**DISABILITY AND SOCIAL SECURITY MYTH-BUSTER**

**Welfare spending is not out of control**

* It is [lower than a decade ago](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-claims-of-spiralling-spending-on-benefits-are-false-and-ideological-official-figures-show/) and **not set to rise within the next five years**.
* [What is true](https://inequalities.substack.com/) is that **disability benefits as a share of overall welfare spending** has risen. This is due to many factors, one being the increase in State pension age, but also NHS and mental health support waiting lists, the effects of Long Covid, and escalating mental distress among young people. These are all very real issues which we need the government to address.
* **Nearly £23 billion** worth of social security and social tariffs [**currently goes unclaimed**](https://policyinpractice.co.uk/blog/missing-out-2024-23-billion-of-support-is-unclaimed-each-year/#:~:text=Policy%20in%20Practice%20estimates%20that,%C2%A322.7%20billion%20a%20year.) due to lack of awareness, stigma and the complexity of the UK social security system. [In the Financial Year Ending (FYE) 2024](file:///C:\Users\User\Documents\Ellen\DPAC\welfare%20reform\26%20March\Unfulfilled%20eligibility%20in%20the%20benefit%20system%20Financial%20Year%20Ending%20(FYE)%202024%20-%20GOV.UK), DWP estimates that 4% (£870 million) went underclaimed for PIP and 11% (£750 million) for DLA.

**Tests for eligibility for disability benefits are not too easy**

* Deaf and Disabled people who need disability benefits are too often found ineligible by assessments that are **arduous, harrowing, frequently inadequate and result in arbitrary decisions**. These are the same assessments that Labour criticised when in opposition and which were the subject of a number of highly critical [Work and Pensions Committee reports](https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1468/health-assessments-for-benefits/publications/). **Only around 54% of applications are successful.**
* The rate of assessment **decisions over-turned at appeal is at an all-time high**. Currently [around two-thirds of PIP appeals](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2024) are overturned in favour of the claimant compared to around half of universal credit and ESA appeals. However, many give up either before or after Mandatory Reconsideration stage because they cannot face the battle and due to lack of welfare advice and support to challenge unfair decisions.
* Recent research demonstrates that people claiming benefits for reasons of mental health are living with **high levels of mental distress**: [Mental distress among people receiving benefits: new evidence](https://inequalities.substack.com/p/welfare-and-mental-distress). This is in contrast to deliberate misrepresentations contained within political rhetoric and media reporting of people supposedly found eligible for benefits who have low levels of anxiety or depression.
* This picture is further supported by [OBR’s calculations](https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/UC-WCA-employment-effects-supplementary-release.pdf) that of the 163,000 benefit claimants with mental distress impacted by the proposals to change the WCA, **a maximum of 3% would be able to find and undertake paid work.**
* Recent media headlines about 200,000 claimants found unfit for work who are ready and willing to work now were **deeply misleading**. [The survey question to which these claimants responded](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-aspirations-and-support-needs-of-health-and-disability-customers) was whether they could work now with the **“right job”** and the **“right support”.** There was no follow up question about the likely availability of either. The 200,000 figure was extrapolated from a **much smaller claimant sample**. People who have **learning disabilities and/or are autistic** were twice as likely to respond yes to this question. **49% of respondents felt they would never be able to work or work again.** 62% of these customers were **over the age of 50**, and **66% felt their health was likely to get worse** in the future.

**This is not about fraud**

* The **latest figures for PIP fraud are 0%** according to the [DWP’s Fraud and Error in the Benefits System Annual Report of 2024](file:///C:\Users\User\Documents\Ellen\DPAC\welfare%20reform\26%20March\Fraud%20and%20error%20in%20the%20benefit%20system,%20Financial%20Year%20Ending%20(FYE)%202024%20-%20GOV.UK), so the government’s crackdown on benefit fraud and its impact is inconsistent with the figures and very low rates of PIP fraud. When government ministers cite amounts lost to fraud, they **use the figures for overall benefit fraud** rather than disability benefit fraud. This is **deliberately misleading**.
* Actual benefit fraud requires a court of law to establish that a claimant knowingly or dishonestly claimed benefit. **Only 820 people were convicted** on this basis in [2023-2024](file:///C:\Users\User\Documents\Ellen\DPAC\welfare%20reform\26%20March\Fraud%20and%20error%20in%20the%20benefit%20system,%20Financial%20Year%20Ending%20(FYE)%202024%20-%20GOV.UK). The DWP statistical definition of fraud is much less rigorous - it is an assessment by the DWP of those who were not entitled to benefit but could ‘reasonably be expected to know.’ DWP estimate that rates for this type of overpayment were 2.8% (£7.4 bn) in 2024. Rates of overpayment for claimant error were put at 0.6% (£1.6bn) and DWP official error at 0.3% (£0.8bn).

