



# Craig Whittaker MP

CALDER VALLEY

[www.craigwhittakermp.co.uk](http://www.craigwhittakermp.co.uk)

## **Mental Health and Access to Benefits: Work Capability Assessments**

Thank you for contacting me about access to social security for those with mental health difficulties.

People with mental health conditions face specific challenges in the application and assessment process for benefits. I am therefore pleased that special provisions have been put in place to support individuals with mental health conditions in making claims.

Improving the Work Capability Assessment for people with mental health conditions has been a central focus for Ministers at the Department for Work and Pensions. I am pleased that mental health champions have been introduced into assessment centres to provide advice to assessors. Additionally, the Government has accepted most of the recommendations produced by the five independent reviews of the assessment to date.

The WCA has been under constant review since it began in 2008, with more than 100 recommendations made. Some of the most important changes have concerned mental health. The WCA claimant questionnaire has been redesigned to make it clear that evidence from healthcare professionals and advocates is particularly valuable in mental health cases. All Work Capability and PIP assessors and frontline Department for Work and Pensions staff receive training in mental health. Additionally, Mental Function Champions have been introduced to provide advice to assessors during the assessment process. They are specialist practitioners who have at least 2 years of clinical experience in mental health or learning disability roles.

As an important safeguard, claimants for both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) with mental, intellectual or cognitive impairments who do not return their claim forms are referred directly to the assessment providers for a face-to-face consultation, rather than their claim being ended. Individuals may also bring a relative, carer or friend to the assessment. I understand that all health professionals carrying out disability assessments receive specific training in assessing mental health conditions.

PIP ensures parity between mental and physical health conditions by looking at the needs of the individual not their condition. Over two thirds of recipients with a mental health condition receive the enhanced daily living component, compared with around a fifth who used to receive the higher rate under Disability Living Allowance. New PIP claims are now being cleared around four times faster than when the payment was introduced.

I hope this offers some reassurance. Of course, the social security system needs to be both efficient and sensitive in meeting people's needs and I hope that claimants, their families and carers and all those involved professionally will continue to monitor developments and be involved in the continuing debate about how the system can be improved.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP