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The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

via email

Dear Steve,

Re: Health, poverty and employment effects of cutting income replacement benefits for the disabled [J. Epidemiol Community Health 2026; 0: 1-8](#).¹

Further to previous contact, I'm writing in my capacity as the research lead for the UK Preventable Harm Project² to alert you to the above link to a new peer-reviewed research paper¹ published online prior to publication by the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* and written by the critically acclaimed public health team at Liverpool University, led by Professor Ben Barr:

A central question underpinning these reforms is whether reducing the generosity of incapacity benefits is an effective means of increasing employment and reducing economic inactivity, or whether such reductions instead exacerbate poverty and worsen health outcomes without delivering meaningful labour market gains. ... (p.2)

Previous UK reforms to eligibility assessments and conditionality have been linked to increases in mental health problems and suicides, with little evidence of sustained improvements in employment outcomes among people with long-term conditions (LTC). However, there has been no causal evaluation of the 2017 ESA payment reduction and limited evidence examining its combined effects on poverty, mental health and employment transitions. ... (p.2)

It is perhaps unsurprising that policies that reduce the payments to social security claimants increase risk of poverty. It could be argued, however, that these income effects are compensated by increased employment incentives, reducing poverty through higher employment. In our study, **we found no evidence** of an increase in employment following the reduction in benefit generosity, while the risk of severe poverty increased. (p.5)¹ [My emphasis. MS]

¹ Song, H. *et al* (2026) Health, poverty and employment effects of cutting income replacement benefits for the disabled. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2026; 0: 1-8 [doi:10.1136/jech-2025-225477](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2025-225477)

² [Preventable Harm Project](#)



I believe I have regularly advised you of the ongoing and well documented government-induced public health crisis³⁻⁸ impacting on those in greatest need by social policy reforms of recent years via the Coalition and successive Conservative administrations; which have been exclusively concerned with a fiscal priority whilst disregarding health and wellbeing. Many people in greatest need were always destined to suffer, with no-one held to account.⁹

To justify the adoption of harsh and unnecessary austerity measures, which were introduced without ethical approval, the Coalition administration elected in 2010 vehemently challenged the integrity of the chronically ill and disabled community and routinely accused disability benefit claimants of fraud, while failing to produce evidence to support their claims. Their often hostile rhetoric encouraged a 213 percent increase in prosecuted disability hate crimes, and successive administrations disregarded the thousands of deaths directly linked to the Work Capability Assessment, which was adopted using a discredited and dangerous biopsychosocial model of assessment to restrict access to long-term disability benefit. Influenced by corporate America since 1992, the UK social policy reforms guaranteed that many of those in greatest need were destined to die when, covertly, *killed by the State*. (p.217)³

The UK benefits from world-leading academic experts in social geography, public health, and the social sciences. As an independent disability studies researcher, I have yet to discover any publisher peer-reviewed research paper which supports successive government claims that many disability benefit claimants are fraudulent. However, the chronically ill and disabled community who are unable to work are relentlessly verbally attacked by senior politicians, with no politician seemingly identifying the public health crisis they are generating by their relentless hostile attacks against those in greatest need.

Given the growing government-induced public health crisis,³⁻⁸ as continued by the Labour

³ Stewart, M. (2022) The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms;

Justice, Power and Resistance 6(2): 217-228, July 2022. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1332/GQDH4178>

⁴ Barr, B., Taylor-Robinson, D., Stuckler, D., Loopstra, R., Reeves, A. and Whitehead, M. (2016) 'First, do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? A longitudinal ecological study, *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 70(4): 339–45, doi: 10.1136/jech-2015-206209.

⁵ Boardman, J. (2020) Dismantling the social safety net: social security reforms, disability and mental health conditions, *British Journal of Psychiatry Bulletin*, 44(5): 208–212, doi: 10.1192/bjb.2020.79.

⁶ Garthwaite, K. (2014) Fear of the brown envelope: exploring welfare reform with long-term sickness benefit recipients, *Social and Policy Administration*, 48(7): 782–98, doi: 10.1111/spol.12049.

⁷ Stewart, M. (2019) Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis, *Journal of Public Mental Health*, 18(4): 224–30, doi: 10.1108/JPMH-07-2019-0070.

