

# Mo Stewart

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## [Preventable Harm Project](#)

Tom Pursglove MP  
Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work  
Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House, 6-12 Tothill Street  
London, SW1H 9DA

Ref: MC2022/xxxxx

Private & Confidential  
via email

Dear Minister

Re: The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms  
*Justice, Power and Resistance*<sup>1</sup>

Further to your letter of 17<sup>th</sup> November to my constituency MP Steve Barclay, where you identify me by name having accessed my private correspondence with him, it is cause for concern that your letter content totally dismisses the fact that I am the UK research lead for the Preventable Harm Project<sup>2</sup> (2009 - 2019) and is another example of a Minister from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) demonstrating political rhetoric and very little else. Must I remind you, Minister, that you have only been in Parliament since 2015, and at the DWP for less than a month. Clearly, the content of your letter disregards the identified and well documented public health crisis created by successive social policies adopted since 2008, and significantly increased since 2010.<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup>

Given that references to published academic research include evidence by world experts in public health, social policy and human geography, I humbly suggest you become much more aware of the public health crisis and the many fatalities created by the adoption of the totally discredited Work Capability Assessment (WCA), as initially introduced in 2008 to limit access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) long-term disability benefit. The adoption of social policies using a financial priority whilst disregarding health and wellbeing always was very, very dangerous, with DWP Ministers failing to accept the often fatal human consequences of social policy reforms.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms [Justice, Power and Resistance](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Preventable Harm Project [Mo Stewart Research](#)

<sup>3</sup> 'First do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health?  
[British Journal of Epidemiology Community Health 2016: 70:339-345](#)

<sup>4</sup> Punitive and ineffective: benefit sanctions within social security [Journal of Social Security Law, 25 \(3\), 142-157](#)

<sup>5</sup> Fear of Brown Envelope: Exploring Welfare Reform with Long-Term Benefit Recipients.  
[Journal of Social Policy and Administration 48 \(7\), pp. 782-798](#)

<sup>6</sup> Violent bureaucracy: A critical analysis of the British public employment service.  
[Journal of Critical Social Policy Volume 42, Issue 2, May 2022, Pages 306-326](#)

<sup>7</sup> Blaming the victim all over again: Waddell and Aylward's biopsychosocial model of disability  
[Journal of Critical Social Policy Volume: 37 issue: 1, page\(s\): 22-41](#)

<sup>8</sup> A catastrophic indifference to human need: the mental health crisis created by the DWP.  
[British Journal of General Practice, 2021](#)

Please be advised that the WCA was adopted in 2008 against the advice of the government's own advisory body.<sup>9</sup> Every clinical authority in the UK insisted that the WCA should be abolished due to the identified preventable harm it was always destined to create. The Royal College of Psychiatrists, The British Medical Association, The British Psychological Society, The Royal College of General Practitioners, The Work and Pensions Select Committee and the President of the Social Entitlement Chamber all advised that the WCA should be abandoned. They were all disregarded. Regardless of very predictable catastrophic human consequences,<sup>10,11,12</sup> every UK administration since 2008 has used the dangerous and fatally flawed WCA which totally disregards all clinical opinion. A public health crisis was always inevitable. The fact that successive DWP Ministers continue to attempt to justify the unjustifiable and resist access to all published, peer-reviewed research evidence demonstrating the public health crisis directly linked to the WCA was, also, inevitable.

A lot of evidence has identified the negative human impact of austerity measures and welfare reforms on public mental health and, especially, the psychological terror imposed by the adoption of the fatally flawed WCA, which is unfit for purpose. The former psychological security of the UK welfare state for anyone whose doctors had deemed their patients unfit to work has been removed, and the public opinion of disability benefit claimants has been successfully tarnished.

The WCA is "intrusive, insensitively administered and regularly leads to inappropriate outcomes in respect of disabled people's capabilities."... Claimants have been intimidated over a period of years, are very conscious that public opinion is against them and that they are treated with suspicion not empathy.

