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THIRD SECTOR NEED STRONGER ROLE IN PREVENTION OF PENSIONER POVERTY, SAYS NATIONAL CHARITY

The report of the Work and Pensions Committee into pensioner poverty published today (30 July 2009) has been welcomed by Counsel and Care, the national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support.

Accessible, user friendly information and independent advice of the type provided by charities can help older people to know which benefits they are entitled to and eradicate the stigma still felt by many around claiming money from the state.

Counsel and Care also supports the call in the report for greater dignity for older people living in care homes by increasing the Personal Expenses Allowance from £21.90 to £40 a week. Older people without savings or relatives to turn to have no other money to draw on if their costs exceed this derisory amount. Their ability to stay in control and independent is liable to be severely compromised as they are forced to make difficult choices about essential everyday purchases that most take for granted.

The Committee's examination of the differences between Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance also give cause for greater debate with the publication of the green paper on social care funding, *Shaping the future of care together*, which suggests that at least one of these valued benefits may be drawn into social care funding.

For an older person living alone on a low income, Attendance Allowance can offer a passport to other essential benefits. This potential for income maximisation must be better promoted, especially for the most vulnerable older people and the housebound, without carer support.

Stephen Burke, Chief Executive of Counsel and Care, said: "Counsel and Care and many others have long called upon the government to deal with pensioner poverty, so we fully support the report of the Work and Pensions Committee.

"By working with the third sector to continue to provide high quality, independent and user-friendly advice, information and advocacy, the government can begin to confront pensioner poverty. Together we must ensure that current and future cohorts of older people are not destined to a life after retirement spent worrying about whether they can afford to eat or pay their household bills.

"With an ageing population, the government cannot ignore this issue any longer.

"Attendance Allowance is popular with millions of older disabled people because it provides financial support towards the extra costs of disability, such as heating or washing, but gives freedom of choice and flexibility over how these needs are met, is accessible regardless of income or savings and not subject to the postcode lottery.

“We must ensure that the freedoms allowed with such non-means-tested disability benefits are not lost and, instead, become an integral part of the new care and support system.”

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Copies of Counsel and Care’s submission to the Work and Pensions Select Committee Inquiry into Tackling Pensioner Poverty in Great Britain can be downloaded from:
http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/assets/library/documents/DWP_pensioner_poverty_submission_Feb_09.pdf
- Counsel and Care is a national charity getting the best care and support for older people, their families and carers. Advice on issues affecting older people and carers can be obtained by calling 0845 300 7585 or emailing advice@counselandcare.org.uk
- Counsel and Care’s Advice Service opening hours are 10am-4pm Monday-Friday except Wednesday afternoons.
- More information about Counsel and Care can be obtained from www.counselandcare.org.uk