

Article

The impact of winter pressures on adults in Great Britain: December 2022

First insights from our new winter survey providing monthly updates on how increases in the cost of living and difficulty accessing NHS services are impacting people's lives during the autumn and winter months.

Contact:
Caleb Ogwuru, Catarina Figueira,
Ana Wheelock-Zalaquett and Tim
Vizard
policy.evidence.analysis@ons.
gov.uk
+44 3000 671543

Release date:
15 December 2022

Next release:
20 January 2023

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Overview of the impact of winter pressures](#)
3. [Impacts of increased cost of living](#)
4. [NHS waiting lists](#)
5. [GP access](#)
6. [Impacts of winter pressures on health and well-being](#)
7. [Feelings about society](#)
8. [Impact of winter pressures on adults in Great Britain data](#)
9. [Glossary](#)
10. [Data sources and quality](#)
11. [Related links](#)
12. [Cite this bulletin](#)

1 . Main points

- Around a quarter of adults (23%) were occasionally, hardly ever, or never able to keep comfortably warm in their living room in the past two weeks.
- Over 6 in 10 (63%) adults reported using less gas and electricity because of increases in the cost of living, with more than 9 in 10 (96%) of these adults using the heating less.
- Around 1 in 3 (34%) of all adults reported that cutting back on heating their home has negatively affected their health or well-being.
- Around 1 in 6 (16%) adults were somewhat, or very, worried their food would run out before they had money to buy more, and 6% said their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more.
- Around 1 in 5 (19%) adults reported eating smaller portions because of the rising cost of living, while 17% said they were eating food past its use by date.
- 1 in 5 (20%) reported they were waiting for a hospital appointment, test, or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS; of those who said waiting for NHS treatment has negatively affected their life, around 6 in 10 (59%) reported that the wait has affected their well-being, while around 1 in 3 (36%) said it has made their condition worse.
- Barriers to getting a GP appointment in the past month included: being offered only a telephone consultation when they wanted a face-to-face appointment (41%), waiting too long for a GP appointment (36%), and not being able to get a GP appointment (22%).

2 . Overview of the impact of winter pressures

Our latest [Public opinions and social trends bulletin](#) asked adults what they feel are the most important issues facing the UK today. The most commonly reported issues were the cost of living (92%) and the NHS (80%). In this article, we delve deeper into how increases in the cost of living and difficulties accessing NHS services are affecting people's lives.

This is the first of a series of monthly publications reporting findings from our new Winter Survey. The survey aims to understand the impact of certain economic, societal, and healthcare pressures on people's worries, experiences, behaviours, and health during late autumn and winter.

3 . Impacts of increased cost of living

Our latest [Public opinions and social trends bulletin](#) (22 November to 4 December 2022) shows that around 9 in 10 (92%) adults in Great Britain reported their cost of living had increased, compared with a year ago. Around three-quarters (74%) of adults reported an increase in their cost of living compared with one month ago. A similar proportion (73%) reported being very, or somewhat, worried about rising costs of living in the past two weeks. When asked why their cost of living had increased over the last month, the most common reasons reported were:

- the price of food shopping increasing (94%)
- gas or electricity bills increasing (76%)
- the price of fuel increasing (53%)

Those who reported an increase in their cost of living compared with a month ago said they were:

- spending less on non-essentials (71%)
- using less fuel, such as gas or electricity, in their home (68%)
- shopping around more (54%)
- spending less on food shopping and essentials (52%)

Our latest [Public opinions and social trends bulletin](#) also mentions that around 2 in 10 (18%) adults said they did not have any savings.

We asked the same adults to tell us more about the challenges they are facing as the weather gets colder, and the actions they are taking as a result.

Energy insecurity

Energy insecurity refers to the inability of a household to meet its basic energy needs, such as heating their homes and having a warm bath.

A quarter of adults (23%) were occasionally, hardly ever, or never able to keep comfortably warm in their living room in the past two weeks (14% occasionally, 7% hardly ever, 2% never). Younger adults were more likely to report this, with around 1 in 3 (32%) of those aged 16 to 29 years doing so, compared with around 1 in 10 (11%) of those aged 65 years or older.

Our latest [Public opinions and social trends bulletin](#) reported that:

- around half (48%) of adults who pay energy bills found it very, or somewhat, difficult to afford them
- almost 6 in 10 (57%) adults were very, or somewhat, worried about keeping warm in their home over winter

We asked adults who reported using less fuel in their home because of increases in the cost of living what actions they were taking to reduce their energy consumption, compared with the same time last year. The most common actions were:

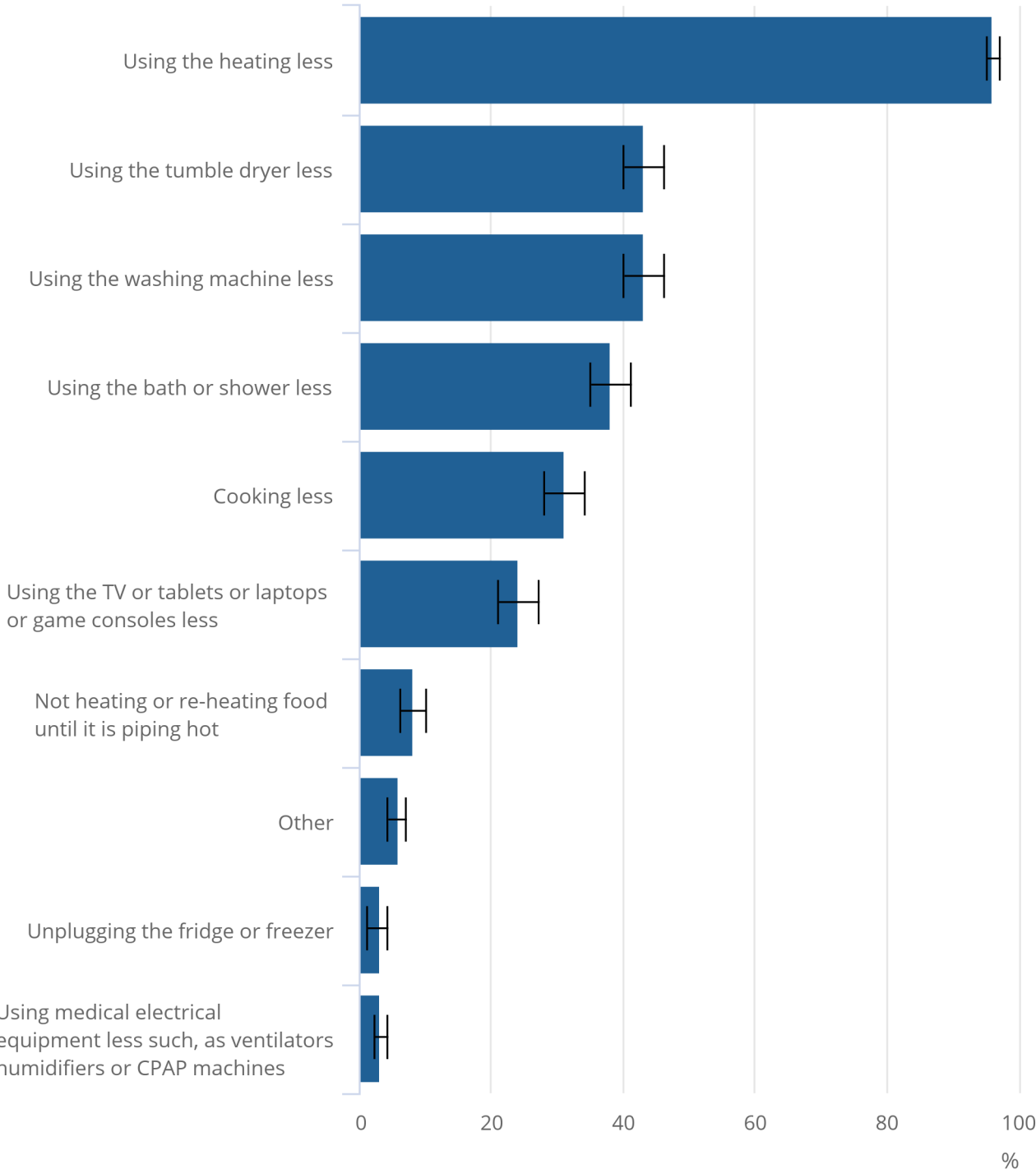
- using the heating less (96%)
- using the washing machine less (43%)
- using the tumble dryer less (43%)
- using the bath or shower less (38%)

