

UK Cutting Benefits for People with Incurable Disease



London, April 10 (RHC)-- The UK government's economic policies have put the strain on disabled people with progressively worsening diseases by cutting their benefits.

Between April and October 2016, the government invited about 3,500 people with incurable conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS) or Parkinson's disease to reassess their eligibility for Personal Independence Allowance, or PIP, which provides help with daily activities and mobility. This is 45 more than the total of 2,400 people who were called in throughout all of 2015-16.

The highest increase was for people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, with 2,000 of them reassessed in the first half of last financial year, an increase of two-thirds on the previous 12 months.

While the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) claims that the reassessment tests are aimed at increasing the payments and improving the services, over 48 percent of claimants either had their PIP payment decreased or removed altogether between 2013 and October last year.

Activists and some lawmakers have called on the government to change the way they reassess people for PIP, saying that the current procedure is "rigged" against people with progressive conditions and subjects thousands of them to unnecessary stress. Some 1.2 million people were eligible for PIP as of January 2017.

According to the MS Society, which represents multiple sclerosis patients, another downside to the PIP is the frequency of the reassessments. While the previous benefit – known as the Disability Living Allowance – required tests once every five years the PIP assesses half of the patients every two years.

“We’re concerned about the number of people with MS being inappropriately reassessed, especially when we know assessments can cause stress and anxiety and in some cases exacerbate MS symptoms,” said Laura Wetherly, the MS Society’s policy manager for welfare and employment.

“The PIP system needs to accurately reflect the realities of living with a fluctuating and progressive condition. Having a disability like MS is hard enough; people should be able to rely on support without fear of having it taken away,” she added.

While the DWP says that PIP provides for higher payments to individuals based on their circumstances, charities argue that the government has tailored the program to help trim the £50 billion benefits budget by introducing tighter criteria.

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