

Increasing poverty in older age will lead to adverse health outcomes, researchers warn

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Many people will be much poorer than they had expected in their older age and this has profound implications for the health of our ageing population claims an editorial published today in *Age & Ageing*, the scientific journal of the British Geriatrics Society.

Professor Martin McKee, public [health](#) physician at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and sociologist Dr David Stuckler from Cambridge University, paint a picture of the economic challenges facing the UK. They cite poor performing pensions, changes to taxation, possible changes to the universal benefits system and the absence of cross-party agreement to resolve the future funding of social care as factors which will impact not only on people's wealth in their older age but also on their health.

In 2010, British pensioners were already at greater risk of poverty in all but three other European Union countries, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Spain. The authors argue that the failure of the economy to grow threatens to reduce older people's access to advanced medical care, such as cancer treatment, where outcomes at older ages lag well behind those in some other high income countries.

Professor McKee said: "If the UK's economic situation deteriorates further, there will be increasingly adverse effects on older people's health. This will have profound consequences for an increasingly cash-strapped and fragmented health system."

Dr Stuckler said: "Older people often have multiple and complex health problems, requiring inputs from a range of professionals in different settings. Co-ordinating their care is challenging at the best of times not least as these individuals often have the most complex, and thus expensive and unpredictable, problems. We are concerned about the impact of reforms to health and social care in England and how the needs of these vulnerable individuals will be met, especially if there is a move towards service delivery by private for profit providers."

More information: Martin McKee and David Stucker, Older people in the United Kingdom: under attack from all direction. Age Ageing 2012, [doi: 10.1093/ageing/afs168](https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afs168)

Provided by British Geriatrics Society

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