

February 8, 2005

**AGE CONCERN RESPONSE TO DWP BENEFIT TAKE-UP FIGURES
ANNOUNCED TODAY**

Gordon Lishman, Director-General of Age Concern England said:

"These figures should deeply concern the Government. It's unforgivable that up to £2.9 billion in money benefits is failing to reach the pockets of pensioners while one in five live in poverty.

"Steep increases in council tax bills in recent years have proved a major strain for older people. But up to £870 million in council tax benefit remains unclaimed by up to 1.8 million older people each year. If claimed, this could cut the average pensioner's bill by up to £468 a year.

"Despite around half of all pensioners being eligible for money benefits, they are still the group more likely than any other to miss out - either because they don't realise that they are entitled, don't know how to claim, or feel that there is a stigma attached to claiming and would rather 'make do'.

"The Government must turn its back on means-testing and increase the basic state pension to at least £105 per week to ensure a decent income for all pensioners."