

Local Authority Breakdown: Incapacity Benefits and Disability Living Allowance claimants with main condition of alcohol or drug abuse

January 2012

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.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a non-means-tested benefit that provides a cash contribution towards the extra costs of needs arising from an impairment or health condition. From 2013 the Government is proposing to replace DLA with a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment to support disabled working age people with the greatest needs and help them live more independently.

More information on incapacity benefits and DLA is available on the DirectGov website at http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/FinancialSupport/esa/DG_171894 and http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Disabledpeople/DG_10018702 .

The Department publishes a range of statistical information on IB/SDA, ESA and DLA 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 local authority area of residence of the claimant.

This analysis provides a breakdown of the local authority of residence of those whose main medical condition is drug or alcohol abuse, at February 2010 to May 2011. It updates earlier publications in July 2011 and December 2010, providing a longer time series.

Results

To qualify for IB, claimants have to undertake a medical assessment of incapacity for work called a Personal Capability Assessment. Under the ESA regime, new claimants have to undergo the Work Capability assessment. Since April 2011 IB recipients have begun also to undertake this assessment. The medical condition recorded on the claim form does not itself confer entitlement to IB or ESA. So, for example, a decision on entitlement for a customer claiming IB or ESA on the basis of drug or alcohol abuse 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.

Similarly, entitlement to DLA depends on an assessment of how much help someone needs with personal care and/or mobility because of their disability. A diagnosed impairment or medical condition does not in most cases mean that someone is

automatically entitled to DLA. The level of care and mobility components in payment determine the value of the DLA award which is in turn reflected in the expenditure figures.

At May 2011, a total of 1.9 million people were claiming IB or SDA, of whom 38,910 (2.0%) had a main medical condition of alcoholism and a further 34,080 (1.8%) a main condition of drug abuse. Of the 662,230 ESA claimants, 16,990 (2.6% - a larger percentage than for IB/SDA) had a main medical condition of alcoholism and a further 10,140 (1.5% - closer to the percentage for IB/SDA) a main condition of drug abuse.

Of the 3.2 million people receiving DLA at May 2011, 21,340 (0.7%) had a main disabling condition of either drug or alcohol abuse.

The tables in the accompanying spreadsheet further break down the figures by local authority area for the period February 2010 and May 2011.

Between May 2010 and May 2011, the numbers claiming IB, SDA and ESA combined with a main medical condition of alcoholism decreased by 1,050 – a decrease of 2% - and the number with a main medical condition of drug abuse decreased by 3,960 – a decrease of 8%. The number of DLA claimants with a main disabling condition of drug or alcohol abuse increased by 180 – an increase of 0.9%.

Prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse in the benefit system

The figures in the spreadsheet represent those claimants whose main medical or disabling condition is recorded as drug or alcohol problems. However, these figures are likely to undercount the total numbers of problematic drug users and alcohol misusers in the benefit system, as people with another medical condition or disability with drug use or alcohol misuse as a secondary factor will not be included. In addition, some claimants may not tell the Department that they have a drug or alcohol problem.

The Department has published research into the feasibility of providing population estimates of problematic drug users and alcohol misusers in England who access DWP benefits (including Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support as well as IB and DLA). These working papers are available at http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/wp_abstracts/wpa_046.asp and http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/wp_abstracts/wpa_094.asp.

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January 2012