**Austerity cuts to social care and health caused 57,000 deaths, research suggests**

The government has refused to apologisefor the “appallingly unnecessary” impact of austerity spending cuts, afterresearchers linked post-2010 reductions in spending on social care and health to more than 57,000 deaths in just four years.

The findings of the government-funded research suggest that cuts to social care, health and public health caused 57,550 more deaths in England than would have been expected if spending had continued on pre-2010 trends.

The research shows the number of deaths due to austerity was even higher [than suggested by previous research](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/research-linking-care-cuts-to-120000-deaths-is-fresh-evidence-austerity-kills/), which had linked about 45,000 deaths to health and social care funding cuts between 2010 and 2014.

The researchers also found that extra funding on social care is more than twice as productive in terms of preventing deaths as the same amount of funding spent on healthcare.

The researchers at the [University of York](https://www.york.ac.uk/) conclude: “Our results are consistent with the hypothesis that the slowdown in the rate of improvement in life expectancy in England and Wales since 2010 is attributable to spending constraints in the healthcare and social care sectors.”

The average amount spent by local authorities on adult social care in 2013-14 was £307 per person, although this “varied considerably”, with Barnsley spending £209 per person compared with £660 per person in the City of London.

Real social care spending increased by 2.20 per cent per head between 2001-02 and 2009-10, but it fell by 1.57 per cent from 2010-11 to 2014-15.

The analysis suggests that a one per cent fall in social care spending would lead to 1,569 extra deaths, so the total cut in social care spending between 2010-11 and 2014-15 – comparing the actual level with how it would have been if it had continued to increase at 2.20 per cent a year – will have caused 23,662 additional deaths.

The same analysis applied to the loss of healthcare spending caused 33,888 extra deaths, they believe.

Professor Peter Beresford, co-chair of the disabled people’s and service-user network [Shaping Our Lives](https://www.shapingourlives.org.uk/), said: “We see the deaths caused by the austerity cuts as appallingly unnecessary and our major concern is that they should not be lost and forgotten as simply another set of statistics but need urgently to be acted upon in the interests of both disabled and non-disabled people.”

A spokesperson for [Manchester Disabled People Against Cuts (MDPAC)](https://twitter.com/McrDPAC) said: “That social care spending is twice as effective at saving lives than healthcare adds further evidence and urgency to our call for a [National Independent Living Support Service](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/meeting-could-lead-to-groundswell-of-support-for-independent-living-campaign/), free at the point of need, co-designed with disabled people.

“And crucially, an end to government choosing austerity and the outdated and wrong dogma that supports this deadly policy.”

[Earlier this month](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/video-van-drives-disabled-voices-right-to-the-edge-of-tory-conference/), MDPAC helped organise a mobile video screen that showed messages from disabled people about the years of attacks on their support and rights to delegates visiting the annual Conservative party conference in Manchester.

A spokesperson for [Cheshire DPAC](https://twitter.com/OCharging), which also helped organise the mobile video screen, said: “The York researchers’ findings deepen our understanding of the impact of political decisions on disabled voters’ lives – and the risk to life that results from health and social care policy that opts for short-term electoral advantage over the interest of society as a whole.

“The main political parties’ internal cultures tend to foster ableist attitudes, and that inevitably results in production of poorly-designed social care policy that fails to uphold disabled people’s rights.

“We have to start withholding our support and votes from politicians who fail to engage with the transformative potential of disabled people’s own social care policy proposals.

“The way forward for us as a progressive and inclusive society is to reframe social care as the right to an independent life, supported by universal, publicly-owned services, free at the point of need.”

[In the paper](https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/11/10/e046417#xref-ref-8-1), published by BMJ Open and funded by the National Institute for Health Research, a government agency, the researchers say that the powerful impact of extra social care spending on reducing deaths is “slightly surprising”.

But they say this is likely to be because cuts to social care spending have both direct and indirect effects.

Direct effects could include cuts to social care increasing the risk of life-threatening falls.

And indirect effects could include a lack of social care leading to a hospital being unable to discharge patients from hospital, so bed cannot be used by others who might benefit from them.

The researchers say: “Although social care is primarily concerned with improving the quality of life, it is perfectly plausible that social care extends life and that those with care needs enjoy both a lower mortality rate and a better quality of life in those [local authorities] with more generous social care provision.”

