



Our unique advocacy on the cost-of-living crisis

Since the start of the cost-of-living crisis, Citizens Advice have campaigned to ensure that the issue is central to the government's agenda, sharing insights from the frontline and building the case for targeted support to help the worst affected.

Our access to near real-time data on the issues people are facing provides unique insight into the impact for people on the ground. We've used this to raise the alarm about the crisis, and successfully call for government support. The team have used innovative ways to analyse and share this data, including a bespoke cost-of-living data [dashboard](#) showing monthly trends, featured in London Playbook's 'Influence' edition and regularly covered in the national press. We used inventive modelling to understand how certain groups are likely to be impacted in the future, alongside specialised polling to help MPs understand the local impact of the crisis.

As a result we are a leading voice in the cost-of-living debate. Representatives from Citizens Advice are regularly invited to share our insights and asks on broadcast shows like the Today show, Newsnight, BBC Breakfast, Good Morning Britain.

Raising the alarm

A unique strength of Citizens Advice is the way that our frontline work informs our policy and campaigns. This was the case in the early stage of the crisis, as estimates for April's energy bills rose. We advised clients through our local offices, advice phone lines, and web channels. Our work focussed on accurately understanding the scale and nature of the problem, making sure people were able to receive the right support if they were struggling, and posing costed, feasible solutions to the government. Working at pace, the team developed a [policy briefing](#) in early January which estimated the scale of the problem and posed potential interventions.

Soon afterwards, we published a further briefing which made the case for [targeted financial support](#) for people on low-incomes, alongside regular media outputs. Central to our case was unique modelling, to explore the impact of predicted price rises on people on employment benefit. We found that April's estimated price cap would leave a single adult spending a third (33%) of their standard allowance on energy bills. We found this would rise to 37% from October.

In the build up to the price cap announcement, our '[red alert](#)' report warned of our record-breaking demand, picking up widespread coverage and interest from MPs. In the build up to the April cap, our '[Crunch Point](#)' report demonstrated the impact of future price rises on different groups, while calling for the introduction of broad and targeted measures to support people.

Developing new ways to engage MPs

In February, the government announced a package of support but we knew it wouldn't solve the problem. In the build-up to the price cap announcement, we realised we needed to build political interest in support for households on low incomes. We commissioned granular constituency

level polling, to gain an accurate picture of how people would be affected by price rises across the country.

Alongside local Citizens Advice offices, we reached out to MPs with our data. We met with more than 60 MPs, where we were able to share our constituency-level data and policy asks, and highlight the need for support. We targeted and engaged with over 30 Conservative backbench MPs, with many tabling Parliamentary Questions, writing to the Chancellor, and mentioning our work in press or in Parliament. Building on this, in July we held a drop-in event for MPs in Parliament attended by 43 MPs, split evenly across Conservatives and Labour.

We called on the government to introduce both broad and targeted support to mitigate the impact of energy price hikes. Specifically we proposed that this could be achieved by a combination of measures, including turning the energy rebate into a grant and further targeted direct payments. On May 26th the chancellor announced a package which included the doubling the value of the energy rebate and turning it into a grant, and providing additional targeted support to disabled people and people in receipt of benefits.

Using our data in open and innovative ways

Following the package of support announced in May, we focused on using our data to understand the impact and gaps in this support. We looked at new ways of sharing our data with the government, regulator, and other organisations. In July we published our [cost-of-living dashboard](#), which highlights key cost-of-living trends affecting people, and allows users to interact with our data.

We launched the dashboard with a virtual panel event, which had over 1,500 attendees. This included key people from government, the regulator, and civil society. The dashboard and the event were covered widely in the media and on social media. Influential journalists such as the Financial Times' chief data reporter John Burn-Murdoch attended the briefing. We were also invited to share our insights with key government departments. Our graphs have been reproduced by multiple national news outlets, including the BBC, the Financial Times, and Sky News.

As we moved later into the summer and new price cap predictions made it clear that more support would be needed to help people, this data was central to our calls on the government to make this available.

In the build-up to the government's announcement of an energy price guarantee, we used our data in other inventive ways. For example, using data from detailed budget planner exercises our advisors conduct with debt clients, [we forecasted](#) the impact of the support on people's budgets. More recently, we [updated this analysis](#) to examine the impact of the announced support.

Conclusion

Throughout the cost-of-living crisis, Citizens Advice have drawn on our data and expertise to ensure that the crisis is a government priority. Our ability to draw on unique real-time insights, and make evidence-based, creative and realistic policy proposals has ensured we are a credible and influential voice. We will continue to draw on this work to ensure that the right support is needed in the future.