

## **SENSITIVE INFORMATION: RESEARCH SUMMARY**

Re: [Proposal for An Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths](#)

As an introduction, please be advised that I write in my capacity as the research lead for the [Preventable Harm Project](#) (the Project), ongoing since 2009. In my attempts to contact you, your team invited me to provide a research summary to bring to your attention. This summary will identify links to published evidence within the text for ease of access.

It is my understanding that you have been appointed as the [new Chair of NHS England](#) and, as the research lead for the Project, I am duty bound to alert you to the ongoing government-induced public health crisis which has implications for future demands on the NHS.

My most recent published paper is identified as '[The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms](#)' and I write to alert you to the impact of '*disability denial*', adopted by successive administrations, who introduced a fatally flawed assessment model to limit access to the Employment and Support (ESA) long-term disability benefit. The disturbing brutality adopted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), together with the relentless vitriolic political attacks against disability benefit claimants supported by hostile banner headlines in the national press, has [negatively impacted on public mental health](#), with one NHS report advising that almost 50% of ESA benefit claimants [had attempted suicide](#) at some point, which was never released to the media and was disregarded by the DWP.

The fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA), as adopted by the DWP, is identified as '*a functional non-medical assessment*' which totally disregards all clinical evidence when assessing chronically ill and disabled benefit claimants. The assessment was adopted to disregard all GP opinion regarding the clinical need of benefit claimants, and the WCA disregards diagnosis, prognosis, past medical history and prescribed drugs. Consequently, thousands of those in greatest need [have suffered and died](#) with no-one held to account.

There are volumes of published papers identifying this government-induced public health crisis. One significant paper was provided by [Professor Ben Barr](#) and colleagues in an academic paper which identified the threat to public health by the use of the WCA:

'Given that doctors and other health professionals have a professional and statutory duty to protect and promote the health of patients and the public, our evidence that this process is potentially harming the recipients of these assessments raises major ethical issues for those involved. ...

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 may 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 benefit.'

Attn: Dr Penny Dash

More recently, Consultant Psychiatrist Dr Jed Boardman expressed his concerns regarding the negative impact on public mental health of disability assessments in the [British Journal of Psychiatry](#):

‘This article has documented some of the problems faced by people with mental health conditions and disabilities resulting from the changes that have emerged from welfare reforms instituted over the past 12 years. These changes, rather than enhancing support for people with disabilities, have been unjust and ethically unsound, undermining citizenship and damaging to people’s health and well-being. It reinforces the extent to which many people with long-term mental health (and physical health) conditions are stigmatised and socially excluded and highlights the ways in which they are vulnerable to falling into poverty. ... At present, the system appears at worst to be punitive and at best to provide an inadequate sticking plaster.’

Given the above, you should be alert to the impact on NHS resources resulting from this government induced public health crisis. Recent reports have identified the excesses of GPs’ time needed to support benefit claimants [with requested paperwork](#) which is ‘*diverting doctors from seeing patients.*’ Also, given the excessive demands on Accident and Emergency departments, many of those in greatest need now visit A&E when the DWP’s actions have negatively impacted on their health, wellbeing and survival as a catastrophic indifference to human need is generating a mental health crisis impacting on the NHS as reported by the [British Journal of General Practice](#):

‘Ten years after the adoption of austerity measures, added to social policy reforms, why are those in greatest need living in fear of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)? Why were social policy reforms adopted that were guaranteed to kill many, including government imposed financial sanctions which led to some of those in greatest need actually starving to death in C21st UK; with no-one it seems objecting to this government enforced tyranny. ... Successive UK administrations justified the adoption of the fatally flawed WCA due to fiscal priorities, whilst disregarding health and wellbeing, and they successfully created a mental health crisis that few are reporting. Suicides linked to DWP assessments have increased. Relentless thoughts of suicide are linked with the assessments, with published research evidence which identifies the negative impact of the WCA continually dismissed by the DWP, who refuse to conduct a cumulative impact assessment regarding the impact of social policy reforms since 2010.’

I am aware that this evidence would not usually be brought to your attention as the Chair of NHS England. However, given the need to rebuild the NHS which has historically been underfunded for 30 years, I felt it appropriate to alert you to increased demands on the NHS due to the public health crisis generated by the DWP. Thank you for your time.

Mo Stewart  
5<sup>th</sup> March 2025