DHSC refused this week to apologise for the tens of thousands of deaths the research suggests were caused by the post-2010 period of austerity, or to say if it accepted that this sharp decrease in spending on health and social care was a mistake.

It also refused to say if it accepted the findings of the government-funded research.

But asked if DHSC agreed that the research made a strong argument for sharply-increased spending on social care in next week’s spending review, a government spokesperson said: “We are committed to levelling up health and the new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities will support people of all ages, in all areas of the country, to live healthier lives.

“The government is helping local authorities improve public health by increasing their grant to over £3.3 billion this year, as well as making over £10 billion available to address the wider costs and impacts of COVID-19.

“We are also investing £36 billion in health and care over the next three years\* – including £5.4 billion for social care – to put in place comprehensive reforms that are sustainable and fit for the future.”

*\*When the prime minister’s plans for social care reform* [*were announced last month*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/johnsons-social-care-fix-is-disappointing-regressive-and-insulting/)*, there was almost universal criticism across the disabled people’s movement of the inadequate level of funding, the failure to address the needs of working-age disabled people, the lack of detail, and the disproportionate impact of the plans on lower-income workers*

**21 October 2021**

**Peers set to debate ‘dangerous’ and ‘incoherent’ assisted suicide bill**

Disabled people have called on MPs and peers to focus their efforts on pushing for a right to live independently, and not a right to die, as the House of Lords prepares to debate a “dangerous” and “incoherent” bill that would legalise assisted suicide.

More than 100 members of the House of Lords are tomorrow (Friday) due to debate the second reading of [a private members’ bill](https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2875) proposed by the crossbench peer Baroness Meacher.

The bill would allow “competent adults who are terminally ill to be provided at their request with specified assistance to end their own life”.

But in the build-up to the debate, disabled people opposed to the bill [have recorded video messages](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsHhEX9nXB1x3m840GiFFyg/videos), which have been sent to peers, explaining why they oppose legalisation.

Many of them call on parliament to focus on ensuring disabled people have a right to live independently, before even considering legalisation of assisted suicide, and they also warn that the bill adds to the “distorted view” that many have of disabled people’s lives.

Earlier plans for a protest outside parliament by opponents of the assisted dying bill have been called off by [Not Dead Yet UK](http://www.notdeadyetuk.org/) (NDY UK), the leading organisation of disabled people campaigning against legalisation, because of the COVID-related risk it would pose to those taking part.

The disabled crossbench peer Baroness [Jane] Campbell, NDY UK’s founder, said: “We thought about this long and hard, but we are talking about respecting and valuing disabled people’s lives and we are therefore not going to put them at any risk by calling for a demonstration.”

Instead, NDY UK is emailing peers with links to the videos recorded by its members.

Baroness Campbell said this would ensure members of the House of Lords would be able to hear directly from disabled people about their concerns about the bill, and could “reflect on them” in the lead-up to the debate.

She is likely to warn fellow peers tomorrow that supporters of the bill claim it will offer those at the end of life a “choice”, when in fact this is not a “real” choice because it fails to guarantee universal palliative care, fails to offer adequate support to those with progressive conditions, and fails to remove the fear of “being a burden” on family, friends and the community.

One of those who recorded a video for NDY UK, Ernest Bow, says: “It is a very dangerous bill that does not respect disabled people and their rights.”

He calls for an assisted living bill instead of an assisted dying bill.

Another, disabled activist Simone Aspis, says she believes that legalisation would lead to “increasing pressure” being placed on society and doctors for disabled people to take the assisted suicide option.

She says: “The focus needs to be on supporting disabled people’s right to live independently and have assistance with living right up to the day that somebody dies.”

Hannah Woods says in her video that many people “already have a very distorted view of the lives of sick and disabled people” and that the bill “feeds into it in all the wrong ways, because people are so afraid of becoming disabled, they’re so afraid of illness, that they don’t see that it’s still possible to lead a valuable life”.

Anne Pridmore, a former chair of the British Council of Disabled People, says in her video that disabled people need “the right to live, decent social care packages paid for at source through taxation”, and “good palliative care”.

She says she fears that legalisation would give some of those in power the chance of “ruling us out because we are seen as costing too much”.

NDY UK’s Dennis Queen, another prominent disabled activist, tells peers in her video that there are “many people who don’t have the support and help they need to live a decent quality of life, and we absolutely need that first”.

Another disabled activist, Jennifer Jones, says she is “scared” of the bill, particularly as someone with long-term experience of mental distress.

She tells peers: “I want you to know, and I want you to be able to understand, how terrified the prospect of this being put into law makes me and a lot of other people like me.”

She speaks of her own cycles of mental distress and points to cases in which people like her in some of the places where assisted suicide has been legalised have been assisted to die.

Baroness Meacher has said that her bill would only enable “terminally ill, mentally competent people whose suffering is beyond the reach of palliative care to die well and on their own terms”, but there are fears that once a bill becomes law it will gradually be widened to include other groups of disabled people.

Researcher Dr Miro Griffiths, a member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s disability advisory committee, although speaking in a personal capacity, says in his video that the bill is “vague and incoherent”, unsafe and dangerous and “should not be considered at a time when disabled people are experiencing widespread injustice, discrimination and oppression”.

He says: “It diverts attention away from important policy interventions that should provide people with necessary support to participate in their communities and access sufficient palliative care at the end of their life.

“We have arrived at debating dignity in death before there is dignity in life.”

And another disabled person, Sue Elsegood, who has been prominent in campaigning for the right to independent living, says she believes the government should be focusing on removing barriers and changing attitudes to disabled people.

She adds: “I would like the government to ensure that assistance is available – personal assistance to live, not assistance to die.”

So far, 12 UK disabled people’s organisations have told NDY UK of their opposition to the bill, while not one has come out in favour of legalising assisted suicide.

[In a new article for The House magazine](https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/assist-disabled-people-to-choose-life-not-death), a publication written mostly by peers and MPs, with a cross-party editorial board, Baroness Campbell says that passing the bill would be “a dark day in our nation’s history”.

She says: “It would run counter to our duty to protect the most vulnerable, and would exacerbate their fears, through insidious pressure, of being regarded as an expendable burden.”

And she warns that, as has happened in places where assisted suicide has been legalised, the bill would “doubtless be extended” to cover more groups of disabled people, other than those the bill currently covers.

Meanwhile, Baroness Campbell will be supporting an amendment to the bill proposed by the scientist, fertility studies pioneer and television presenter Professor Lord [Robert] Winston, who has called for the bill to be altered so that it refers to “euthanasia” rather than “assisted dying”.

They believe this would be a more accurate description of what the bill would allow.

Baroness Campbell told Disability News Service this week that fighting the latest attempts to persuade parliament to legalise assisted suicide had taken “an enormous emotional toll” on disabled people.

She said: “They really find it difficult to speak out on this because it is so personal, and it does nothing for their feelings of self-worth.

“When people are saying to them, time after time, ‘We want to assist people like you to die,’ it doesn’t take much of a leap of imagination to take these words and apply them to yourself.”

**21 October 2021**

**Disabled people urged to provide evidence for UN on government’s record on rights**

Disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) have launched a fresh bid to hold the government to account over its implementation of the UN disability convention, four years after their previous efforts helped lead to ministers being accused of causing a “human catastrophe”.

A partnership of DPOs from across England are leading work to collect evidence from disabled people and their organisations on how the UK government has met its obligations under the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf) (PDF).

That evidence is likely to include repeated and continuing breaches of many of the convention rights, including rights to independent living, to accessibility, to education, to an adequate standard of living, to participation in public and political life, to work, to health, and to life.

The evidence collected will be included in a report that will be sent to the UN’s committee on the rights of persons with disabilities.

This shadow report, alongside other evidence, will eventually play a part in a public examination of the UK government’s progress in implementing the convention.

Four years ago, that examination resulted in public humiliation for ministers after the committee’s chair, Theresia Degener, told the UK delegation that the UK government’s cuts to social security and other support for disabled people had caused “a human catastrophe”.

The committee later told the government [in a report](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fGBR%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en) to make more than 80 improvements to the ways its laws and policies affect disabled people’s human rights, raising concerns on all but three [of the 33 treaty articles](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx#48) it could have breached.

The committee is believed to be keen to see how the UK government has responded to the recommendations it made in 2017.

Yesterday, a partnership of DPOs, led by Inclusion London on behalf of the Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA), launched a call for disabled people, DPOs and allies across England [to submit evidence](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/uncrdp/call-for-evidence/call-for-evidence-now-open/) that can be used in a “shadow report” that will eventually be submitted to the UN committee.

Svetlana Kotova, director of campaigns and justice at Inclusion London, said: “Hearing from Deaf and disabled people from a range of backgrounds and different experiences is an important part of the committee’s examination process.

“Too often non-disabled people are talking on our behalf – whether it’s non-user led charities giving comments to the media or people being denied choice and control in their own lives.

“This is an internationally-important exercise, and we should lead it.”

Ellen Clifford, lead author for the report, said: “We’re hoping that the end result will be a report that Deaf and disabled people across the country feel genuine ownership over.

“It’s a steep task, given that the word limit for the report is just 5,350 words and we know people will have a lot to say, but collectively Deaf and disabled people can do great things when we come together in a spirit of unity.”

The UN committee will use the shadow report to help draw up a “list of issues”, a series of questions it will ask the UK and devolved governments to answer in their own reports on how they have made progress under the convention.

The UK and devolved governments will later be examined in public on these issues.

Over the next month, DPOs across England will hold more than 20 events that explain the UN process and accept evidence on the most crucial issues to include in their shadow report.

There will also be targeted work to capture views among seldom heard groups, such as disabled refugees, sex workers, and members of the gypsy and traveller community.

DPOs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – led by [Disability Wales](https://www.disabilitywales.org/call-for-evidence-reviewing-the-united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-disabled-people-in-wales/), [Inclusion Scotland](https://inclusionscotland.org/get-informed/uncrpd-report) and [Disability Action Northern Ireland](https://www.disabilityaction.org/) – are compiling their own reports, which will be combined with the England version into a single UK shadow report that will be submitted to the UN.

A key part of the process will involve consulting on the priority issues to be included in the UK shadow report, as the UN will only allow a maximum of 10,700 words.

Other organisations working with Inclusion London are [ROFA](https://www.rofa.org.uk/), DPO Forum England, [Disability Rights UK’s](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/) Our Voices group of member DPOs, [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/), and experts from the University of York’s [Centre for Applied Human Rights](https://www.york.ac.uk/cahr/) and the [London School of Economics](https://www.lse.ac.uk/).

The shadow report is due to be formally launched next March.

**21 October 2021**

**Timpson silent over ‘accessibility fails’**

The high street retailer Timpson is facing allegations from disabled campaigners that many of its stores are inaccessible to disabled people.

The concerns focus both on its high street stores and on the small “pods” – factory-built kiosks – it has increasingly used in recent years to set up tiny stores in the car-parks of out-of-town supermarkets, but which frequently do not have wheelchair-accessible entrances.

Access campaigner Esther Leighton, co-founder of the disabled-led campaigning organisation [Reasonable Access](https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/), told the company – which repairs shoes, cuts keys and offers dry-cleaning services – on Twitter this week that she was frustrated with how many of its stores do not have step-free access, or even a portable ramp.

Another disabled access campaigner, Sam Jennings – who secured [a high-profile legal victory](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/train-company-pays-17000-after-repeatedly-leaving-disabled-woman-stranded/) against rail company Southern in March over its repeated access failings – highlighted how Timpson failed to act when she pointed to a new and inaccessible “pod” in Taunton, Somerset.

The company’s chief executive, James Timpson, [had bragged about the new store](https://twitter.com/flowergirl_lon/status/1366319365201817600) in March, saying that he had “high hopes for this beauty”, even though the picture he tweeted showed a clearly inaccessible entrance.

Jennings was told by a Timpson manager at the time: “Most of our pods don’t have ramps due to the limited space inside the pods for wheelchairs, however we’re always more than happy to come outside to you so we can still give you the same great service.”

Leighton told Disability News Service (DNS) that she was likely to send the company a “letter before action” – a letter sent to try to resolve a grievance before starting legal action – the next time she visited an inaccessible Timpson store.

She warned that offering street service, rather than enabling a way for the disabled person to enter the store, was likely to be a breach of the Equality Act, although only a judge would be able to rule on any particular case.

She said the Timpson failures were another example of how the Equality Act was not being enforced.

Jennings told DNS: “Timpson staff do tend to be very lovely and motivated and keen but that isn’t a trade-off for accessibility fails.”

Leighton added: “Timpson is known for being amazing in some areas of ethics, particularly being a good employer, so their failure to ensure even the most basic access for disabled people 25 years after they were required to [under the Disability Discrimination Act] is even more disappointing.”

Timpson had refused to comment on its track record on access by noon today (Thursday).

**21 October 2021**

**New charter calls for ‘bold’ action from government on disability employment**

Disabled people’s organisations and allies have joined together to issue a series of demands to the government that they believe would help to end employment discrimination against disabled people.

