

Austerity linked to rising mortality rates among older pensioners

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Rising mortality rates among pensioners aged 85 and over are linked to reductions in spending on income support for poorer pensioners, suggests new research published today by the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. The researchers suggest that austerity measures in England have affected vulnerable old-age adults.

Sociology and public health researchers analysed [mortality statistics](#) for 324 [local authorities](#) in England covering the years 2007 to 2013 to examine whether budgetary reductions in pension credit and [social care](#) have been associated with recent rises in [mortality rates](#) among pensioners aged 85 and over. They found a significant association between both declines in pension credit spending per beneficiary and the number of beneficiaries with increases in age-85+ [mortality](#).

The researchers say that put into perspective their model estimates that the average drop in pension credit spending per beneficiary in 2012 of 3% corresponds to a 1.4% rise in mortality. The decline in pension credit beneficiaries observed in 2012 translates to a rise of 2.7% in mortality. Lead researcher Dr Rachel Loopstra, Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, said: "Together, these changes are of a sufficient magnitude to explain almost 90% of the observed 4.6% rise in mortality of that year.

Pensioners have been one group thought to be protected from austerity policy, as much emphasis has been placed on promises to protect the state pension such as the so-called 'Triple Lock'. However, this does not

apply to pension credits, which directly impact upon the poorest older age adults. In England, total spending on Pension Credits, income support payments for low-income pensioners, reduced by 6.5% in 2012.

Dr Loopstra said: "Poorer older age adults are one of the most vulnerable groups in the population and a reduction of just a few pounds could make a considerable difference to disposable income. Declines of this magnitude can cause significant stress and anxiety to people of older ages, which could precipitate heart attack or stroke." Other reasons for the increase in mortality for these pensioners could include reduced nutrition, inadequate heating, damp or other health damaging circumstances, and social isolation.

"Both recent and proposed future changes to welfare spending fall heavily upon pensioners", said Dr Loopstra. The social care [spending](#) gap, exacerbated by population ageing and rising demand for services, has been projected to be £2.8 to £3.5 billion by 2019/20. "Healthcare professionals have a crucial role in drawing attention to the consequences of these cuts and advocating publicly for policies that protect some of the most vulnerable individuals in society."

More information: Austerity and old-age mortality in England: A longitudinal cross-local area analysis, 2007-2013, [DOI: 10.1177/0141076816632215](#)

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