

**APPG Call for Evidence:
Inquiry into the Disproportionate Impact of Poverty
and Inequality on Disabled People**

Evidence provided by Mo Stewart

SUMMARY

This evidence in response to the APPG Call for Evidence is written in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,¹ ongoing since 2009.

The identified government-induced public health crisis² negatively impacting on the health, wellbeing and survival of many of those in greatest need is a consequence of social policy legislation adopted by successive neoliberal administrations, who introduced social policy reforms based on a fiscal priority whilst disregarding health and wellbeing.² As a direct consequence of these social policy reforms, the chronically ill and disabled community whose physical and financial survival is dependent upon disability benefit income when unable to work, have also suffered a disproportionate impact of poverty and inequality which was a political decision with no-one held to account for the additional suffering that would unfold.^{3,4}

‘However, since 2010 the UK Government has persisted in introducing radical policy changes and severe cuts, while refusing to evaluate the likely impact of those changes on disabled people. ...

In 2010 the Government began the process of cuts and other policy changes, sometimes called Austerity. From the start it was obvious to any objective and reasonably well-informed observer that disabled people and their families would suffer serious harm from the combined impact of these policies. However, the Government persisted in these harmful policies despite:

- There are legal and moral obligations to protect disabled people from harm, in particular obligations set out by the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with disabilities (UNCRPD).
- The Coalition Government claimed that it would protect disadvantaged groups from harm.
- There was no robust empirical evidence to justify any of the policies that have targeted disabled people and their families for cuts.
- There has been obvious and ongoing harm experienced by disabled people, their families and wider society.’⁴

¹ [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

² [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms *Justice, Power & Resistance* 6\(2\): 217-228](#)

³ [A fair society? How the cuts target disabled people](#)

⁴ [Cumulative Impact Assessment: Statement by the Centre for Welfare Reform](#)

CONSIDER

The mass inequality impacting on the disabled community was encouraged by the progressively deeper cuts in social care support service for people with severe disabilities, ongoing since 2010, due to the reduced funding for local government by successive administrations. Those in greatest need were always destined to suffer. 'By 2017 50% fewer people with severe disabilities were receiving adult social care'⁴ Therefore, influenced by neoliberal ideology, preventable harm of those in greatest need is ongoing justified by a fiscal priority, regardless of the human consequences of those in greatest need.

Elected in 2024, the Labour government is continuing with the hostile political rhetoric of previous administrations insisting that there are too many people claiming long-term disability benefit, without any evidence apart from political prejudice insisting that at least 1 million people should be moved from disability benefit into work. This is a political claim ongoing since the Blair administration in 2005, which is based on '*Cash Not Care*'.⁵ Whilst there is a vast amount of evidence demonstrating the negative impact of social policy reforms impacting on the chronically ill and disabled community, successive administrations disregard all published evidence that fails to support their hostile social policies which are guaranteed to cause preventable harm to many of those in greatest need. Various institutions provide published reports identifying poverty/destitution in the disabled community, including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)⁶ and the Institute for Fiscal Studies,(IFS)^{7,8} as reported by Ken Butler, DR UK's Welfare Rights and Policy Adviser:⁹

'The findings of the JRF research are both shocking but unsurprising.

The social security system should provide a financial safety net for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

Yet, since 2008, changes to welfare benefits have led to this safety net collapsing, causing disabled people to feel abandoned by a cruel and unfair system. Financial security for disabled people has all but vanished and many of us have been left living in poverty and isolation as a result.

Radical reform of the disability benefit system is urgently needed. Not only does a reformed system need to provide better and reliable financial support, it also needs to provide tailored support to those disabled people who could work without compulsion, conditionality and threat of sanction.'⁹

⁴ [Cumulative Impact Assessment: Statement by the Centre for Welfare Reform](#)

⁵ '[Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state](#),' Mo Stewart 2016, New Generation Publishing, London

⁶ [From disability to destitution – Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

⁷ [Living standards of working-age disability benefits recipients in the UK – Institute for Fiscal Studies](#)

⁸ [The effects of reforms to the Work Capability Assessment for incapacity benefits | Institute for Fiscal Studies](#)

⁹ [Disabled people make up nearly half of the most deprived working-age adults in the country | Disability Rights UK](#)

'*From disability to destitution*'⁶ is a disturbing title for any published report when referring to what is meant to be a civilised society, but it's even more disturbing when published by the respected *Joseph Rowntree Foundation* (JRF) and referring to life in the UK when disabled, unable to work and in need of financial support from the State.

'The official story on poverty among disabled people is bad enough. But new JRF analysis reveals that when it comes to the real essentials of life, like heating and food, the problem is far worse than acknowledged in Whitehall.

Illness is not an indulgence for which people should have to pay, the costs of which should be shared by the community. That is the logic that has inspired the NHS since its inception, and – you might think – a close corollary would be that the community should also collectively ensure that neither the costs nor the obstacles to earning a wage that disabilities impose should force anyone into penury. Indeed, from the early 1970s, a dedicated system of benefits evolved with precisely this aim in mind.

More recently, however, amid such retrenchment as the hacking back of the old Disability Living Allowance into the more stringent Personal Independence Payment, policy has again come to approach long-term health conditions almost as 'an indulgence'. The inevitable result is evident in, as JRF reported in [UK Poverty 2022](#), 'a gap of around 12 percentage points in poverty rates between disabled and non-disabled people' in our last pre-pandemic analysis, covering the financial year 2019/20.

That sounds bad enough. But what if we look instead specifically at deep poverty? Exactly how deep income poverty has to be to qualify is obviously somewhat arbitrary, but drawing the line at 40% of the contemporary median, as compared with the standard headline measure of 60%, is as defensible as anything else. If we do that and further restrict our attention to working-age families (pensioner families, of course, enjoy a different benefit regime) we find that about 15% of people in disabled families to be in deep poverty, compared with 9% of people in non-disabled families. ...

None of the absolute numbers here are vast, because we are deliberately restricting ourselves to the very poorest. But the thing to watch is the gap. And what the first chart shows is that the risk of deep poverty, on this basis, is some 60% higher in families where someone is disabled than those where nobody is. ... Immediately, we can see that the deep poverty rate for people in single disabled families is now considerably higher than that reported for all disabled families above. At around 20%, it is also strikingly high as an absolute figure, given this is a very low poverty line which is drawn to catch only the poorest of the poor. Moreover, we can see that the 'gap' with non-disabled Britain is now much more dramatic: the deep poverty rate for those in our 'single disabled' families is revealed as more than twice as high.'⁶

⁶ [From disability to destitution | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

DWP-RELATED DEATHS

For any APPG inquiry considering ‘the disproportionate impact of poverty and inequality on disabled people’ I suggest that the human consequences of what is an identified government-induced public health crisis² should be considered as part of the evidence for the inquiry. Many of these ‘human consequences’¹⁰ are demonstrated by the death of thousands of those in greatest need when, covertly, ‘*killed by the State*,’¹¹ without anyone held to account. Therefore, this ongoing government-induced human suffering of those in greatest need has led to a Proposal for an Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths,¹² which is felt by many to be long overdue.

‘If nothing else, the past fourteen years has demonstrated how easy it is to manipulate the British public and the British Parliament. At the same time as Iain Duncan Smith MP successfully created his ‘character assassination’ of disability benefit claimants when Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for the Coalition administration (2010-15), with his fiction regarding bogus benefit claimants, DWP official reports were claiming the opposite. Indeed, in 2011 the DWP identified that disability benefit fraud was only 0.5 percent, meaning that 99.5 percent of claims were genuine. The biggest threat to the welfare budget was the high level of DWP errors, not fraudulent claims.

Years later, in 2024, the DWP identified that disability benefit fraud had fallen to zero just days before Rishi Sunak, the outgoing Conservative Prime Minister, launched the latest attack on benefit claimants with new political powers for the DWP to access private bank accounts when claiming that access to disability benefit was being abused, which was untrue. ...

Given that the Chief Coroner has been alerted to the fact that the DWP disregarded successive Prevention of Future Death reports by various coroners, it is clear that if there isn’t much greater scrutiny of the DWP the chronically ill and disabled community will continue to live in fear, and the death tolls of those in greatest need will continue to rise when, relentlessly, *killed by the State*.¹²

Given that the New Economics Foundation identified that ‘the politics of ‘welfare’ has distorted public perceptions of social security’,¹³ it is hoped that this evidence is helpful to the APPG inquiry, demonstrating the government-induced public health crisis generated by successive administrations and negatively impacting on the health, wellbeing and survival of many of those in greatest need.

² [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms *Justice, Power & Resistance* 6\(2\): 217-228](#)

¹⁰ [The Department: How a violent government bureaucracy killed hundreds and hid the evidence. John Pring, 2024 Pluto Press, London](#)

¹¹ [Killed By The State: a transcript of a webinar conducted on 27th November 2020, hosted by the Centre for Welfare Reform](#)

¹² [Proposal for an Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths](#)

¹³ [The Politics of ‘Welfare’ Has Distorted Public Perceptions of Social Security. New Economics Foundation](#)