Figure 1: Of those who said they were using less fuel in their home due to the cost of living, more than 9 in 10 (96%) adults reported using the heating less

Proportion of adults taking actions to reduce gas or electricity consumption in their homes compared with the same time last year, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 1: Of those who said they were using less fuel in their home due to the cost of living, more than 9 in 10 (96%) adults reported using the heating less

Proportion of adults taking actions to reduce gas or electricity consumption in their homes compared with the same time last year, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Notes:

1. Question: “In what ways, if any, are you using less gas or electricity in your home compared with the same time last year?”
2. Base: Those who said they are using less fuel such as gas or electricity in their home due to increases in the cost of living.
3. Respondents could choose more than one option.
4. Please note upper and lower confidence limits (UCL and LCL) and upper and lower confidence intervals (UCI and LCI) on figures throughout this article may be asymmetrical due to rounding.

We asked adults what actions they were taking to keep warm over winter, with the most reported actions being:

- putting on more clothing or blankets (82%)
- only heating rooms at home that I use (46%)
- using hot water bottles or microwave warmer (31%)
- going to bed earlier (27%)

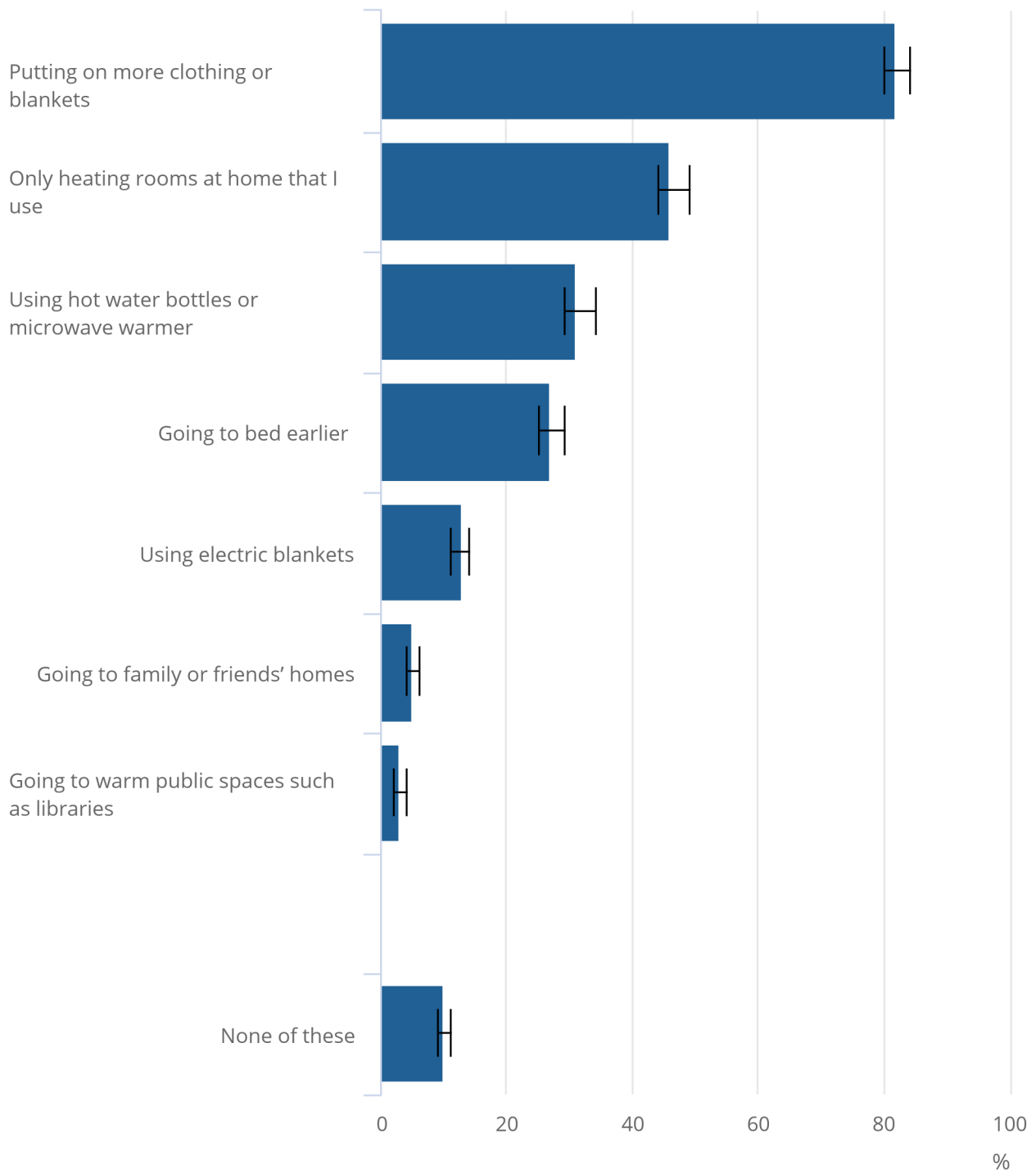
Adults aged 16 to 29 years were more likely to report putting on more clothes or blankets (85%) and using water bottles or microwave warmers (37%) to keep warm over winter. Those aged 65 years or older were less likely (76% and 24%, respectively).

Figure 2: Around 8 in 10 (82%) adults reported putting on more clothing or blankets to keep warm

Proportion of adults taking actions to keep warm during the winter, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 2: Around 8 in 10 (82%) adults reported putting on more clothing or blankets to keep warm

Proportion of adults taking actions to keep warm during the winter, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Notes:

1. Question: “Which of these, if any, are you doing to keep warm over winter?”
2. Base: All adults.
3. Respondents could choose more than one option.

Food insecurity

Food insecurity refers to the inability of households to acquire enough food to lead a healthy life. We adapted three questions from the “Household stage 1 module” of the [United States Department of Agriculture’s \(USDA\) food security survey](#) to understand the extent to which adults are worrying about food running out and the proportion of people who report not being able to afford enough food or a [balanced diet](#). Our survey found that:

- around 1 in 6 (16%) adults were somewhat, or very, worried their food would run out before they had money to buy more
- around 1 in 16 (6%) reported their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more
- over 1 in 10 (11%) said they tend to, or definitely, disagree with the statement "my household can afford to eat a balanced diet"

Using different food security questions, which aim to identify households with very low food security, the [Food Foundation](#) showed that in September 2022, 18.4% of households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity during the previous month, an increase from 13.8% in April 2022.

In our latest [Public opinions and social trends bulletin](#), 47% of adults said they had to spend more than usual to get what they normally buy while food shopping. Moreover, 51% said they have been buying less in the past two weeks.

