

Hounded by the DWP: Mother yet again forced to prove her son is severely disabled

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A SEVERELY disabled young man who is unable to talk, read or write and needs round-the-clock care has been targeted yet again by the Department of Work and Pensions because of Tory government changes to disability benefits.

Last year The National revealed how Stuart Chester, who has Down's syndrome, epilepsy and autism and is unable to feed or wash himself, was sent a 20-page work capability assessment form to fill in to assess his fitness for work and whether he deserves his Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) benefits.

His mother Debbie McKenzie, 51, said receiving the form had caused her "undue stress" and after filling in the form last August she was told he would have DLA for life because his condition was never going to change.

Now the DWP has dropped another bombshell and sent Stuart a 42-page form to fill in to prove he is severely disabled and entitled to the the new PIP (Personal Independence Payment) that is replacing the DLA.

Debbie, from Glasgow, said: "I couldn't believe it when Stuart got yet another form from the DWP, which was 42 pages long this time, asking for medical evidence to prove Stuart was entitled to the PIP which is replacing the DLA.

"It is an absolute nightmare after all we went through last year with the DWP work capability forms. We were eventually told last year that Stuart would have the DLA for life and then they go and change the DLA to PIP.

"I presumed all the information I put on his form last year with all the medical evidence of his condition on it that they could just use that and he would be transferred across to PIP, but I've been told I have to go through this whole rigmarole again."

Debbie filled the form out, giving all the details of social workers and doctors to contact for the medical details and ticked the box allowing the DWP to use all the information she put on his 20-page form last year, but she receive a letter days later saying that was not enough and she would have to gather the proof of his condition herself through his medical records and evidence from the medical profession.

Debbie added: "I called the DWP to complain, but they said it wasn't their job to get Stuart's medical information, so I had to go to the doctors and get all the medical information again and send it to them. The man on the phone said they had been getting lots of similar complaints. I feel I am back to square one. If one is replacing the other, the information I gave for the DLA, which is still the same, should be moved across.

"It is an absolute nightmare, it's so stressful. People have contacted me on Facebook worried about filling out yet another form and that they might lost their money. I have also heard of people who are genuinely ill and are entitled to their PIP not getting their money and having to appeal against the decision.

"I sent a private email to Nicola Sturgeon and Mhairi Black letting them know about this. It is all over the internet that people are having to go through another nightmare with forms and appeals because of the changeover.

"Maybe the DWP are hoping it is so difficult for people to fill in the forms they just won't bother. I wouldn't like to think people are going to lose out on benefits simply because they found filling in the forms too stressful."

A DWP said that because PIP was tailored to suit each individual needs it was important to get all the information to ensure people get the right support. A spokesperson said: "PIP is tailored to suit each individual's needs, so it's really important that we get all the information to ensure people get the right support. The evidence provided by the claimant, their carers, healthcare professionals, and information from a previous DLA claim can also help us decide if a face-to-face assessment is needed. There is support available for claimants who need help filling

out the form.”