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Warns Age Concern

An unfair rule which stops the poorest pensioners receiving benefits cash when they travel abroad for more than four weeks must be scrapped, says Age Concern.

The anomaly, which stops Pension Credit¹ after just four weeks overseas, means that pensioners must re-apply for the benefit on their return - leaving many facing mounting bills they can't afford while they wait weeks, often months, for it to be reinstated. The rule particularly affects older people visiting family in countries such as Australia, India, Canada and the Caribbean.

Many older people live on a low income and have to rely on relatives to cover the cost of a trip abroad, so only get the chance to travel every few years. The current rule is distressing for many pensioners who feel they are being penalised for taking an extended trip.

The rule also penalises older people who want to travel abroad for medical treatment, as well as those who need to stay longer for faith reasons: older people from Muslim or Hindu religions, for example, may wish to observe periods of mourning with their loved ones overseas which can often last several weeks or months.

Age Concern is calling on the Government to change the costly four week rule and extend it to a minimum of 13 weeks to bring it in line with other benefits such as Housing Benefit.

Gordon Lishman, Age Concern's Director-General, said: "This anomaly not only causes hardship to many of the poorest pensioners but is also costly to administer. It makes absolutely no sense for Pension Credit to be stopped after just four weeks when other benefits such as Housing Benefit continue for 13 weeks.

"Pensioners with family living in this country are not penalised if they choose to visit them for more than four weeks, but many older people with families living abroad have to cut their trips short or face the consequences. This is unfair and totally unacceptable. The Government must take immediate action to change this unjust rule."