

# Living well at the end-of-life: Energy hardship

## The Real Cost of Cancer

Cancer has many costs. A diagnosis means households lose income. At the same time, day-to-day costs remain and additional expenses emerge, including for medication, personal care items and utility bills.<sup>1</sup>

Energy hardship occurs when households cannot afford energy use or access energy services.<sup>2</sup> Energy usage (and therefore costs) tend to increase in households where a person is nearing the end of their life.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of life, people can experience the cold more, clothes/bedding must be washed more often, and some people rely on electronic medical devices. Living in a cold home adversely impacts physical health and mental wellbeing.<sup>4</sup>

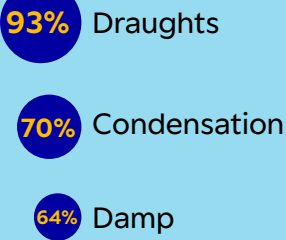
Energy hardship affects quality of life for cancer patients with a life limiting diagnosis.

The Irish Cancer Society funded Dr Suzanne Denieffe (South East Technological University) and her team to examine energy hardship for people with a life limiting cancer diagnosis, receiving palliative care at home.<sup>5</sup> The preliminary results outline the observations of palliative home care nurses who visit patients in their home.

### Nurses witnessed energy hardship in households.

One in 3 nurses said they experienced patients' homes without heating. Half of the nurses reported evidence of financial hardship in homes they visited.

#### Most nurses reported:



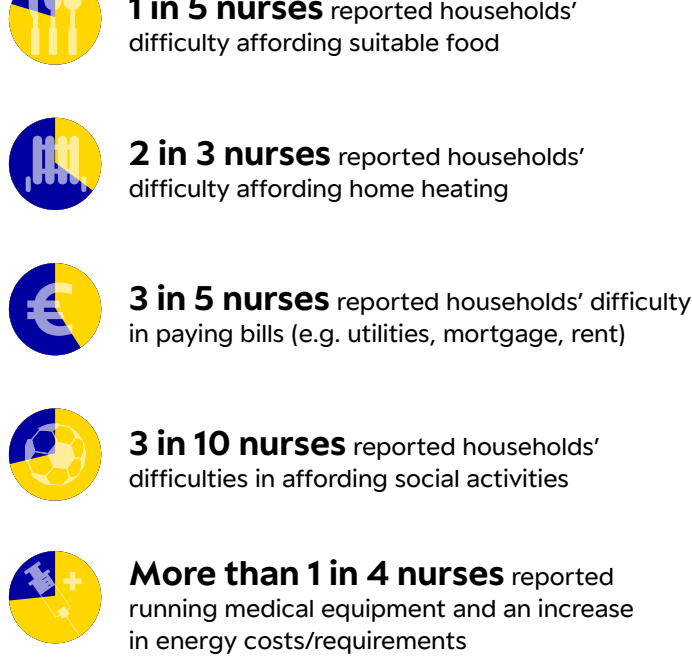
#### Half of nurses reported that homes they visited had: Mould and No Central Heating System

*"[...]one family didn't have fuel for their stove for their loved one's dying days."*

*"Numerous people stay in bed as it's warmer and cheaper than turning on heating or lighting fire."*

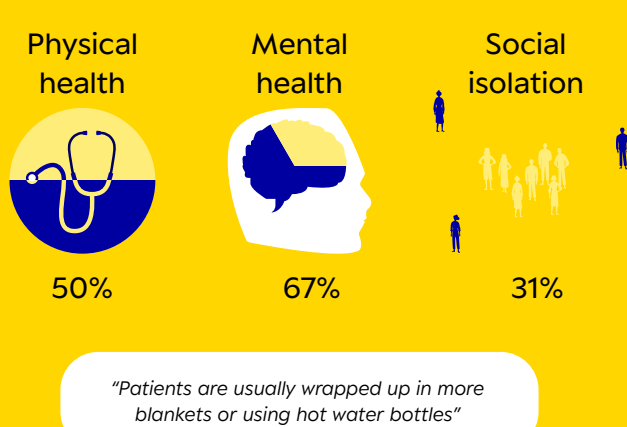
## Affording necessities at the end of life can be difficult

Financial challenges were reported to 70% of the palliative care nurses surveyed:



*"I regularly visit elderly patients who have electric plug in heaters on 24/7 to heat the one room of the house they live in; fuel bills cause huge financial worry for a cohort of patients living off a pension or sometimes family members paying their bills"*

### Nurses identified household problems, which could compromise health:



*"Patients are usually wrapped up in more blankets or using hot water bottles"*

## Recommendations for Government to support people to live well at the end-of-life

Across the country, cancer patients and their carers need additional and timely financial support at the end-of-life. The Irish Cancer Society calls on Government to provide the following to people living with a life-limiting cancer diagnosis:

- Automatic entitlement** to the Household Benefits Package, the Fuel Allowance payment and the Additional Needs Payment to a person with a life-limiting cancer, waiving means-testing.
- Electricity credits** for the remainder of a person's life to support with electricity costs.
- No charges for medical card holders** and a reduction on the threshold for the Drugs Payment Scheme to at least €72 per month.

1. Irish Cancer Society and Kantar. (2019). "The Real Cost of Cancer." Available at: [cancer.ie/sites/default/files/2020-01/Real%20Cost%20of%20Cancer%202019%20report.pdf](https://cancer.ie/sites/default/files/2020-01/Real%20Cost%20of%20Cancer%202019%20report.pdf)

2. Brabo-Catala, L., Cernic, A., Collins, E. & Barton, B. (2023). "The heat goes on: Simplifying the identification of energy hardship," Heliyon, 9(8). doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e19087; Brabo-Catala, L., Collins, E. & Barton, B. (2023). "Fuel Poverty of Energy Hardship: Analysing the literature, the proposed official definition and the views of experts in Aotearoa New Zealand," Policy Quarterly, 18(4).

3. Marie Curie. (2023). "One charge too many: The impact of rising energy cost of people at the end of life." Available at: [mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/policy/dying-in-poverty/k406-povertyenergyreport-finalversion.pdf](https://mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/policy/dying-in-poverty/k406-povertyenergyreport-finalversion.pdf)

4. Marie Curie. (2023).

5. Dr Martina Gooney, Dr Patricia Hunt, Dr Muireann Prendergast, Dr Pilar Luz Rodrigues (all South East Technological University); Dr Mary Nevin (Dublin City University), Dr Mary Rabbitt (All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care), Dr Emer Brangan (All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care), Dr Peter May (King's College London), Dr Margaret Denny (University of Maribor)