



**Ronald McDonald
House Charities™**
United Kingdom

Keeping families close™



Cost of Living Survey:

The impact for families staying in
Ronald McDonald Houses

Foreword

Life costs more for families with a child in hospital

We're experiencing the worst cost of living crisis in years and families with a child in hospital are being hit hard.

Parents and carers with sick children are struggling with the cost of energy, fuel and food and are often having to make difficult decisions about what to prioritise.

At Ronald McDonald House Charities UK, we know that life costs more if your child is being treated in hospital, especially when that treatment isn't close to home.

In January 2023, we conducted an eight-week survey of families who'd stayed in a Ronald McDonald House within the last six months. Through our survey, we have collected data and testimony on the cost of living for families who find themselves in the most difficult of situations.

The results from the survey present a bleak picture with more than 7 in 10 respondents stating their finances were negatively impacted by having a child in hospital. Tragically, more than 2 in 3 people shared that their mental health was suffering as a result of the economic climate.

High energy bills are making the situation worse, especially when families are separated between home and hospital. People are having to make significant changes to their lifestyle and many are desperately reaching out for help.

We're heartened that the survey results reveal a huge majority of families feel that the Charity has helped them through the immense challenge of having a child in hospital during a cost of living crisis. We're committed to helping families cope better so that they can focus on the needs of their sick child.