**Disability benefits do not act as a disincentive to work**

* Disability benefits keep Deaf and Disabled people **out of absolute poverty**.
* In 2022/23, there were 16 million people in the UK living in families in poverty. Of these, there were **8.7 million people in poverty** who are Disabled themselves, or who live with a Disabled person, up from 6.9 million in 2019/20. **33% of people living in the lowest income decile are Disabled** compared to just 9% in the top.
* The rate that Universal Credit standard allowance is paid at is **deliberately set to be too low to survive on** for anything but a very short, temporary amount of time. For those unable to earn a living through paid work, an out of work disability benefit component is essential in addition to the standard allowance.
* Personal Independence Payment is a **non-means tested extra costs benefit** intended to contribute to the additional unavoidable expenditure that Deaf and Disabled people face. [Scope estimates](https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/disability-price-tag#:~:text=The%20Disability%20Price%20Tag%20is,to%20%C2%A31%2C067%20a%20month.) that **Disabled people face on average extra costs of £1067 per month** compared to non-Disabled people.
* Many **PIP claimants will not be able to continue in work** if they lose access to this benefit. This is because engaging in paid work places extra demands on us that can exacerbate our conditions which in turn increases our unavoidable disability related expenditure. It also gives us less time on top of managing our impairments and illnesses to be able to function in other necessary areas of our lives such as domestic tasks. The OBR states that [one sixth of PIP claimants are in work](https://obr.uk/box/trends-in-working-age-disability-benefit-onflows/).
* The rise in PIP claimants can be explained by the **cost of living crisis**. Research [obtained through a Freedom Of Information request by Disability News Service](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/research-that-ministers-sat-on-for-three-years-shows-no-evidence-to-support-call-for-pip-cuts/) found that the majority of new applicants need the benefit in order to **pay for essentials**.
* **Disability-related poverty had** [**increased dramatically**](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwps-truly-shocking-disability-poverty-stats-are-terrible-indictment/) even before the cost of living crisis:
* 54% of all poverty in the country is now disability related.
* The proportion of people in families with at least one Disabled child and one Disabled adult who were living in poverty rose by 7% from 2019–21 up to 46% in 2021-22. This is compared to a consistent figure of 17% for individuals in families with no Disabled members across these two years.
* Poverty moves people **further from employment**. In 2021–22, the [poverty rate](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmworpen/142/report.html) for individuals in a household in receipt of a disability benefit was 20%.

**Cutting disability benefits will not solve labour shortages in Britain**

* There is **nothing currently stopping those who can and want to engage in paid employment from doing so** while also remaining eligible for the Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity (LCWRA) component of Universal Credit. Many claimants simply cannot do this because of the amount of pain, distress and/or fatigue they live with and/or volume of time spent attending medical appointments and engaging in treatment/therapy and/or volume of time that basic daily living tasks such as getting washed and dressed require due to the level of our support needs and severity of our disablement.
* Deaf and Disabled people **do not choose a life out of paid employment** reliant on social security for fun. Many more people should be found unfit for work than currently are. Even if you receive both out of work disability benefits and the higher rates of both the mobility and care components of PIP this is **just 60% of the Minimum Income Standard** required for a decent standard of living.
* **Labour has intensified significantly** over the past few decades, increasing the barriers that we face to getting and staying in paid work. For example, whereas once it was traditional for South Londoners to spend Summer holidays hop-picking in Kent, now farmers have picking targets that need to be met in order to stay profitable, leading to the number of [farm workers seeking help with dismissal](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/sep/08/seasonal-workers-migrant-fruit-pickers-sacked-uk-farms) after travelling to work in British fields and orchards soaring. Professions that may only pay minimum wage nevertheless require considerable energy and skill, for example social care work. One of the reasons for rising disability prevalence among working age adults is because **increasing numbers of us no longer fit** within intensifying and **worsening workplace conditions**.
* Measures to review and make changes to the Access to Work government disability employment programme outlined in the Green paper do not include addressing current problems with the scheme. [As of the end of 2024](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-10-04/6749), there were a reported **55,500 unresolved cases**. Anecdotally, many Deaf and Disabled people have **lost employment or are owed significant, unsustainable sums of money** due to delays.
* [**Working From Home (WFH) has not increased the employment chances** of Deaf and Disabled people](https://www.wbs.ac.uk/news/wfh-no-easy-fix-for-disabled-workers-disadvantage/). We are no more likely to have benefited from it than non-Disabled people despite our greater need for it. This is because jobs that can be done remotely are more likely to be managerial and to require higher levels of education and therefore to be out of the reach of many Deaf and Disabled people due to the barriers we face in multiple areas of our lives.
* Deaf and Disabled workers have **not benefited from advances in flexible working**. Research has shown that workers with childcare responsibilities have been the beneficiaries and [Flex Plus working is only rarely available.](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/flex-plus-working-for-disability-inclusion)
* There are **very few available jobs** **that meet the accessibility needs** of Deaf and Disabled workers. [Journalist Rachel Charlton-Dailey](https://x.com/RachelCDailey/status/1901648828626767964) found that out of 27,467 jobs on the DWP Find a Job site, only eight were fully remote, Disability Confident and part time.

**Cuts to disability benefits will cost the economy more in the long-term**

* [Poverty costs money](https://www.jrf.org.uk/counting-the-cost-of-uk-poverty). In 2016 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that **poverty costs the economy £78 billion per year** and that £1 in every £5 spent on public services went towards mitigating the harms caused by poverty.
* Cuts will cause substantial **additional pressures on the NHS, mental health services, and social care services** and will lead to an increase in **survival crime**.
* Disability benefit cuts will also push up **child poverty rates**. [870,000 children live in families who receive PIP](file:///C:\Users\User\Documents\Ellen\DPAC\welfare%20reform\26%20March\•%09Cuts%20to%20disability%20benefits%20would%20undermine%20government%20plans%20to%20tackle%20child%20poverty,%20warns%20charity%20–%20Child%20Poverty%20Action%20Group%20(CPAG)) with 290,000 of these children already in poverty.

**What we need from government**

* Research and improved data collection to build an evidence-base for the amount needed to support Deaf and Disabled people to have a decent standard of living.
* Investment in public services to improve health and well-being, bringing Deaf and Disabled people closer to employment.
* Real investment in Access to Work.
* Work with employers to increase the availability of suitable jobs with decent pay and working conditions and with ultimate flexibility for employees with unpredictable and fluctuating conditions.
* Work with DDPOs to identify bureaucratic issues with the social security system and engagement with DWP that push claimants further from employment.