⁸ Stewart, M. (2018) Psychological tyranny prescribed by the DWP: preventable harm is government policy, *British Journal of General Practice* 2018, 68, 677: 579

⁹ Stewart, M. (2026) No-one held to account. *Citizen Network* online <https://citizen-network.org/library/no-one-held-to-account.html>



administration,¹⁰ I would be most grateful if you could please alert your colleagues in the Conservative opposition to resist their relentless, disturbing and hostile political attacks against the disabled community, which seem to have increased in opposition.^{11,12} You are alert to the disturbing commentary by your colleagues at the 2025 Conservative Party conference, with commentary by the Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions¹² not only disturbing but also verging on disability hate speech, which is actually against the law and was totally untrue:

... millions have got themselves a sicknote from the GP and signed onto sickness benefits with just a form and a phone call. Millions are getting benefits for anxiety and ADHD along with a free Motability car. ... The problem is, you can get £5,000 more per year on sickness benefits than as a minimum wage worker, so no surprise that's what many people are choosing, and it's wrong. Our welfare system should be a safety net, not a lifestyle choice. ... Fix the sicknote system, bring back face-to-face assessments, end sickness benefit for low level mental health problems, stop the abuse of Motability and put British citizens first in our benefits system.¹²

Other than hostile political rhetoric, there is not, nor has there ever been, any evidence of significant levels of disability benefit fraud, with official Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) figures demonstrating that **disability benefit fraud is minimal**.¹³

These comments by Sunak, including calling for an end to what he called 'a sicknote culture,' led to him being accused of whipping up hostility towards disabled people, and demonising and scapegoating claimants of disability benefits. ...

But they also show that fraud for PIP claimants fell from 0.2 per cent in 2022-23 to 0.0 per cent, while fraud by Disability Living Allowance was estimated at just 0.1 per cent.¹³

¹⁰ Pring, J. (2025) Anger and frustration after DWP's latest jobcentre announcement and McFadden's 'incentives' comment. *Disability News Service*, 25 September.

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/anger-and-frustration-after-dwps-latest-jobcentre-announcement-and-mcfaddens-incentives-comment/>

¹¹ Letter to Kemi Badenoch MP, Leader of HM Official Opposition

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/REDACTED-Letter-to-Kemi-Badenoch-leader-of-the-opposition.pdf>

¹² Letter to Helen Whately MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/REDACTED-Letter-to-Helen-Whately-Shadow-SoS-for-Work-and-Pensions.pdf>

¹³ Pring, J. (2024) DWP silent over whether Sunak was wrong to say PIP as being exploited, as fraud falls to zero *Disability News Service* 23 May

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-silent-over-whether-sunak-was-wrong-to-say-pip-was-being-exploited-as-fraud-falls-to-zero/>



Furthermore, there has been no less than three reports during previous Coalition and Conservative administrations by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, challenging the UK administration for breaches in the UN Convention.¹⁴ All the political rhetoric against the disabled community doesn't change the fact that successive UK administrations have led a hostile political attack against those in greatest need, with no-one held to account.⁹

A United Nations panel has presented UK government officials with a stark assessment of reforms to the benefits system over the past 14 years, describing a political agenda that "demonises" disabled people and results in unacceptable living standards. The observations came at a session of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that was held in Geneva yesterday, following up previous inquiries – including a damning 2016 report. That document found welfare reforms since 2010 had resulted in “grave or systematic violations” of disabled peoples' rights. ...

"We see a reform agenda that is framed in a political narrative that demonises disabled people, including proposals to cut disability benefits to reward working people by cutting taxes – which tells disabled people that they are underserving citizens," she said.¹⁴

Given the government-induced public health crisis initially generated by Conservative rule, I would be grateful if you could please alert your colleagues to the new paper by the Liverpool team, and strongly suggest they stop attempting to score political points against the Labour government at the expense of some of the most vulnerable people in the UK.

Yours sincerely

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

Mo Stewart

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The Preventable Harm Project

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

Editor [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

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⁹ Stewart, M. (2026) No-one held to account. *Citizen Network* online
<https://citizen-network.org/library/no-one-held-to-account.html>

¹⁴ Dunton, J. (2024) United Nations takes aim at UK's disability benefits reforms
<https://www.civilserviceworld.com/news/article/united-nations-takes-aim-at-uks-disability-benefits-reforms>