

IMPROVING THE BENEFITS SYSTEM FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

This project aims to explore ways to improve disabled people's experiences and outcomes when claiming benefits like Personal Independence Payments (PIP), Employment Support Allowance (ESA), or Universal Credit. It relates to policy and practice in England and Wales.

The aim of the project is to:

- Build our evidence on the problems people experiences when applying for benefits and completing Work Capability or PIP assessments
- Work with clients and advisers to identify ways in which the process for applying for benefits could be improved.

Why we've chosen this topic

Advice on disability benefits is the number one issue among clients who come to Citizens Advice for help. In 2018 we helped nearly 250,000 people with PIP or ESA.

2 in 5 clients report having a disability or long-term health condition. Around two-thirds of people in this group need help with a benefits issue. A growing proportion of clients coming to Citizens Advice for help with disability benefits need advice on challenging or appealing the outcome of a Work Capability Assessment for ESA or UC, or an assessment for PIP. Data published by the Ministry of Justice shows that around two-thirds of the PIP and ESA decisions taken to appeal are overturned.

We also receive a large amount of evidence on problems with the assessment process. These often cover issues our clients face in completing the assessment - for example, confusion over how to fill out application forms, issues with the accessibility of assessment centres, or errors in assessment reports.

But they also suggest more fundamental and complex problems, such as how the process treats people with fluctuation conditions or multiple impairments, or the impact of waiting long periods of time for an appeal hearing.

Case study - Evidence from client needing help with PIP

A client with a severe mental health condition came to us for help after she was awarded zero points in her PIP assessment when transferring from DLA. The local office helped her to submit a detailed request for a Mandatory Reconsideration but this did not result in any changes to the decision.

After supporting the client to take her case to an appeal, the decision was overturned and she was awarded PIP with 15 points for daily living and 12 points for mobility. The process of challenging the decision caused significant stress for the client. In addition, she fell behind on her rent and was extremely worried at the possibility of losing her home.