

Analysis of Work Capability Assessments outcomes: Detailed medical condition breakdown after the effect of appeals – update

12 September 2012

Introduction

This statistical release presents information on new claims for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in Great Britain. It provides information on the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) outcomes by showing outcomes, adjusted to account for appeals, broken down by detailed medical condition. The figures are derived from administrative data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare. This analysis presents information on new claims for ESA only. It does not contain incapacity benefits reassessments to determine eligibility for ESA.

The Department regularly publishes official statistics on ESA and the WCA. The latest report was published in July 2012 and can be found on the internet at the link below:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca

This publication shows the outcomes of the initial WCA for new ESA claims between October 2008 and November 2011 by detailed medical condition. The outcomes include the results of any appeals heard. It is consistent with the information shown in Table 4 of the July 2012 publication (see link above).

This publication updates the analysis contained in the previous publication, published on 21 September 2011, by using an additional year's worth of data to cover claims that started up to the end of November 2011. In addition, rounding has been changed from the nearest 100 to the nearest 10.

Background

A key part of the ESA regime is the WCA process, which is used to assess capability for work and eligibility for benefit. Within this the service contractor Atos Healthcare undertakes an assessment and, following the assessment, their recommendation is passed on to DWP. A DWP Decision Maker then considers the WCA, alongside the other evidence relating to the claim, when making a decision on the claimant's ESA status. This will be one of the following:

Claimants can be found fit for work, meaning that despite their illness or disability they are able to undertake some forms of work. In this case their claim:

- closes and the claimant can move to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA); or
- remains open following receipt of a challenge against the decision (either a reconsideration by DWP, or an appeal to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS)). If redress is sought, the pre-assessment rates remain until closure;

Claimants can be found to have limited capability for work. In this instance, they are allowed the benefit and placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). Those in this group are not expected to work, but are provided with help and support to prepare for work where possible. They receive a higher payment than those on JSA. Claimants can also appeal the decision to be put in the WRAG instead of the Support Group (SG); and

Claimants can be found to have limited capability for work and, in addition, limited capability for work related activity. In this situation, claimants are allowed the benefit and placed in the SG. Claimants in this group have the most severe functional impairments and so are provided with unconditional support and receive a higher premium than those in the WRAG.

Both WRAG and SG claims run until the initial or latest ‘prognosis period’ ends, which is usually, but not always, a standard length of time such as 3, 6, 12, 18 or 24 months based on the individual claimant’s health and then have a repeat assessment.

More information on ESA is available on the DirectGov website at the following link:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/FinancialSupport/esa/DG_171894.

Medical Condition

- The detailed medical conditions are based on the International Classifications of Diseases, 10th Edition, published by the World Health Organisation.
- Entitlement to ESA is based on functional capabilities, not on condition per se. The medical condition recorded on a claim form does not in itself confer entitlement to ESA.
- The data on health conditions is based on the information recorded on the medical certificate (‘fitnote’) provided by a person’s GP when they first make a claim for ESA. This represents what their GP considers to be the reason a person cannot work at that time. However, many people applying for ESA will, in fact, have more than one condition, and these conditions may affect each other. Where someone has more than one diagnosis or disabling condition, only the predominant one is currently recorded.

Results

For all new ESA Claims from 27 October 2008 to 30 November 2011, the breakdown of initial WCA outcomes including the effect of appeals heard to date are as follows:

- Support Group – 9%
- Work Related Activity Group – 20%

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- Fit for Work – 31%
- Claim closed before assessment complete – 37%
- Assessment still in progress – 3%

Please see the accompanying spreadsheet for the breakdown of these results by detailed medical condition.

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