

PM launches new drive to tackle barriers faced by disabled people

Higher accessibility standards for new housing, an overhaul of statutory sick pay, and greater workplace support are part of renewed efforts to ensure disabled people can fully participate in society.

New national outcomes data for disabled people will also be published, shining a light on injustices and driving action to tackle barriers they face.

With around a fifth of the working age population living with a disability, the Prime Minister has also announced a new cross-government disability team.

Incorporating the Office for Disability Issues, the new team will sit alongside the Government Equalities Office and Race Disparity Unit in a new Equalities Hub at the heart of government.

This team will work closely with disabled people, disabled people's organisations and charities to develop a new approach to disability, with their views and experiences at the forefront of any new policy. Further measures will be set out later this year.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

My determination to identify and tackle injustices, wherever they exist in society, remains as strong as ever.

So I am proud to announce new measures to break down barriers faced by disabled people, whether in employment, housing or elsewhere.

"We all have a crucial role – businesses, government and civil society – in working together to ensure that disabled people get the support they need, and go as far as their talents can take them.

Recognising that too many disabled people still live in unsuitable homes, the Government will consult on mandating higher accessibility standards for new housing.

This could help deliver up to 300,000 new accessible and adaptable homes every year. Guidance will also be published to help councils meet current standards for accessible housing in England.

A consultation on new measures to help employers better support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in work will also be published next month.

These include reforming Statutory Sick Pay so it is better enforced, more flexible to encourage a phased return to work, and covers the lowest paid.

The Government will also consult on offering small and medium employers a conditional rebate to support those who manage staff on sickness absence and help them get back to work.

The Work and Pensions Secretary will also explore how to improve support for those on disability benefits through a Green Paper, for which her department will engage extensively with disabled people's organisations and charities.

Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Disabled people encounter too many challenges in life and I want to see these end.

We want to change the landscape for disabled people and to make sure there is always a level playing field for them.

Because all of us need an equal chance to live a life of opportunity and fulfilment.

We intend to support disabled people in all phases of their life so that the pursuit of equality is a shared goal.

Other proposals include:

- New employee rights to request workplace modifications on health grounds
- New metrics to compare how well companies deliver for disabled customers in essential markets, such as energy, broadband and water.
- New research to ensure disabled people are at the heart of future Government policy, to be published early next year.

Richard Kramer, Chief Executive for the disability charity Sense, said:

Today's announcement is a significant one for disabled people, and addressing the inequalities they face.

For too long now, disability policy has been focused on what benefits or services disabled people do or don't access, rather than the lives they want, and have a right to lead.

Equality for disabled people is everyone's business and cuts across all areas of policy and life, which is why we have been calling for and welcome this new cross government approach.

We know that today is just the beginning of the journey, but we look forward to working with the government as this work takes shape, and ensuring it is led by and centres around disabled people to truly deliver meaningful change.

Mark Hodgkinson, Chief Executive at disability equality charity Scope, said:

Continued action from government to tackle the barriers Britain's 14 million disabled people face is welcome.

Making workplaces more flexible, improving market regulation and government coordination are positive steps in the right direction.

We know that half of disabled people feel excluded from society [1], and are too often shut out of work. Life also costs more if you are disabled, and Scope research shows that these costs add up to on average £583 a month [2].

We have long-called for a concerted effort from government to improve the lives of disabled people in this country. It is therefore positive to see recognition from government that a joined up approach is needed and necessary.

David Isaac, Equality and Human Rights Commission Chair, said

The barriers experienced by disabled people in their everyday lives are unique. We have long said that addressing key issues such as housing and secure employment so disabled people can live independently in their communities requires a joined-up strategy.

The creation of a cross-government team to coordinate disability policy is a bold statement from the government to tackle these problems and a very welcome move.

It will help ensure the views of disabled people are better represented at the heart of government and will create a more coherent approach to improve the daily lives of millions of disabled people across the country.

We look forward to working closely with government to improve the experiences of disabled people in all areas of life.

Mike Cherry, FSB National Chairman, said:

Everyone in our society deserves the opportunity to thrive. For all of our members who employ themselves and others with disabilities, the right Government support is crucial.

It's good to see Government consulting on an SSP rebate and support in accessing occupational health as part of a comprehensive package, showing the Government is serious in backing small businesses and the self-employed to do more of what they do best – using everybody's talents to provide the jobs and wealth our communities thrive on.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Every person, whatever their ability or age, must have the opportunity to succeed in life – that means providing new homes that meet the everyday needs of whoever lives in them.

However, too many of the homes built in the past have not lived up to this basic promise, which is why we're looking very closely at strengthening accessibility requirements, including making them mandatory for all new homes.