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Image source, Getty ImagesMillions of pensioners are not getting the winter fuel payment, after the government changed the rules.Payments are only going to those who already receive pension credit or other means-tested financial support.Pension credit tops up the state pension for those on low incomes, and is a gateway to other benefits like the winter fuel payment.After criticism of the government's limit on the payment, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer signalled a partial reversal of the changes but did not provide details.The winter fuel payment, external was previously paid to all pensioners to help with energy costs during the coldest period of the year. But in July 2024, the government said future payments in England and Wales would go only to those on low incomes who received specified benefits such as pension credit.The changes mean that more than 10 million pensioners did not receive a payment in winter 2024.Several charities, unions, and MPs criticised the decision to means-test the payment.They expressed concern about the number of older people living on a relatively small income who will miss out, and those who do not currently claim pension credit despite qualifying for it. It was also signalled as a source of voters' anger with the government at recent elections.The winter fuel payment is worth £200 for those on certain benefits and born between 23 September 1944 and 22 September 1958. For those born before 23 September 1944, and on certain benefits, it is worth £300.If you live with someone, and jointly claim benefits, only one of the couple receives the payment. Although the winter fuel payment is paid automatically, without a direct claim, the vast majority of those eligible will only receive the money if they have first registered to receive pension credit, external.This is a state pension top-up, which itself is worth thousands of pounds a year, and can be a gateway to other financial support, including a reduction in council tax, a free TV licence for those aged over 75, or help with NHS costs. However, an estimated 760,000 eligible pensioners fail to claim it.You could be eligible for pension credit if you are above state pension age and have an income of less than £218.15 a week, or less than £332.95 as a joint weekly income with your partner. Savings are also taken into account.Anyone entitled to pension credit for at least one day between 16 and 22 September 2024 received the winter fuel payment last winter.Disabled people, those caring for someone, or those with housing costs could still be eligible even if they have additional income or savings.You can check your eligibility for pension credit via the government's online calculator, external.Information is also available on how to make a claim, external online.The winter fuel payment is usually paid automatically in November or December. Those eligible receive a letter confirming their entitlement.Owing to the extra applications, some people had to wait for their claim to be processed. The Department for Work and Pensions said it had deployed 500 additional staff to speed up processing.The government estimates 1.9 million pensioners - about 15% - already live in relative poverty.This means their income is less than 60% of the median. The median income is the amount of money that divides a population into two, with half earning more, and half less. In November, Work and Pensions Secretary Liz Kendall confirmed the government expected significantly more pensioners to be in relative poverty due to the new rules-an extra 50,000 in the years ending March 2025, March 2026 and March 2028 an extra 100,000 in the years ending March 2027, March 2029 and March 2030The annual figures are rounded to the nearest 50,000 and do not take into account any increase in the take-up of pension credit.

Writing to MPs on the Work and Pensions Select Committee, Kendall said means-testing winter fuel payments "was not a decision this government wanted or expected to take", external but it was "right that we target support to those who need it most".Asked about the figures, Starmer said many pensioners would be better off from April 2025, when both the state pension and pension credit increased by 4.1%, under "the triple lock" arrangement.Meanwhile the Committee has launched its own inquiry into pensioner poverty, external - partly prompted by the winter fuel cut. There is a guide to benefits, who qualifies, and what to do if something goes wrong, provided by the independent MoneyHelper website, external, backed by governmentNorthern Ireland Communities Minister Gordon Lyons said funding constraints meant the Stormont government would have to change the rules as well. He later said affected pensioners would receive of one-off payment of £100 to help with heating costs. The Scottish Government has announced plans for a new winter heating payment "for every single Scottish pensioner" to be introduced ahead of winter 2025. Pensioners in Scotland in receipt of qualifying benefits, such as Pension Credit, will receive payments of £200 or £300 depending on their age, while other households will receive £100. The Holyrood government had already planned to introduce a replacement universal benefit north of the border, but said the financial implications of Labour's decision had forced it to delay this until late 2025.It has also announced some extra welfare funding for councils in the current financial year, as well as additional money for the Warmer Homes Scotland Scheme, external.CashMoneyPersonal financePensions Reading Time: 2 minutes In a significant policy reversal, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has announced plans to expand eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment, following widespread criticism over previous cuts that affected millions of pensioners. Background: The Initial Cuts Shortly after taking office in July 2024, Chancellor Rachel Reeves implemented a means-tested approach to the Winter Fuel Payment, limiting it to pensioners with annual incomes below approximately £11,500. This move aimed to address a £22 billion budget shortfall but resulted in over nine million pensioners losing out on payments of up to £300. The cuts sparked