

Analysis of Incapacity Benefits: detailed medical condition and duration - update

August 2011

Background

Incapacity benefits are weekly payments for people who become incapable of work while under State Pension age. They are:

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), which is for new claimants from October 2008, offers personalised support and financial help, so that claimants can do appropriate work, if they are able to, and provides increased financial support for those who have an illness or disability that severely affects their ability to work.

Incapacity Benefit (IB) provides support for people who cannot work because of an illness or disability which started before October 2008. Similarly, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) could be claimed before April 2001 by those unable to work for at least 28 weeks in a row because of illness or disability.

IB and SDA are being phased out, and work is underway to review claims of those under state pension age to see if they can claim ESA instead.

More information on incapacity benefits is available on the DirectGov website at http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/FinancialSupport/esa/DG_171894. More information about the review of existing IB/SDA claims is available at http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Illorinjured/DG_188859.

The Department publishes a range of statistical information on IB/SDA and ESA claimants at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool>, including statistics on the numbers of claimants by the main medical condition and duration of the claim at http://83.244.183.180/100pc/ibsda/icdgp/ctdurtn/a_carate_r_icdgp_c_ctdurtn_feb11.html and http://83.244.183.180/100pc/esa/icdgp/ctdurtn/a_carate_r_icdgp_c_ctdurtn_feb11.html.

Causes of incapacity are based on the International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision, published by the World Health Organisation.

This analysis updates the earlier one published on 20 April 2011, providing a more detailed breakdown of the medical conditions and durations at February 2011.

Results

At February 2011, a total of 2.6 million people were claiming incapacity benefits, of which around 600,000 people were claiming ESA, 1.8 million IB and 200,000 SDA.

The main difference from August 2010 is the slight decrease of 30,000 (1%) in the total numbers on incapacity benefits, composed of an increase of 70,000 in ESA claimants and a decrease of 100,000 in IB/SDA.

Of the 2.6 million people claiming incapacity benefits, 31 per cent have a claim duration of up to 3 years and 35 per cent have a claim duration of 10 years and over.

To qualify for Incapacity Benefit (IB), claimants have to undertake a medical assessment of incapacity for work called a Personal Capability Assessment. Under the Employment Support Allowance regime, new claimants have to undergo the Work Capability assessment. From April 2011 Incapacity Benefit recipients have begun also to undertake this assessment. The medical condition recorded on the claim form does not itself confer entitlement to Incapacity Benefit or Employment Support Allowance. So, for example, a decision on entitlement for a customer claiming Incapacity Benefit would be based on their ability to carry out the range of activities assessed by the Personal / Work Capability Assessment; or on the effects of any associated mental health problems. It is also important to note that where someone has more than one diagnosis or disabling condition, only the predominant one is currently recorded.

The relationship between medical condition and duration of claim at February 2011 is very similar to August 2010. At February 2011, around 1.1 million people claiming incapacity benefits are in the main disabling group Mental and Behavioural disorders with over half a million with the medical condition of Depressive Episode, and their claims have similar durations to the incapacity benefits caseload as a whole. The claims of people with congenital conditions tend to have longer than average durations, with 70% of claims of the 20,100 people with Down's Syndrome and 68% of the 4,620 with Spina Bifida being over 10 years. Claims which tend to have shorter than average duration can be found amongst those claimants in the Neoplasms group, and also those with certain injuries, such as fractured arm or leg.

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