



## Bombarded: reducing the psychological harm caused by the cost of living crisis

### Summary

- The cost of living continues to take a toll on our collective mental health. In new national polling, we find that more than half of UK adults (54%) report having felt either anxious, depressed, filled with dread or unable to cope – or a combination of these emotions – due to concerns about their finances.
- For some this was particularly acute, with one in six (17%) saying that they had experienced suicidal thoughts or feelings as a result of the rise in the cost of living this year. That share was even higher among people who were in debt, rising to half (49%) of those who were behind on more than one kind of payment like energy bills or rent.
- Respondents were also asked whether they made an attempt to take their own life in the last nine months as a result of the rise in the cost of living. Across UK adults, 4% reported having done so, with that proportion rising to 13% among people who are behind on any payments.
- Experts by experience told us how repeated contact by multiple creditors can be a trigger for suicidal thoughts, leaving people feeling bullied and scared.
- To minimise the psychological damage caused by the cost of living crisis, it's vital that the government and creditors like banks and telecoms providers protect people and deliver support to them effectively.

### The UK government should:

- Urgently publish its updated 10-year suicide prevention strategy, with an emphasis on action to break the links between financial difficulty and suicidality.
- Ask the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to quickly explore how to reduce the damaging pressure that customers who have fallen behind on payments feel, including the introduction of new limits on the number of times creditors can contact people in debt within a given window.

### Regulators in key markets like banking, energy and telecoms should:

- Underline to firms the importance of supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances, and harshly penalise companies failing to do so.
- Carefully monitor how firms communicate with customers who have missed payments, and set out what good and bad practice looks like.

### Firms should:

- Examine their approach to debt collection and test their communications with real consumers to understand the potential negative impacts they can have, and how to maximise the chances of someone engaging and seeking support.
- Make disclosing a mental health problem a straightforward process, with clear information on how to do so and what will happen after disclosure.

## The important link between the cost of living and our mental health

In June 2022, we published our initial findings on how rapidly rising prices were affecting both our day-to-day lives and our mental health.<sup>1</sup> That paper told a now unfortunately familiar story of people struggling with energy, food and transport payments. But through our research we also heard how the pressure to keep up with bills was taking a psychological toll, raising the risk that the cost of living crisis could become a mental health crisis.

Since June, inflation has continued to hit record levels. The cost of a typical basket of goods and services was 11.1% higher in October than a year before. The Office for National Statistics reported that between June and September almost half of us found it difficult to afford our energy bills.<sup>2</sup>

Help has come from the government in recent months. The Energy Price Guarantee capped the cost of a unit of energy. The Energy Bills Support Scheme took a further £400 off energy bills. Alongside these more universal policies, there have also been payments targeted at specific groups, including those on means-tested or disability-related benefits.

November's Autumn Statement, however, announced a scaling-back of the Energy Price Guarantee, and the Energy Bills Support Scheme is due to end in April 2023. The latest inflation forecasts do expect the peak to be reached in late 2022, but year-on-year price rises are still expected to average over 7% in 2023.<sup>3</sup> With a recession already thought to be underway and unemployment predicted to rise, the financial and psychological pressure many of us are feeling may well grow. There is a well-established connection between financial difficulties and a negative impact on mental health, with half of people in problem debt having a mental health problem.<sup>4</sup> Evidence has also pointed to a link between recessions, economic distress and suicidality.<sup>56</sup>

To help understand those twinned issues of money and mental health, this paper explores how people have been coping six months on from our first paper. We particularly wanted to understand how the actions of key players like the government and creditors including banks

and energy companies were contributing to how people were feeling. That's vital because when the messaging and support from these actors is focused on protecting people from harm and is designed effectively, it can make a massive positive difference to both our budgets and mental health. But when handled poorly, these institutions can heap more worry on top of those of us who are already struggling to get by. Getting a clear picture of the state of play now should give these organisations a valuable insight into the impact of what they do, and how they could be doing better.

To explore those questions, we:

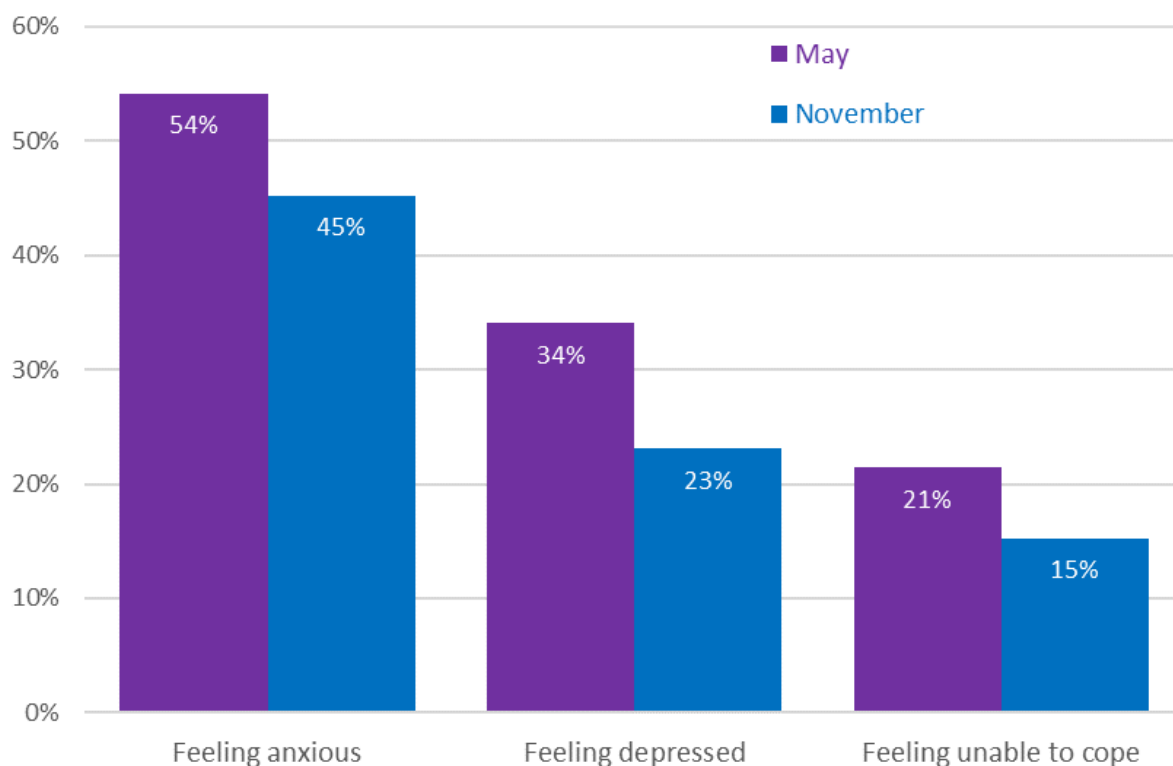
- Commissioned YouGov to run a nationally-representative online poll of 2,049 people over 11-14 November, re-running a number of the questions we asked in May 2022 for our previous cost of living paper, as well as a selection of new questions to gain insights into different experiences.<sup>7</sup>
- Carried out an online survey with our Research Community, a group of nearly 5,000 people with lived experience of mental health problems. The survey asked about contact from creditors about missed payments, with 215 respondents over 4-14 November.
- Analysed debt communications diaries from three members of our Research Community who responded to the survey. Each of these respondents were behind on a number of payments and were receiving frequent contact from their creditors.<sup>8</sup>

### One in six say they have felt suicidal as a result of the cost of living

We conducted the polling for our previous paper in May 2022. Then, we asked respondents how the cost of living had affected their mental health in the preceding months. Re-running this question in November, we find once again that a majority of people (54%) have experienced negative feelings as a result of the rise in the cost of living.<sup>9</sup> Approaching half (45%) have been anxious, nearly a quarter (23%) have been depressed and 15% said they have felt unable to cope.

## Figure 1: The cost of living continues to have a negative impact on our mental health

*Thinking about the last three months, which, if any, of the following have you experienced as a result of the rise in the cost of living?*



Source: Money and Mental Health analysis of YouGov online polling of 2,049 UK adults, November 11-14 2022, and of 2,149 UK adults, May 5-6 2022.

Comparing these figures to our polling in May, there has been a small but noticeable drop in the share of people reporting each of these experiences, as shown in Figure 1. These drops are visible for both people with and without mental health problems, although people with mental health problems are much more likely to have experienced these feelings; one in three (33%) people who had experienced mental health problems within the past two years reported having felt unable to cope due to the cost of living.

Given the relatively small change, these improvements shouldn't be overinterpreted. Optimistically, however, it could be that the greater certainty around support with the cost of living in November as compared to May has contributed.

