

HOW THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS IMPACTS OUR HEALTH

It's hard to find anyone who hasn't been profoundly affected by the global cost of living crisis — **defined by the World Health Organization** as “the fall in real disposable income (that is, income adjusted for inflation and after taxes and benefits) that people have been experiencing since late 2021.”

Some researchers have observed that economic stresses like rising prices for food, fuel, housing, and other basic needs can hit citizens with **the same force as a natural disaster**. In the United Kingdom, 55% of citizens blame the cost of living crisis for a variety of health problems, according to a **Royal College of Physicians Survey**. Heating costs (84%) and food prices (78%) were the most frequent culprits mentioned, with 46% stating that the stress brought on by high costs was responsible for their decline in health.

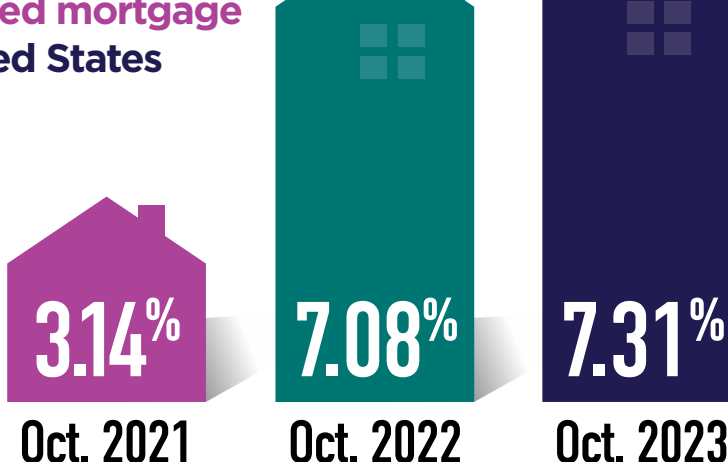
How does a high cost of living impact health? These data points tell the tale:

SKYROCKETING HOUSING PRICES



Source: USA Today

Average rate for a 30-year fixed mortgage in the United States



Source: Freddie Mac

The average life expectancy of a person with housing instability is **27.3% lower** than someone who has housing stability, according to the American Hospital Association. People who lose their homes may need to relocate far from the family or other support networks they depend on. They may end up in structures that don't meet their needs or in situations that put them in danger.

Also, **The Lancet notes**, “mortgage or rental arrears are associated with increased consultations for depression ... [and a] sense of desperation can lead to ‘self-medicating’ with alcohol [or] drugs.”

“Current cost pressures are also threatening the safety nets that protect against the consequences of poverty. Charities, schools, food banks, community centers, libraries, and museums (some of which act as ‘warm havens’) are all facing increased costs, not least for energy and funding pressures.”
Economics Observatory

ESCALATING FOOD PRICES



Reported that they struggled to put food on the table in the last 12 months

Source: 2023 No Kind Hungry survey

Food price increases, 2022-2024

+ 2.2% in 2024 (projected)

+ 5.2% in 2023 (projected)

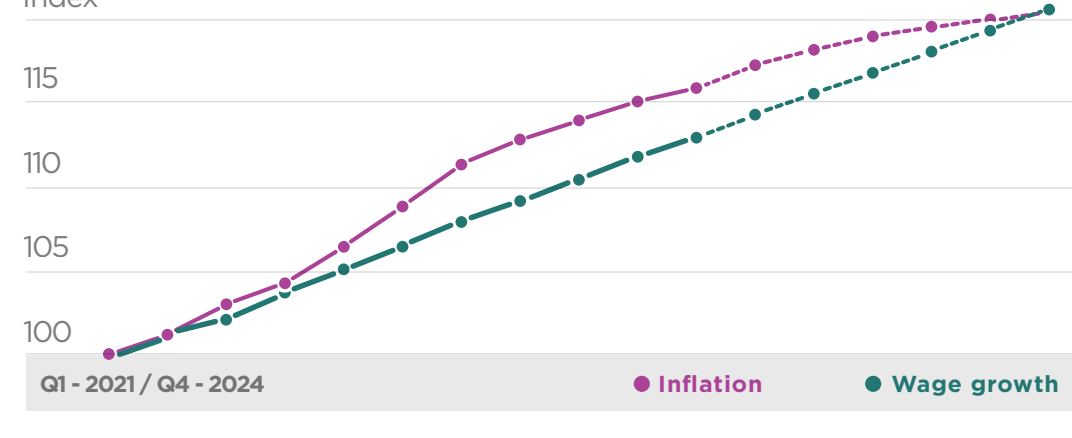
+ 9.9% in 2022

Source: USDA Economic Research Services

Financial challenges force people to make difficult choices when it comes to feeding their families. They may swap healthier whole-food options for cheaper, processed foods—or they may skip meals altogether. Over time, these choices can have devastating health effects. **For adults**, poor nutrition can result in weight gain and increased risk of chronic conditions such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease. **For children**, skipping meals or eating an unhealthy diet can affect their ability to concentrate in school and lead to a decline in their mental health.

