

Department for Work and Pensions announcement about health and disability assessment services

I have received this update from the Government:

Dear John

I am pleased to be writing to you to let you know that we have announced today our next steps in improving health and disability assessment services through our Health Transformation Programme.

This announcement builds on our existing commitment to transform the way we will deliver assessments for Work Capability Assessments and Personal Independence Payment that was announced on 5 March 2019.

Our ambition remains to create – from 2021 – a single, integrated service for people who need to undergo a health assessment to determine their benefit entitlement or what is expected of them in terms of work related activity. This will be supported by an integrated DWP-owned IT platform, replacing the current situation where different health assessments are run on different IT systems.

We recognise that our claimants include some of the most vulnerable in society and it is critical that we carefully develop the new service; we understand the importance of getting it right. Given how critical and sensitive this service is, we will be establishing a new DWP-led Departmental Transformation Area which will be a defined area where we can develop this service and rigorously test and learn on a small scale before it is rolled out at greater scale and ultimately nationally. This will start from Autumn 2021.

For claimants in this Transformation Area, assessments will be conducted by DWP, rather than outsourced to providers. This will give us the flexibility to explore new ideas including:

- trialling better ways of carrying out face-to-face assessments;
- how to triage more effectively so that only those people who need a face-to-face assessment will have one;
- how to make it easier for claimants to understand the evidence they need to provide and why;
- how to remove the need for claimants to give the same information twice;
- how to ensure that claimants are aware of the whole range of support available to them both from DWP and more widely.

To support this important work, I am also announcing that we will be undertaking procurement exercises that will put in place contracts for conducting health assessments from 1 August 2021. This will ensure continuity of service when the current contracts for Work Capability Assessments and Personal Independence Payment end on 31 July 2021. We will continue to work with the successful providers to ensure continuous improvement in their service, including how developments in the Departmental Transformation Area can benefit delivery by our contracted providers.

With the transfer of competence from the United Kingdom Government to the Scotland Government for the remaining social security powers taking place in April 2020, with PIP being replaced in Scotland as of Spring 2021, this means that this single, integrated assessment service will not be delivered in Scotland. However, we remain committed to delivering the best outcomes for claimants and taxpayers and we will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government to support the smooth transition from Personal Independence Payment to the new replacement benefit.

This announcement and update today will help us to continue to improve the claimant experience. We will also be engaging with stakeholders more widely on the health and disability agenda. This includes exploring how the welfare system can better meet the needs of claimants with disabilities and health conditions. To this end, we have already announced our plans for a Green Paper consultation exercise later this year and we would welcome your engagement in this important discussion.

Later in the year the Government will launch its national disability strategy to increase inclusivity in all spheres of life for disabled people.

Kind Regards

Justin Tomlinson