But alongside that potential positive shift, our November polling also deepens our understanding of just how difficult this period

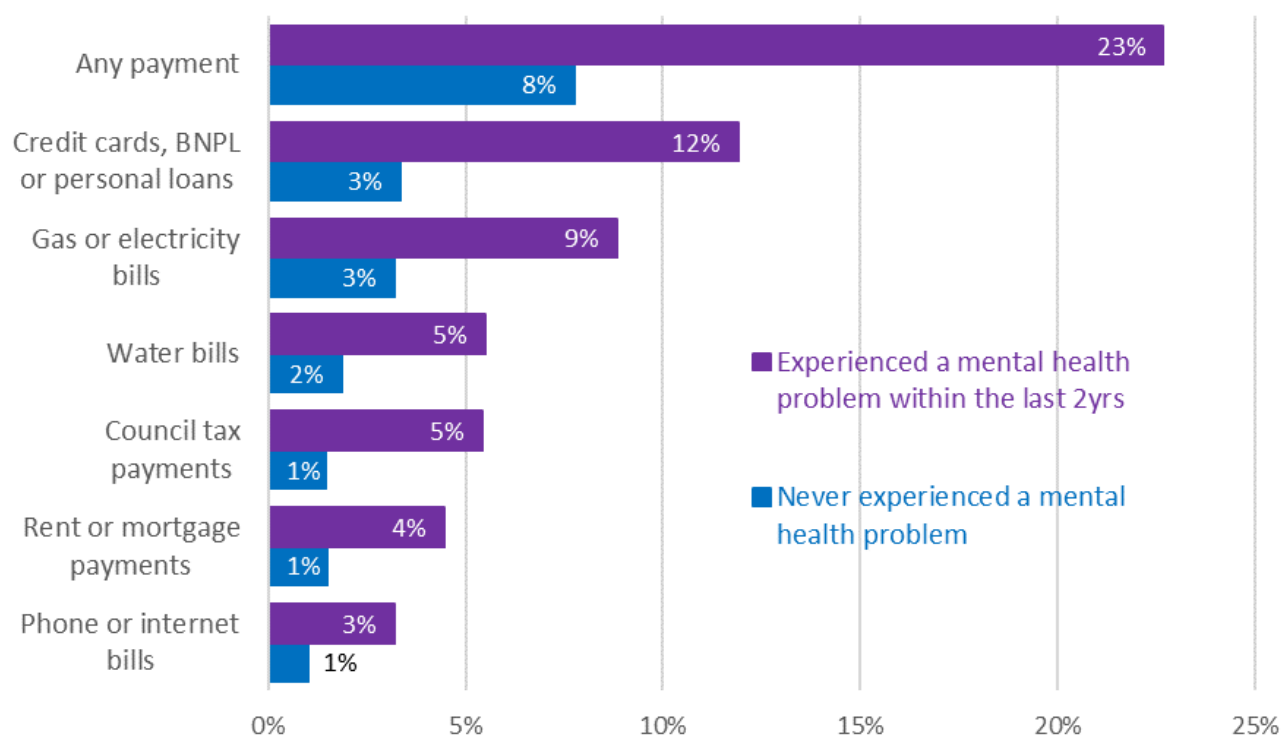
has been for some of us. We asked respondents whether they had experienced suicidal thoughts or feelings as a result of the rise in the cost of living since February 2022. Altogether, 17% of respondents – one in six UK adults – said they had. If this was reflected nationally, this would suggest that just under 9 million people have been affected to that extent by the cost of living. It is worth underlining that suicidal thoughts and feelings are very common, and can and do pass. A range of organisations exist to support people who are experiencing thoughts of harming themselves.<sup>10</sup>

### Being behind on bills is linked to worse mental health

People respond to financial difficulty in different ways. As our last note discussed, this can be through skipping meals, not bathing or cooking, or missing medical appointments to save on travel costs.

**Figure 2: People with mental health problems are three times more likely to be behind on a payment**

*Which, if any, of the following bills are you currently behind on payments for?*



*Source: Money and Mental Health analysis of YouGov online polling of 2,049 UK adults, 619 of whom had experienced a mental health problem within the last two years.*

These approaches can negatively affect us, whether physically or mentally. They are often also short-term strategies and missing payments on bills can quickly become a necessity.

Asked about a range of bills in our polling, people with recent experience of mental health problems are more likely to have fallen behind than people who have never experienced a mental health problem. Across common outgoings like energy bills, credit cards and rent, nearly one in four (23%) people with a mental health problem were behind on at least one of these payments, compared to 8% of people who have never had a mental health problem, as Figure 2 shows.