Suicides linked to ESA assessments are climbing, and a growing number of benefit-related deaths are associated with sanctions in what has been described as "Britain's secret penal system." One NHS statistical survey revealed that almost half of ESA claimants had attempted suicide at some point...

"Being treated like a second-class citizen, being blamed for not being an ideal neoliberal subject, being denied the basic financial means to survive, being sanctioned for being too ill to make an appointment – these belittlements monopolise the internal world and the result is now often suicide."<sup>12</sup>

Please be further advised Minister that when working in healthcare, many of my patients were chronically ill and were living with a life threatening condition. I didn't feel the need to terrify them. When chronically ill, disability benefit claimants are unlikely to wake every day and wonder how much more money they can extract from the DWP. They are much more inclined to wonder if this may be their last day on earth. The DWP's idea of "help and support"<sup>13</sup> for these people is to send brown envelopes demanding yet another assessment, often to claimants whose quality of life is threatened by their health, and their survival limited due to the anxiety created by relentless intimidation and coercion by the DWP whose contact letters with all disability benefit claimants are invariably hostile, as the DWP continue to disregard the thousands who have died when, quite literally, "killed by the state".<sup>14</sup> Unless and until the adoption of disability denial<sup>15</sup> is acknowledged

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<sup>9</sup> 'Ruthless' DWP 'forced through WCA' despite knowing of harm. [Disability News Service, 2015](#)

<sup>10</sup> Death has become a part of Britain's benefits system. [The Guardian, 2015](#)

<sup>11</sup> Psychological tyranny prescribed by the DWP: preventable harm is government policy. [British Journal of General Practice, 2018](#)

<sup>12</sup> Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis [Journal of Public Mental Health Vol 18 No 4 2019, pp. 224-230](#)

<sup>13</sup> Shaping Future Support: the Health & Disability Green Paper briefing. [Centre for Welfare Reform](#)

<sup>14</sup> Killed By The State? Social Policy Abused. [Centre for Welfare Reform](#)

<sup>15</sup> The Work Capability Assessment is the adoption of disability denial. [BJGP LIFE, 2021](#)

as being the basis for social policy reforms and the continued use of the fatally flawed and dangerous WCA, many more of those in greatest need will continue to live in fear of the DWP. Indeed, many more chronically ill and disabled claimants will die due to an assessment model that totally disregards clinical need, and with an assessment process that guarantees that anyone whose unfit to work and in need of State financial support will live in fear of the DWP. This, Minister, is shameful.

The WCA is not a medical assessment, an incorrect assumption often claimed by politicians, journalists and academics. Influenced by corporate America, the WCA is the adoption of a biopsychosocial (BPS) model of assessment, which is the invention of the health insurance industry to limit access to claims, and is identified as a “non-medical functional assessment” which disregards clinical opinion and failed all academic scrutiny.<sup>15</sup>

At the time when the Coalition administration (2010-2015) were demonising the disabled community claiming there were vast numbers of fraudulent claims for disability benefit, the DWP’s own published papers were stating the opposite, demonstrating that disability benefit fraud was only 0.5% of the entire welfare budget. This means 99.5% of claimants were genuine, which confirms that the adoption of the WCA was ideologically motivated and, due to the public health crisis it has created, there is no moral justification whatsoever to continue to use the assessment.

I strongly suggest this identified and ongoing government induced public health crisis is nothing to celebrate, and you may be assured that I most certainly did not find the content of your letter to Steve Barclay MP to be helpful or reassuring in any way. It simply demonstrated that you are totally unaware of the identified public health crisis<sup>15</sup> created by the adoption of social policies which were guaranteed to cause preventable harm to many of those in greatest need, and I humbly suggest you may now avail yourself of the detailed references in this letter as soon as possible. I further suggest you stop attempting to justify the unjustifiable continued use of a fatally flawed assessment model.

I trust, Minister, you are now much better informed.

Yours sincerely



**Mo Stewart**

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform  
Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project



“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: Steve Barclay MP and Vicky Foxcroft MP – Shadow Minister for Disabled People

<sup>15</sup> The Work Capability Assessment is the adoption of disability denial. [BJGP LIFE, 2021](#)