

Is DLA really going to be axed?

I am aware that many mental health services users receive disability benefits.

There has been considerable concern about the “Shaping the Future of Care Together” Green Paper which has proposed that disability benefits such as Attendance Allowance should be stopped and the cash handed over to social services instead.

What are “disability benefits”?

Disability benefits include Attendance Allowance (“AA”) and Disability Living Allowance (“DLA”), both of which are non means-tested, tax-free benefits for adults (and children) who need help with personal care and mobility.

Mental health services users can claim AA or DLA if they need care and/or mobility support for their day to day needs.

What is the Green Paper about?

A Government Green Paper – called “Shaping the Future of Care Together” – has revealed proposals to stop paying disability benefits, for example, AA, and hand the cash over to social services instead.

Under the plan, current claimants would have their disability benefits converted to a ‘personal budget’ administered by local authorities and used to pay for services - not to spend as they wish. It is suggested that this funding is used to increase the funding available for social care.

AA is similar to the care component of DLA, but for older people. DLA is not specifically named in the paper, but some people believe that the DLA care component is also under threat because the Government is talking about ‘disability benefits’.

What does Bob think?

I am concerned that if the changes proposed in the Green Paper are implemented, local authorities would be given the exclusive right to assess the needs of mental health services users without having regard to the varying needs of mental health services users and individual choice.

I believe that AA and DLA gives mental health services users the freedom and independence to manage their personal care.

I respond to the proposed changes stating that mental health services users may still encounter barriers in the mainstream. This is despite the existence of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 more than 10 years ago.

AA and DLA allow mental health services users to make a contribution towards access to support so they can have access to goods and services, education and employment with maximum choice.

I welcome the opportunity to review the social care system so that it accurately reflects the needs of disabled people. However, I believe that this should not be at the expense of mental health services users.

Will DLA be cut?

Mental health services users who receive benefits are concerned that the changes proposed by the Green Paper will result in the benefits they receive being reduced.

Creating the Green Paper is simply the first step on the road to the creation of new laws. The Government is required to go through a consultation process and the consultation for the Green Paper closes on 13 November 2009.

However, if politicians do not receive the opinions of disabled people and disabled organizations, they will not know what DLA or AA means to claimants of DLA or AA and how it helps them.

For now, however, mental health services users are advised that:

If you are receiving AA or DLA, this Green Paper will not change your entitlement to these benefits for the foreseeable future.

What now?

To sign a petition, write a letter to your MP or just access more information then visit my 'Mental Health Survival Guide' via this link:

www.houlston.freeseve.co.uk/mental.htm



Write on! - Best wishes & stay well from,

Benefits Bob the Welfare Weasel