There was a noteworthy and concerning difference between people behind with just one of the payments respondents were asked about, and those who were behind on more. Among the former, as Figure 3 (below) shows, 32% said they had felt suicidal. But among those who had

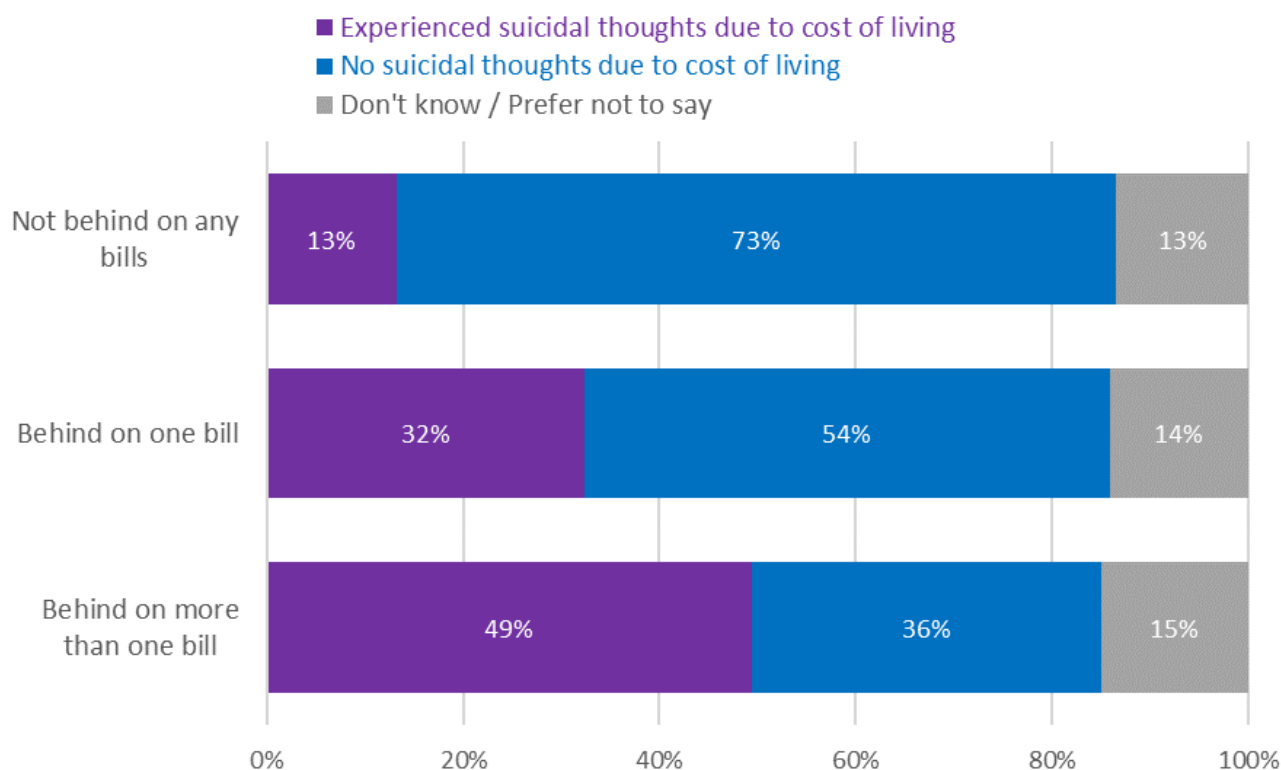
missed payments with multiple creditors, this rose to a staggering 49%.

Our polling also asked respondents whether they had made an attempt to take their own life in the last nine months as a result of the rise in the cost of living. Across UK adults, 4% reported having done so. Mirroring the pattern with suicidal thoughts, however, that proportion rose to 13% among people who are behind on any payments, or one in eight in that situation.

### **Communications from creditors are often damaging and counterproductive**

Given people with mental health problems or who have had suicidal thoughts are overrepresented among those in debt, it is vital to understand how creditors are communicating when chasing payments. In our polling, we found that people with these experiences were more likely to say they felt dread about being contacted by creditors.

**Figure 3: Half of those who are behind on multiple bills have had suicidal thoughts as a result of the cost of living**



*Source: Money and Mental Health analysis of YouGov online polling of 2,049 UK adults, 337 of whom said they had experienced suicidal thoughts since February 2022 as a result of the rise in the cost of living.*

Among respondents with recent mental health problems, 19% felt dread about opening letters from creditors, 15% felt dread about emails from creditors and 12% felt dread about receiving phone calls, compared to 6%, 3% and 3% respectively among those who have never experienced a mental health problem.

Exploring debt communications with our Research Community, a recurring theme was the distress that these contacts often caused. For some respondents, the tone used by creditors was particularly upsetting, whether in writing or over the phone.

*"[My energy provider] are constantly sending emails and have passed it through to a debt collection agency already who are also sending very scary letters. Their staff on the phones are also very rude and don't listen to what I have to say before trying to impose their solution rather than working with me to resolve the issue."*  
Expert by experience

For others, the frequency of the contacts was most difficult, leading to people describing a feeling of being "bombarded".

