Payments (chapter 6) or Winter Fuel Payments (chapter 6).

What might I get?

The smallest amount you can ask for is £100. You can get up to:

- £348 if you're single
- £464 if you're part of a couple
- £812 if you have a child.

The amount also depends on whether you:

- can pay the loan back
- have any savings over £1,000 (or £2,000 if you or your partner are 63 or over)
- have any other Budgeting Loans or Crisis Loans (these were stopped in 2013, but you may still be repaying any you took out before this date).

You normally have to repay the loan within two years. The repayments will come from your benefits.

You can't owe the Social Fund more than £1,500.

How do I apply?

Apply online (gov.uk/budgeting-help-benefits/how-to-claim), or complete form SF500, which you can:

- download from gov.uk/government/publications/budgeting-loan-claim-form
- pick up from your local Jobcentre Plus office (gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus)
- request by calling [0800 169 0140](tel:0800 169 0140).

Your claim can take up to 15 working days.

If you get Universal Credit, you'll have to apply for a Budgeting Advance instead. Contact the office that pays your Universal Credit.

If you're turned down

You can ask for the decision to be looked at again. To do this, you must write to the benefit office that made the decision within 28 days of the date on the decision letter, explaining why you think the decision was wrong.

You will then receive a reviewed decision. If you still disagree with the decision, you can ask for a further review by an Independent Case Examiner – you must have asked the benefit office to review the decision before you can do this. You can find out more from gov.uk/government/publications/budgeting-loans-how-to-ask-for-a-further-independent-review or by calling [0800 414 8529](tel:0800 414 8529).

5. Help towards the cost of a funeral

If you're on a low income and responsible for paying for a funeral, you may be eligible for a Funeral Payment.

Who can claim?

You can claim a Funeral Payment if you or your partner receive one of the following benefits:

- Pension Credit
- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Working Tax Credit including an extra amount for disability
- Housing Benefit
- Child Tax Credit at a rate above the family element
- Universal Credit.

You can still make a claim if you've applied for one of these benefits and you're waiting for a decision.

You must have had a close relationship with the person who died – for example, they may have been your partner. If they were a close relative or friend, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will check whether you're the most appropriate person to pay for the funeral or whether another relative (who isn't receiving one of the benefits listed above) could pay instead.

You must make a claim within six months of the funeral.

You don't have to repay a Funeral Payment, but it will have to be paid back from any money left from the estate of the person who died.

What can I claim for?

The Funeral Payment can cover:

- burial or cremation costs, including the cost of the doctor's certificate
- a return journey to arrange or go to the funeral
- the reasonable cost of moving the body within the UK, for the part of the journey over 50 miles
- up to £700 for other funeral expenses, such as a coffin, flowers or funeral director's fees.

If the person who died had a pre-paid funeral plan, you will only get £120 for items not covered by the plan. The amount you get may also be affected if they had an insurance policy.

A Funeral Payment will only cover the basic costs of a funeral. You will have to pay any extra costs yourself. You may be able to apply for a Budgeting Loan or a Budgeting Advance to help with the cost as well.

Good to know



The amount you get from a Funeral Payment varies, but usually won't cover the full cost of even a simple funeral.

How do I claim?

To claim, complete form SF200, which you can get from your local Jobcentre Plus (gov.uk/contact-jobcentre) or download from gov.uk/funeral-payments/how-to-claim. Or you can claim by calling the Bereavement Service helpline on [0800 731 0469](tel:08007310469).

The Funeral Payment is usually paid directly to the funeral director. If they've already been paid, the money will be paid into your account.

If you're turned down

You must ask for a mandatory reconsideration within one month of the date of the decision. If you disagree with the result of the reconsideration, you can appeal – you won't usually be able to appeal unless you've asked for a mandatory reconsideration first. It's a good idea to get advice – speak to Independent Age ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789)) or your local Citizens Advice ([03444 111 444](tel:03444111444), citizensadvice.org.uk).

Good to know



Our factsheet **What to do after a death** has more advice on how to pay for a funeral and keep the costs down.

