

Written evidence from the Royal Mencap Society CLP0037

About Mencap

Our vision is for the UK to be the best place in the world for people with a learning disability to live happy and healthy lives. We do this by supporting the 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK and their families, improving access to health and care services as well as education and employment. We directly support over 5,000 people with a learning disability to live their lives the way they want.

A learning disability is caused by the way the brain develops before, during or shortly after birth. It is always lifelong and affects intellectual and social development. Those people with a learning disability with eligible needs for care and support will therefore likely need to access support for their entire adult lives.

Summary

- As part of the government's cost of living support package, throughout 2023-24 people with a learning disability who claim means-tested benefits will receive 3 payment instalments totalling £900. Anyone who claims disability living allowance (DLA), personal independence payments (PIP) or adult disability payment (ADP) will also receive a further one-off payment of £150 which will be paid in the summer.
- Mencap welcomes the unprecedented nature of these measures and recognises the beneficial impact that they have had on households across the country.
- However, we are concerned that the government has failed to adequately recognise the increased costs that disproportionately impact people with a learning disability and the concurrent structural economic inequality they face: people with a learning disability have been impacted by the cost of living to a far greater degree and the existing cost of living payments are not commensurate with the scale of need.
- Whilst we welcome the cash-first approach, the government also needs to introduce permanent, long-term solutions that address the root causes of poverty for disabled households: failure to do so will mean that cost of living support payments have limited efficacy in helping disabled people weather this crisis.

1.To what extent have the cost of living support payments been sufficient at helping eligible households meet the cost of essentials such as food and electricity?

Increased costs of essentials for people with a learning disability

1. People with a learning disability face higher day-to-day living costs than non-disabled people. New data from Scope indicates that on average disabled households need an additional £975 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households, equivalent to 63% of household income after housing costs.¹
2. These extra costs occur in a wider context of record inflation and a welfare system that increasingly does not provide disabled people with enough to guarantee their essentials.²

¹ Scope, Disability Price Tag, 2023

² JRF, An Essentials Guarantee, https://www.jrf.org.uk/system/files/an_essentials_guarantee_report.pdf

3. Disabled people are also almost three times as likely to live in material deprivation than the rest of the population³ and around 600,000 disabled people already have just £10 or less per week to pay for food and other essentials.⁴
4. Many people with a learning disability also have higher energy and water requirements than non-disabled people which has made them all the more vulnerable to price increases. Mobility and hygiene needs require increased consumption of electricity, for example, to run electric wheelchairs and scooters, or frequent use of washing machines and tumble driers. Some people with a learning disability have additional health barriers, requiring medical equipment like oxygen concentrators, ventilators, sensory mats that detect seizures, feeding pumps, saturation monitors, or dialysis machines, which require constant charging. Other health conditions may require homes to be heated to a higher temperature to help with circulation.
5. All of the above indicates the increased vulnerability that people with a learning disability have to the cost of living crisis and the necessity of comprehensive, robust and targeted support payments for this group that are set at a rate which meets their needs.

Cost of living payments

6. Some elements of the cost of living payments have increased their impact, such as the fact that they are tax-free, do not count towards the benefit cap or contribute to any social care assessment of resources.
7. However, the flat-rate nature of the £900 cost of living payments and the low-figure sum of the £150 disability cost of living payment do not adequately account for the disproportionately high extra costs that disabled people face; in fact, the one-off disability payment is less than a quarter of the monthly costs of disabled households outlined in point 1.
8. Even when in receipt of cost of living payments, many people with a learning disability and their families or carers are still forced to make choices about purchasing their essentials which could be detrimental to their health and wellbeing. Data from the 1,000+ individuals surveyed by Mencap in January 2023 show that 26% of people with a learning disability who responded reported not turning the lights on, 35% reported skipping meals and 38% had not used their heating when they were cold.⁵
9. As a result, it is our view that the cost of living support payments have not been at a sufficient level to meet the costs outlined in points 1-5 and as such were not commensurate with the scale of need for people with a learning disability.

2. What role have the following factors played in access to the cost-of-living support payments:

- a) **Passporting: not already in receipt of certain means-tested benefits, despite being eligible, and consequently being prevented from accessing emergency support**

10. We recognise that targeting cost of living payments through the benefits system means that support can be administered nationally and efficiently (compared with locally-administered

³ Scope calculations based on the microdata of Quarterly Labour Force Survey various quarters.

⁴ <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/about-us/our-news/press-releases/rising-costs-are-catastrophe-disabled-people>

⁵ Mencap web survey, January 2023

funds) and has meant that many people with a learning disability continue to receive vital help.

11. However, linking cost of living support payments to benefits as the only mechanism for payment receipt, means that these emergency measures risk missing those who aren't already claiming benefits they are entitled to. We are concerned that many people with a learning disability could be missing out on cost of living support payments due to accessibility barriers within the welfare system.

b) Cliff-edges: not being in receipt of a certain means-tested benefit, because households failed to meet certain qualifying thresholds;

12. Claimants whose incomes are low enough to bring them within the scope of the cost of living payment for means-tested benefits are, by definition, on a low income.
13. There are many other disabled people whose incomes are not significantly above means-test levels and who consequently experience similar problems when accessing essentials during the cost of living crisis.
14. We have concerns that people with a learning disability and their family members who narrowly fail to meet eligibility criteria for means-tested benefits will miss out on the £900 cost of living support payment, and will only have the £150 disability payment. This could result in people effectively missing out on support twice – marginally missing out on their original benefit payment but also on the emergency support that is tied to it.

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