The new [Disability Employment Charter](http://www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org/) makes demands of the government in nine key areas in a bid to address the widespread disadvantage disabled people face in their working lives.

Among the calls is for the government to increase and improve employment support, and to force all employers with at least 250 employees to publish annual data on how many disabled people they employ, and the gap in pay between their disabled and non-disabled employees.

The organisations that have created the charter\* include [Disability Rights UK (DR UK)](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/), the Business Disability Forum and the public services union UNISON, as well as the [Disability@Work group of academics](https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/), who have played a significant role in raising evidenced concerns about government policy on disability employment.

The charter also recommends reform of the Access to Work (AtW) programme, including a call to remove the current cap on AtW payments for individual claimants.

[Earlier this month](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/conservative-conference-new-minister-silent-on-plummeting-access-to-work-figures/), Disability News Service (DNS) reported that the new minister for disabled people, Chloe Smith, appeared to be unaware that AtW spending had plummeted during the pandemic.

The charter also includes a recommendation that would prevent ministers continuing to use misleading statistics to suggest that the disability employment gap has fallen under successive Conservative-led governments.

Instead, the charter says, ministers should take account of research which shows that an increasing proportion of people are self-identifying as disabled, when calculating the gap in employment between disabled and non-disabled people.

[Disability@Work has shown](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mps-and-experts-rubbish-governments-claims-it-cut-disability-employment-gap/) that the disability employment gap has not narrowed at all since 2010, once account is taken of this increasing disability prevalence.

Among other calls for action, the charter says the government should force employers to make decisions on reasonable adjustment requests by disabled employees within two weeks.

And it says the government should ensure that all decisions to award public sector contracts should take account of the percentage of disabled people in the workforce of the organisation that wins the tender.

The charter also calls for reform of the government’s [much-criticised Disability Confident scheme](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dismal-job-figures-show-failure-of-disability-confident-says-de-cordova/), to ensure that all employers signed up to the upper levels of the scheme employ a minimum percentage of disabled people, while entry level members have to improve their performance on disability employment or lose their accreditation.

Among disabled people’s organisations to have signed the charter so far are [Spinal Injuries Association](https://www.spinal.co.uk/), [Disability Cornwall](https://www.disabilitycornwall.org.uk/), [Disability North](https://www.disabilitynorth.org.uk/) and [Living Options Devon](https://www.livingoptions.org/).

Kamran Malik, DR UK’s chief executive, said: “Disabled people face a range of hurdles in finding and progressing in work, which just shouldn’t be there.

“The charter simply and powerfully sets out the concerted actions that government needs to take to move the dial forward.

“It’s not enough to tinker round the edges, we need a bold plan to bring down the barriers.”

The disabled Conservative peer Lord Shinkwin said: “The government should stop using business as a feeble fig leaf for inaction and instead celebrate the example some corporates are already setting.

“Transparent and consistent data reporting, the lead call of this charter, is the first step towards building a level playing field on which businesses can compete for top disabled talent.

“It’s time the government built on the success of gender pay gap reporting and realised the potential of this tool to bring about true meritocracy and equality of opportunity.”

Diane Lightfoot, chief executive of [Business Disability Forum](https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/about-us/), added: “The charter sets out the responsibilities that we all have – as business, government and providers – to work with disabled people to find solutions and to recognise the valuable contribution that everyone can make to the workforce.”

A DWP spokesperson said: “The National Disability Strategy\*\* sets out probably the widest-ranging set of practical actions to improve the lives of disabled people ever developed, including improving inclusion in the workplace and tackling the disability employment gap.

“Through our green paper\*\*\*, we are also exploring ways the welfare system can better support the needs of disabled people and people with health conditions to enable them to live independently and access work.”

*\*The charter was drawn up by Business Disability Forum, the DFN Charitable Foundation, Disability Rights UK, Disability@Work, Leonard Cheshire, Scope, Shaw Trust Foundation, UNISON and the University of Warwick*

*\*\*Analysis of the strategy,* [*published by DNS in August*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/national-disability-strategy-new-analysis-shows-document-is-just-cynical-repackaging/)*, exposed how it was “full of tweaks and not much substance”, and how ministers had padded it out with scores of consultations, reviews and vague pledges*

*\*\*\*Disabled people* [*have raised serious concerns*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/deep-concern-over-governments-disability-benefits-green-paper/) *about the green paper,*[*Shaping Future Support*](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/shaping-future-support-the-health-and-disability-green-paper)*, particularly suggestions that ministers want to cut future spending on disability benefits and merge personal independence payment with universal credit. These suggestions were repeated and reinforced* [*at this month’s Conservative party conference*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/conservative-conference-coffey-says-merging-pip-with-universal-credit-is-on-the-table/)

**21 October 2021**

**Claimants return to court for third battle with DWP in fight for universal credit justice**

The high court has this week heard the latest stage in a long-running battle to secure justice for thousands of disabled benefit claimants who lost out financially after being forced onto universal credit.

The hearing, due to end today (Thursday), concerns policies that left many claimants worse off when their circumstances changed and they had to move from legacy benefits like employment and support allowance onto universal credit (UC).

Two of the three claimants taking the case – known as TP and AR for legal reasons – have already twice defeated the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in the court of appeal in connected cases.

Their first legal case challenged rules that meant they lost out on about £180 a month in the move to UC, because they were no longer receiving severe disability premium (SDP) and enhanced disability premium (EDP).

DWP responded by temporarily stopping other claimants in similar positions from migrating onto UC and introducing payments of about £80 month for those already affected.

TP and AR then had to take another legal case – which they also won – because this payment failed to bridge the gap between what they were now receiving and what they would have been receiving if they were still claiming ESA.

Despite the two victories, they were forced to take a third legal action after DWP announced that the level of compensation for disabled people who had been receiving EDP and SDP and had moved onto UC before 16 January 2019 – when another set of regulations came into force to protect other claimants in similar situations – would be set at a lower rate than the £180 a month they had secured through the second case.

They have been joined in the third case by another disabled claimant, AB, who has a partner and a child, and has lost out by even more.

TP and AR are currently losing out by £60 a month and AB and her partner by nearly £400 a month.

TP said last month: “It has been entirely frustrating and exhausting having to exist on an overall unreasonable cut in financial assistance brought about by a move forced upon me into universal credit, whilst at the same time battling debilitating illness during a most challenging period of increased expenditure during this pandemic.

“The principle of a fair transition into universal credit has already been upheld by the courts on numerous occasions now, yet the government has been dragging its feet for a prolonged period of time to my detriment in abiding by these rulings both in letter and spirit.”

AR added: “Yet again I am having to go to court and fight for what is fair.

“Over the last years I should have had much needed support in place to help me get through the challenges I face on a daily basis as a result of my disabilities, but instead I have had to put time and energy into fighting for that support.

“I hope this is the last time we have to fight the secretary of state for support that is so obviously needed.”

Their solicitor, [Tessa Gregory](https://www.leighday.co.uk/about-us/our-people/partners/tessa-gregory/), a partner at Leigh Day, said last month that it was “difficult to believe that our clients have been forced to bring a third set of legal proceedings against the government in order to ensure they and thousands of other severely disabled persons are not unlawfully discriminated against following their move on to universal credit”.

AB and her child are represented by Southwark Law Centre, with all three claimants represented by barristers from Matrix Chambers.

The hearing is due to end today, with judgment likely to be reserved to a future date.

A DWP spokesperson said: “We do not comment on ongoing legal proceedings.”

**21 October 2021**

**Government has shown disabled people ‘active contempt’ during pandemic, festival hears**

The pandemic has seen a “deliberate marginalisation” of disabled people by a UK government that has shown them “active contempt”, a leading disabled artist-activist has told a festival.

Jess Thom told the disabled-led [Neurostages](https://www.nationaltheatrescotland.com/events/neurostages) arts festival in Glasgow that many of disabled people’s “hard-won gains” were under threat because the pandemic, and the political response to it in the UK, had further intensified the barriers they faced.

She said that any discussion about disabled people during the pandemic had been dominated by “paternalistic” ideas of protection, with [little thought to the leadership they could provide](https://www.touretteshero.com/2020/04/26/nasa-for-now/).

She said later that this included the failure of supermarkets to talk to disabled people’s organisations and respond to the needs of disabled people, and the government’s failure to address the needs and concerns of users of direct payments, in the early months of the pandemic.

Thom, co-founder of [Touretteshero](https://www.touretteshero.com/), told the festival that this had been a “wasted opportunity” to learn from disabled people and their “abundance of knowledge, skills and expertise” as the country adapted to the long-term repercussions of the pandemic.