*"I struggle with telephone calls. I have learning difficulties and I don't always understand what the letters mean. I have told the companies but I am constantly bombarded with telephone calls and letters which get increasingly confusing for me and the companies get more and more frustrated with me which makes me more confused."* Expert by experience

We heard examples of this bombardment reaching extreme levels. Steven,<sup>11</sup> one of our Research Community members who kept track of debt communications across a week, shared how he received seven contacts in seven hours from one debt collection agency, including two text messages, two emails, a letter and two phone calls which he did not answer.

*"Feeling harassed and persecuted. The sheer number of contacts scares me, it's almost as if*



they are threatening and bullying me into compliance. They have me at the point of not answering calls and removing my SIM so they can't contact me. I am becoming more reclusive as a result." Steven, expert by experience

Steven's reaction of disengaging from contact was one we heard from a number of Research Community respondents. People told us about how the aggressive approach taken by some firms was counterproductive and made it less likely that they would get in touch.

"The constant calling & emailing just makes you feel worse. It makes you less inclined to want to get in touch & sort it out. Even when you tell

them not to call & email they still call you everyday." Expert by experience

"It makes me anxious and stressed. I avoid answering the phone and delete the messages without listening. Their constant ringing 3 times a day causes me anxiety." Expert by experience

These frequent contacts are not one-off experiences that people face, but patterns that recur on a daily basis. Figure 4 sets out Sandra's experience,<sup>12</sup> a Research Community member who had fallen behind on a number of payments and recorded the contacts she received over several days.

**Figure 4: Sandra's debt communications diary**

#### **Thursday 17 November**

Today I had a letter from [an online retailer] asking to pay arrears. It did however say if I was struggling I could contact any debt relief companies for advice. I had a phone call at 2.30 which I didn't answer from [the same online retailer]. They left a voicemail saying they have tried several times to get hold of me and could I phone them back on the number they called from. I feel like I'm really being pressured to answer the phone when I don't like answering the phone because I know I will be told I owe money. I have phoned Pay Plan for advice.

Also had a phone call from [a telecoms provider] as my payment hadn't gone through on the day it should have gone through but I did manage to pay it online a few days after. I did at this point ask to be put through to the department [so] I could try and lower my contract. I cancelled a channel so hoping it will bring the monthly bill down.

Feel really fed up today. Feel it's all too much, I'm struggling to pay basic bills so Christmas is going to be rubbish. My food bill was £15 more expensive for just the basic bread, milk, dog food and a few bits for my daughter. I have no money left until next week now.

#### **Friday 18 November**

Today I had two letters from [a bank] to say there was insufficient money in the bank to pay for two direct debits. One was for my phone contract which is only £7 a month and the other was for my TV licence. Not big bills but I feel absolutely rubbish today. I have no money at all so we will have to do without over the weekend until we get my husband's carers allowance on Monday.

My husband also had a brown letter which I dread. It said they may be overpaying us for child tax credit. We have both sat and worried about it. My husband then spent the best part of an hour on the phone, 50 minutes of that was waiting to be spoken to. 10 minutes if not less to be told "you don't earn £12,000 so don't worry about it". I felt like we didn't matter. To them it was, hey ho you've just worried over nothing and wasted an hour phoning. As I've said I feel rubbish today.

### Saturday 19 November

I received two letters today. Just had me more worried than I was yesterday. I can't do anything about them as I simply don't have the money. I went shopping with my last £10 yesterday to buy bread and milk so until Tuesday I have no money. I feel terrible as when I took out these two plans I had the money to pay the minimum amount and they helped me at the time. Now they are just a burden.

### Monday 21 November

Thankfully I've not received any letters today which will be a first for a long time. I'm hoping I don't get any phone calls today either. Gosh this will be amazing if I don't get anything today. Feeling relieved today.

### Tuesday 22 November

I've not received any letters or received any phone calls today. I find this a little worrying but at the same time relieved. I'm now worried I'll have bailiffs turn up as one of the letters said it was now passed onto a collection agency. Does this mean bailiffs? I don't know.

The damaging and counterproductive impact of debt communications was mentioned both by people who could not afford to make payments, but also those who struggled with payments and managing their account because of the symptoms of their mental health problem.

"They keep sending letters about legal action even though I try to pay what I can every month. It causes tremendous damage to my mental health so much that I became suicidal." Expert by experience

"I don't know why but I sometimes struggle to pay bills. I have the money but sometimes I get so frightened as I think I will get it wrong. I've ended up with late charges due to this." Expert by experience

Seeking support from health professionals and debt advisors are routes to better financial and mental health. But unfortunately, we heard from respondents how the actions of firms, or the fear of what they may do, could work against that positive action that people had taken.

