

Dear Sir,

I write in response to the Chancellor's disregard for pension and healthcare reform in his 2006 Budget and to add the voice of ethnic minority elders to the comments of Gordon Lishman, Director General of Age Concern, and Mervyn Kohler of Help the Aged (Scrooge policies anger elderly, 23 March 06) .

I echo the call for a White Paper to address the needs for pension provision for women, low paid workers, carers and those with no access to the second state pension. As 2.5 million elders live below the poverty line in the UK there are serious deficiencies in housing, health and social care. Furthermore, these issues are compounded within ethnic minority communities. The majority of black and minority ethnic elders have not been earning UK pension credits for as long as their white peers and therefore receive a considerably lower State income in retirement. The average weekly income of an ethnic minority male between the ages of 60 to 64 is 32.5% less than his white counterpart, a difference that increases to 44.7% over 65. Research by PRIAE (The Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity) shows that, with a rapid rate of increase in the ethnic minority elderly population, the current unacceptable levels of poverty experienced will rise, and the poverty gap will widen. The Government's current strategy in the fight against poverty through employment will also fail to reach ethnic minority elders.

As a society we are living longer. And if Mr Brown is the future rather than the past he must stop papering over the cracks with 'quick fix' policies and address the immediate and complex issues of long term care and increasing poverty.

Yours faithfully,

Professor Naina Patel, OBE  
Founder and director of PRIAE  
(The Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity)