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The Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP
Secretary of State
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
6-12 Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Private & Confidential

via email

Dear Secretary of State,

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

[Justice, Power and Resistance 6\(2\): 217-228](#)¹

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

I write in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,² ongoing since 2009, which identified the government-induced public health crisis generated by the adoption of a fatally flawed assessment model to restrict access to long-term disability benefit.¹ The adoption of a fiscal priority for social policy reforms, whilst disregarding health and wellbeing, guaranteed a catastrophic impact on those in greatest need with all evidence of the identified government-induced public health crisis created by successive social policy reforms routinely disregarded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).^{3,4,5}

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.⁴

¹ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: *Justice, Power and Resistance* 2023 Vol 6 No 2 pp. 217-228](#)

² [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

³ [Killed By The State – social policy abused](#)

⁴ [Burden and benefits-related suicides: ‘misperception’ or state crafted reality? *Journal of Public Mental Health* 2022 21\(1\), pp.46-56](#)

⁵ [Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis *Journal of Public Mental Health* 2019 18\(4\), pp.224-230](#)



It remains cause for serious concern that successive administrations have disregarded various Prevention of Future Deaths coroners' reports,⁶ which identified the link between the fatally flawed DWP disability assessment and the suicides of vulnerable and chronically ill disability benefit claimants, which the DWP continue to dismiss.⁷ Secretary of State this is dangerous neglect, and an ongoing national scandal with no one held to account:

MATTERS OF CONCERN are as follows:

The DWP assessing doctor (who saw Mr O'Sullivan for a 90 minute consultation) did not take into account any of the views of Mr O'Sullivan's treating doctors, saying that the ultimate decision maker would do that.

However, the ultimate decision maker (who is not, I understand, medically qualified) did not request and so did not see any reports or letters from Mr O'Sullivan's general practitioner (who had assessed him as being unfit for work), his psychiatrist or his clinical psychologist.⁶

Please be advised that Professor Harrington warned the DWP in 2010 about the 'culture' developed by underqualified 'Decision Makers' who disregard clinical opinion provided by the medical support of the benefit claimants, which was a dangerous precedent guaranteed to generate preventable harm.⁸ Deaths were always inevitable if medical opinion impacting on the clinical needs of chronically ill and disabled benefit claimants are disregarded by the DWP.

It is important to note that advice from the Atos assessment to the Decision Maker is just advice. It provides evidence collected by a healthcare professional (HCP) as to whether the claimant has or has not met a particular threshold of capability for work. The Decision Maker should then use this evidence as part of a suite of information, including the original ESA50 [application form] and any other additional evidence provided by the claimant to make an informed judgement. They should, for instance, consider whether the findings of the Atos assessment are consistent with what the claimant has stated on the ESA50, or with any particular representations or case notes from the claimant's own doctors and HCPs. (p.47) ...

It is clear that a culture has developed amongst Decision Makers that sees that the advice from Atos as forming the decision, and that they are simply to ratify that decision. This is evident in the language officials use about decisions; many talk about '*overruling*' the Atos advice rather than making an evidence-based decision, while others reference the difficulty in going against the recommendation of the Atos HCP: '*It's difficult. I mean, they're a doctor. They've assessed this person. I don't know enough about it to overrule what they are saying*'. Jobcentre Plus Decision Maker. (p.50)⁸

⁶ <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/OSullivan-2014-0012.pdf>

⁷ [DWP dismissed coroner's concerns over WCA suicidal link, document reveals. Disability News Service](#)

⁸ [Harrington, M. \(2010\) *An Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment*. London: The Stationary Office](#)



The adoption of successive social policy reforms were introduced due to the impact of neoliberal politics, and the long-held political ambition to eventually demolish the UK welfare state to be replaced by income replacement health insurance, which was reported long ago and enjoys bi-partisan support.^{9,10} Social policies were adopted to gradually move the UK towards this ultimate political ambition.

Stewart's research is compelling. Her findings are backed by strong evidence from a broad range of sources which are transparently included in the book. The writing style makes the book accessible beyond academics and should be widely read and debated. ... Cash Not Care is a harrowing but vital read, and an absolute must for policy makers, responsible journalists and activists.¹⁰

Clearly, the multiple warnings to successive administrations which identified the increasing government-induced public health crisis impacting on the health, wellbeing and survival of disability benefit claimants has been disregarded by the DWP, and it is long past time for this growing national scandal to be addressed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mo Stewart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mo Stewart

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



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

Editor [*The Preventable Harm Project*](#)

Researcher [*Influences and Consequences*](#)

⁹ [Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state: Amazon.co.uk: Stewart, Mo: 9781785077838: Books](#)

¹⁰ [Cash Not Care – Reviewed | Guest Blog | Independent Living](#)

Copied to: The Rt Hon Darren Jones MP – Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms KC, MP – Minister for Social Security & Disability
Baroness Merron – Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety,
Women's Health and Mental Health

Dr China Mills – Healing Justice Head of Research

Dr Gail Allsopp – DWP Chief Medical Advisor

The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP – Constituency MP