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Disability Poverty Campaign Group pre-budget statement

In the run-up to the budget, the government has announced there will be ‘no return to austerity.’ But in relation to Disabled people, the plans announced so far look indistinguishable from it. 14 years of draconian cuts have had a terrible impact on our community. [Most food bank users live in Disabled households](#). Many of us cannot heat our homes or charge essential health and mobility equipment because of rising energy costs. [One in three disabled people live in poverty](#) – a far higher rate than non-disabled people. Years of policies have failed to address our problems. We need something different.

This is why we are deeply disappointed not yet to see Labour investing in the social infrastructure that we, and the country, so desperately need. Labour’s self-imposed fiscal limits and tax pledges are generating short-term thinking. We are seeing decisions that may save money in the short run but risk costing more overall – as well as being fundamentally unjust, such as the move to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment. This will leave millions of Disabled older people in the cold without support this winter, likely leading to higher costs borne by the NHS. We know that austerity undermines healthy societies: it starves vital government services of resources, and [often reduces economic growth rather than promoting it](#).

The DPCG steering group is provided by Disability Rights UK and Inclusion London. A list of our members and supporters is available at www.disabilityrightsuk.org/disability-poverty-campaign-group



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Disabled people make up almost a quarter of the population. We provide essential contributions to our families, communities, and workplaces – including often acting as unpaid carers. We need the government to enable us to thrive and flourish, not to label us as a burden. But at the Labour party conference, we heard repeated messages that stigmatised Disabled and sick people as ‘economically inactive,’ ignoring our contributions.

The [Prime Minister argued everyone receiving social security payments due to long-term sickness should look for work](#), calling this a necessary ‘sacrifice’ applicable even in ‘hard cases’ – implicitly, those who would be harmed by work. The government also relaunched earlier Conservative plans to pass a [‘Fraud, Error, and Debt Bill’](#) that would subject us to disproportionate and invasive surveillance of our bank accounts. This is despite Personal Independence Payment, the flagship social security payment for Disabled people, having a [0% fraud rate](#) in the most recent government statistics.

These stigmatising narratives generate ‘solutions’ that do not work. Studies have shown, for example, that [sanctioning social security recipients makes them less likely to find work](#). The current system has an [abysmal record](#). Protecting people against poverty makes it more likely they will be able to find work, however the UK’s social security system is currently unable to do this. It offers [some of the lowest rates of out of work payments in the OECD](#), despite the UK being one of the richest countries in the group.

We welcome the government’s focus on strengthening workers’ rights. We are also pleased to see plans to introduce a separate [bill mandating disability pay gap reporting](#) for large companies. However, the draft Employment Rights Bill, which includes specific measures to strengthen some areas of equalities legislation, does not mention Disabled people or the specific challenges we face in the workplace. This is despite [disability discrimination being a major factor contributing to our low rates of employment](#).

We agree that increasing appropriate assistance to disabled people to find and thrive within suitable work is a good idea. But this will not happen if government interventions focus on punishing those out of work rather than dealing with the barriers to getting into and staying in it. We call on the

government to use this budget to invest in social infrastructure so that those Disabled people who are able to work get the right kinds of support to do so. This includes:

- healthcare without excessive waiting times;
- independent living services;
- accessible housing;
- well-resourced Special Educational Needs services;
- effective enforcement of equalities legislation such as the right to reasonable adjustments in the workplace; and
- adequate social security payments, reflecting the cost of living with disability, as well as other financial support such as an energy social tariff targeted at Disabled people with high energy needs.

Incredibly low historic investment in these areas has placed a huge burden on Disabled people, exacerbating physical and mental health problems to crisis point. Local government has been starved of funding, with the costs of essential services such as care and personal assistance being displaced onto Disabled people, [forcing many of us into debt](#).

Investing in these areas would help correct some of the injustices of the austerity period. It would also be far more effective at getting Disabled people who are able to work into employment, providing a huge medium- to long-term return for the government. For example, [Disabled people living in accessible accommodation are four times more likely to be employed](#). Alongside this, the government must recognise that some Disabled people are unable to work and ensure that we are able to maintain a decent standard of living, without being made to feel guilty for existing.

For too long, solutions have been created for Disabled people's lives without our involvement, resulting in discriminatory and unworkable approaches. This government states they want to 'work with' Disabled people when developing policy, but, so far, we are not seeing this happen. To make effective policy for Disabled people, our lived experience must be at the centre through coproduction with us and our Disabled people-led organisations.