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Baroness Merron
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Priority attention

via email

Dear Lady Merron

Re: The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms¹

[Justice, Power and Resistance 6\(2\): 217-228](#)

I write in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,² ongoing since 2009, to alert you and colleagues at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to the identified and increasing public mental health crisis directly linked to successive social policy reforms,¹ and to the hostility demonstrated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) towards those in greatest need; which demonised disability benefit claimants when negatively impacting on public mental health^{3,4,5} with no-one held to account.

The findings highlight the systemic, intersectional and cumulative production of suicidality by governmental 'welfare reform' in the UK, through positioning welfare claimants as 'burdens' on society. They show that by locating the problem of burdensomeness in individual 'misperceptions', the Interpersonal Theory allows the government's role in crafting stigmatisation and conditions of suicidality to be overlooked and to be reproduced.³

It remains cause for concern that successive administrations disregarded the well-documented public health crisis¹⁻⁴ generated by political attacks against those in greatest need, whilst adopting social policy legislation destined to cause preventable harm to many.⁵

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

² [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

³ [Burden and benefits-related suicides: 'misperception' or state crafted reality? *Journal of Public Mental Health*](#)

⁴ [Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis *Journal of Public Mental Health*](#)

⁵ ['First, do no harm': are disability benefit assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health?](#)



The latest DWP threat to the health, wellbeing and survival of those in greatest need is posed by the DWP Pathways to Work Green Paper,⁶ now out for consultation, which has caused such concern that a group of this nation's top academic experts expressed their concerns in the *British Medical Journal*.⁷ This is rare, yet there was also another letter written by top UK Social Scientists to the Government and Parliament to express their concern regarding the further threatened cuts to Personal Independence Payment and Universal Credit.⁸ This letter was published online and shared with multiple MPs, and there is now a growing rebellion by backbench MPs against this impending increased preventable harm planned with these latest threatened cuts to disability benefits, which will negatively impact on those in greatest need:

“We are writing to express our concern about the planned cuts to Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit as outlined in the March 2025 Green Paper and Spring Statement. As social scientists we feel morally obligated to speak out against policy changes that evidence suggests will cause harm. It is our professional opinion that these cuts will cause disproportionate harm to disabled people and accomplish little or nothing in terms of helping the economy or balancing public finances.

As demonstrated by the Bibliography attached to this letter, the existing literature indicates that previous similar cuts to welfare, especially those targeted at disabled people, were ineffective in getting people back into work and instead drove people into deeper poverty, damaged mental health and were associated with high numbers of preventable premature deaths. Furthermore, the problems caused or exacerbated by such cuts typically end up being even more costly to resolve as they increase the burden on various public services.

Policy-makers in the UK Government should already be aware of the social research that has proven the ineffectiveness and harms of such approaches, and have been warned by the UN that they must reverse the disability welfare cuts enacted by the preceding Conservative Government. We urge the government to comply with the UN rather than indulge in further ineffectual and harmful cuts targeting disabled people. These cuts will not help disabled people back into work, bring growth, or balance public finances. They are likely to increase rates of poverty, mental ill-health, and premature death.

We call for all announced cuts to Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit to be overturned. Should the UK Government proceed with current plans, we implore all MPs to vote against these cuts when they come before Parliament and speak out against continued austerity. Public finances can and should be improved via redistributive measures such as a wealth tax. As once promised, those with the broadest shoulders should bear the heavier burden.”⁸

⁶ [DWP Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper](#)

⁷ [UK welfare reforms threaten health of the most vulnerable](#)

⁸ [Open letter from Social Scientists to UK Government and Parliament, opposing cuts to disability benefits outlined in the March 2025 Spring Statement](#)



As the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health I urge you to please access the above links and, in particular, to access the bibliography attached to the published letter from this nation's top Social Scientists,⁸ providing a vast amount of published peer-reviewed evidence demonstrating the public health crisis generated by successive social policy reforms, which have impacted on disability benefit(s), and those whose health, wellbeing and survival is dependent on them.

A public health crisis was guaranteed when social policy reforms adopted by successive administrations were based on a fiscal priority whilst disregarding health and wellbeing. This was always dangerous, and there have been thousands of deaths of those in greatest need when, quite literally, '*killed by the State*'.⁹ Consequently, there is now a proposal for an urgently needed Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths.¹⁰

In the distant past, this growing government-induced public health crisis was dismissed by the DHSC, claiming it was a DWP problem. This is unacceptable and a disregard of ethical duty and care to the chronically ill and disabled community who have been relentlessly intimidated by the DWP, causing a major and increasing public health crisis which should be a significant concern to the DHSC given the volumes of evidence demonstrating the preventable harm generated by the DWP when influenced by a notorious right-leaning think tank.¹¹

I trust this contact is welcome, that the contents of this letter are cause for serious concern, and that the DHSC will now consider the identified, ongoing and relentless preventable harm generated by the DWP when creating a well-documented public health crisis.

Yours sincerely

Mo Stewart

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



Copied to: Dr Jed Boardman, Consultant Psychiatrist and Senior Lecturer in Social Psychiatry
Professor Clare Bamba, Professor of Public Health & NIHR Senior Investigator Newcastle University
Professor Benjamin Barr, Professor of Applied Public Health Research University of Liverpool

⁸ [Open letter from Social Scientists to UK Government and Parliament, opposing cuts to disability benefits outlined in the March 2025 Spring Statement](#)

⁹ [Killed By The State? Social Policy Abused online seminar, November 2020](#)

¹⁰ [A Proposal for an Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths](#)

¹¹ [EXCLUSIVE: Iain Duncan Smith think tank behind latest DWP reforms targeting disabled people](#)