When we asked adults what actions they were having to take to save money on food because of the increased cost of living, the most common responses were:

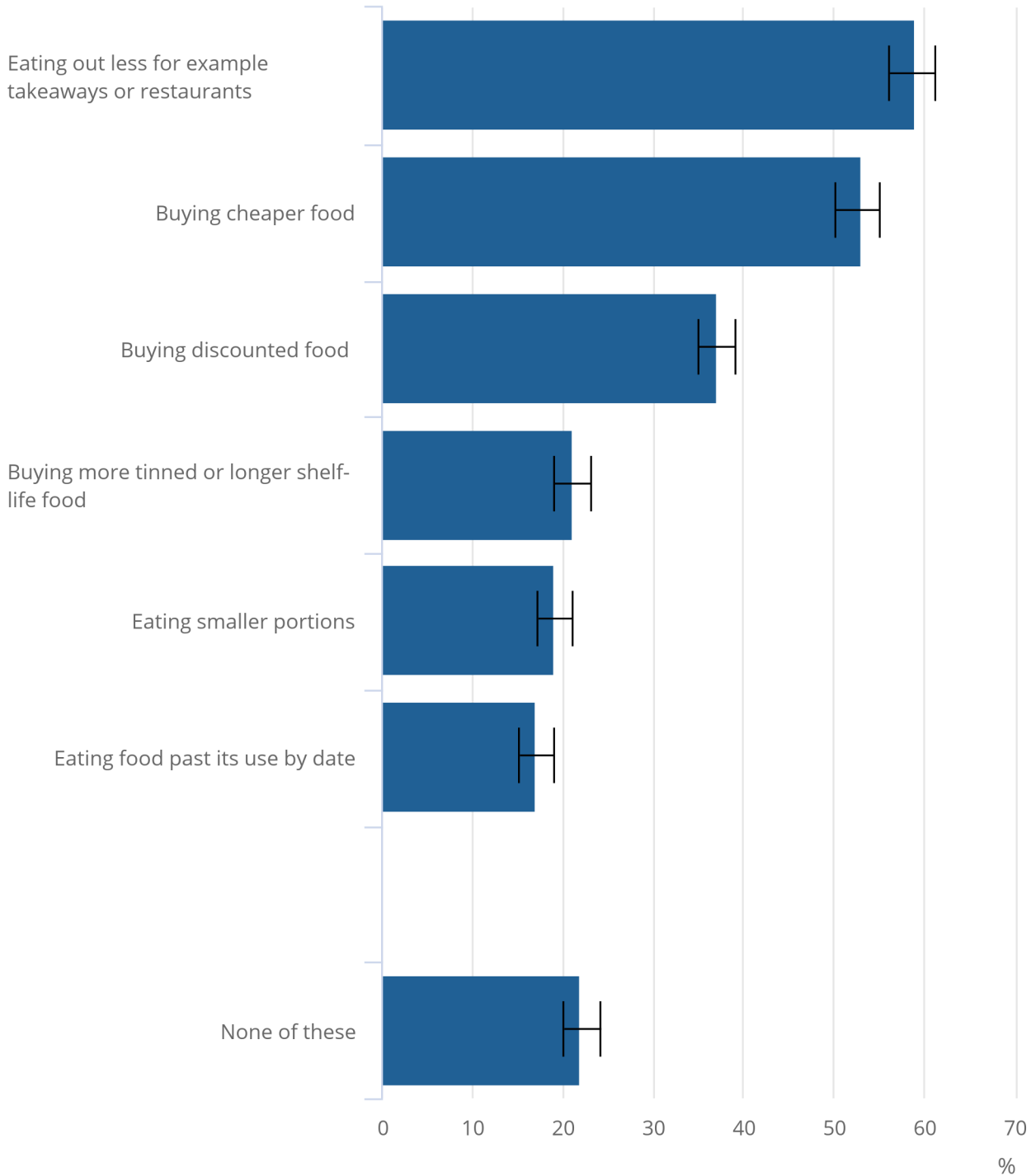
- eating out less at, for example, takeaways or restaurants (59%)
- buying cheaper food (53%)
- buying discounted food (37%)

Figure 3: Around 1 in 5 (19%) adults reported eating smaller portions due to the rising cost of living

Proportion of adults taking actions to save money on food due to the rising cost of living, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 3: Around 1 in 5 (19%) adults reported eating smaller portions due to the rising cost of living

Proportion of adults taking actions to save money on food due to the rising cost of living, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

Notes:

1. Question: “Which of these, if any, are you doing to save money on food because of the increases in the cost of living?”
2. Base: All adults.
3. Respondents could choose more than one option.

Our findings resonate with those reported by [the Food Standards Agency \(FSA\)](#) in September 2022. The FSA reported that 40% of adults aged 16 to 75 years felt worried about being able to afford food in the next month. Moreover, 30% reported they had skipped a meal, or cut down on meal sizes, because they did not have enough money to buy food in the last month.

4 . NHS waiting lists

Around 7 million people, including children, were on an NHS waiting lists for consultant-led elective care in England, according to the latest figures from [NHS England](#) as of October 2022. In Scotland, there were roughly 475,000 people on an NHS waiting list as of September 2022, according to [Public Health Scotland](#). In Wales, around 755,000 people were waiting for NHS treatment in September 2022, according to [StatsWales](#).

We found that 1 in 5 (20%) adults reported they were waiting for a hospital appointment, test, or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS. Of those waiting for an appointment, 70% reported that they had been waiting for up to 6 months. Around 8% reported that they had been waiting between 7 and 11 months, and 18% reported they had been waiting for a year or longer.