6. Help with heating costs

Winter Fuel Payment

Winter Fuel Payment is an annual payment to help with heating costs during winter. Most people who have reached the qualifying age for Pension Credit will qualify for a payment in winter 2018/19. You can visit [gov.uk/state-pension-age](https://www.gov.uk/state-pension-age) to find out when you qualify.

If you're eligible, you'll receive a Winter Fuel Payment automatically if you or your partner receive State Pension or certain other benefits. You should get the payment by Christmas. If you qualify but don't get it automatically, you'll need to make a claim by calling the Winter Fuel Payment helpline on [0800 731 0160](tel:08007310160). You only need to claim once and then payments will be made every year as long as your circumstances don't change. You will get between £100 and £300 depending on your age and who you live with.

You may still be entitled to receive a Winter Fuel Payment if you live in Switzerland or certain EEA countries and receive a State Pension.

Cold Weather Payments

Cold Weather Payments help people with a low income with increased heating costs when it's very cold. You may be eligible if you or your partner receive Pension Credit or certain other means-tested benefits.

You'll get an extra £25 each time the average temperature in your area has been, or is predicted to be, 0°C (32°F) or below for seven days in a row between 1 November and 31 March.

You don't need to make a claim as payments are made automatically. If you don't receive your Cold Weather Payment,

contact the Pension Service on **0800 731 0469** or your local Jobcentre Plus ([gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus](https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus)).

See our guide **Winter wise** for more information about looking after yourself in winter.

7. Debt advice

If you're having debt problems get specialist advice from the National Debtline ([0808 808 4000](tel:08088084000), nationaldebtline.org) or Stepchange ([0800 138 1111](tel:08001381111), stepchange.org). It's never too early or too late to get help with debts, and these charities will offer confidential practical help. You can also contact your local Citizens Advice ([03444 111 444](tel:03444111444), citizensadvice.org.uk).

If you are facing repossession or eviction, you should get advice as soon as possible. Contact Shelter ([0808 800 4444](tel:08088004444), shelter.org.uk) or the organisations above for specialist debt advice.

8. Grants from charities

Before you apply

Most charities will only help if you're already receiving all the benefits you are entitled to. Some charities won't contribute towards the cost of items or services which should be provided by your council, the NHS or a government scheme. Before you make an application, make sure you've done the following, if applicable:

- checked if there are any benefits you can claim (see page 8)
- checked what assistance your local council or the Social Fund can provide (see chapters 2–6)
- got advice about debts (see chapter 7)
- if you need money towards work on your home, applied for any other sources of funding, such as council or government grants. You should also check whether your landlord should be paying for the work or if home insurance will cover any damage. See our factsheet **Paying for maintenance and repairs in your home** for more information
- if you're applying for disability equipment, checked whether your local council can help. If they can't, your doctor or occupational therapist (OT) should provide details of why you need the equipment and why it isn't provided by your local council. See our factsheet **Adapting your home to stay independent** for more information.

What sort of help could I get from a charity?

There are many charities that provide different types of help if you can't get support elsewhere.

You may be able to get:

- a small one-off payment or voucher for things like food or clothes
- larger amounts for household goods, such as a cooker or washing machine
- a one-off grant to cover an emergency or unplanned expense
- a grant towards a holiday or respite care
- disability equipment and aids
- help towards housing maintenance, repairs or removal costs
- travel costs.

Charities won't pay for items that are considered luxuries, foreign holidays, legal fees or debt.

Most charities will need proof, such as a receipt, to show that you've used the grant as intended.

Some charities offer small regular weekly or monthly grants to help with ongoing expenses. This shouldn't affect any benefits you are claiming but it's a good idea to let your benefit office know so there won't be any problems with your benefit in the future.

You may be able to get small regular payments to help pay a top up towards your care home fees, but this is rare. See our factsheets **Paying care home fees** and **Paying care home top-up fees** or call our Helpline if you have a question about care home fees ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), independantage.org).

Finding the right charity to apply to

Charities, benevolent funds and trusts have specific criteria for who they will help. Some charities will only consider applications from certain areas of the country, or from people of particular age groups or backgrounds. You may have to provide quite detailed information about yourself when you apply.