"I find letters I receive from credit card companies like [a credit card provider] very intimidating and threatening. I am neurodiverse and their letters aren't neurodiverse friendly. I am on a DMP [debt

management plan] with Step Change and have had a letter from [the company] threatening debt collectors. [The company] know I am on a DMP and have said these letters are automated but they feel threatening and make me anxious, so I would rather not open them." Expert by experience

"The thought of bailiffs banging on my door makes me feel sick and quite frankly awakens my self harm urge. I'm waiting 18 weeks just to speak to a therapist." Expert by experience

"I am celebrating my 5th month of not gambling and most of my debts are precisely about that. They keep threatening me, earlier in the year they clamped my car and I had to borrow £500 to release it, which is more borrowing on my end." Expert by experience

And while we did hear some encouraging stories of people contacting their creditors and coming to agreements on repayment plans, we also heard of missed opportunities.

"I asked if I could possibly extend the term to reduce payments or a set rate. The letter I received back did not cover any of these questions. Now they have waited until interest is sky high and payments are greater than I am

going to lose my home. My mum lives with me, she's not well, I'm not well. I have pets that keep me going, if I lose the house will I have to lose them too? I have contemplated suicide because I cannot cope with the guilt of losing the family home or cope with the feelings of immense anxiety. This may sound extreme but unless you have felt it you cannot understand it." Expert by experience

### **The urgent need for action**

With one in six people saying they have felt suicidal as a result of the cost of living crisis this year, there is an immediate need for greater support. In our paper in June, we made a number of recommendations to the government, designed to boost incomes to help shield people from rising prices. Those recommendations remain vital. In this note, we build on those ideas by exploring how to protect people who are struggling and make the support that is available accessible and effective.

### **Updating the suicide prevention strategy**

In our previous paper, we highlighted the ongoing review of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy as an opportunity to take action. We noted then that it was due to be published later this year, 10 years on from the last version, which only briefly discussed the role that financial difficulties can play in suicidality.<sup>13</sup> With the updated Strategy still to be published, it's vital the government issues it as soon as possible. It should address the gap highlighted in the previous version by designating people at risk of economic adversity as a high-risk group. That shift in perspective is important. But given the urgency of the current situation, the government could also use the publication of the Strategy as an opportunity to tackle more specific harms.

### **Controlling creditor contact**

Our research (and that of others<sup>14</sup>) has shown how common it is for people to have multiple debts. In our polling, a little under half (42%) of those who were behind on a payment had missed at least one other kind of payment. Among our Research Community respondents (who all have experience of mental health problems), the proportion was higher, with over two-thirds (69%) of respondents who were

behind on payments saying they had multiple missed payments.<sup>15</sup>

The high frequency of contact that people in this position can receive from their creditors and debt collection agencies makes this particularly concerning. Among Research Community respondents who had fallen behind, over a third (38%) had been contacted three or more times in the previous week by their creditors about their debt, with 5% having been contacted 10 times or more.<sup>16</sup> The examples of Sandra, Steven and other Research Community members illustrate just how negatively this can affect people's mental health and their likelihood of engaging with the firms.

This is not a new development: research we conducted in 2018 also found that creditor activity can be a trigger for suicidal thoughts and feelings<sup>17</sup> and led to our "Debt Threats" campaign, which saw HM Treasury change one particularly outdated and frightening letter that firms were required to send to people at risk of defaulting on a payment. While those changes were a step in the right direction, the current economic circumstances make the need to better protect people in these difficult circumstances more pressing.

Existing efforts don't suggest a solution will emerge quickly. The government has launched a review of the Consumer Credit Act, the legislation which sets the groundwork for what firms can and can't do. This is likely to be a process that takes years. The FCA handbook on credit – called CONC – does require firms to give "fair and appropriate treatment" to customers who the firm considers "particularly vulnerable".<sup>18</sup> A document published by the Office of Fair Trading which CONC refers to discusses psychological harassment and warns firms against contacting customers in debt at "unreasonable intervals".<sup>19</sup> None of the guidance, however, provides clear guidelines on how many contacts would be excessive. It also does not consider the compounding impact of contact from multiple creditors: the volume of contacts that might seem reasonable from one creditor quickly appears more likely to constitute harassment when you consider the experiences of people who are behind on multiple payments.



A more direct approach is seen in the US, where the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau – the body that oversees consumer protection in financial services – has introduced a Debt Collection Rule.<sup>20</sup> This limits debt collectors to making no more than seven calls within a seven-day period, or within seven days after a telephone conversation with the customer about the particular debt. Given how many people have multiple debts, this threshold could still lead to people in vulnerable circumstances being contacted dozens of times in a week, and only covers phone calls. This approach would nonetheless provide more clarity than the current situation in the UK.