In response to a question from Disability News Service at the end of her keynote presentation, she said she had seen many examples of the government’s “active contempt” for disabled people during the pandemic.

She pointed to its refusal to have an on-stage British Sign Language interpreter for televised pandemic briefings; the failure to engage with disabled people’s organisations on social care; and the “continued leaning” on the views of non-disabled professionals rather than “disabled people who have professional and lived expertise and could be shaping a better future”.

She said she believed the government had no interest in learning from the knowledge of disabled people.

She added: “I feel like my belief in that has only got stronger throughout the pandemic because as a disabled person I could see that my experiences and those of my community were missing from pretty much every piece of policy.”

She said that much of this was “more than just a lack of thought, it was a deliberate writing out of people from our society and a deliberate marginalisation”.

And she said she had not seen anything that would make her “feel confident that the current government mean anything but harm to our communities”.

Thom also told the audience – who applauded her answer – that she believed art had the potential to draw attention to the invisibility of disabled people in policy in “bold, brave, unignorable ways”.

In her presentation, she had spoken of how disabled people were continually seen as problems, as a “risk”, and as a threat to non-disabled people.

But while many disabled artists and allies had previously been gradually “chipping away” at this idea, much of the progress that was being made had been “slipping away” over the last 18 months, she said.

She told the festival: “It is essential that we are alert to this and don’t allow risk to be used as an excuse to cut access.”

She said that the “extremely narrow” way COVID-related risk was assessed during the pandemic saw other factors being ignored, and led to millions of people being put in vulnerable situations.

Thom [wrote last year](https://www.touretteshero.com/2020/07/03/understanding-the-risks/) of how this included blind and partially-sighted people who were not offered shielding support “even though shopping or other tasks would be more likely to be reliant on touch or close support”, disabled people like her who needed “close physical support to undertake everyday tasks and can’t socially distance in the same way as a non-disabled person as a result”, and those who were living in overcrowded housing.

She also highlighted how access measures were removed during the early months of the pandemic, such as [the provision of assistance](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coronavirus-disabled-pharmacy-worker-was-denied-rail-assistance-three-times/) to disabled passengers at rail stations.

She told the audience: “I want us to learn from this and develop a comprehensive approach that values the experiences and knowledge of disabled people.

“We must be trusted partners in the process of calculating risk and evaluating the benefits.”

The two-day hybrid festival was held online and at Glasgow’s [Centre for Contemporary Arts](https://www.cca-glasgow.com/).

It was curated by the [Scottish Neurodiverse Performance Network (SNPN)](http://www.abywatson.co.uk/snpn) and delivered by National Theatre of Scotland and SNPN, as part of the [Limitless](http://www.limitlesspilot.co.uk/) project to engage autistic people in creative activity as artists, audiences and participants.

**21 October 2021**

**Other disability-related stories covered by mainstream media this week**

An investigation has been launched into “organised abuse” at a special school in London after CCTV was discovered of pupils being physically assaulted and neglected, BBC News has learned: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58885635>

The Football Association has pledged to increase the number of people playing disability football in England by 50 per cent in three years, as it announced its first plan to support the game: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2021/oct/14/fa-reveals-first-disability-football-plan-beacon-for-society?fbclid=IwAR3s92MXCpEk2X1oAbAesgF085tzeEtzhvcTjI6rlSZdEyYkfBS03Bls2U8>

A care home claiming “exceptional personalised care” for dementia patients has been put into special measures after inspectors found residents with faeces under their fingernails and food on their faces, wearing other people’s clothes and sleeping in dirty bedrooms: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/19/inadequate-blackburn-care-home-put-into-special-measures>

Subtitles, audio descriptions and signed broadcasts are likely to remain unavailable to viewers of Channel 4 until mid-November, after an incident in September severely affected the broadcaster’s output: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/oct/19/channel-4-outage-subtitles-remain-unavailable-mid-november>

A severely disabled man who can’t walk or speak has launched legal action against the DWP after it stopped his benefits because he was in hospital: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/dwp-faces-legal-action-stopping-25252581>

Ministers have adopted a “dystopian” policy of requiring [universal credit](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/universal-credit) claimants to send in photographs of themselves in front of their homes and hold local newspapers in order to continue receiving benefits: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/universal-credit-benefit-photos-dwp-b1940174.html>

**21 October 2021**

**News provided by John Pring at** [www.disabilitynewsservice.com](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com)