Turn2us can help you find a charity to apply to. It has an online grants search tool ([0808 802 2000](tel:08088022000), turn2us.org.uk) or you can write to Turn2us, Hythe House, 200 Shepherds Bush Road, London W6 7NL.

There are often books with details of charities in the reference section of local libraries too, such as the annual Guide to Grants for Individuals in Need published by the Directory of Social Change.

Most charities support people in financial need who have something in common, such as:

- a profession, trade or employment
- religion or faith
- membership of a society, club or trade union
- a medical condition, illness or disability
- living in or coming from a specific geographical area.

Some organisations only have one fund. Others have different funds for specific purposes. Many funds also help the dependents of the people they support, such as partners or children. You may also be eligible for help through a partner's connection to a charity, for example if they worked in a particular trade.

Depending on the charity you apply to, you may be asked for information about your education, employment history, social situation or background. If you can't remember all the details

of your work history, you can ask HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for a record ([0300 200 3500](tel:03002003500), gov.uk/get-proof-employment-history).

For details of organisations that may be able to support you if you have a long-term health condition, see our factsheet **Living with health difficulties**. For example, Macmillan Cancer Support can make small payments to help people with costs related to living with cancer ([0808 808 0000](tel:08088080000), macmillan.org.uk).

If you served in the armed forces, including National Service, you or your family may be eligible for support from:

- the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA) ([0800 731 4880](tel:08007314880), ssafa.org.uk),
- the Royal British Legion ([0808 802 8080](tel:08088028080), britishlegion.org.uk)
- the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund (RAFBF) ([0800 169 2942](tel:08001692942), rafbf.org).

Help with energy bills

If you are having problems paying your energy bills, some energy companies have grants or trusts that can help. You can apply to them even if you're not their customer. Contact your own supplier first to find out if they have grants available. You can also try the following:

- British Gas Energy Trust, which helps anyone with gas or electricity debts ([01733 421060](tel:01733421060), britishgasenergytrust.org.uk). You should get debt advice before you apply as you're more likely to be successful. They also provide grants for energy-efficient white goods and cookers and help with funeral arrears.
- Npower has a Health Through Warmth scheme that helps people with long-term illnesses to heat and insulate their

homes ([0800 022 220](tel:0800022220), npower.com/health_through_warmth).

- Charis Grants can direct you to organisations that can help with energy debts ([01733 421 021](tel:01733421021), charisgrants.com).

Most charities only have the resources to provide small grants. If you are trying to raise a large amount of money, you may need to apply to several charities at the same time. There are hundreds of charities out there so it's worth doing some research.

Good to know



In addition, if you receive Pension Credit, you may qualify for a discount on your electricity or gas bill. Contact your energy supplier or the Warm Home Discount Scheme to find out more ([0800 731 0214](tel:08007310214), gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme).

How to apply

Each charity will have its own application process. Contact your chosen charity to ask them how to apply.

You may have to apply through an application form or online form, or by writing a personal letter.

The charity may ask for evidence that you've been turned down for other sources of funding, such as the local council, government schemes or other charities that might be more suitable.

Some charities have case workers or welfare officers who will handle your application. They may be able to help you apply to other charities, especially if the charity can't fund the full amount you need.

You can also get help to apply through organisations such as Turn2us ([0808 802 2000](tel:08088022000), turn2us.org.uk) or Citizens Advice

(03444 111 444, citizensadvice.org.uk), or other advice organisations that work with people in financial need.

When to apply

Charities set their own timetables for processing applications and awarding grants. Some charities have committees who meet to process applications, which may mean it takes longer to get a decision. If you need funding urgently, look for charities that process applications and make decisions quickly.

If you are turned down, you don't normally have any right to appeal. Being eligible doesn't mean you will automatically get help. You may be turned down due to limited funding, even though you meet the charity's criteria, although this means you may be able to apply again to the same charity in the future.

Charities don't have to help you and, if they provide regular payments, can review or withdraw this help at any time. However, they should write to let you know about any changes to your payments.

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request. Contact us using the details below.

Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this information was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us

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