Ella Joseph, Chief Executive of Ronald McDonald House Charities UK

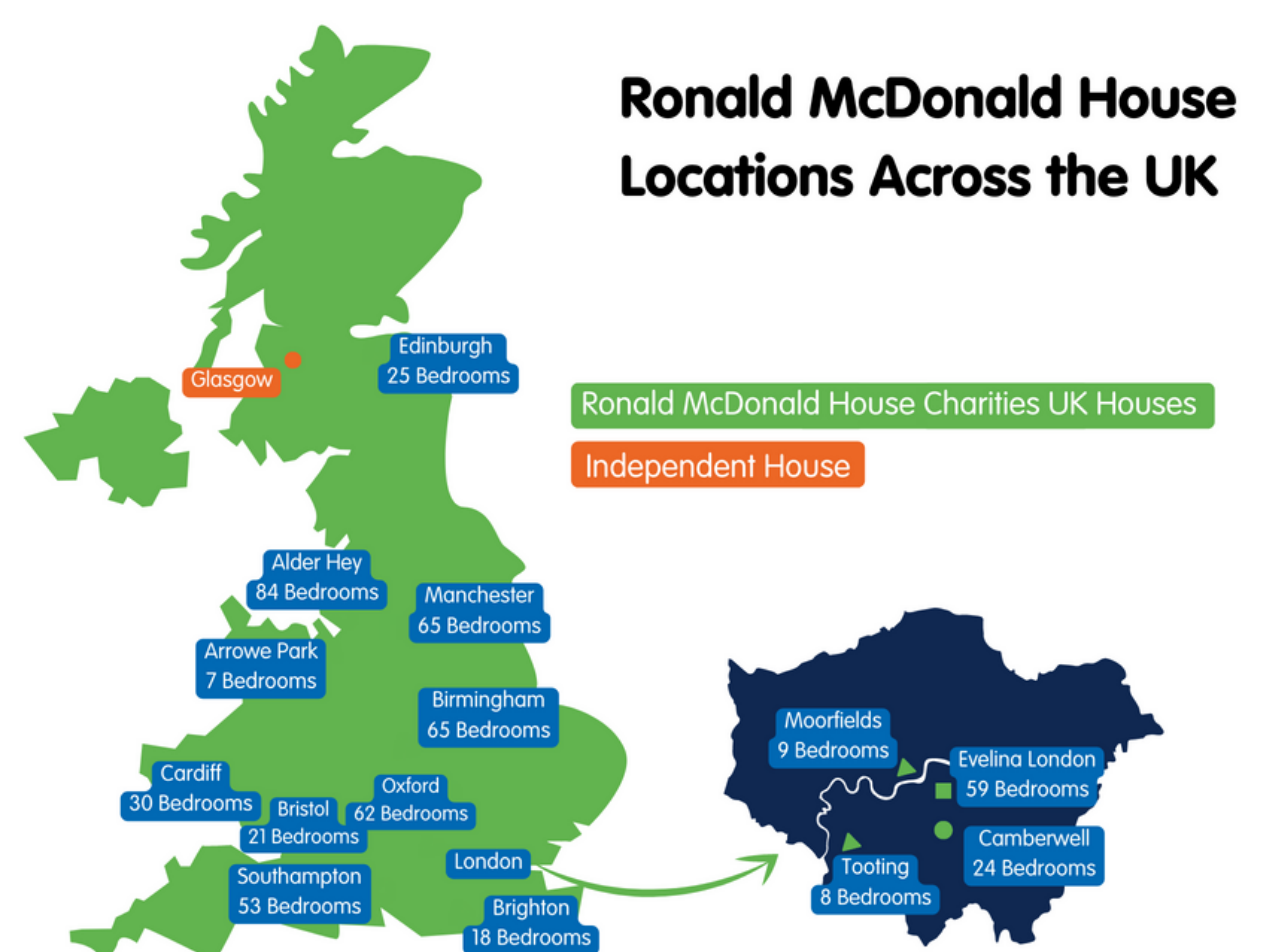


Our Charity

Ronald McDonald House Charities UK is an independent charity providing free 'home away from home' accommodation and support for families with children in hospital. There are 14 Houses in England, Scotland and Wales, and the Charity's mission is to ensure every specialist children's hospital in the UK has free, homely, and supportive accommodation for families.

The best medical care isn't always close to home, and families often find themselves travelling long distances to be with their child in hospital. This is an unimaginably painful and traumatic experience for families to go through. At Ronald McDonald House Charities UK, we help to ease some of the emotional and financial burden of having a sick child in hospital.

A Ronald McDonald House provides much more than a warm and comfortable place to stay; it provides comfort, support, and resources for families, just a stone's throw from the hospital, when their child needs treatment and care.



In 2022:

- We accommodated 6,654 families who stayed for an average of 16 nights
- One family moved into Ronald McDonald House Manchester in 2018 and was still there on 31 December 2022 – a total of 1,555 nights
- We saved families, on average, from travelling 73 miles to and from hospital each day to be with their child – that's a combined total of more than 10 million miles each year

Who took the survey?

246 people took the survey from across all 14 of our Houses.

This represents 7.8% of families who were staying with us, or who had checked out of a House within the past six months.

The majority of respondents (62%) have children under the age of three, with 45% having children aged between four and 11.

What we found out

Cost of living worries

68% revealed that the cost of living crisis is having a detrimental effect on their mental health



78% said having a child in hospital has had a negative impact on their finances

Over half (54%) of the UK's general population, said that rising prices had a negative impact on their mental health*. This compares to 68% among the families we support, which is a significant 25% more than the national picture.

* www.nhsconfed.org/long-reads/can-mental-health-services-afford-cost-living-crisis

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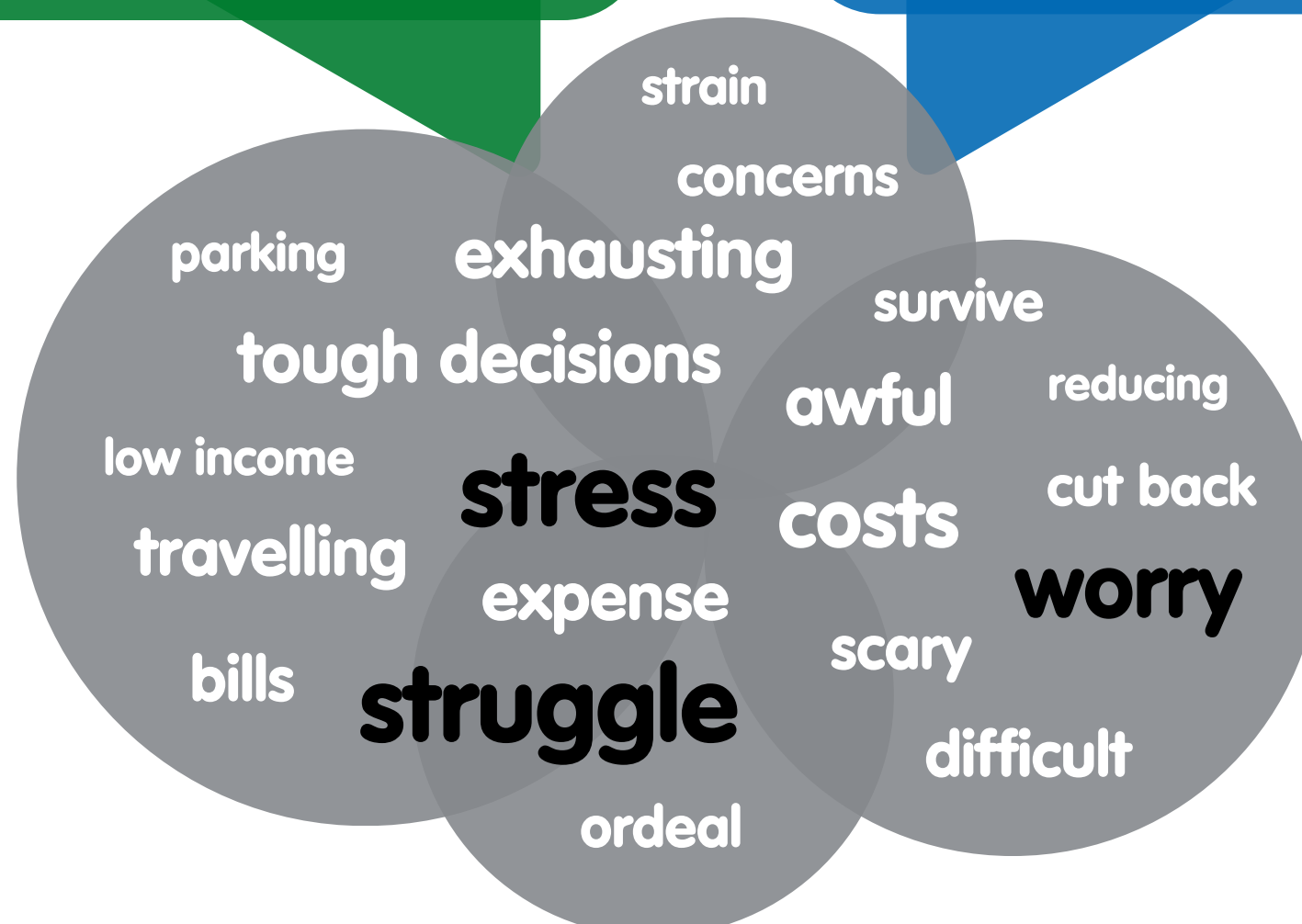
Constant worry I fear is making me less emotionally able to connect with and respond to my kids. We never go out and do anything socially, only out for walks because they don't cost anything.