This more prescriptive approach would differ from outcomes-focused Consumer Duty, which the FCA will use to make firms do a better job of supporting consumers but does not include more fixed guidelines. Creditors also shouldn't fear reaching out to struggling customers with offers of help. But given the evidence in this paper on how repeated communications can quickly lead to people feeling extremely distressed – especially when they are on the receiving end of contact from multiple creditors – a more fixed rule seems appropriate. It would also be in line with the prescriptive reforms to payday lending – another instance in which customers are more likely to be vulnerable – which capped the daily interest rates and charges customers could face. This would also fit with the FCA's responsibility to consider outcomes for consumers across financial services markets, rather than looking solely at experiences with individual firms in isolation, as well as its commitment to ensure that people in vulnerable circumstances have as good outcomes as those of other consumers.

Given the scale of potential harm, the government should ask the FCA to review current practice from firms, speak to indebted consumers about their experiences, in order to set an appropriate limit on the number of contacts firms collecting debts can make within a given period.

### **Widening access to Breathing Space**

This would not be the first action the government

has taken in recent years to protect those in debt from their creditors. The Breathing Space scheme gives people in debt temporary protection from creditors while they get debt advice. Money and Mental Health campaigned for people experiencing a mental health crisis to be given support to access this help and to get longer protection from creditor action, which led to the introduction of the Mental Health Crisis Breathing Space. This initiative, however, has had less impact than it could because of the limited range of professionals who can refer people into the scheme. Expanding this would enable more people to benefit from this valuable support.

### **Introducing a 'routine enquiry' in the NHS**

Despite policies like Breathing Space, there is still a missed opportunity in the health system to break the toxic links between our finances and our mental health. Making it a standard process that everyone using a mental health service is asked about their financial situation and whether it is negatively affecting their health could help to identify more people in need of support and direct them to appropriate help, for instance debt advice. The same question should be asked of those presenting at a hospital having attempted suicide or self-harmed.

#### **The UK government should:**

- Urgently publish its updated 10-year suicide prevention strategy, with an emphasis on immediate action to break the links between financial difficulty and suicidality.
- Task the FCA with introducing new rules on the acceptable volume of creditor contact to people in debt.
- Broaden access to the Mental Health Breathing Space scheme so that more professionals can refer in, and more people can be given space from creditors while getting support with their mental health and finances.
- Ensure everyone using mental health services or presenting at A&E departments having attempted suicide or self harmed is asked about their money and offered money advice if it's needed.

The cost of living crisis has seen more discussions of how well regulators are monitoring firms' activity. Using Ofgem as an example, it has launched compliance reviews into key consumer issues. But despite Ofgem judging that some suppliers have demonstrated 'severe weaknesses' in how they deal with customers having payment difficulties and in how they treat customers in vulnerable situations, its website suggests no fines have been levied against firms since 2020.

Firms, and energy companies in particular, will also have experienced disruption and difficulties as a result of the cost of living crisis, which came quickly on the back of the Covid-19 pandemic. A constructive approach, explaining best practice and the positive impact it can have for both customers and firms, is still needed. But given the seriousness of difficulty many customers are facing, it's important that regulators are willing to dole out more severe penalties to companies who repeatedly fail their customers in need.

#### **Regulators should:**

- Carefully monitor how firms communicate with customers who have missed payments, and make clear what good and bad practice looks like.
- Underline to firms their duties to treat vulnerable customers and those in financial difficulty fairly, and harshly penalise companies failing to do so.

Firms shouldn't wait for the government or regulators to force them to take action. There are a range of steps companies in key markets can take to support their customers. Reducing the costs that customers are facing is the most direct way to help, highlighting more affordable deals, including social tariffs where relevant.

Making it easier for customers to share with a firm that they are experiencing a mental health problem is another important action companies can take, enabling them to better meet the additional needs that a customer may have. With Research Community members discussing the lack of trust they feel in firms and fears of negative responses from staff, there is still much to be done. A recent series of guides that Money and Mental Health published in collaboration

with the Money Advice Trust sets out how firms can make changes to help more customers get to the help that is available, covering the disclosure journey, training for staff and recording data responsibly and effectively.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, this note has shown how devastating excessive and unsupportive communications from firms can be to customers in debt, and how firms' understanding of what is 'excessive' must be informed by the experiences of people with multiple creditors, rather than only considering their own firm's behaviour in isolation.

