



CRC 21/07

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Pension credit take-up: rural pensioners left out in the cold!

As part of its series of State of the Countryside updates, the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) is today publishing new information about the take-up of pension credit in rural England. Overall the take-up of pension credit is lower in rural areas: 42% of eligible rural pensioners are non-recipients of pension credit compared with 35% in urban areas. In villages and hamlets and isolated dwellings the difference is even more pronounced – 54% of eligible pensioners are non-recipients of pension credit. We estimate that more than 250,000 pensioners in rural areas are eligible to receive pension credit but are not claiming their entitlement.

Commenting on the findings, Graham Russell, Director of Practice at the Commission for Rural Communities, said: “The situation with pensioners living in hamlets and isolated dwellings being much less likely to claim their entitlement to pension credit is extremely concerning, especially as the rural population is ageing faster than the urban population. Because of where they live pensioners in rural areas can be more isolated from sources of information and advice. Also our research shows that they tend to be more independent or more anxious about any stigma associated with receiving pension credit.

“I hope the findings we are publishing today will encourage organisations in rural communities, such as GP surgeries, carers and pub landlords, to work with us to ensure that people in rural areas who are eligible to claim pension credit are aware of their entitlement. Increased take-up of benefits could reduce pensioner poverty dramatically, since the additional spending would, by definition, go almost exclusively to the poorest pensioners. Pensioners are entitled to claim this allowance; it is imperative that no one who is in genuine need misses out, no matter where they live.”

Anna Pearson from Help the Aged said: “It is very worrying that in many rural areas, particularly those areas which are most isolated, that a high proportion of pensioners are missing out on benefits that they are entitled to.

“Help the Aged believes that it is vital that the Government provides funding for face-to-face benefits advice projects in rural areas to increase take-up. In addition, urgent attention needs to be given to introducing a system of paying benefits to people automatically. This would avoid the problem of physically finding entitled pensioners.”

Today’s findings are part of ongoing work by the CRC to tackle specific aspects of rural disadvantage. Early in the new year we will be producing new information which shows how positive steps can be taken to promote financial inclusion in rural areas working alongside the financial services sector.

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes for editors

1. Pension credit is an entitlement for people aged 60 or over living in Great Britain. Pension credit guarantees everyone aged 60 and over an income of at least:

- £119.05 a week for someone who is single
- £181.70 a week for someone with a partner.

Those who are eligible for a pension credit may receive a payment backdated for up to 12 months from the day they were first entitled to the date first applied. For further information about pension credit go to:

www.thepensionerservice.gov.uk/pensioncredit/home.asp

2. 'Pension credit take-up in rural areas', State of the Countryside Update No 4, CRC WEB 23, December 2007 is available at:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/SOTCupdate4.pdf

3. Information about the Commission for Rural Communities and our work can be found on our website: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk

Our Annual Review provides an overview of our activities during the last year:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/annualreview20062007