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Despite both being working parents the stress and cost of trying to care for our child, keep our own home and our other kids there alongside staying in the House is immense. Once my sick pay runs out we will only have one income to survive on which is terrifying when costs are going up and up.

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In the past year, **almost a quarter of families** have skipped meals to make ends meet and even more (**28%**) have gone cold to avoid using the heating at home.

More than **40%** have asked family or friends to borrow money within the last 12 months and **58%** have cut back on non-essential spending.

☞ Our child cannot regulate his temperature so not putting the heating on is not an option. Our gas bill has gone from £40 to £135 a month. I skip meals to save money, we don't go out, eat takeaways, go on holiday etc. ☞

☞ We faced tough decisions of my husband having to go back to work as we couldn't afford our bills. We were in our overdraft, couldn't afford to get food for the evenings or during the day at the hospital. It was tough. We had no family around. One family member gave us a small amount of money, but we didn't really have anyone to turn to. ☞

Household bills

According to a survey*, 45% of all British adults found it difficult to keep up with household bills and credit commitments in the last few months. Our survey revealed that more than 65% of our families are experiencing the same struggles.

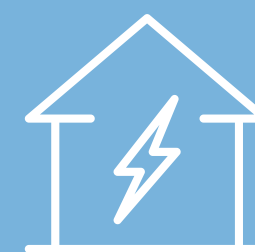
* YouGov for StepChange Debt Charity, October 2022



More than **65%** said they have struggled to pay at least one of their household bills over the last year.



More than **40%** said electric and heating bills were difficult to manage.



Almost **30%** of families identified that travel costs, including fuel, were causing difficulties. The same percentage of people struggled to keep up with food bills.



☞ We live in the Channel Islands and had to leave home in a rush. It meant we needed to buy clothes, essentials and everything else a parent of a child with cancer needs to make things comfortable. With a nine-month stay, the costs become scary especially when you have children and a mortgage to cover back home. ☞

How we help our families

- We provide free 'home away from home' accommodation for families with sick children in hospital, helping to reduce the emotional and financial burden
- In 2022, we saved families, on average, from travelling 73 miles each day to be with their child in hospital
- We save families, on average, £1,240 each in accommodation costs*
- Many of our Houses have a 'Grab & Go' scheme, providing families with free food items such as cereal bars and fresh fruit, saving them from having to buy expensive snacks to take to the ward
- Where possible, Houses provide food donated by corporate supporters, foodbanks, volunteers and charities
- Baby clothes including premature sizing, toys, toiletries and other essentials are available in many of our Houses, either free of charge for a small amount
- Our Charity has partnered with myHappyMind to support children's mental health and wellbeing
- All of our Houses are equipped with complimentary broadband and Wi-Fi, and most offer a space for remote working



Background

During 2022, our service delivery teams reported an increase in the number of families who were struggling financially. We were keen to substantiate this anecdotal evidence and understand if and how the cost of living crisis is exacerbating the financial pressures of having a child in hospital. We conducted an anonymous online survey between January and February 2023. It was promoted via House teams to families staying in Houses and to those who had checked out since July 2022.

Survey content

- Employment status including income
- Benefits
- Homeowner status
- Bills, loans, and debt
- Impact of crisis on mental health
- Support from the Charity

Objectives

- Capture vital information about the nature and extent of the issues our families are facing
- Determine how well we have been supporting families through the crisis
- Identify possible ways in which we could do more to help



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