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[The Preventable Harm Project](#)

Katie Farrington
Director General
Disability, Health and Pensions
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House, Tothill Street
London
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PRIORITY ATTENTION

via email

Dear Director General

Re: Evidence provided in Committee, 29th March 2023

[The Work and Pensions Committee](#)¹

Further to my previous contact in July 2022, and given the evidence you recently provided for the Work and Pensions Committee,¹ (the Committee) in March, I was concerned not to have received any response to the peer-reviewed research paper offered for your consideration last year, which identified the ongoing public health crisis directly linked to social policy reforms as highlighted by the [Preventable Harm Project](#)² that I've led since 2009.

*'The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms'*³ has been published and, now that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have advised that the fatally flawed^{2,3} Work Capability Assessment (WCA) initially adopted to limit access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is to be eventually removed,⁴ can you please advise what evidence has been used by the DWP in deciding to employ the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment to limit future access to Universal Credit for those in greatest need? This is a totally different albeit equally discredited assessment model to the outgoing WCA.⁵

Furthermore, can you please explain why it is presumed by the DWP that a work coach, with no clinical training, should be given the responsibility of deciding what work-related activity a chronically ill person can carry out without any knowledge of the preventable harm, which is likely, and which would leave chronically ill and disabled people *'extremely exposed to bad practice'*.⁶ Given that the evidence recently provided by various experts for the Women and

"If you combine the greater imposition of sanctions, the failure to understand in a consistent way across the service the fitness for work of disabled people, and the link to personal independence payment, I think it's a very, very scary prospect."⁶



Equalities committee into the government's National Disability Strategy,⁶ which was ruled to be unlawful by the high court in 2022, you should be alert to the fact that these various experts joined one disabled Conservative peer who delivered an 'almost completely negative assessment of the Transforming Support white paper,'⁶ and it should surely be cause for concern to note that this distinguished disabled Conservative peer identified the DWP as being 'stuck in a time warp'.⁷

"Lord (Kevin) Shinkwin said he believed the DWP treated disabled people "as maybe people from ethnic minority backgrounds or even as women would have been treated by men 50 years ago"... Lord Shinkwin told the committee he did not believe the DWP was capable of coming up with solutions to the widespread inequality that disabled people face and which were described in the strategy in July 2021... He said "I can't help thinking this was symptomatic of the DWP's defensiveness and their inability to engage with disabled people as equals, as equal partners."^{7,8}

The 'DWP's defensiveness' as identified in evidence provided by Lord Shinkwin⁷ was clearly demonstrated by the Secretary of State during his recent evidence to the Committee when resisting any meaningful discussions regarding the impact of benefit sanctions,¹ which have been fatal for many. It is something that the DWP fail to accept any responsibility for, and they have a tendency to disregard the negative accumulative impact of social policy reforms.⁹

As the Secretary of State has not been in post very long, I feel certain that he is unaware of one 2014 NHS report, that was never published, which identified that almost 50 percent of ESA claimants had attempted suicide at some point.¹⁰ That evidence alone should have identified a public health crisis in the ESA assessment process, but was not actioned as the DWP disregard all published evidence demonstrating this identified government induced public health crisis. The Secretary of State was alerted to this identified public health crisis linked to disability benefit assessments in a letter in December 2022. Therefore, his evidence to the Committee was surprising, given the volumes of published research evidence by a multitude of academics,¹¹ demonstrating the brutality of some DWP staff towards claimants, the fact that some find sanctioning a form of entertainment, and put bets on how many claimants can be sanctioned in any given time frame.¹² This is not evidence of care, concern or compassion by DWP staff as all evidence of a moral compass has clearly disappeared:

"Focusing on the outcomes of these reforms, a growing body of research has found that claiming processes became a more 'institutionally violent' and injurious experience for out-of-work benefit claimants... Grover (2019) conceptualises post-2010 social security changes as a form of 'violent proletarianisation'. He concludes that reforms led to a range of avoidable harms and fatalities; primarily by forcing claimant groups off benefit and/or into precarious wage labour in ways that 'socially murdered' some of Britain's most vulnerable individuals through penury or suicide. Relatedly, Wright et al., (2020) view this as a form of 'social abuse'..."¹²



The defensive comments by the Secretary of State when giving evidence to the Committee¹ claiming that DWP staff are caring and sensitive, and only sanction those who fail to attend an appointment without a justifiable cause is clearly not supported by anyone outside the DWP.^{3,6,7} If you access published, peer-reviewed research evidence,^{3,11,12} it demonstrates how chronically ill claimants have advised the Jobcentre they are too ill to attend an appointment, and are then routinely sanctioned for months, due to a demonstrated DWP preconception of guilt of all disability benefit claimants, whilst the DWP disregard the human consequences of this relentless DWP persecution.^{13,14}