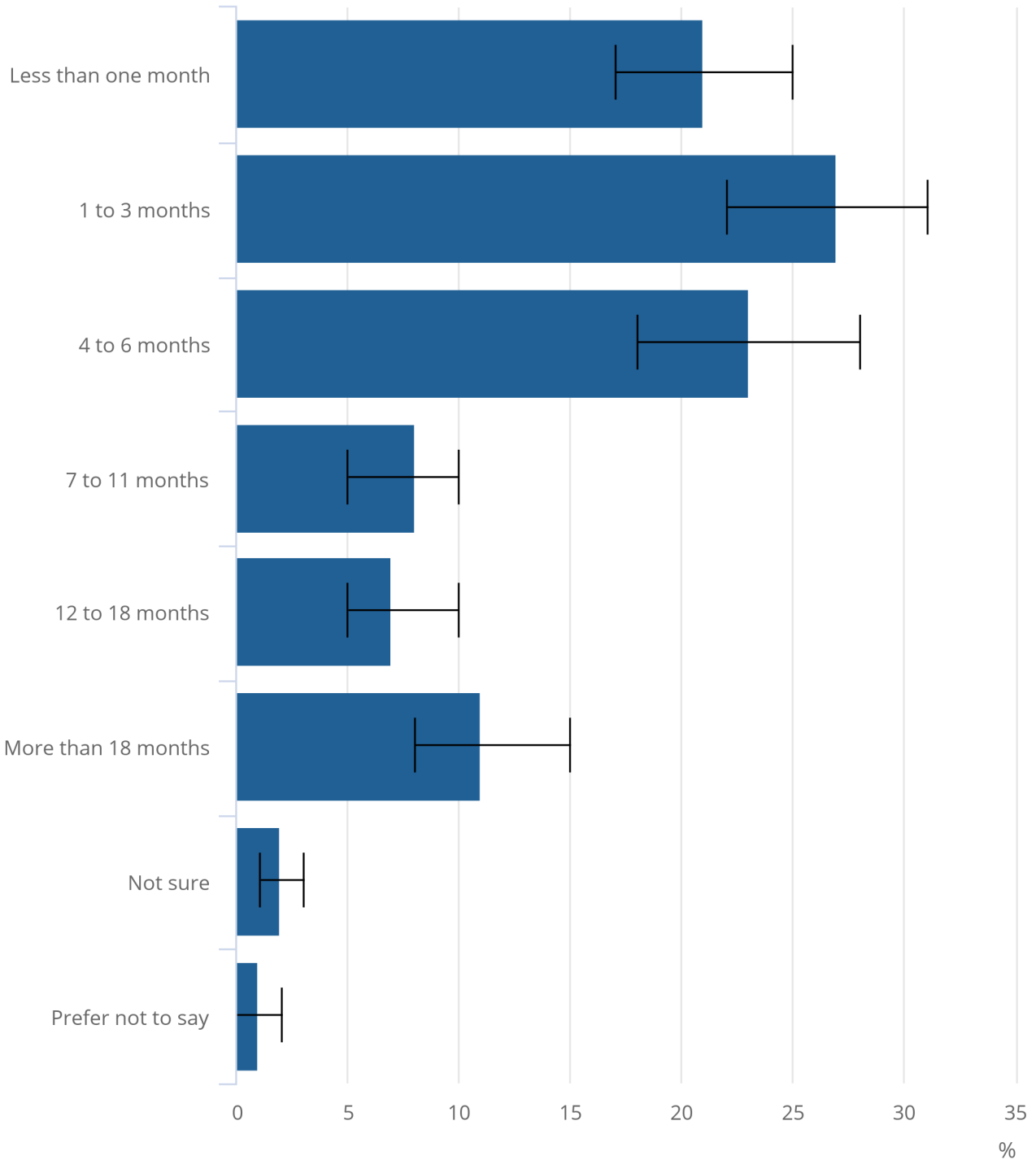
Please note, our estimates are based on adult respondents who took part in the survey and may therefore differ from the actual number of people who are currently on an NHS waiting list. For administrative data on NHS waiting lists, visit [NHS England](#), [NHS Scotland](#) or [NHS Wales](#).

Figure 4: More than 1 in 6 (18%) adults who reported being on an NHS waiting list have been waiting for 12 months or more

Reported waiting times of adults on an NHS waiting list, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 4: More than 1 in 6 (18%) adults who reported being on an NHS waiting list have been waiting for 12 months or more

Reported waiting times of adults on an NHS waiting list, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Notes:

1. Question: “And how long have you been waiting for a hospital appointment, test, or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS?”.
2. Base: adults currently waiting for a hospital appointment, test, or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS.
3. Estimates are based on adult respondents who took part in the survey and may therefore differ from the actual number of people who are currently on an NHS waiting list.

The impact of waiting for treatment

Around a third (34%) of adults currently waiting to start NHS treatment reported that the wait has had a strong negative impact on their life, while 42% reported it has had a slight negative impact on their life. The most commonly reported negative impacts were:

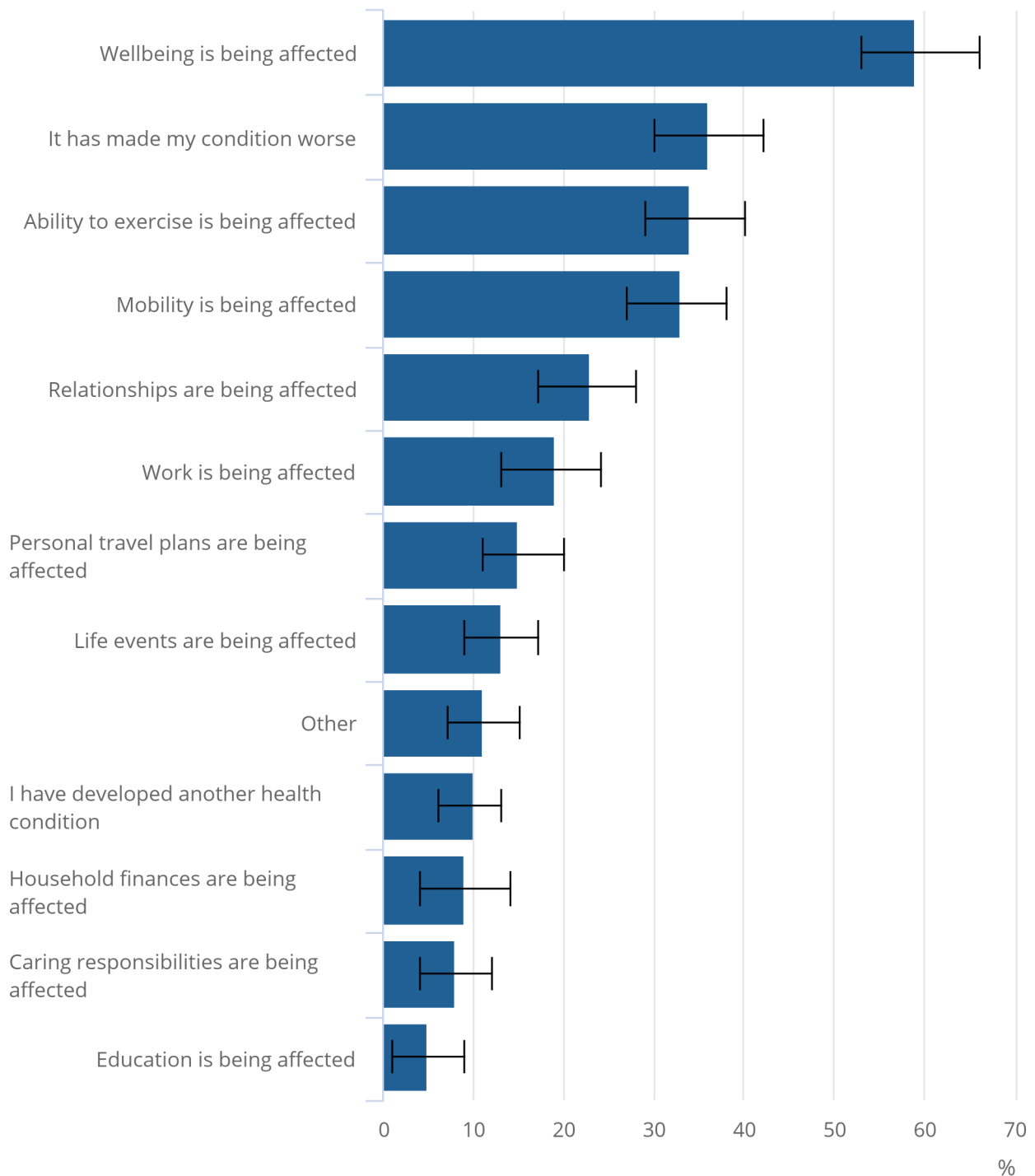
- my well-being is being affected (59%)
- it has made my condition worse (36%)
- my ability to exercise is being affected (34%)
- my mobility is being affected (33%)

Figure 5: Around 6 in 10 (59%) adults reported that waiting for NHS treatment has affected their well-being

Proportion of adults reporting that waiting for NHS treatment has negatively affected their life, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 5: Around 6 in 10 (59%) adults reported that waiting for NHS treatment has affected their well-being

Proportion of adults reporting that waiting for NHS treatment has negatively affected their life, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Notes:

1. Question: “In which ways has waiting for NHS treatment impacted your life?”.
2. Base: adults who said waiting for NHS treatment has negatively affected their life.
3. Respondents could choose more than one option.

