

WARM HOMES HEALTHY FUTURES

Newsletter **March 2026**



45 years of fighting fuel poverty

www.nea.org.uk/projects/warm-homes-healthy-futures

Welcome to the Warm Homes, Healthy Futures newsletter

**Hi, I'm Shelly McDonald,
Project Development Manager
at National Energy Action.**



I manage the programme of community engagement and workplace training events

delivered by our team of regional Project Development Co-ordinators and localised Energy Advisers who know their communities and make engagement successful.

We offer training on carbon monoxide poisoning, energy efficiency, managing fuel debts, benefit entitlement and fuel poverty. Our events and training are targeted at households that would otherwise struggle to access support due to mental or physical health conditions, language barriers or a lack of face-to-face provision in the area where they live.

Reaching vulnerable householders often involves working with community groups and health professionals in the places where people meet and work, such as libraries, wellbeing centres or food hubs.

Importantly, these settings create natural pathways into deeper 1:1 casework by enabling advocacy, real-time triage, and cross-referral with collocated partners such as benefits, housing or health teams.

We find that group events encourage rich conversations, peer learning, trust-building and make advice more accessible by reducing the stigma associated with asking for help about living in fuel poverty.

I am very proud of the connections we have made and support we have provided for thousands of vulnerable people across the country through the Warm Homes, Healthy Futures programme.



Our impact so far

- Led by National Energy Action, involving 27 delivery organisations working with over 400 health professionals across more than 100 communities
- Reached over 39,000 people and provided in-depth advice for 17,000
- £7.7 million in benefits unlocked and £1.8 million in additional financial outcomes
- Over 3,000 professionals trained across the health and social care sector
- 27,700 conversations on carbon monoxide safety and energy efficiency
- Health outcomes improved, with 29% of clients reporting better physical health and 33% reporting better mental health.
- Fuel poverty fell by 29% for those receiving support.

Clients say

- They are less likely to fall behind on energy bills and to need to ration food and fuel.
- They have better knowledge of how to save energy while staying comfortable.
- They feel more confident communicating with their suppliers and better able to heat their homes safely.

