

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP  
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

1 August 2023

Dear Sir Stephen,

### **Health assessments for benefits**

Thank you for your letter dated 03 July 2023, which followed the Government response to the Work and Pensions Committee's report, 'Health assessments for benefits'.

Please find answers below to the points raised in your letter.

- 1. In our recommendation at paragraph 28, we proposed that an external assessment be undertaken of the potential physical and mental health effects of the proposed changes to health assessments. The response focussed on internal work being undertaken by the Government. Does the Government have any plans for an external assessment of the effects of the proposed changes in the White Paper?**

The department routinely evaluates and impacts policy changes. All evaluation adheres to professional processes and protocols, with evaluation being aligned with the detailed implementation of the changes. As the detail of the policy takes shape, further work will be undertaken to define and scope the details of the evaluation and, where appropriate, consideration given to the use of external evaluation contractors. Publication of any evaluation will follow professional guidance. The proposed changes outlined in the White Paper will be rolled out carefully and adjusted based upon the evaluation findings.

- 2. What is the Government's view on whether "external researchers [should] have access to good quality, anonymised data" to assist their research, as we recommended at paragraph 38?**

The department is engaged with [ADR UK](#) (Administrative Data Research UK) who are looking to work with government departments to make more de-identified administrative data available to researchers in a secure way, while making access quicker and easier. Some key DWP data have already been made available to ONS who, in turn, can make this available to accredited researchers via their Secure Research Service. We are also in regular discussion about making available other potential data.

The department is also engaged in specific data sharing projects which look to make de-identified data available to researchers for specifically defined projects, where data requirements are discussed on a case-by-case basis. For example, the department is undertaking a data linking project with South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLAM) and King's College London (KCL). This project has linked the department's benefit data to SLAM's mental health data and external SLAM-accredited researchers are able to apply to use the linked data<sup>1</sup>.

**3. The Government rejected the Committee's recommendation that assessments should be recorded by default, with an opt-out provision, and instead favoured the continuation of an opt-in approach. What are the Government's reasons and evidence for believing an opt-out option, which would still enable an assessment to not be recorded, would damage trust in the system and cause concern (paragraph 98)? Does the Government recognise that all the providers now favour recording by default?**

The department is aware of provider's views on default audio recording which they explained to the committee. Default audio recordings might increase trust in the system for some claimants, but might be of concern to other claimants who are already worried by the assessment process, even if they are provided with the option to opt-out. Some claimants may need to discuss sensitive and personal information at the assessment and may not want this to be recorded; they may be concerned about how their information would be kept safe; and may worry about asking, or remembering to ask, to opt-out. Our current opt-in system provides claimants who want an audio recording the opportunity to request one, though take up is low.

As we said in our response to the Committee, the Health Transformation Programme will explore the recording of assessments as part of its work to improve the whole assessment process, including helping claimants to better understand the availability of the current opt-in option.

**4. At paragraph 109, we proposed that the Department develop targeted interventions to improve awareness of Attendance Allowance (AA). In addition to the information provided in the Response, how is the Department working with organisations to raise awareness of AA?**

The department is constantly working to improve the way it communicates information and is committed to encouraging people to take up the benefits they are entitled to.

Information and advice about entitlement to Attendance Allowance and other benefits are available from a range of outlets, including Jobcentre Plus offices, DWP and other helplines, gov.uk and other websites, local authorities, Citizens' Advice and welfare benefit offices, social services, voluntary organisations, such

as Age UK and Macmillan, public libraries, health clinics, doctors' surgeries and health visitors.

Of course, if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

**Tom Pursglove MP**

Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work



## Work and Pensions Committee

03 July 2023

### Tom Pursglove MP

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work  
Department for Work and Pensions  
(By e-mail only)

Dear Tom,

#### **Government Response: Health Assessments for Benefits**

Thank for you for providing the Government Response to the Committee's Report, *Health assessments for benefits*.

The Committee has now considered the Response and would be grateful if you could provide further information on the following points:

1. In our recommendation at paragraph 28, we proposed that an external assessment be undertaken of the potential physical and mental health effects of the proposed changes to health assessments. The response focussed on internal work being undertaken by the Government. Does the Government have any plans for an external assessment of the effects of the proposed changes in the White Paper?
2. What is the Government's view on whether "external researchers [should] have access to good quality, anonymised data" to assist their research, as we recommended at paragraph 38?
3. The Government rejected the Committee's recommendation that assessments should be recorded by default, with an opt-out provision, and instead favoured the continuation of an opt-in approach. What are the Government's reasons and evidence for believing an opt-out option, which would still enable an assessment to not be recorded, would damage trust in the system and cause concern (paragraph 98)? Does the Government recognise that all the providers now favour recording by default?"
4. At paragraph 109, we proposed that the Department develop targeted interventions to improve awareness of Attendance Allowance (AA). In addition to the information provided in the Response, how is DWP working with organisations to raise awareness of AA?

I would be grateful for your response to these questions by Monday 31 July. As is usual practice with the Committee's correspondence, I will be publishing this letter and your response on the Committee's website.

Yours sincerely,

**Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP**  
**Chair, Work and Pensions Committee**