significant backlash from the public, Labour backbenchers, and opposition parties. The policy was also linked to Labour's poor performance in recent local elections, adding pressure on the government to reconsider its stance. The U-Turn: Expanding Eligibility Addressing the House of Commons, Prime Minister Starmer acknowledged the ongoing cost-of-living pressures faced by pensioners and emphasized the need for them to benefit from the improving economy. He stated "I recognise that people are still feeling the pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, including pensioners. As the economy improves, we want to make sure people feel those improvements in their daily lives. That's why we want to ensure that, as we go forward, more pensioners are eligible for winter fuel payments." While specific details are yet to be finalized, the government is considering raising the income threshold, currently set at £11,500, to allow more pensioners to qualify for the benefit. Implementation Timeline The revised eligibility criteria are expected to be outlined in the upcoming Autumn Budget, scheduled for October 2025. However, Downing Street has not confirmed whether the changes will take effect in time for the 2025-2026 winter season. What This Means for Pensioners If the proposed changes are implemented, a significant number of pensioners who were previously excluded due to the income cap may regain access to the Winter Fuel Payment. This benefit provides a one-off tax-free payment of £200 or £300, depending on age and circumstances, to help cover heating costs during the winter months. Pensioners are advised to stay informed about the forthcoming Autumn Budget announcements and check their eligibility status once the new criteria are published. Political Repercussions The government's reversal has drawn criticism from opposition leaders. Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch labeled the U-turn as "extraordinary" and questioned the Prime Minister's reliability. Despite the criticism, the government's decision reflects a response to public concern and internal party pressures, aiming to address the financial challenges faced by pensioners amid the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. As the situation develops, pensioners and stakeholders should monitor official channels for updates on the eligibility criteria and implementation timeline of the revised Winter Fuel Payment policy. Who is eligible for the £300 Winter Fuel Payment (Image: Getty)Sir Keir Starmer has announced plans to make more pensioners eligible for the winter fuel payment, a U-turn on Labour's highly criticised policy to reduce uptake and save money. The Prime Minister has faced increasing pressure to change course following backlash on the move that stripped millions of the annual payment, worth up to £300, last winter.Starmer's stepdown represents a huge victory for The Express who led the crusade to reverse Labour's cruel stance. During Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday, Sir Keir said: "I recognise that people are still feeling the pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, including pensioners. As the economy improves, we want to make sure people feel those improvements in their days as their lives go forward. That is why we want to ensure that, as we go forward, more pensioners are eligible for winter fuel payments." He said the Government will "only make decisions we can afford" and will therefore look at this as part of the next fiscal event. So, what is the winter fuel payment, and who is currently eligible?Sir Keir Starmer has announced plans to make more pensioners eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment (Image: Getty)First launched in 1997, the winter fuel payment is a tax-free benefit to help older and vulnerable Britons meet the costs of heating their homes.The payments, which are distributed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are typically made between November and December every year to those eligible.The payment was previously available to everyone above the state pension age (currently 66) in the UK, but in the 2024/25 tax year, new rules enforced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves meant only state pensioners on means-tested benefits would qualify. Ms Reeves said the move would help save the Government between £1.3billion and £1.5billion per year.In line with new rules, people currently qualify for a winter fuel payment if they were born before September 23, 1958. They must also live in England or Wales and get one of the following benefits:Pension CreditUniversal CreditIncome-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)Income Support.The move stripped the payments away from an estimated 10 million pensioners.However, following mounting pressure from Labour ranks, Sir Keir has said the criteria will change again to make "more pensioners eligible" for the payment. It's currently not clear what the new threshold will be, how many more will be eligible, and when the changes will come into effect.Charities fear hundreds of thousands will still miss out on the payment due to "complex" benefit application processes.Lucy Bannister, head of policy and influencing at charity Turn2us, said: "We welcome the Prime Minister's indication that the Government plans to widen eligibility for winter fuel payment, helping more low-income pensioners to stay warm and safe this winter. We hear from people every year about the difference this support makes."But we remain concerned that hundreds of thousands of eligible pensioners still miss out each year due to a complex application process, lack of awareness, and stigma. Many feel shame for needing support, a direct result of how benefits are too often talked about by politicians and the media. The Government must urgently ensure its narrative around its wider social security reforms reduces this stigma, simplify the system, and proactively reach to those being left behind." During the 2024/25 tax year, payment amounts ranged between £200 and £300, and the amount eligible people received depended on their birth date.People who live alone received:£200 if they were born between September 23, 1944, and September 22, 1958£300 if they were born before September 