



# Mo Stewart Research

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Date: 17<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Debbie Abrahams MP  
Chair  
Work and Pensions Select Committee  
House of Commons  
Palace of Westminster  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Priority attention

via email

Dear Chair,

Re: Deaths linked to DWP disability benefit assessments – safeguarding vulnerable claimants

I write in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project<sup>1</sup> to offer further reflections relating to the number of deaths linked to disability benefit assessments administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

During the Work and Pensions Committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> February,<sup>2</sup> Committee members were continuing their inquiry, including identifying the number of deaths linked to disability benefit assessments, with less than helpful comments by the panel.

You may recall that Dr Allsopp once again referenced the significance of the Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) reports issued by coroners as being significant, which are also very rare. However, she failed to identify the fact that the DWP routinely disregards the findings of the PFD reports,<sup>3</sup> as previously identified in written evidence to the Inquiry.<sup>4</sup>

“The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has repeatedly dismissed concerns raised by coroners who have investigated the deaths of benefit claimants, in a pattern of behaviour that stretches back 14 years, analysis by Disability News Service (DNS) has revealed. ...

But in its response, published this month, DWP told the coroner it disagreed with each of the three key concerns she raised about the way the system was working, particularly for universal credit claimants.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Preventable Harm Project](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Work and Pensions Committee, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025](#)

<sup>3</sup> [DWP’s 14-year history of dismissing coroners’ concerns over benefit claimant deaths – Disability News Service](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Evidence submitted for the inquiry into safeguarding vulnerable claimants](#)



Please be advised that the number of claimant deaths linked to the DWP disability benefit assessment are **in the thousands**, not just 80 or 90 as suggested during Committee. You need to go much further back in time to access the evidence, and also consider the thousands of deaths linked to disability benefit claimants who are refused access to benefit when using the fatally flawed and totally discredited assessment,<sup>4</sup> which was an average of almost 90 deaths per month as reported by the the *Guardian*<sup>5</sup> and the BBC in August 2015<sup>6</sup> (Table 1).

There were also 7,200 deaths of claimants in the work related activity group, who the DWP had decided should prepare to return to work regardless of diagnosis or prognosis which are disregarded, and 7,540 deaths of claimants in the assessment phase when economically inactive. These claimants suffered from the DWP's adoption of 'disability denial.'

Table 1

DWP Mortality Statistics: ESA claimants, published August 2015

<b>WCA outcome at most recent ESA assessment  Dec 2011 – Feb 2014</b>	<b>Number of claimants leaving ESA with a recorded date of death</b>
Fit for work	2,380
Work related activity group	7,200
Assessment phase	7,540
Support group	32,530
Unknown	930
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50,580</b>

Source: Reproduced from DWP mortality statistics. Table created by author.

Please be alert to the fact that following the public and political reaction to the mortality totals reluctantly published by the DWP in 2015,<sup>5,6</sup> the DWP have **resisted publishing** further evidence relating to the number of disability benefit claimants who died shortly after being pronounced 'Fit for Work' by the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and refused access to disability benefit. Therefore, statistics which should be in the public domain are unavailable relating to the thousands of human casualties due to this corporate influenced and fatally flawed WCA assessment model, which disregards all clinical need and was always guaranteed to cause death, despair and preventable harm.

<sup>4</sup> [Evidence submitted for the inquiry into safeguarding vulnerable claimants](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Thousands have died after being found fit for work, DWP figures show | Benefits | The Guardian](#)

<sup>6</sup> [More than 2,300 died after fit for work assessment – DWP figures](#)

<sup>7</sup> [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: Justice, Power and Resistance Volume 6 Issue 2](#)



“To justify the adoption of harsh and unnecessary austerity measures, which were introduced without ethical approval, the Coalition administration elected in 2010 vehemently challenged the integrity of the chronically ill and disabled community and routinely accused disability benefit claimants of fraud; whilst failing to produce evidence to support their claims. Their often hostile rhetoric encouraged a 213 percent increase in prosecuted disability hate crimes, and successive administrations disregarded the thousands of deaths directly linked to the Work Capability Assessment, which was adopted using a discredited and dangerous biopsychosocial model of assessment to restrict access to long-term disability benefit. Influenced by corporate America since 1992, the UK social policy reforms guaranteed that many of those in greatest need were destined to die when, covertly, killed by the State.”<sup>7</sup>

The resistance by the DWP’s Chief Medical Advisor to accept the link between DWP disability assessments and suicide is cause for concern, given the published peer-reviewed evidence demonstrating the link which she continues to downplay.<sup>7,8,9</sup> Someone should challenge what appears to be another policy-based clinical opinion, which is historically very common with former DWP Chief Medical Advisors.<sup>10</sup>

“In total, across England as a whole, the WCA disability reassessment process during this period was associated with an additional 590 suicides, 279,000 additional cases of self-reported mental health problems and the prescribing of an additional 725,000 antidepressant items. ...  
Our study provides evidence that the policy in England of reassessing the eligibility of benefit recipients using the WCA many have unintended but serious consequences for population mental health, and there is a danger that these adverse effects outweigh any benefits that may or may not arise from moving people off disability benefits.”<sup>8</sup>

Given that a new Work and Pensions Committee was created following the general election, it seems likely that the Committee will not have had the opportunity to access all the evidence provided for the original call for evidence for the safeguarding vulnerable claimants inquiry. Therefore, I humbly recommend that members of the Committee access the evidence I provided in October 2023<sup>4</sup> in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project. The evidence identifies the well-documented public health crisis generated by the DWP impacting on the health, wellbeing and, in many circumstances, on the survival of chronically ill and disabled benefit claimants which the DWP fail to acknowledge.

<sup>4</sup> [Evidence submitted for the inquiry into safeguarding vulnerable claimants](#)

<sup>7</sup> [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: Justice, Power and Resistance Volume 6 Issue 2 \(2023\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [‘First do no harm’: are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? \*J Epidemiol Community Health\* 2016;70:339–345](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis. \*Journal of Public Mental Health\* 6\(2\): 224-230](#)

<sup>10</sup> [“Blaming the victim, all over again: Waddell and Aylward’s biopsychosocial \(BPS\) model of disability”, \*Critical Social Policy\*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 22-41](#)



There is a great deal of evidence which identifies this ongoing government-induced public health crisis negatively impacting on those in greatest need,<sup>11</sup> and it would benefit the Committee a great deal if they became more familiar with this politically motivated crisis.

It remains unacceptable that those in greatest need now live in fear of the DWP, with successive neoliberal administrations justifying the unjustifiable whilst disregarding the deaths, despair and preventable harm adopted due to ideology, regardless of human consequences which can be fatal.<sup>11</sup>

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mo Stewart', written in a cursive style.

**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 ['Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state'](#)

Editor [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

Researcher [Influences and Consequences](#)

Copied to: Members of the Work and Pensions Committee

Dr Jed Boardman – Consultant Psychiatrist/Senior Lecturer in Social Psychiatry

Professor Seena Fazel - Director of Suicide Research, University of Oxford

Professor Ben Barr – Professor in Applied Public Health Research

Professor Matthew Johnson – Professor of Public Policy, Northumbria University

Professor David Hunter – Emeritus Professor of Health Policy & Management, Newcastle University

<sup>11</sup> [Killed By The State ~ a transcript of the November 2020 webinar.](#)