

Dear Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee,

We are writing to you to express the importance of including specific financial support for disabled people in the upcoming 2024-2025 budget.

We have all felt the effects of the cost-of-living crisis, but we have not all experienced it equally. We have found that there are disabled people across Wales, forced to live in awful circumstances due to the twin problems of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. A fifth of the population of Wales is disabled¹ and households containing at least one disabled person is more likely to be living in poverty,² disabled people are more likely to be economically inactive or if in work, that work is more likely to be insecure and low wage.³ Poverty has long been a problem for disabled people living in Wales, but the rising cost-of-living is forcing people into worse and worse circumstances.

The 2023-2024 budget did not provide specific support for disabled people during the crisis and our findings from our report “Barely Surviving the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on disabled people” displays some of the consequences. We found that the financial support available was short-sighted, the cost-of-living payments supporting people to pay one month of bills, but nothing beyond. Disabled people often have more essential costs than non-disabled people, this extra cost of disability has not been accounted for, beyond the support already available.

The consequences are severe. Disabled people reported only being able to eat one meal a day, having to let go of support workers or stop going to vital therapies because of cost, being unable to run access equipment due to costs, in some cases losing their lives.

¹ Office of National Statistics, Census 2021, “Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021”, 19th January 2023, <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/disabilityenglandandwales/census2021#how-disability-varied-across-england-and-wales>>

² Joseph Roundtree Foundation, “UK Poverty 2023 – The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK”, 20th January (2023), p65, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/uk_poverty_2023_-_the_essential_guide_to_understanding_poverty_in_the_uk_0_0.pdf>

³ Department for Work and Pensions, “Employment of disabled people 2022”, UK Government, 26th January (2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2022/employment-of-disabled-people2022#labour-market-stat>

These have been difficult years to be a disabled person in Wales. We have been living through a mass-disabling coronavirus pandemic, in which disabled people have been disproportionately harmed. Disabled people have disproportionately been impacted by over a decade of austerity policies and with severe changes to their benefit entitlement from the UK Government, this period of financial uncertainty and continued poverty does not look likely to change.

We are calling for the Budget to include a series of recommendations and for certain questions to be asked of what we need and what is missing.

- The Welsh Government, health services and local authorities in Wales should provide specific support for the running and maintenance of disability related equipment, to ensure that all disabled people are not financially impacted by their need to use certain equipment.
- Welsh Government to urgently review its policy on social care charges, including whether the disregards for disability related expenditure are adequately protecting disabled people on low incomes with high costs.
- Urgent action to recognise and tackle mental health issues amongst disabled people, including pathways to accessing appropriate mental health support whether from social care, other areas of the health service and/or through peer support, such as from disabled people's organisations.
- Food subsidies should be considered to reduce the cost of food in shops. To supplement this, the Welsh Government and Local Authorities should provide support to and nurture the creation of community food schemes. These schemes should include accommodation for dietary requirements and include options for access requirements.
- Public transport, such as buses and trains, should be taken under public ownership to be delivered as a public service, including measures such as reduced ticket prices with the eventual goal to make public transport in Wales free.
- Provision of resources and capacity building measures to ensure the establishment and sustainability of at least one Disabled



People's Organisation in every local authority, to support coproduction of policies and services with public bodies, including peer support schemes for disabled people

- Commitment from the Welsh Government to prioritise tackling the extra cost of disability

For more information, please contact

megan.thomas@disabilitywales.org. You can find our full report here:

<https://www.disabilitywales.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Barely-Surviving-cost-of-living-report.pdf>

Kind regards,

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Disability Wales