STAGNATING WORKER WAGES

Inflation has outpaced wage growth since Q1 of 2021. The gap is not expected to close until Q4 of 2024.



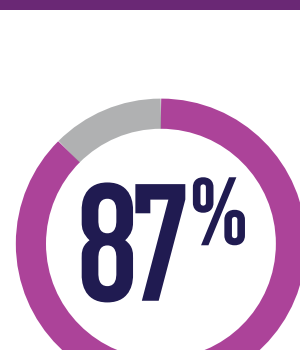
Source: Bankrate

A person's income has a tremendous influence on their health. Money is necessary to pay rent or a mortgage, purchase healthy food, travel to and from doctors' offices and supermarkets, obtain an education, participate in social activities, and keep their utilities running.

With less money, people **find themselves with dire choices** like whether to “heat or eat.” Those choices have consequences: According to the **U.K. charity National Energy Action**, 45 people died daily during the winter of 2021-22 because they couldn't afford to heat their homes. In the US, lower heating prices, particularly for natural gas, were linked to a 1.6% reduction in winter deaths due to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, saving over 11,000 lives from 2005-2010, according to the **Northwestern Institute for Policy Research**.

“This crisis is disproportionately affecting people with disabilities. Some disabled people—for example, those recovering from cancer treatments—may need additional heating in their homes. Others use assistive technologies, which need regular charging, or eat specialist diets. Because disabled people often face economic exclusion—with higher rates of unemployment, under-employment, and worklessness—rising costs are especially hard to manage.” - **Economics Observatory**

CRIPPLING INCREASES IN STRESS



of respondents rated **“rise in prices of every day items due to inflation”** as their top source of stress

Source: American Psychological Association, “Stress In America” Survey, 2022



Financial challenges and mental health are often locked into a vicious cycle: financial problems can lead to mental health struggles, which can lead to physical health problems, which can deepen financial problems. “Stigma around debt can mean that people struggle to ask for help and may become isolated,” notes **this report on the Money and Mental Health Survey**. “[It] can be particularly severe if they resort to cutting back on essentials, such as heating and eating, or if creditors are aggressive or insensitive when collecting debts.” This stress can lead to what **The Lancet termed** “diseases of despair,” including drug use, alcohol abuse, and suicide.

HOW TRANSFORMATIVE PRIMARY CARE CAN HELP

The COVID-19 pandemic **plainly illustrated health disparities** across the globe that divide sharply along lines of race, socioeconomic status, disability status, and others. For all the reasons explored in this infographic, the cost-of-living crisis is driving similar consequences among marginalized communities.

Health care providers—especially primary care providers—must recognize and respond to these disparities. ChenMed's transformative primary care model empowers PCPs and care teams to identify and address affordability challenges in a variety of ways, including:

- using a team-based approach to better observe changes in patient behavior or habits that could indicate cost-of-living struggles related to housing, utilities, proper nutrition, reliable transportation, and other basic needs.
- engaging in motivational interviewing techniques to build trust with patients and learning about the factors guiding their health decision-making—which often include financial concerns.
- incorporating multidisciplinary specialists, social workers, and pharmacy technicians in the daily operations of the clinic, ensuring patients receive comprehensive care under one roof whenever possible.
- innovating to address patient needs, like exploring partnerships with rideshare apps to help transportation-insecure patients or arranging food delivery services for patients living in food deserts.
- advocating beyond the clinic for systemic changes at the local, state, and national levels that can help achieve health equity—during and after the current cost-of-living crisis.

To learn more about how PCPs can help address the public health fallout of the cost-of-living crisis, download our white paper, [Achieving Health Equity: The Critical Role of Transformative Primary Care](#).



ChenMed

Chen Senior Medical Center

Dedicated Senior Medical Center

JenCare Senior Medical Center

For more information, visit [ChenMed.com](https://www.chenmed.com)