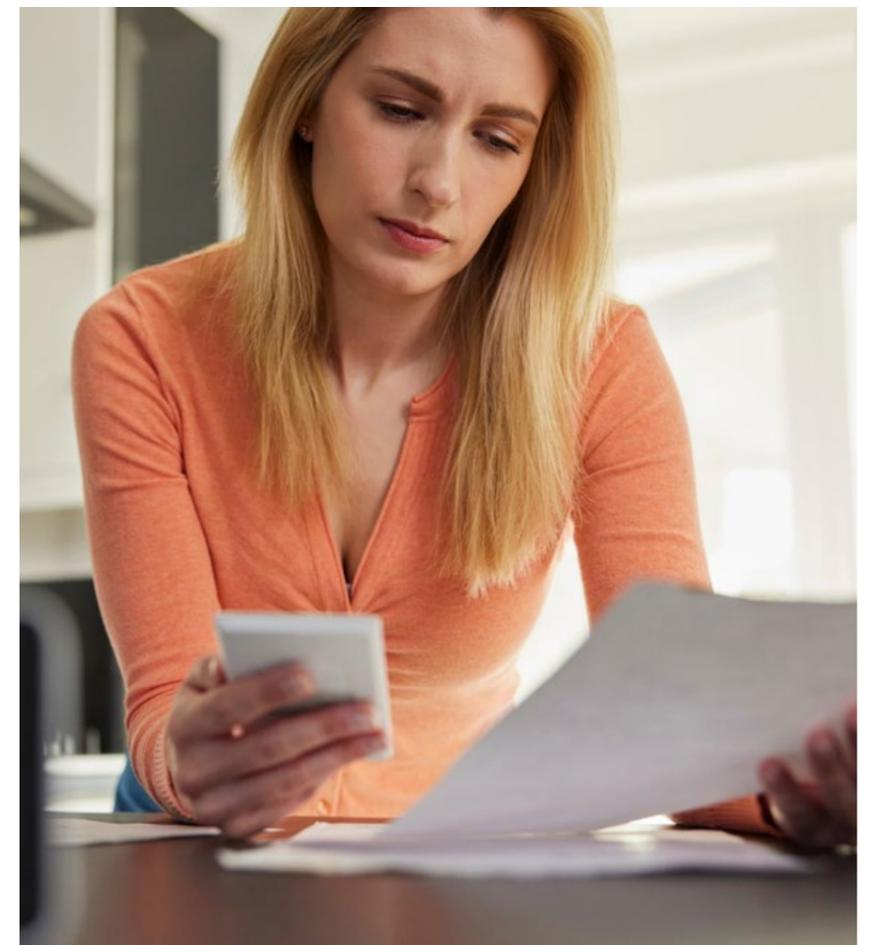


Photo: Shutterstock/Daisy Daisy

Celebrating 45 years of fighting fuel poverty

Our biggest Annual Conference ever was held in our home region of the North East



Bringing together almost 500 delegates, 40 exhibitors and 38 speakers, our biggest ever Annual Fuel Poverty Conference took place in early February.

With recent government announcements regarding the Warm Homes Plan, it

was a timely occasion to meet in person to discuss the priorities that need to be addressed to ensure the millions of people across the UK can afford to heat and power their homes.

The event coincided with our 45th birthday as a charity, so we were thrilled to hold it at the Glasshouse in Gateshead,

near to Durham where the charity was founded and near to Newcastle where our head office remains to this day.

To mark the occasion, we lit up Gateshead's Millennium Bridge in National Energy Action colours, which was covered in the local press. Founder David Green spoke movingly about the work he and his fellow founders did to set up Neighbourhood Energy Action (as we were originally called) in 1981 and how far we have come since and how much there still is to do.

We heard from experts on our panels on a host of key issues ranging from retrofit, child poverty and lessons learnt from 45 years of fighting fuel poverty. Oxford University's Dr Brenda Boardman reflected that her 10% definition of fuel poverty is still in use over 40 years later because it's the one that has always been easiest to understand for the general public.

The exhibition allowed stallholders to meet other delegates who are passionate about ending

fuel poverty. They were able to share best practices and make connections to work together moving forward.

While recognising the challenges that we face, we closed our Conference by celebrating some fantastic individuals and organisations who do amazing work to help people on the ground.

We were pleased to recognise Sheffield Citizens Advice, Ashford Borough Council, Hope 4 U, YES Energy Solutions and Lightning Reach with our Annual Conference Recognition awards for their work in going above and beyond to make life better for those they support.

The Conference was both a testament to the enormous effort and valuable work being carried out every day to help people in fuel poverty, and an inspiration to do more and to learn from each other. Thank you so much to all our speakers and exhibitors, and our sponsors Evouchers, Northern Gas Networks, Northern Powergrid and OVO for making the event possible.

Photo: National Energy Action/TyneSight

Struggling to keep warm and to be heard: Emma's story

A brilliant outcome for a vulnerable client with multiple health conditions reliant on food banks



Photo: Shutterstock/fizkes. Model used.



Emma lives in social housing and suffers from asthma, COPD, and anxiety, making it essential for her to keep her home warm. However, rising energy costs and billing issues led to £1,200 of energy debt within six months,

despite Emma limiting her heating use.

Her energy supplier converted her smart credit meter to prepayment mode without offering alternative repayment options or properly considering her vulnerability, even

though she was registered on the Priority Services Register.

Emma's request to make fuel debt repayments via Fuel Direct was initially denied due to concerns about its impact on her Universal Credit payments.

To cope, Emma rationed heating, prioritising warmth only when her daughter or grandchildren visited. She also relied on food banks, often struggling in the final week of each month.

Emma reached out to National Energy Action, from which an adviser:

- Provided an energy voucher and Winter Warmth Support Pack
- Advocated on her behalf with her supplier
- Helped secure grant funding to clear her gas debt
- Arranged for Emma to return to quarterly billing and set up Fuel Direct payments

'I can't thank her (National Energy Action Energy Advice and Benefits Adviser) enough, I really can't. She's the only person that I've ever spoken



to [about the issue]. She went beyond and above to help, she really did. I would never have been able to speak to my energy supplier, and because she knew her job very well, they couldn't fob her off like they probably would me.

