

Consultation Response

Age UKs response to ‘Shaping future support: the health and disability green paper’

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About this consultation

This Green Paper asks for views on how the Government can help people to live more independently, including support to start, stay and succeed in work, and ways to improve the experience people have of the benefits system. It looks at how to address short and medium term issues in health and benefits as well as considering whether there should be more fundamental changes over the longer term. The focus is on people of working age.

About Age UK

Age UK is a national charity that works with a network of partners, including Age Scotland, Age Cymru, Age NI and local Age UKs across England, to help everyone make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances. In the UK, the Charity helps millions of older people each year by providing advice and support. It also researches and campaigns on the issues that matter most to older people.

Introduction

Age UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to 'Shaping future support: the health and disability green paper'. The focus of the Green Paper is on working age benefits although it says that the Government will 'look at potential impacts of support for people with similar needs over State Pension age, and unpaid carers'. While Age UK does work on behalf of people who are in their 50s and early 60s, and our information and advice services support people with benefits such as Personal Independence Payment and Employment and Support Allowance, the majority of people who contact us about benefits are pensioners. Age UK is therefore not making a detailed submission to the Green Paper although we are members of the Disability Benefits Consortium which is responding.

However, we would like to respond to the question on mobility needs. Age UK has long argued that it is unfair that disabled older people are excluded from financial support with the costs of mobility and urge the Government to reconsider the position

Support with mobility needs

The Green Paper asks 'Are we meeting disabled people's mobility needs? Please tell us why/why not.' Age UKs strongly agrees with the statement in the Green Paper that 'The ability to move around and make journeys is a key part of independent living.' This applies

as much to people over State Pension age as to younger people. Disabled older people also need to be able to carry out practical tasks such as shopping and banking, attend hospital and GP appointments, visit friends and family, be able to engage in social activities, and in some cases, go to work. And yet Attendance Allowance, the disability costs benefit for people who claim after State Pension age, does not include a mobility element.

We receive many enquiries about benefits from older disabled people and providing support with Attendance Allowance applications is a key area of work for advisers working in the 130 or so local Age UKs in England. Attendance Allowance is a vital and much valued benefit that helps many older people with disability costs and promotes independence. However, while the rates are in line with the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) daily living components, there are no equivalent mobility components. We are regularly contacted by disabled older people who cannot understand why they are unable to get support from the benefit system with mobility needs and who feel the current position is unfair and discriminatory.

A man in his early 70s with a serious health condition which means his ability to walk is very restricted asked us why he could not claim a mobility component with his Attendance Allowance saying, 'I feel I am being discriminated against because of my age.'

Another who applied for PIP but found he was 4 months too old to qualify told us how hard it was to manage. He lives in a rural area with no bus services, so a car is very important, but he was finding it difficult to meet the costs of driving.

We of course support the fact that those who are already receiving help with mobility costs through PIP, or Disability Living Allowance (DLA) can continue to receive this after reaching State Pension age. However, this leads to anomalous situations. Someone aged 66 who developed mobility difficulties and successfully claimed the PIP mobility component shortly before reaching State Pension age can receive £62.55 a week (around £3,250 a year) for the rest of their life. In contrast, someone with the same restrictions whose needs developed just after reaching State Pension age, or who had problems before then but had not been aware that they could claim PIP, receives no support with mobility costs.

Other support linked to the PIP mobility component

Even in the context of a system that denies people direct help with mobility costs based solely on their age, Age UK believes there are important changes that could be made to

enable access to other support that is currently linked to receipt of the PIP/DLA mobility component. People who are over State Pension age can apply for a Blue Badge for disabled parking (albeit it through a lengthier claim process than those who can use the automatic criteria). However, they cannot apply for exemption from road tax or access the Motability Scheme unless they had started to receive a benefit such as the enhanced mobility component of PIP or the higher rate mobility component of DLA before reaching State Pension age.

As the Green Paper says, Motability is a popular way for people to spend their mobility allowances, and we regularly hear from older people receiving Attendance Allowance who would also like to use their benefit to access the scheme.

A local Age UK advice service was contacted by a woman in her 80s with mobility difficulties who has a mobility scooter and would like to use the Motability Scheme to lease a car with a flat boot which would enable her to get out more and use her scooter in town. However, she is unable to do so because she only receives Attendance Allowance. In contrast, she has a twin sister who has similar mobility problems but, because she receives the higher rate mobility component of DLA, has been able to use the Motability Scheme, although unfortunately can no longer drive.

Another man whose wife has several very serious medical conditions told us that without a Motability vehicle she was confined to home. He said 'I wish I could load her in her wheelchair into an adapted vehicle and be able to take her out and about. Not much to ask for.'

In conclusion, the ability to get around is important for everyone, whatever their age, and as part of the Green Paper review, we hope the Government will consider extending support with mobility to those over State Pension age.