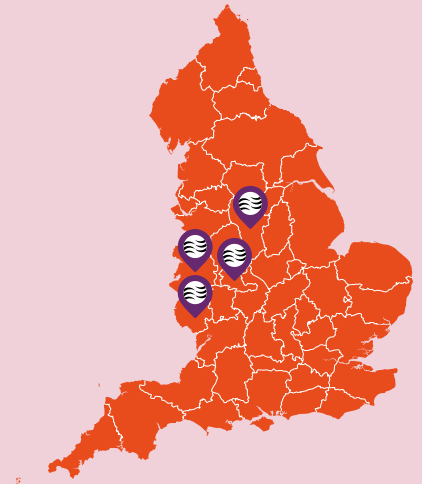


The Project: Understanding the Relationship between Fuel Poverty and Health

What we did:

Over 3 million people live in fuel poverty in England. To better understand the impact of fuel poverty on health and wellbeing and how to best support those experiencing fuel poverty, we conducted in-depth interviews with thirteen people living in fuel poverty and thirteen staff members at Marches Energy Agency (MEA) providing support to those affected by fuel poverty.



People living in fuel poverty are often:

- Elderly and vulnerable
- Living with physical and/or mental health problems
- Escaping abuse
- Experience further disadvantage such as food poverty



They experience precarity and a lack of control due to:

- Low pay, insecure work, or reliance on benefits
- Struggling to pay bills and getting into debt
- Risk of job loss or eviction
- Barriers to taking actions to ensure a warmer home



They tend to live in old properties with:

- Inadequate insulation
- Aging and failing heating systems
- Single-glazed windows
- No central heating



They have a need for practical knowledge about:

- Navigating the energy market and provider systems
- Heating efficiently and managing costs
- Taking steps to prevent heat loss
- Importance of good ventilation



90% of MEA clients

live in some kind of deprivation. Cost of living and fuel price rises have tipped people who could afford heating into fuel poverty.

Types of Fuel Poverty

Everyone experiences fuel poverty differently.

Some people experience one or two moments in fuel poverty: this is acute fuel poverty. Others live permanently in fuel poverty, as the causes are complex and unlikely to change: this is chronic fuel poverty.

'Acute' Fuel Poverty:



One incident (e.g. boiler breaking) or outstanding bill can 'tip' someone previously coping into fuel poverty.

Once the situation is resolved, the moment of fuel poverty is theoretically 'over', but for many the space between incidents of fuel poverty were getting shorter every year.

"So, we live, pretty much, hand to mouth. Bills are paid. What's left is very little, and we just couldn't afford to replace the boiler. We didn't know how we were going to find the money for it. We knew, because of its age and the fact that it was making such a noise, that we were on borrowed time."

'Chronic' Fuel Poverty:



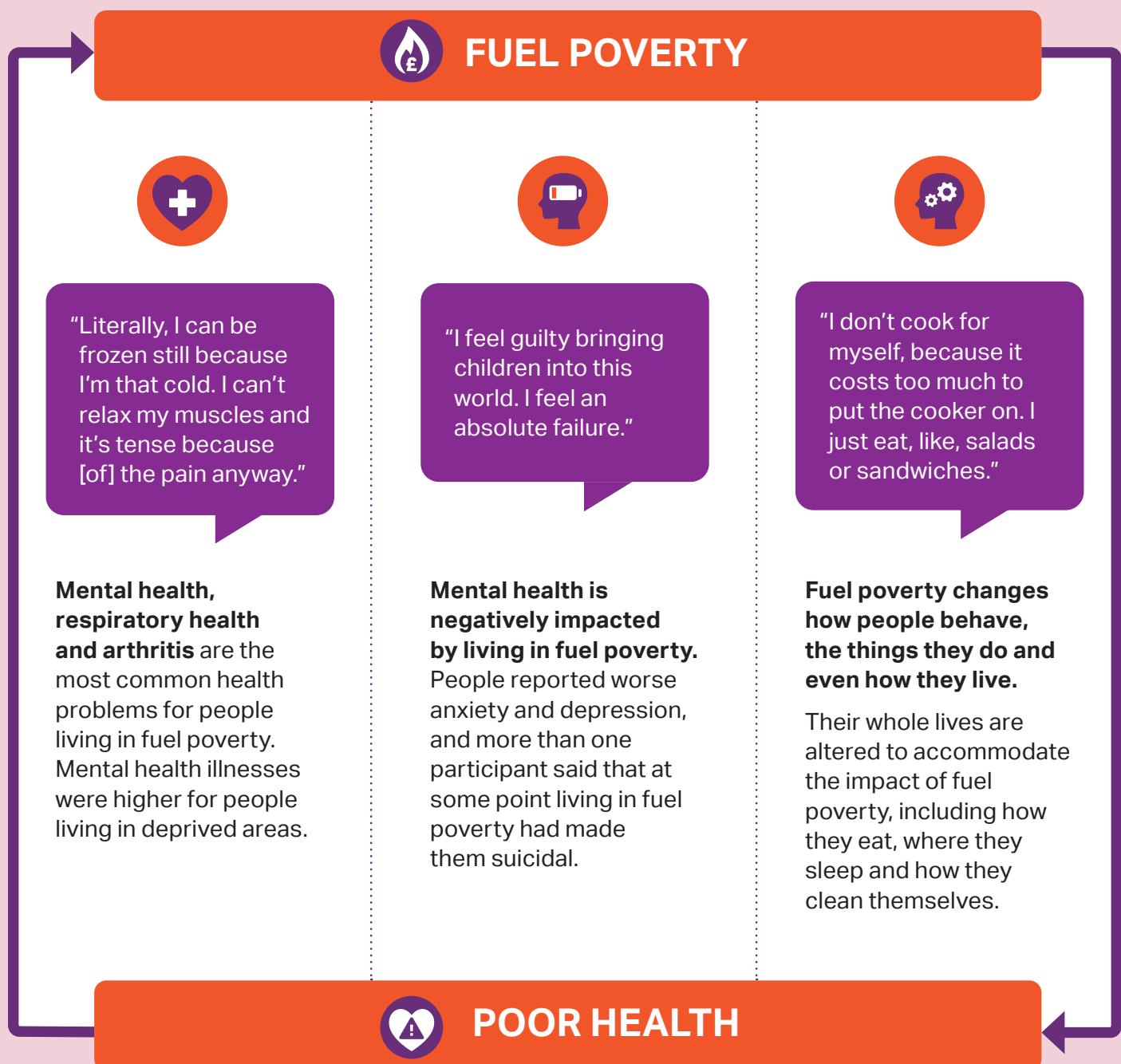
Chronic fuel poverty is complex, multifaceted and intersectional:

- Financial causes
- Fuel type (e.g. oil/coal, or upgrading is too expensive)
- State of housing (damp, single pane windows, council vs private landlord, etc.)
- Lack of support (physical, mental, social, financial) makes it difficult to fix the problem causing the fuel poverty.

"The cost of having to move and deposits and things like that. I've been on long-term benefits for more than 10 years due to ill health. I just could not afford to put oil in the tank, to have the heating on. And we went more than a month without any heating. It was a very cold period as well."

Impact of Fuel Poverty on Health and Wellbeing

The relationship between health and fuel poverty is a vicious cycle where health is made worse by living in fuel poverty, but fuel poverty often exists because of ill health.



The Important Role of Charities in Supporting those in Fuel Poverty



How fuel poverty charities help

Through actions such as:

- Financial and practical support
- Co-ordinating with other services
- Retrofitting properties
- Listening and providing mental health support

Sharing practical knowledge about:

- Using heating appliances efficiently
- Saving money on heating
- Heat loss and ventilation
- Understanding complex bills

"It's just it makes such a difference to us. The relief when somebody said, "Yes, we can help you," I think I actually cried. Yeah, because I don't know what we would have done if he hadn't phoned them. I really don't."

Service user



MEA staff have real impact on the lives of the people they help.



Fuel poverty also takes a toll on MEA staff personally.



MEA staff wish they could help even more.