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The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street, London
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Private & Confidential

PRIORITY ATTENTION

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

I write in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,² ongoing since 2009, to alert you to the public alarm generated by the latest government threat to the health and wellbeing of the chronically ill and disabled community who are unable to work.³

It remains cause for serious concern that the administration emphasise claims that mental illnesses have been 'overdiagnosed,' whilst, constantly, disregarding the volumes of published and detailed peer-reviewed research evidence demonstrating the government-induced public health crisis^{1,4-6} impacting on those in greatest need, due to the endless hostile and often shameful political rhetoric against disability benefit claimants.⁷ This is a government-induced public health crisis, not reckless overdiagnosis of mental illness, and another demonstration of policies adopted using a fiscal priority whilst disregarding the health and wellbeing of those in greatest need who live in fear of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)^{1,4-6} and, now, also the Department of Health and Social Care.^{3,8}

¹ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: *Justice, Power and Resistance* 6\(2\) :217-228 DOI: 10.1332/GQDH4178](#)

² [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

³ [Streeting orders probe of mental illness overdiagnosis - News - Patient Safety Learning - the hub](#)

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

⁵ [Burden and benefits-related suicides: 'misperception' or state crafted reality? *Journal of Public Mental Health* 21\(1\): 46-56](#)

⁶ ['First do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? *Journal of Epidemiol Community Health* 2016; 70: 339-345 doi: 10.1136/jech-2015-206209](#)

⁷ [Letter to Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, 30 September 2025](#)

⁸ [Wes Streeting: there is overdiagnosis of mental health conditions](#)



Our study provides an initial investigation of the mental health effects of this natural policy experiment, indicating that it may have substantial adverse consequences for mental health. ... Given that doctors and other health professionals have professional and statutory duties to 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. Regulators and other bodies representing health professionals should advocate for the benefits and harms of alternative disability assessment policies to be established through a well-designed trial. ...

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 benefits. (p.343)⁶ *Prof Ben Barr and colleagues*

I believe you should be alert to the fact that mental health experts have been concerned regarding your comments which are viewed as a threat to benefit claimants with profound mental illness,⁹ and many experts are wondering what ‘evidence’ you claim to be following to justify generating more fear in the chronically ill and disabled community who, constantly, feel punished for being unable to work. Actions always have consequences and it is disturbing that successive administrations demonstrate that, due entirely to the welfare budget, disability benefit claimants will be treated with suspicion and the human consequences are disregarded as deaths linked to disability assessments continue to increase.¹⁰

The evidence is overwhelming: Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions have been systematically harmed by a welfare system that prioritises cost-cutting over care, suspicion over support, and bureaucracy over basic human dignity.

For years we have seen the devastating consequences of punitive policies, most notably the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and wider benefits system, which have forced people into impossible situations – pushing many into poverty, mental distress, and, tragically, even to their deaths. Reports have repeatedly exposed the failures of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in safeguarding Disabled people’s lives, yet accountability remains absent, and lessons are not being learned. Instead, we see the same hostile rhetoric and damaging policies recycled by successive governments, ignoring the real-life consequences for those most in need of support.¹⁰ *Kamran Mallick, CEO DRUK*

⁶ [‘First do no harm’: are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? *Journal of Epidemiol Community Health* 2016; 70: 339-345 doi: 10.1136/jech-2015-206209](#)

⁹ [Experts criticise Streeting for saying mental health problems overdiagnosed](#)

¹⁰ [An independent advisory panel on DWP-related deaths](#)



You should be alert to the *'strong evidence of the causal link between being on a low income and the likelihood of experiencing poor mental health. There is also evidence that poor mental health has a negative impact on employment outcomes.'*¹¹ Secretary of State, for those in greatest need we are living in very dark and dangerous times. When are Ministers going to be alert to the impact on population mental health when generating more doubt as to their eligibility to be supported by the welfare state when, clearly, too ill to work? The British public didn't grant the Labour Party authority to terrorise those in greatest need, and I strongly suggest you stop doing it as more chronically ill and disabled people are destined to die when, covertly, *'killed by the State'*. (p.217)¹

Yours sincerely

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Editor [The Preventable Harm Project](#)
Researcher [Influences and Consequences](#)

Copied to:

The Rt Hon Darren Jones MP – Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister
The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP – Minister for Social Security and Disability
The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP – Constituency MP
Dr Sarah Hughes – CEO MIND
Kamran Mallick – CEO Disability Rights UK
Dr China Mills – Healing Justice Head of Research
Dr Gail Allsopp – DWP Chief Medical Advisor
Dr Stephen Brien – Chair, Social Security Advisory Committee
Layla Maran MP – Chair, Health & Social Care Committee
Professor David Hunter – Institute of Health & Society, Newcastle University
Lorraine Jackson CBE – Director of DWP/DHSC Joint Work & Health Directorate, DHSC
Zara Todd – Chair, Independent Disability Advisory Board
Jeremy Bernhaut – Head of Policy, Rethink Mental Illness
Tom Pollard – Head of Policy, Campaigns & Public Affairs, MIND
Iain Porter – Senior Policy Adviser, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Secretary, Disability Labour

¹ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: Justice, Power and Resistance 6\(2\) :217-228](#)
[DOI: 10.1332/GQDH4178](#)

¹¹ [Inadequate Universal Credit and barriers to work. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 2023](#)