“The compulsion and sanction inherent within social security systems premised on welfare conditionality frequently triggers profoundly negative personal, financial, health and wellbeing outcomes among social security benefit recipients...The analysis presented here provides further evidence that one intended outcome of benefit sanctions is to discipline and punish those who are unable or unwilling to comply with the mandatory work-related requirements specified as conditions of their continued eligibility to claim (pp 135-136).”¹⁴

The evidence provided for the Committee¹ demonstrates that the DWP continues to be oblivious to the public health crisis created since the adoption of the WCA and the increased use in what are brutal sanctions. It is totally unacceptable in C21st UK that some of those in greatest need can be starved to death by the State,¹⁵ and that others are left living in fear¹⁶ of the next enforced disability assessment often for health conditions that can't improve and are destined to deteriorate over time. Disregarding diagnosis and prognosis for disability benefit assessments always guaranteed that many would die when 'killed by the State.'¹⁷ It's also unacceptable that the DWP send threatening and intimidating letters to disabled people, including disabled working-age War Pensioners who were permanently disabled in the military service of this nation, with threats to remove their pension. It seems there is a great deal ongoing in the DWP that remains unknown to the Secretary of State and to the Director General, and it's past time for the Department of Justice to identify this continued breach of human rights of those in greatest need by the DWP.

“Many of those who are unfit to work were destined to die often by suicide or starvation when, quite literally, 'killed by the state', with no-one held to account for this government imposed psychological tyranny created by social policy reforms, using psycho-coercion to remove the past security of the welfare state when influenced by corporate America since 1992. This has been achieved. Chronically ill and disabled people who are unfit to work live in fear of the DWP, who disregarded coroners' warnings of the risk of suicide relating to the WCA. The adoption of the 'politics of fear' was skilfully introduced over time, and the creation of 'disability denial' was adopted for social policy legislation relating, exclusively, to the costs of the welfare state and not to the health, wellbeing or to the survival of disability benefit claimants.”¹⁶



Please also be advised that as a medically retired healthcare professional it is my educated opinion, following almost 14 years of independent disability studies research,² that it remains totally unacceptable that UK social policy reforms were adopted following the influence with UK social policies since 1992 of the second worst health insurance giant in the US.² Adopting the ‘politics of fear’¹⁶ guaranteed that the DWP is linked to many thousands of deaths of those in greatest need, whose only crime is that they were unfit to work... but the DWP’s preconception of guilt of all disability benefit claimants, as successfully created during the Coalition government’s term in office (2010-15), meant that disability denial policies would be adopted.¹⁸

“The recent inquest into the tragic death of Philippa Day has once again shown the inadequacies and cruelty of a benefits system that damages the mental health of claimants. The disability benefits system engenders a culture of systemic disbelief towards claimants, creating a hostile environment towards the very people it is supposed to support. Reports of claimants who complete suicide or starve to death as a result of traumatic assessments or benefit sanctions do not appear to have prompted any change in policy or procedure by successive ministers in charge of the DWP.”¹⁸

By definition, any political administration that adopts oppressive social policies which are guaranteed to create a public health crisis has adopted tyranny.¹⁹ When successive administrations continue and extend that tyranny by definition that’s an atrocity,²⁰ as now ongoing in C21st UK with no-one held to account for the thousands of deaths directly linked to the fatally flawed disability assessments and the political resistance to funding long-term disability benefit.

The British public didn’t elect any administration to adopt starvation as a form of discipline, and no-one gave approval for successive administrations to demonise those in greatest need to justify extreme austerity measures, which were identified as being ‘politically motivated but not financially necessary’.²¹

Actions have consequences. It remains unacceptable that those in greatest need live in fear of the DWP, and no-one takes responsibility for the identified public health crisis created by ideology and by disregarding the often fatal human consequences of social policies influenced by corporate America since 1992,²² which were always destined to kill many people.¹⁷

Adopting an assessment model designed to restrict access to long-term disability benefit whilst disregarding clinical need²³ always was a very dangerous precedent to set. Written in 1995 by Mansel Aylward, who at the time was the Principal Medical Advisor for the then Department for Social Security, and co-authored by John LoCascio of the notorious UnumProvident Insurance, the American corporate insurance giant appointed by the Major administration as the UK government advisor for ‘welfare claims management’, this one academic paper²³ generated a future public health crisis in the UK as diagnosis, prognosis and clinical need were disregarded when assessing claimants for long-term disability benefit.