We asked adults whether they had paid for private medical care in the past year because they felt the wait for NHS treatment was too long. Around 1 in 8 (13%) adults reported they had paid for private medical care, with 5% using private insurance and 7% paying for the treatment themselves.

5 . GP access

We asked respondents about their experiences with accessing a GP. Of those who had made an appointment in the past month, around a third (35%) reported it being easy or very easy to make an appointment. Over half (52%) reported it being difficult or very difficult.

We asked adults who needed to make a GP appointment in the past month if they had experienced any barriers. The most common barriers experienced were:

- being offered only a telephone consultation when they wanted a face-to-face appointment (41%)
- waiting too long for a GP appointment (36%)
- difficulty contacting the GP practice (29%)
- not being able to get a GP appointment (22%)

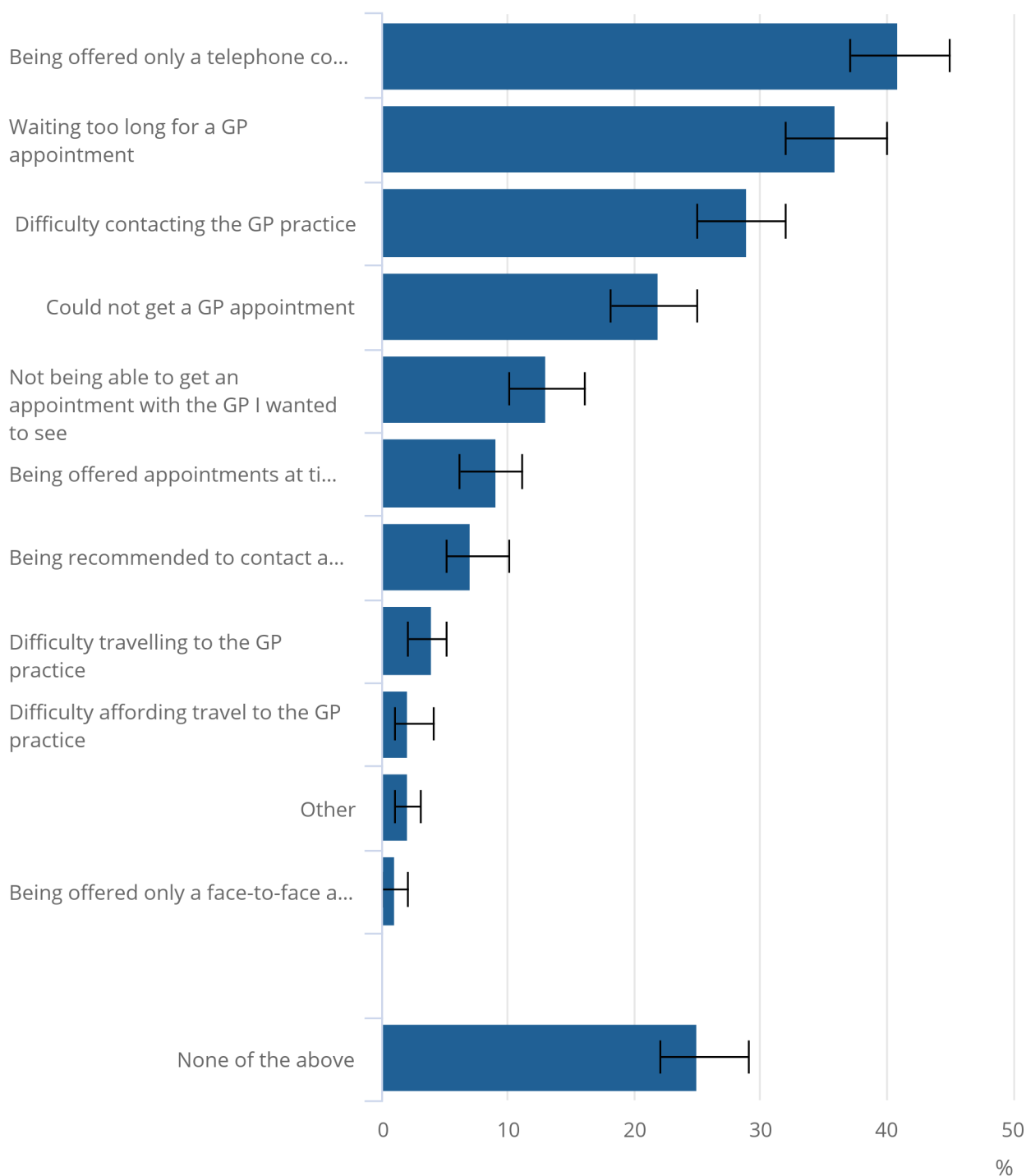
The [2022 GP Patient Survey](#) (PDF, 1.68MB) showed that, between January and April, 15.4% of patients reported not getting an appointment with their GP practice when they last tried to make one, either because they did not take the appointment offered or they were not offered an appointment.

Figure 6: Around 4 in 10 (41%) adults reported they were only offered a telephone consultation when they wanted a face-to-face GP appointment

Proportion of adults experiencing barriers when making an appointment with a GP, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 6: Around 4 in 10 (41%) adults reported they were only offered a telephone consultation when they wanted a face-to-face GP appointment

Proportion of adults experiencing barriers when making an appointment with a GP, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

Notes:

1. Question: “What actions, if any, did you take when faced with these barriers?”.
2. Base: adults who reported experiencing barriers when making an appointment with a GP.
3. Respondents could choose more than one option.

Actions taken by those who faced barriers when trying to make a GP appointment included:

