

Welfare Benefit Changes

You might have recently heard about changes to the benefit system including the new Personal Independence Payments, for example. Some of our clients ask the fieldworkers about changes to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and also about the new "Bedroom Tax", as well as Universal Credit. Here is a quick overview!

What's changing?

Some of the main changes include:

DLA and PIP (Personal Independence Payment)

DLA is on its way to becoming replaced by PIP. Like DLA, PIP helps with some of the extra costs caused by long-term ill-health or a disability. What you'll get is not based on your condition, but on how your condition affects your daily living and your ability to get around. PIP is tax-free and can be paid whether you're working or not. It is made up of two components - Daily Living and Mobility. The PIP claim process involves completing a form and being called for a face-to-face assessment.

NB Anyone currently receiving DLA does not have to do anything until invited to apply for PIP, which in most cases will be from October 2015. But the following exceptions may apply:



April 2013

New claims to PIP start for people living in areas including Cheshire, Cumbria, Merseyside, North East England and North West England. When a DLA claim is received from this area, it will be treated as a claim to PIP instead. DLA new claims continue **in all other parts of the country** and for existing DLA claimants.



June 2013

New claims to PIP will start for the remaining parts of Great Britain. There will be no new claims to DLA for people aged 16 to 64.



October 2013

Reassessment to PIP starts for fixed period DLA awards coming up for renewal, young people turning 16 or where DLA claimants report a change in their condition.



October 2015

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will begin selecting existing DLA claimants and tell them what they need to do to claim PIP. They will prioritise DLA claimants who have turned 65 after 8 April 2013, when PIP was first introduced.

Under-Occupation Rule, Social Sector Size Criteria – The Bedroom Tax

If you live in council or housing association housing, your housing benefit may have been cut because you have what new legislation describes as a spare bedroom. This is sometimes called the 'bedroom tax', 'under-occupancy charge' or 'removal of the spare room subsidy'. You may be affected if you're of working age, even if you are sick or disabled. However, check if there any special rules that might apply to you.

Under the new rules, if you have more bedrooms than the government says you need, your home will be counted as being too big for you. If this is the case, you may lose some or all of your Housing Benefit. It is up to your landlord to say how many bedrooms there are in your home. Your tenancy agreement will usually say this.

Govan Law Centre has produced a toolkit guide that could help you to challenge a decision to cut your housing benefit.

YOU HAVE ONE MONTH TO MAKE A CHALLENGE.

This starts on the date you received a letter telling you of the decision to cut your housing benefit.

The toolkit guide includes a dispute form you can complete and send to your local authority. It also includes a list of arguments that may help to challenge a decision, for example that it breaches your human rights in some way, or that a room has wrongly been classified as a 'bedroom'. You can find out more and download the toolkit guide on the Govan Law Centre's website at www.govanhillc.com

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a new single monthly payment for people in or out of work, which will gradually replace most means-tested benefits. Pilot schemes have already started in some areas of England. These are called Pathfinder schemes. The new benefit will be rolled out nationally for **new** claimants in October 2013, with existing benefit claimants gradually being transferred to Universal Credit over the next few years.

Universal Credit will replace:

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit

If you're worried that the benefit changes will reduce the money you have coming in, it's a good idea to start thinking ahead. Whilst Epilepsy Connections' fieldwork team can give you general advice about benefits, and help you to fill in forms, your local Citizens Advice Bureau is able to look at all aspects of individual entitlements and can provide more complete information and advice.

NB Although all of the information provided is correct at the time of print, the Welfare Reforms are still changing and developing. Therefore this information update is intended as a quick introduction only. For up to date and specific information (and information on changes to other benefits not listed here), please use the resources listed on the following page.

Further Information:

- ✓ The DWP website: www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/
- ✓ Your local Citizen's Advice Bureau <http://www.cas.org.uk/> (Fieldworkers can advise of locations and opening times if needed)
- ✓ The "Benefits and Work" website: <http://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/>
- ✓ A local money advice service (Ask Fieldwork for more details)
- ✓ The website <https://www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en> (This also has an online chat facility)

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