

Getting disability benefits right the first time

A briefing from Scope

disability benefits =
without the fight =

SCOPE

= Equality for disabled people

Background

- A key purpose of the welfare safety net is to provide vital support for disabled people whose disability or condition impacts them financially. Yet we are now seeing a growing link between disability and poverty.
- We also hear every day from disabled people who tell Scope about the stress, fear and anxiety of trying to access financial support.
- It's clear that, for too many people, the system isn't working. Disabled people shouldn't have to fight for the benefits they are entitled to.
- At a time when energy prices are rising, the cost of living is going up, and the economy is recovering from the pandemic – in addition to the extra costs that disabled people already face - it's more important than ever that disabled people get the right benefits first time around.
- Urgent action is needed to fix the benefits system to ensure disabled people get the right decision the first time.



42%

of families that rely on disability benefits are in poverty.



Latest figures show that

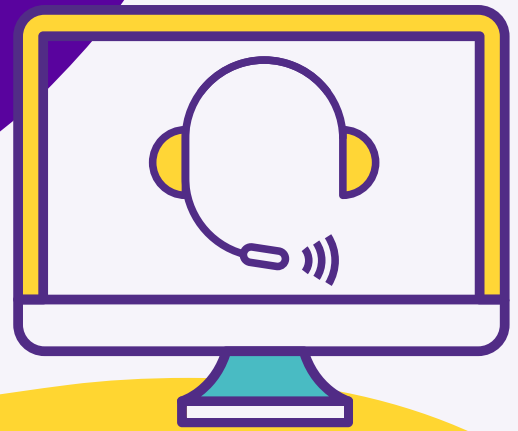
70% of PIP tribunals and

57% of ESA tribunals result in a successful outcome for the claimant.

Getting it right first time

- The assessment process often impedes, rather than facilitates, access to vital financial support.
- Millions of pounds are being wasted on fixing wrong decisions. £120 million was spent by the Government fighting disability benefit claims for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) between 2017 and 2019.
- On average, more than 12,000 disabled people successfully overturn wrong PIP decisions every month. It is clear that assessment reform is urgently needed.
- Assessments should be person-centred, fair and compassionate, while ensuring that disabled people get the right support decision the first time.

The right to a specialist assessor



- Scope is calling for the introduction of the right for claimants to request an assessor with appropriate knowledge of their condition or impairment.
- Far too many disabled people get assessed by someone who doesn't understand their condition. Disabled people are being repeatedly failed by these stressful and degrading assessments.
- **Less than half of people** who have an assessment for PIP receive a decision entitling them to the benefit. But we know many of these decisions are wrong. The latest figures show that of those who go to tribunal **70%** are successful in overturning these decisions.
- In the current system, there's no way to make sure you'll get an assessor who understands your condition or impairment. But we know that this is something that is important to disabled people.
- We recently ran a survey of over 1,000 disabled people to gain insight into their experiences and opinions of benefits assessments. Feedback overwhelmingly suggested that claimants would welcome the introduction of assessors with specialist knowledge of their condition or impairment.
- All disability benefit assessors are medical professionals. But not every medical professional is the most appropriate. For example, if a mental health condition means someone can't work, they could find themselves being assessed by a physiotherapist.
- Having an appropriate professional with relevant knowledge and skills to a disabled person's condition or impairment is vital to getting the right decision the first time around.

How it would work

- We are recommending that assessors should be broadly categorised into groups of specialisms, such as mental health, neurological conditions, musculoskeletal, learning difficulties and so on, and then be triaged to claimant cases accordingly.
- The introduction of telephone and video assessments makes this change possible, even if specialists are at the other end of the country to the claimant. It would lead to more accurate and insightful assessment reports.
- Our recommendation is just one of many that can ensure the welfare benefits system works for disabled people. The Government has a unique and important opportunity to improve assessments as it forms its response to the recent 'Shaping Future Support' Health and Disability Green Paper.

It shouldn't be a fight.

Disabled people should get the right benefits the first time around.



“ The assessor was a nurse with knowledge of physical injuries. They had no understanding of my autism at all. I scored zero in all sections but was finally awarded the enhanced rate on appeal. ”

“ I think we were very fortunate to have an assessor who clearly had an understanding of autism and the impact of mental health conditions and who allowed our son time to formulate his answers and allowed us as his advocates to add a more detailed explanation of his needs and to give examples of their impact on daily life, where appropriate. ”

How you can help

If you would like to find out more about Scope's work on welfare, we'd be happy to meet with you. Our team can provide suggestions on how you can raise these issues in Parliament, and provide more detail about our campaign.

To arrange a meeting or to discuss anything included in the briefing, please get in touch with:

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