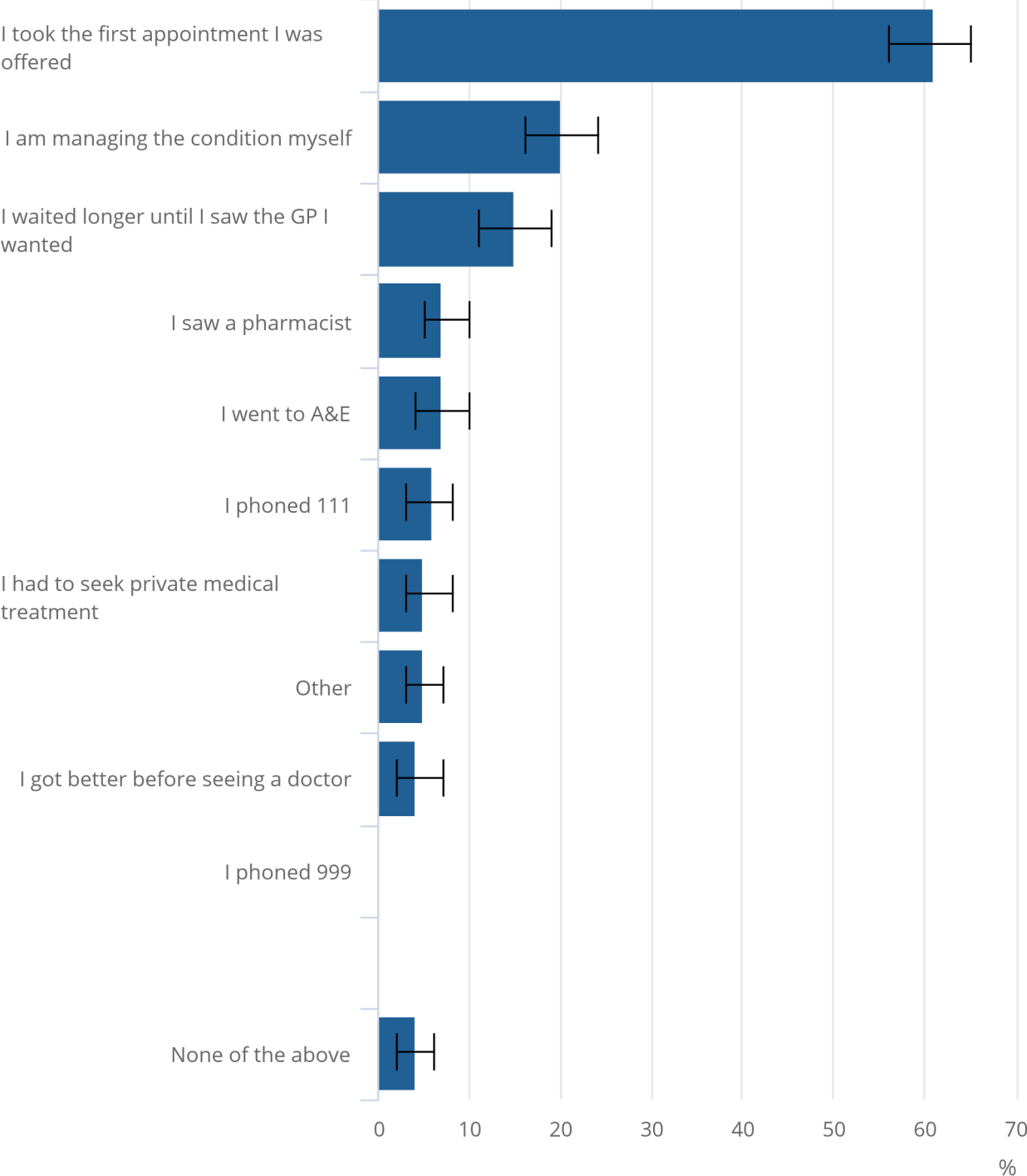
- taking the first appointment offered (61%)
- managing the condition themselves (20%)
- waiting longer until they saw the GP they wanted (15%)

Figure 7: 1 in 5 (20%) adults reported managing their condition themselves because of barriers they experienced when making a GP appointment

Proportion of adults taking actions because of the barriers they faced while making an appointment with a GP, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 7: 1 in 5 (20%) adults reported managing their condition themselves because of barriers they experienced when making a GP appointment

Proportion of adults taking actions because of the barriers they faced while making an appointment with a GP, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Notes:

1. Question: “What actions, if any, did you take when faced with these barriers?”.
2. Base: adults who reported experiencing barriers when making an appointment with a GP.
3. Respondents could choose more than one option.

6 . Impacts of winter pressures on health and well-being

We sought to understand the impact the cost of living, NHS waiting lists, GP access and other pressures are having on the public's health and well-being. Adults were most likely to report that the following issues negatively affected their health or well-being in the past month:

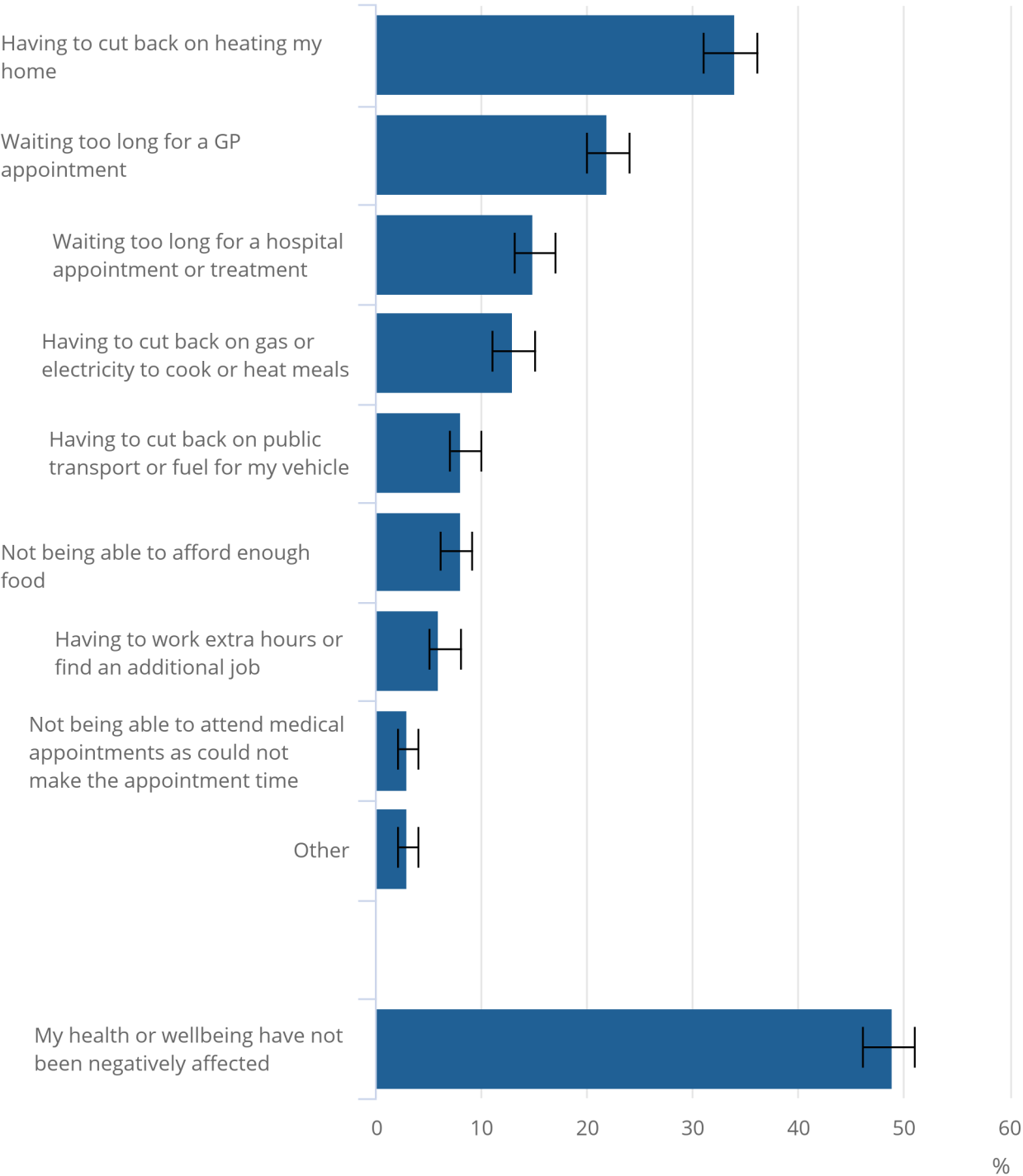
- having to cut back on heating my home (34%)
- waiting too long for a GP appointment (22%)
- waiting too long for a hospital appointment or treatment (15%)
- having to cut back on gas or electricity to cook or heat meals (13%)

Figure 8: Around 1 in 3 (34%) adults reported that having to cut back on heating their home has negatively affected their health or well-being

Proportion of adults reporting that their health or well-being had been affected by one, or more, pressures in the past month, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 8: Around 1 in 3 (34%) adults reported that having to cut back on heating their home has negatively affected their health or well-being

Proportion of adults reporting that their health or well-being had been affected by one, or more, pressures in the past month, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Notes:

1. Question: “In the past month, which of these, if any, has negatively affected your health or well-being?”.
2. Base: all adults.
3. Respondents could choose more than one option.

