

## [How will the climate and nature crises impact older people and Disabled people? - NPC \(thinknpc.org\)](https://www.thinknpc.org)

Older people and Disabled people are among the worst affected by heatwaves and flooding.

This briefing, published jointly with [Re-engage](#) and [Disability Rights UK](#), reviews the evidence for the impacts of both the climate and nature crises, and environmental policy, upon older people and Disabled people.

Specific risks include:

- Inaccessible cooler spaces. Older people living in care homes, confined to their bed, or living alone are believed to have the highest rates of illness, injury, and death from heatwaves. This is likely due to not having help to hydrate or move to a cooler space.
- Heatwaves and flooding disrupting routine needs such as medical appointments and access to medication.
- It being harder to regulate body temperature as people age, leading to heat cramps, heat rash, dizziness and fainting, heat exhaustion, heatstroke, faecal impaction, and increased likelihood of falls.
- The mental health impact of having your home flooded. There is a shortage of suitable accessible housing for Disabled people, which makes it harder to cope if your home is flooded. Meanwhile, older people are more likely to be affected by coastal flooding, due to coastal communities tending to have older populations.
- Risk communication not being accessible for people who are deaf or have hearing loss, are blind or have low vision, or experience cognitive impairment, including dementia or Alzheimer's. This can lead people to underestimate their risk level.

The picture is mixed as to whether environmental policies are making the right impact for older people and Disabled people:

- Older people benefit from numerous policies to reduce pollution and mitigate climate change, including on fuel poverty, renewables technologies, and insulation. Older people would benefit from further improvements to active travel and public transport.
- However, Disabled people appear to benefit from fewer policy areas – mainly just those related to insulation and fuel poverty – despite having comparable risks to older people. There will need to be changes to policies on electric vehicles, active travel, and public transport for Disabled people to get greater benefit.

- Older people and Disabled people on low incomes have likely benefited least from the policies introduced so far, and would require changes to policies on renewables, emergency planning, and electric vehicles.

Those affected will likely include people supported by charities and other civil society organisations. We're therefore encouraging charities and their funders to better understand the impacts of the changing environment on the communities they serve and what they need to change to support people through the green transition.

There are clearly gaps in research, understanding and policy that must be filled to ensure policy makers, health professionals, and others can better target environmental policies and services to the needs of older people and Disabled people. If these are to be effective, older people and Disabled people must be involved in developing and implementing environmental solutions.