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The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Minister for Social Security and Disability
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London, SW1H 9NA

Private & Confidential

via email

Dear Sir Stephen

Re: [The Health, Poverty and Employment Effects of Cutting Income Replacement Benefits for the Disabled](#)¹

Further to our previous contact, I write to alert you to a new published academic paper by the distinguished Professor Ben Barr and colleagues at the University of Liverpool, as identified in the above link.

The paper identifies the impact of changes to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) introduced in the 2016 Welfare Reform Act, which reduced ESA benefit payments, and exposes the fact that there is no evidence of subsequent increased employment of disabled people. In fact, the evidence demonstrates an increase in poverty of disability benefit claimants, and an increase in Common Mental Disorders (CMD) of people with long-term conditions (LTC). Given the subsequent primary legislation for social policy reforms, this evidence is disturbing, with implications of future harm to those in greatest need.

Although there is growing evidence that welfare reforms such as these can have major impacts on public health, they are introduced without any plans to monitor these impacts or modify them to minimise these effects. These adverse health consequences, alongside increases in risks of poverty, are devastating for the individuals involved but also create a false economy of cost shifting. The initial welfare savings also lead to major costs to other public services, notably the National Health Service (NHS), social care and local authority support. ... The stated aim of policymakers for these reforms is to improve the economic participation and employment of people with disabilities. Our evidence indicates that this is not the effect of these changes. Rather, by increasing mental distress and poverty, these reforms may have the opposite effect and reduce social inclusion of people with disabilities.¹



Evidence from the research identified that *'the policy led to around 31,000 additional people entering severe poverty and 92,000 people developing common mental disorders each year following the reform.'*¹ It is clearly demonstrated that the relentless ongoing political attacks on the chronically ill and disabled community suffering with LTCs, which is a cost reducing priority by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), regardless of the negative impact on population mental health, has continued with no one held to account for the human suffering created by successive social policy reforms increasing CMDs.

Given the detailed evidence provided by the *'Safeguarding Vulnerable Claimants'*² report by the Work and Pensions Committee, demonstrating the hostile culture within the DWP, and the detailed published research evidence identifying the government-induced public health crisis,³ I strongly recommend that the DWP consider the identified and relentless preventable harm generated by successive social policy reforms and make a concerted effort to reduce this unnecessary suffering.

Yours sincerely

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

¹ The Health, Poverty and Employment Effects of Cutting Income Replacement Benefits for the Disabled: A Difference – in – Difference Analysis of the 2016 Welfare Reforms
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5717523

² Safeguarding Vulnerable Claimants - A report by the Work and Pensions Select Committee, published by the House of Commons in May 2025. Available from:
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/47840/documents/250688/default/>

³ The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms, Mo Stewart, 2023 DOI: 10.1332/GQDH4178
<https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/jpr/6/2/article-p217.xml>

Copied to: Dr Huihui Song, University of Liverpool
Dr Gail Allsopp, DWP Chief Medical Advisor
Debbie Abrahams MP Chair, Work and Pensions Committee
Layla Moran MP Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Sir Geoffrey Clifton Brown MP Chair, Public Accounts Committee
Stephen Barclay MP