Around half (49%) of adults said their health and well-being had not been negatively affected in the past month. Adults living in the least deprived areas in England were more likely to report their health or well-being had not been affected (58%), compared with those in the most deprived areas in England (33%).

Those living in the most deprived areas in England were more likely to report their health or well-being had been negatively affected by:

- having to cut back on heating their home (44% compared with 27% of the least deprived)
- waiting too long for a GP appointment (34% compared with 18% of the least deprived)
- cutting back on gas or electricity to cook or heat meals (25% compared with 8% of the least deprived)

Since the collection period (22 November to 4 December 2022), the [UK Health Security Agency has warned England will experience severe cold weather starting on the evening of Wednesday 7 December](#). Cold weather can have serious consequences for health, especially for older people and those with heart or lung conditions. Our data shows that over a third (34%) of adults reported that cutting back on heating in their home had affected their health or well-being. We will be monitoring changes in this, and other relevant estimates, as the winter progresses.

Other risks to health reported by adults (see Figure 1) include:

- showering or bathing less (38%)
- not heating or reheating food until it is piping hot (8%)
- unplugging the fridge or freezer (3%)
- using medical electrical equipment less, such as ventilators, less (3%)

The cost of living is also having an impact on medication adherence. Of those who are currently taking prescription medication, 1 in 14 (7%) reported they are taking less medication to save on prescription costs.

7 . Feelings about society

Our [Public opinions and social trends bulletin](#) has been routinely reporting adults’ well-being, but also their worries and opinions on what are important issues facing the UK today. Given the challenges people are experiencing this time of year, we asked them how they feel about society.

We found that around 8 in 10 (78%) agreed, or strongly agreed, with the statement “I am frustrated because society is not as it should be”. Over 7 in 10 (74%) agreed, or strongly agreed, with the statement “I am afraid that things will go wrong in society”.

Being frustrated, because society is not as it should be, was more likely to be reported by those who were:

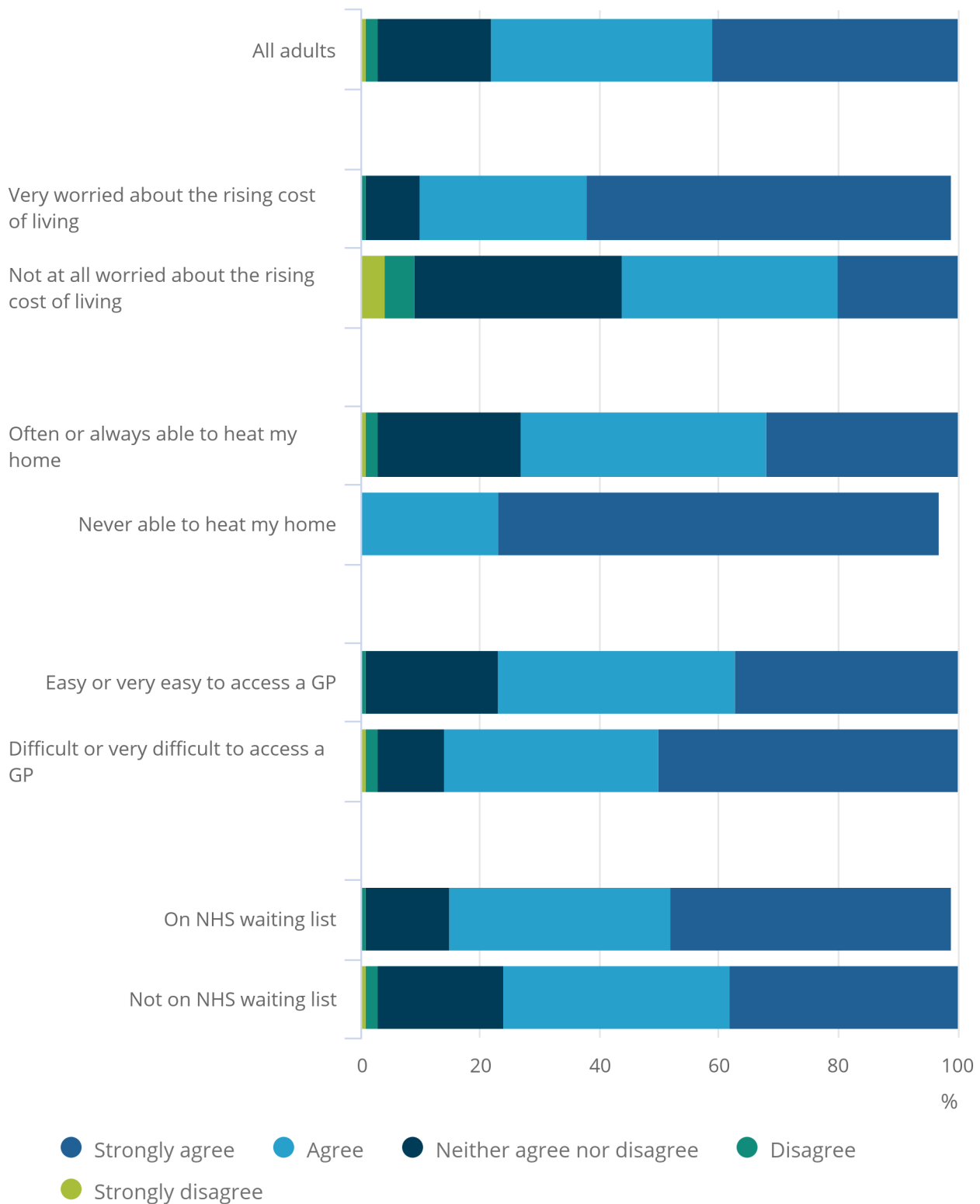
- very worried about rising costs (89%), compared with those who were not at all worried (57%)
- never able to stay warm in their living room during the past two weeks (97%), compared with those who were always, or often, able to stay warm (74%)
- on an NHS waiting list (84%), compared with those not on an NHS waiting list (77%)
- finding it difficult, or very difficult, to access a GP (87%), compared with those finding it easy or very easy (77%)

Figure 9: Adults who were worried about the rising cost of living, or who were never able to heat their home, were more likely to be frustrated because they feel society is not as it should be

Proportion of adults who agree, or disagree, with the statement "I am frustrated because society is not as it should be", Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 9: Adults who were worried about the rising cost of living, or who were never able to heat their home, were more likely to be frustrated because they feel society is not as it should be

Proportion of adults who agree, or disagree, with the statement "I am frustrated because society is not as it should be", Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

Notes:

1. Question: “To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with the following statement...I am frustrated because society is not as it should be”.
2. Base: all adults.