Companies should carefully review their strategy on contacting customers who are behind on payments, factoring in the distress that people in those circumstances are likely to be feeling. Firms should review the volume of contacts and reduce them where excessive, emphasise supportive messages, tailor them to the customer's situation and feature prominent signposting to debt advice and mental health organisations.

#### **Firms should:**

- Actively promote social tariffs and other options available to customers who are struggling to pay.
- Make disclosing a mental health problem as straightforward and helpful as possible, with clear information on how to do so and what will happen after disclosure.
- Limit the distress caused by letters, emails and phone calls to people who have fallen behind, considering whether the frequency, tone, information and signposting are as helpful and supportive as possible.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> D'Arcy C. [A tale of two crises: the cost of living and mental health](#). Money and Mental Health. June 2022.
- <sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS). Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain: June to September 2022. ONS. October 2022.
- <sup>3</sup> Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). Economic and fiscal outlook. OBR. November 2022.
- <sup>4</sup> Money and Mental Health. [Money and mental health: The facts](#).
- <sup>5</sup> The Samaritans. Socioeconomic disadvantage and suicidal behaviour. The Samaritans. March 2017.
- <sup>6</sup> Gunnell D et al. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis: effects on mental health and suicide. University of Bristol. 2015.
- <sup>7</sup> The total sample size was 2,049 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11-14 November 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).
- <sup>8</sup> Participants in this element of the research have been signposted to help and support with their debts.
- <sup>9</sup> This total also includes those who said they felt dread about opening letters, reading emails or receiving phone calls from creditors.
- <sup>10</sup> The contact information for a number of organisations are available on Money and Mental Health's website at <https://www.moneyandmentalhealth.org/get-help/>
- <sup>11</sup> Not his real name.
- <sup>12</sup> Not her real name.
- <sup>13</sup> HM Government. Preventing suicide in England: A cross-government outcomes strategy to save lives. Department of Health. 2012.
- <sup>14</sup> Christians Against Poverty, a charity which offers debt advice, reports that on average their clients have 13 debts. Christians Against Poverty. Is anyone listening? Client report. April 2020.
- <sup>15</sup> Base: 123 Research Community members.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Holkar M and Bond N. [A silent killer: Breaking the link between financial difficulty and suicide](#). Money and Mental Health. September 2018.
- <sup>18</sup> FCA. Consumer Credit (CONC) sourcebook, section 7.2.1.
- <sup>19</sup> Office of Fair Trading (OFT). 'Debt collection'. OFT guidance for all businesses engaged in the recovery of consumer credit debts. October 2011.
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/how-often-can-a-debt-collector-call-me-en-2110/>
- <sup>21</sup> Fitch C, Holloway D and D'Arcy C. Disclosure environments: Encouraging consumers to disclose a mental health problem. Money and Mental Health and the Money Advice Trust. November 2022.

## **If you need support with your finances or mental health, it's important to know that you're not alone and help is out there**

### **Help with mental health**

If you need help with your mental health, or support with caring for someone else, you can find advice on the [Mind](#), [Rethink](#) or [Mental Health Foundation](#) websites, or at [NHS Choices](#).

For 24-hour support you can also call the [Samaritans](#) on 116 123 or text [SHOUT](#) to 85258.

If you are worried that you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 999 – you can ask to stay on the line while you wait for help to arrive.

### **Help with finances**

You can [download Martin Lewis's free guide for everyone struggling with their finances and a mental health problem](#). It will provide useful resources whether you're looking for advice for yourself or for someone you care about.

If you need more direct help with your finances, there are a variety of free-to-use advice and support services with many advisers trained to help those with mental health problems. [Citizens Advice](#), [Stepchange](#), [Christians Against Poverty](#) and [National Debtline](#) can all help. You can also find practical advice and support for your mental health and money issues at [Mental Health and Money Advice](#).

If you're looking for advice on benefits you can use this free [benefits calculator from](#) the charity Turn2Us to check what you're entitled to.

If you need advice regarding your small business, including the self-employed, [Business Debtline](#) can help.

Loansharks are illegal moneylenders who often charge very high rates of interest. If you're worried about a loanshark you can get confidential information and advice, or report illegal activity [here](#).

### **Help with the cost of living**

If you need help with the cost of energy or other essentials there are a number of places that can help right now.

- [National Energy Action](#) has a number you can call for advice and support if you're struggling to afford to heat your home. They also have guides with advice and signposting to further support.
- [Ofgem](#) has a list of government schemes and grants that can help with energy costs.
- [Citizens Advice](#) has advice on using food banks, including how to get a referral.
- This guide from [Money Saving Expert](#) contains tips and advice on how to save money on energy, broadband and lots more.