23, 1944. If a person and their partner jointly claim any of the benefits, one receives a payment of either:£200 if one or both were born between September 23, 1944, and September 22, 1958£300 if one or both were born before September 23, 1944. We use some essential cookies to make this website work. We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services. We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services. You have accepted additional cookies. You can change your cookie settings at any time. The Winter Fuel Payment is designed to help older people with their heating costs. The Chancellor, Rachel Reeves has announced that from winter 2024-25 the payment will only be made to those of State Pension age and over - and only if they are in receipt of Pension Credit or other means-tested benefits. Read more to find out if you'll get a payment this year and how to spot fraudsters looking to taking advantage. What is the Winter Fuel Payment? The Winter Fuel Payment, or Winter Fuel Allowance, is an annual tax-free payment of between £100 and £300 made during the winter months to help older people with their heating costs. Who is eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment? In the past, the Winter Fuel Payment was made to all people aged over 65 and UK resident, and it was not means tested. But eligibility for this benefit is changing. The Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, said in July that from this winter (2024-25) the payment will only be made to those of State Pension age and who are also receiving Pension Credit or other means-tested benefits (such as income support or universal credit). The net effect of this change will be to restrict the Winter Fuel Allowance to an estimated 1.4 million pensioners, although almost 900,000 households are thought to be eligible for Pension Credit but are not currently claiming it. Around 10 million pensioners who have to date been in receipt of the Allowance will not receive it this year because they are not eligible for Pension Credit. The government's changes were approved in a vote in the House of Commons on 10 September. Pension Credit is a means-tested benefit paid to those pensioners on the lowest incomes. Pensioners must apply for Pension Credit, it is not paid automatically. In addition to this qualifying criteria, to get the Winter Fuel Payment you'll also have to be living in the UK for at least one day during the "qualifying week", which is usually the third week in September each year (likely to be 16 September 2024). If you will not be living in the UK during the qualifying week, you may still get the payment if you live in Switzerland or a European Economic Area (EEA) country and you have a genuine link with the UK - such as if you have lived or worked in the UK or have family in the UK, and provided you're in receipt of means-tested benefits. Are there any reasons why I may not qualify? As well as not qualifying because you're not in receipt of Pension Credit, or other means-tested benefits, you also won't be eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment if you live in a European country that has a higher average winter temperature than the warmest region of the UK, including: Cyprus France Gibraltar Greece Malta Portugal Spain. You also won't qualify if you: are receiving free treatment in hospital for more than a year need permission to enter the UK and your granted leave states you cannot claim public funds are in prison for the qualifying week live in a care home and receive certain benefits. How much will I get? The amount you receive will depend on your situation during the qualifying week, including your age and whether you live with anyone else who qualifies. Assuming you are eligible, based on the criteria given above, and assuming the rates remain the same as in the winter of 2023-24 then: If you were born between 25 September 1944 and 24 September 1958 and: live alone, you will receive £200 live with someone who was also born during this period, you'll receive £100 (you'll each get this amount), live with someone born before 25 September 1944, you'll receive £100. If you were born before 25 September 1944 and: live alone, you'll receive £300 and live with someone born between 25 September 1944 and 24 September 1958, you'll receive £150 live with someone born before 25 September 1944, you'll receive £150. How do I claim Winter Fuel Payment? Payments are usually made as a lump sum, automatically between November and December. This winter the payment is likely to be made at the same time as your Pension Credit payment, or at the same time as other benefits. If you haven't received your payment by mid-January, it's best to call the office that pays your benefits. You can do this by calling the Winter Fuel Payment Centre on 0800 731 0160 or by filling in a form that can be downloaded from the gov.uk website. Unscrupulous criminals have been taking advantage of the uncertainty around the scaling back of the Winter Fuel Allowance. In a bid to separate vulnerable people from their cash, fraudsters have been sending text messages claiming to be the 'UK Government Living Allowance Office', a non-existent entity. The messages urge recipients to apply for an equally-fake 'living subsidy' before a certain deadline. It includes links to a fraudulent government website where they are prompted to share personal details, which scammers can then use to drain their bank account. Bryn Thompson, spokesperson at anti-fraud software company, Phonely, says: "We urge people to use extreme caution when receiving unsolicited messages, especially those claiming to be from government bodies. "Scammers create a false sense of urgency to trick individuals into providing personal information or clicking on malicious links. It's important to verify the legitimacy of these messages and never act hastily." The winter fuel payment, which is aimed at helping pensioners pay for higher fuel bills during the colder months, is set to be cut for the majority of people who were previously eligible. Usually about 11.5 million pensioners receive up to £300 - but the government is set to vote today on Chancellor Rachel Reeves' plan to limit the payment to those entitled to Pension Credit - making only 1.5 million