

British pension freeze led Collingwood woman to Ottawa protest

'In our minds this is discrimination,' says Collingwood resident working to get equal pension indexing rules for British ex-pats living in Canada

[Erika Engel](#) Apr 24, 2023 2:52 PM



The Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners during their protest in Ottawa on April 19, 2023. Contributed photo

A Collingwood woman, formerly from the UK, was on the steps of Parliament Hill this week for a protest that aimed to spread awareness of a strange rule,

or lack of a rule, that allows the UK government to freeze pensions for British ex-pats living in Canada.

Edwina Melville-Gray, of Collingwood, is a member of the board for an advocacy organization called the Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners, which has been working to change the UK government's stance on frozen pensions for decades.

While she has enjoyed a successful career with a Canadian pension and other retirement savings, she was struck by the unfairness of the UK pension system when she applied for her own and learned it was frozen and would not increase from the year she reached "pensionable age." For UK pensioners, that's 66 years old, currently.

No matter what happens with inflation, a UK pensioner living in Canada will not receive an increase, but a UK pensioner living in a different country will.

"In our minds this is discrimination," said Melville-Gray in a phone interview with *CollingwoodToday*.



Edwina Melville-Gray with Simcoe-Grey MP Terry Dowdall at Parliament Hill on April 19, 2023. . Contributed photo

She said if the pension freeze was across the board for any ex-pat living outside the UK and collecting a state pension, she might be able to accept it. But depending on the country where the pensioner lives, the UK pays differently.

The crux of the alliance's argument is fairness. A British ex-pat living in the US will get a pension that's indexed for inflation and up-rated yearly, based on the current rates. If that same ex-pat lived in Canada, there would be no up-rating. The pension would stay frozen at the rate from the year the person turned pensionable age (currently 66 years old).

A state pension from the UK will increase each year for an ex-pat living in the

European Economic Area, Gibraltar, Switzerland, and [in countries with a social security agreement with the UK](#), according to the UK government website. Increases are not given to ex-pats living in Canada, even though the UK has a social security agreement with Canada.

"The fact that the pension [indexing] is different for different countries ... is really irksome," said Melville-Gray.

If a British ex-pat living in Canada is collecting a UK pension and moves back to the UK, the pension jumps up to the current indexed rate.

UK pensions are paid to those who have worked in the UK and paid into the national insurance plan for a minimum time period, very similar to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). However, CPP is indexed for inflation wherever the recipient lives in the world.

Examples provided by the Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners include 98-year-old Anne Puckridge, a veteran of the Second World War as a member of the army, navy, and air force, who retired to Calgary at 76 years old. She receives about CAD\$118 a week for her pension.

"I served my country and paid National Insurance contributions every week just like everyone else," said Puckridge in a news release from the alliance. "I consider this theft."

Peter Sanguinetti, now 83, worked in the National Service in the army, serving in the West Indies. He emigrated for work to Orillia in 2011 and has since retired in Northern Ontario. His pension is about half the current indexed rate.

According to the Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners, research has shown that many UK residents who emigrate are not aware of the different rules for indexing state pensions.

"The frozen pension policy currently affects 127,000 Canadian residents,"

states the alliance, which estimates an additional \$450 million for the Canadian economy if British pensioners living here received the current inflation index rate.

Inspired by a recent European Union/UK trade and cooperation agreement that included pension agreements, the Canadian alliance is hoping for similar circumstances in Canada, piggybacking on the current work for a new trade agreement between Canada and the UK.

"There has to be a point where we can get the UK to pay attention," said Melville-Gray.

An agreement between the two countries wouldn't require financial support from the Canadian government, instead it requires negotiations between Canada and the UK, and a commitment from the UK to pay the up-rated pensions.

Melville-Gray was in Ottawa on April 19 with a group of about a dozen members of the Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners with signs of protest and also a petition they were hoping to get MPs to sign. She said about 60 of them did, including Simcoe-Grey MP Terry Dowdall, who marked the occasion on [his social media](#).

The protest was somewhat overshadowed by the national strike of federal service workers, however, that didn't deter Melville-Gray.

"We're in it for the long haul," she said, noting the issue goes back to negotiations that did not happen in the 1970s.

"The reality is, all the Canadian MPs can do is say we're for this and behind this," said Melville-Gray. "Now they've got to reach out to their UK counterparts to say 'you've got to do something about this.'"

She said the issue is more difficult to advocate for on Canadian soil, given that some ex-pats no longer are allowed to vote in British elections, a fact

that may soon change.

Anyone interested in learning more about the advocacy of the alliance, or in getting help to collect a UK state pension, can visit the [Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners website here.](#)