'It was like I felt very comfortable, she would call them and then she would add me in to the conversation. Then she would be there to help me and guide me step by step sort of thing. I would never have been able to do what I did on my own, no way, I wouldn't have been able to do that. I would have probably given up, but she definitely knows her stuff 100%, she's an asset to your company, she really is.'

Photo: Shutterstock/PeopleImages

Deadly impact of cold weather episodes

Over 2,500 cold-associated deaths occurred in the UK across three cold weather episodes in the winter of 2024-25



The first annual cold mortality monitoring report published by the UK Health Security Agency estimated that in the winter of 2024 to 2025, 2,544 cold-associated deaths occurred across three cold weather episodes of two days or more where the temperature drops below 2°C.

The effects of cold weather on health are subtle and build up over days or weeks and may not appear on death certificates, so the actual number may be higher.

Older adults are particularly

vulnerable because they are more likely to have long-term health conditions, such as heart, lung, and circulatory disease, which can be worsened by cold temperatures.

In addition, mobility limitations, social isolation, and reduced ability to heat homes adequately increases exposure to cold among older age groups. See the full report: ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2026/02/18/how-does-cold-weather-affect-health-our-new-report-explores-the-hidden-impact/.

From our partners



Just wanted to thank you for your amazing help. A young mum got in touch to say that you helped her get her boiler fixed just before Christmas. She has two young children and is going through a really difficult time, so having a warm home for Christmas and especially now is

such a help and very appreciated. She even received a Winter Warmth Support Pack. Really appreciate having such great advice for our community. Thank you again. Michelle Vagg | Colne Valley Primary Care Network Social Prescriber Dementia Lead

Did you know?

- The government's recently published Fuel Poverty Strategy for England has a strong focus on improving health outcomes for vulnerable householders living in a cold home.
- 2.7 million households living in fuel poverty cost the NHS £900 million annually on treating illnesses associated with cold, damp homes.



Grants to help run medical equipment at home



 Do you help clients who rely on essential medical equipment to stay healthy at home?

Equipment such as ventilators, oxygen concentrators, suction pumps, dialysis machines, medication fridges, infusion pumps, powered wheelchairs or chair lifts will increase a household's electricity bills.

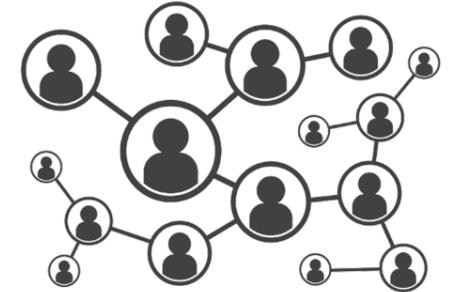
National Energy Action has grants of £400 per low-income household (<£30,000). Householders should have an energy bill in their name which they pay in credit. Grants are available until the end of March 2026.

For further details and an application form, please contact: molly.chambers@nea.org.uk.

→ Referrals made easy

Email healthyfutures@nea.org.uk to find out how to make referrals and offer your clients:

- Bespoke energy advice and support with bills
- Benefit checks and income maximisation
- Servicing of boilers and gas appliances
- Carbon monoxide alarms
- Winter Warmth Support Packs and fuel vouchers
- Help signing up to the Priority Services Register



Coming up

National Energy Action's upcoming round of **free** Fuel Poverty Forums are taking place in April and May.

Aimed at frontline service providers in England and Wales, the forums examine practical and policy initiatives related to fuel poverty and the delivery of solutions at all levels. Attendance is free and lunch will be provided. Spaces are limited and are offered at a maximum of two places per organisation per forum. NEA members will get priority. Visit: www.nea.org.uk/fuel-poverty-forums/dates/.

Training opportunities

We are offering **fully funded training** for frontline workers who support people with health conditions or disabilities made worse by cold homes.

This training focuses on carbon monoxide awareness, particularly in fuel poor households, and is tailored for those involved in the Warm Homes, Healthy Futures programme.

It's a great opportunity to enhance your knowledge and support vulnerable groups more effectively. Visit: www.nea.org.uk/carbon-monoxide-course/.



Where to find us

Email: healthyfutures@nea.org.uk

Web: www.nea.org.uk/whhf

Join the conversation



Twitter/X: [@NEA_UKCharity](https://twitter.com/NEA_UKCharity)



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