Being afraid things will go wrong in society was more likely to be reported by those who were:

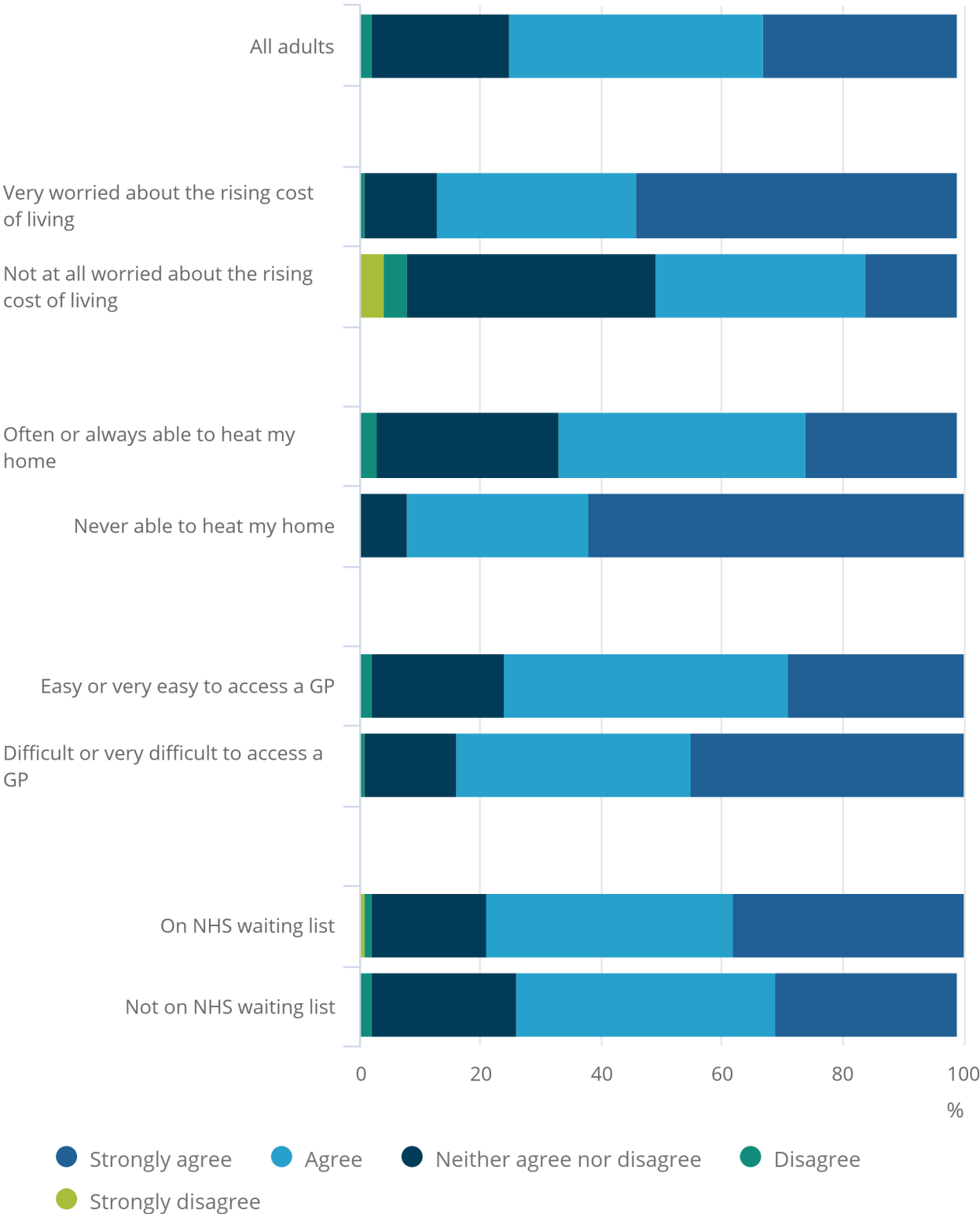
- very worried about rising costs (87%), compared with those who were not at all worried (51%)
- never able to stay warm in their living room during the past two weeks (91%), compared with those who were often, or always, able to stay warm (66%)
- on an NHS waiting list (79%), compared with those not on an NHS waiting list (73%)

Figure 10: Adults who were worried about the rising cost of living, or never able to heat their home, were more likely to be afraid things will go wrong in society

Proportion of adults who agree, or disagree, with the statement “I am afraid that things will go wrong in society”, Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022

Figure 10: Adults who were worried about the rising cost of living, or never able to heat their home, were more likely to be afraid things will go wrong in society

Proportion of adults who agree, or disagree, with the statement "I am afraid that things will go wrong in society", Great Britain, 22 November to 4 December 2022



Notes:

1. Question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement...I am afraid that things will go wrong in society”.
2. Base: all adults.

8 . Impact of winter pressures on adults in Great Britain data

[Impacts of winter pressures: impacts of the cost of living on health and health behaviours](#)

Dataset | Released 15 December 2022

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) winter module related to the impact of the cost of living on health and health behaviours.

[Impacts of winter pressures: GP access](#)

Dataset | Released 15 December 2022

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) winter module related to access to GPs, barriers experienced while making GP appointments, and actions taken when faced with those barriers.

[Impacts of winter pressures: feelings about society](#)

Dataset | Released 15 December 2022

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) winter module related to feelings about society.

[Impacts of winter pressures: NHS waiting lists](#)

Dataset | Released 15 December 2022

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) winter module related to NHS waiting lists, and the wider impacts of being on an NHS waiting list.

9 . Glossary

Balanced diet

A balanced diet includes fruit, vegetables, pulses, meat or fish, starchy foods such as pasta or rice, and dairy.

Index of Multiple Deprivation

In this release we look at people's experiences by the level of deprivation of the area in which they live. This is based on the [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (IMD). We have classified areas into five quintiles ranging from the most deprived to the least deprived areas. Estimates are provided for England only given the relatively smaller sample sizes on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey in Scotland and Wales.

10 . Data sources and quality

This release contains data and indicators from a module being undertaken through the Office for National Statistics's (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

Breakdowns by age, sex and the index of multiple deprivation, including confidence intervals (which are explained in our [methodology on uncertainty](#)) for the estimates, are contained in our Impacts of winter pressures on adults in Great Britain datasets.

Where differences between different demographic groups are presented in this bulletin, or comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the statistical significance (as explained in our [methodology on uncertainty](#)) of the differences.

Sampling and weighting

In this period (22 November to 4 December 2022), we sampled 4,962 households. This sample was randomly selected from those who had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS) or OPN. The responding sample for this period contained 2,524 individuals, representing a 51% response rate.

Survey weights were applied to make estimates representative of the population (based on ONS population estimates). Further information on the survey design and quality can be found in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

11 . Related links

[Cost of living and depression in adults, Great Britain: 29 September to 23 October 2022](#)

Article | Released 6 December 2022

Analysis into the prevalence of depression among adults in Great Britain in autumn 2022. Exploring this in the context of the rising cost of living.

[Consumer price inflation, UK: November 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 14 December 2022

Price indices, percentage changes, and weights for the different measures of consumer price inflation.

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 22 November to 4 December 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 9 December 2022

Social insights on daily life and events, including the cost of living, working arrangements and well-being from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain: June to September 2022](#)

Article | Released 25 October 2022

Analysis of the proportion of the population that is affected by an increase in their cost of living, and of the characteristics associated with having difficulty affording or being behind on energy, mortgage or rental payments, using data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

[The cost of living, current and upcoming work: September 2022](#)

Article | Released 28 September 2022

A summary of ONS's current and future analytical work related to the cost of living.

[Quality of life in the UK: November 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 11 November 2022

An update on UK's progress across 10 domains of national well-being: personal well-being, relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, economy, education and skills, governance, and the environment.

[Cost of living and higher education students, England: 24 October to 7 November 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 23 November 2022

Experimental statistics on the behaviours, plans, opinions and well-being of students related to the cost of living. From the Student Cost of Living Insights Study (SCoLIS).

[COVID-19 question bank](#)

Web page | Updated frequently

Government Statistical Service page that provides a bank of questions from multiple Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys related to coronavirus (COVID-19), to be used in other surveys to further support harmonisation and questionnaire development. This bank also provides users with an understanding of what data the ONS has in relation to the coronavirus pandemic.

12 . Cite this bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 15 December 2022, ONS website, article, [The impact of winter pressures on adults in Great Britain: December 2022](#)