Only in the health insurance industry and in DWP disability assessments, as co-designed by corporate America, is clinical need disregarded from a claimed occupational health assessment. Whilst it is reasonable to consider the capabilities of the chronically ill and disabled community who may be fit enough to work, their clinical needs cannot be dismissed as one assessment is meaningless without the other. Unaccountable corporate giants contracted by the DWP have created state sanctioned negligence on a vast scale,^{3,17,22} as identified by the thousands of deaths directly linked to these fatally flawed assessments.

In his evidence to the Committee¹ (Q135) the Secretary of State dismissed concerns regarding the often-catastrophic impact of sanctions, and published evidence demonstrating that they are 'harmful and counterproductive'.¹⁴ There are claims that 'hardship payments' exist, which dismisses this identified DWP generated public health crisis which is in breach of the human rights of disabled people. This demonstrates the lack of awareness of the mental health crisis often endured by claimants who are sanctioned, which is highlighted by the number of cases who die from starvation^{24,25,26} following a sanction which is often generated by staff who are less caring and considerate than the Secretary of State cares to admit.^{3,10,12,16,17}

Yours sincerely

Mo Stewart

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"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."
Martin Luther-King Jr

Author of ['Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state'](#)
Creator of [The Preventable Harm Project](#)
Consequences [Influences and Consequences](#)

Copied to:

Mel Stride MP – Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Louise Everett – Policy Group, Disability and Health Support Directorate
Sir Stephen Timms MP – Chair, Work and Pensions Committee
Caroline Noakes MP – Chair, Women and Equalities Committee
Steve Brine MP – Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Lord Bellamy KC – Ministry of Justice
Victoria Prentis KC MP – The Attorney General
Members of the Work and Pensions Committee
John Pring – Editor, Disability News Service



LINKS:

- 1 Evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee, 29th March 2023.
<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/12982/html/>
- 2 The Preventable Harm Project:
[Mo Stewart Research | Cash Not Care](#)
- 3 The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms
[Justice, Power and Resistance](#)
- 4 DWP's good intentions on disability support will be hard to implement
[Institute for Government](#)
- 5 Guidance: PIP assessments guide part 1: the assessment process.
[PIP assessment guide part 1: the assessment process - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- 6 Six disability campaigners tell MPs: Government's benefit reforms are not fit for purpose
[Disability News Service, 30th March, 2023](#)
- 7 Disabled Tory peer tells MPs: DWP is 'stuck in a time warp'.
[Disability News service, 30th March, 2023](#)
- 8 National Disability Strategy policy paper, published 28th July 2021
[National Disability Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- 9 Duty of Care and the DWP [Chronic Illness Inclusion](#)
- 10 'Shocking' NHS stats show nearly half ESA claimants have attempted suicide
[Disability News Service, 30th November 2017](#)
- 11 Published academic research papers [Mo Stewart Research](#)
- 12 Violent bureaucracy: A critical analysis of the British public employment service
[Critical Social Policy](#)
- 13 Britain's Inhumane Benefits System Is Giving People PTSD
[Novara Media, 19th November 2021](#)
- 14 The Impacts of Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions Support and Behaviour Change [Policy Press](#)
- 15 Corporate Welfare Crime: Two Case Studies in State-Corporate Harm
[ResearchGate 2016](#)
- 16 The Adoption of Psycho-Coercion to Manipulate the UK Disabled Community: The Creation of the Politics of Fear. [The Centre for Welfare Reform, October, 2022](#)
- 17 Killed By The State? Social Policy Abused
[The Centre for Welfare Reform, November 2020](#)
- 18 Duty of Care and the DWP
[Chronic Illness Inclusion, March 2021](#)
- 19 A Culture of Cruelty
[Independent Living guest blog, January 2023](#)
- 20 Persecuting Those In Greatest Need
[The Centre for Welfare Reform, March 2023](#)
- 21 Austerity: a failed experiment on the people of Europe
[Royal College of Physicians: Clinical Medicine, August 2012](#)
- 22 Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state
[Independent Living book review, October 2016](#)
- 23 Problems in the assessment of psychosomatic conditions in social security benefits and related commercial schemes. [Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Vol 39, No 6, pp. 755-765, 1995](#)
- 24 The death of Errol Graham: Man starved to death after DWP wrongly stopped his benefits
[Disability News Service, 2020](#)
- 25 DWP hounded disabled woman for years before her 'starvation' death, papers show
[Disability News Service, 2022](#)
- 26 DWP failings linked to death of claimant whose body lay undiscovered for years
[Disability News Service, 2023](#)