people eligible. Here is everything you need to know about how it currently works - from how payments are made, to who is eligible, and what to do if you don't receive your payment.Who is eligible for the winter fuel payment?You can get a winter fuel payment if you were born before 25 September 1958. You usually need to live in the UK to qualify for the payment.But if you moved to an eligible country before 1 January 2021, and have a "genuine and sufficient link to the UK" - such as living and working here previously - you will qualify.The eligible countries are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland.There are some cases where you will not be eligible, including if you have been in hospital for all of the last year, if you were in prison for the whole of the week of 16 to 22 September 2024, and if you lived in a care home for the whole time from 24 June to 24 September 2024. How much is the winter fuel payment?The winter fuel payment is between £200 and £300.If you live alone or no one you live with is eligible for the winter fuel payment, you will get either: • £200 if you were born between 23 September 1944 and 22 September 1958 • £300 if you were born before 23 September 1944If you live with someone else who is eligible for the winter fuel payment, only one of you gets the payment on behalf of both of you. You will get either: • £200 if you were both born between 23 September 1944 and 22 September 1958 • £300 if you were both born before 23 September 1944Read more from Sky News:Christmas dinner favourites at risk after washout harvestMiddle class shoppers partly to blame for rise in retail crime How do you get the winter fuel payment?Most people get the winter fuel payment automatically.If you're eligible, you should have received a letter in October or November saying how much you'll get.You will get the payment automatically if you receive the state pension or another benefit, including pension credit, attendance allowance, personal independence payment (PIP), carers allowance, disability living allowance (DLA), income support, income-related employment and support allowance (ESA), income-based jobseeker's allowance (JSA), awards from the war pensions scheme, industrial injuries disablement benefit, incapacity benefit, and industrial death benefit.If you do not get any of these, you will need to claim - but only if you've not got the payment before.You'll also need to make a claim if you have deferred your state pension since your last winter fuel payment. Details on how to claim by post or phone are on the government website.When is the winter fuel payment paid?The winter fuel payment will be paid directly into your bank account in November or December.It will appear in bank statements with the payment reference starting with the customer's National Insurance number followed by 'DWP WFP' for people in Great Britain, or 'DFC WFP' for people in Northern Ireland.What should you do if the payment doesn't come through?If you do not get a letter or the money has not been paid into your account by 26 January 2024, contact the winter fuel payment centre. We use some essential cookies to make this website work. We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services. We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services. You have accepted additional cookies. You can change your cookie settings at any time. You have rejected additional cookies. You can change your cookie settings at any time. Some people will receive £300 this winter.(Image: Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire)This year, millions of people on specific benefits are set to receive a financial boost from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to aid with their heating expenses.A decision by the government will dramatically change who qualifies for the Winter Fuel Payment this year, slashing access to this aid for a significant number of pensioners. Labour's strategy intends to pare down the recipient base for the Winter Fuel Payment an award that can reach £300 targeting it based on means-testing.Contrasting with last year when every pensioner automatically qualified for this single-time transfer which commonly hits accounts starting in November, the current policy dictates only those on Pension Credit or select other entitlements will see the money this season.You can qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment this year if you were born before 23rd September 1958 and live in Scotland, England, or Wales while receiving one of the specified benefits. In certain circumstances, you may be eligible even if you live abroad:Pension CreditUniversal CreditIncome-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)Income SupportWorking Tax or Child Tax CreditsYou won't be eligible if:Are not in receipt of one of the means-tested benefits listed aboveHave been in hospital getting free treatment for more than a yearNeed permission to enter the UK and your granted leave says that you cannot claim public fundsWere in prison for the whole of the qualifying week of September 16 to 22, 2024If you live alone, you'll receive either:£200 if you were born between September 23, 1944 and September 22, 1958£300 if you were born before September 23, 1944If you live with someone and jointly claim any of the benefits, one of you will receive a payment of either:£200 if both of you were born between September 23, 1944 and September 22, 1958£300 if one or both of you were born before September 23, 1944If you live in a care home and are eligible, you'll receive either:£100 if you were born between September 23, 1944 and September 22, 1958£150 if you were born before September 23, 1944If you don't receive any of the qualifying means-tested benefits, you'll need to claim if either of the following apply:You have not received the Winter Fuel Payment beforeYou or your partner get Universal CreditYou can claim your Winter Fuel Payment by:Post - from September 30, 2024Phone - from October 28, 2024If you're on Universal Credit, you'll be informed how to claim through a message in your journal.The deadline for winter 2024 to 2025 claims is set for March 31, 2025. Comprehensive information about eligibility and payments can be found on the Winter Fuel Payment section of the GOV.UK website.