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## What impact does welfare rights advice have on health and wellbeing?

### Qualitative study from the UK

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A substantial minority of people over state pension age in the UK experience relative poverty. We present qualitative findings from a process evaluation, embedded within a randomised controlled trial evaluating the impact of domiciliary welfare rights advice on health and wellbeing. Welfare rights advice is known to increase income, yet the impact on wellbeing and health has not been robustly investigated. Fifty men and women aged 60 to 88 were purposively selected from 755 trial participants to take part in one-to-one interviews exploring feasibility, acceptability and perceived impact of the intervention. Additional income derived from previously unclaimed state welfare benefits ranged from £20 (\$30) to £138 (\$212) per week and was felt to improve health and quality of life. The impact of additional resources was considerable: increased affordability of necessities (utility bills, food, transport); increased capacity to cope with financial emergencies; and reduced stress related to financial worries. The resources enabled social relations, and increased access to services and civic activities. Negative government and media discourses on welfare recipients were reflected by narratives which focused on the stigma attached to claiming state welfare. However, most participants viewed their claims as legitimate and justifiable

following a lifetime of tax contributions and compared themselves favourably with other ‘less deserving’ groups, particularly the younger unemployed and immigrants. We conclude that this intervention is perceived to improve wellbeing and reduce social exclusion and discuss the challenges of integrating this intervention into mainstream services when government policies are concerned with reforming the UK welfare state.