

The Disability Support Pension Impairment Tables Should be Abolished

Background

Changes introduced to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) from 2011 were made to focus on a person's capacity to work, reducing the significance of our condition in the assessment process and diminishing our value to our productive potential in the workforce, rather than people who deserve care and support.

People who were granted the DSP between 1 January 2008 and 31 December 2011 had their eligibility reviewed under the changes, and many were transferred to Newstart, the payment for unemployed people without disability.

Changes from 1 July 2014 introduced participation requirements designed to "activate" people on the DSP if they are under the age of 35. These discriminatory requirements mean people with disability are financially penalised if we do not undertake pointless activities.

The Program of Support (PoS) was also introduced in 2011. This requires people who are assigned 20 points on the impairment tables, but not on a single table, to undergo an 18-month program intended to help us find and keep work before we are able to access the DSP.

Issues

There are hundreds of thousands of people with disability on unemployment payments, and countless others on low incomes who don't receive government support at all.

The application process for the Disability Support Pension (DSP), and the impairment tables specifically, works in concert with extraordinary cost barriers to getting the right paperwork to lock us out of the system the community believes is there to help us.

Changes made to the impairment tables since their introduction have seen the nature of the DSP change to be a strictly targeted payment for those who are completely excluded from the mainstream workforce, rather than a universal payment to assist any people with disability who need it by providing extra support to help manage our life and health needs.

A Voice of Our Own

The impairment tables in their current form actively deter people from applying for the DSP, and exclude many who do apply, and clearly need support, for the simple reason that our disabilities fit in the “wrong” table or do not tick the “correct” box.

These barriers are imposed by the use of confusing and restrictive language, and the intimidation we feel because of historical attacks on people through DSP reviews. The design of the tables seems intended to prevent people from accessing the payment, rather than help us.

The changes to the impairment tables have also seen the number of young people receiving the DSP is going down.

The compounding effects of poverty inflicted on young people by the worsening labour market, undermining of wages for low-paid work and the widening gap between unemployment payments and the poverty line, mean we are less likely to have the money to get the expensive documentation we need for a successful DSP application.

Discussion

The Government is dehumanising people with disability by having applicants who have already gone through great stress and pressure to complete difficult forms then have their evidence reviewed by unfamiliar doctors.

This undermines highly trained treating medical professionals who are required to meet ethical standards and remain independent; it is an extra barrier that is designed only to save the Government money and prevent us from receiving necessary and life-saving financial support.

The operation of the impairment tables has also taken a toll on young people, inevitably contributing to growing intergenerational inequality, and a sense of less hope among young people with disability for our future, those who were able to access the DSP before the impairment tables were introduced.

As the system has become more byzantine, younger people trying to enter it now have higher barriers to navigating the application process and are increasingly struggling to access adequate treatment and advocacy supports to help them succeed.

A Voice of Our Own

As a result, many are trapped on other social security payments like JobSeeker or Youth Allowance, which are even further below the poverty line, when we should be supported by the DSP to live a fulfilling life.

The impairment tables need to be abolished

It is no secret that people with disability are more likely to live in poverty than the general population, and that the introduction of and subsequent changes to impairment tables were designed to force people into poverty.

The impairment tables must be abolished so the DSP can be a gateway to greater support, guarantee that every person with disability is protected by a genuinely safe safety net, and not excluded or penalised.

The system of income support payments needs to be part of a much broader ecosystem of supports to address the higher rates of poverty and social and economic exclusion we experience.

What can be done if the Government refuses to abolish the impairment tables?

The Government has indicated that the impairment tables will be retained regardless of the outcome of a 2021 review. If the impairment tables are to be retained, it must be necessary that the Government proactively consults and co-design any changes to the impairment tables.

The Government should also work closely and collaboratively with people who have been excluded from the DSP, or struggled to have their application approved, to bring about significant improvements.

Improvements to the impairment tables include:

- Prioritise ease of access to the DSP in the design of the tables
- Where people fall between two points levels, the default practice should be to round up not down
- Grant people the DSP if they meet 20 points across multiple tables – ending the ‘Program of Support’
- Remove the “fully treated, diagnosed, and stabilised” criteria
- Introduce a new Medicare line item for appointments related to DSP applications so people can apply regardless of their financial circumstances



**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY
AUSTRALIA**

Position Statement

A Voice of Our Own

- Provide additional support for treating professionals and reintroduce the treating doctor's report
- Don't wait another ten years to change bad decisions

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