

for example on specialist equipment, transport, or essential health services.¹

“Disabled people have extra costs in general than the rest of the population and these don't magically go away during a national crisis.”

Despite these extra costs, many disabled people have seen their financial support plummet over the last ten years of cuts and changes to the benefits system. Disabled people have lost benefit payments of around £1,200 on average each year, as a result of the changes. That's £900 more than the reduction faced by non-disabled people.²

People with the greatest need have also seen the biggest loss. The more disabilities a person has, the more they've lost out: someone who has six or more disabilities has lost over £2,100 each year on average. And in households with at least one disabled child, the total loss as a result of all the benefit changes was, on average, over £4,300 each year.

Increased costs faced by disabled people as a result of the Covid-19 emergency

From the 14th to the 23rd of April, the Disability Benefits Consortium surveyed 224 people who are either disabled or seriously impacted by a physical or mental health problem.

95% of respondents said that their costs had increased as a result of the Covid-19 emergency.

¹ Scope (2019) Disability Price Tag report

<https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs/disability-price-tag/>

² Disability Benefits Consortium (2019). Has Welfare Become Unfair?

The impact of welfare changes on disabled people.

<https://disabilitybenefitsconsortium.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/disability-benefits-consortium-cumulative-impact-report.pdf>

Food

92% of respondents specifically emphasised the additional costs of food.

Reasons for this included:

Many disabled people who normally rely on food deliveries are now unable to find available slots:

“I cannot carry shopping home, due to a chronic illness impacting my spine. As online orders from supermarkets are completely booked, I have had to find alternative shops to order from for home delivery, all of which are considerably more expensive. The world just got tremendously less accessible for me, and as a consequence, vastly more expensive.”

“My partner and I have to self-isolate. She is mid-level risk but if I get sick we don’t have many friends or family that could help with 24 hour care e.g. bathing/meds. She can’t be left in house alone because of her mobility so we have always shopped online (never told Sainsbury’s that but I didn’t realise you needed to disclose your disability pre pandemic) we can’t get any food delivered so have resorted on deliveries from smaller local grocers but they aren’t as cheap, especially as my partner is on a restricted medical diet.”

Disabled people are more likely to be unable to risk leaving their homes at the moment:

“I am a shielded adult. ASDA will only deliver with a minimum spend of £40, I can normally only afford about £10 per week for shopping and even less when I get a bill in. PIP application delayed due to pandemic, two months wait now.”

“I was unable to get a slot as an extremely vulnerable person for four weeks, and I am living alone with no support network as me and my partner recently ended things. I had to live off Deliveroo for weeks or I wouldn’t eat and I have cystic fibrosis so I couldn’t leave the house and this was my only way to get food.”

Disabled people may also be more likely to have medically restricted diets, which are harder and more expensive to source at the moment:

“Food is more expensive too. If you're on a specific diet because of your condition, you're in trouble. I suffer from diabetes.”

For those who normally rely on extra support from friends or family, they may now be doing without that:

“Daughter hasn't been able to help me as much, so I have had meals delivered when I have had flares in fibromyalgia.”

Disabled people are more likely to have a lower income, meaning they may rely on more affordable food options which aren't currently available:

“More money on food because reduced items aren't there anymore, and neither are cheaper items. Also prices in general have increased.”

Many supermarkets currently have long queues to get in, which aren't possible for some disabled people:

“I can't get my shopping delivered because there are no slots and the queue for the nearest supermarket is from 45-60 minutes. I can't sit up or stand for that long, so I have had to get all my food and essentials from the shop in the next village which is much more expensive. I only have between £20-25 a week for food after paying my bills so I'm having to live on cheap junk food like pizza and hotdogs for most of the week and can only have a proper healthy meal twice or 3 times a week.”

Utilities

28% of respondents specifically emphasised the additional costs of utilities.

Reasons for this included:

Many disabled people having to shield at home, or being more likely to need to stay in their house 24/7:

“Medication as my Rheumatologist appointment and orthotics appointment has been cancelled.”

“Having to buy vitamins because my hospital appointments with endocrinologist have been cancelled until further notice and I have suspected immune disorder.”

Needing to minimise increased risk from Covid-19:

“Face masks, disposable gloves, extra cleaning supplies like soap, disinfectant, Dettol spray, antiseptic wipes, bleach, more laundry tablets because changing clothes every time I go outside, shampoo to clean hair after going outside, kitchen towels and sponges to wipe down outer and inner door handles.”

“PPE - to protect myself and my PA/carers”

“Had to buy masks & gloves for going to a CT scan and a blood test as not doable over the phone and I wanted to minimise risk.”

“I had to stock up on all sorts of foods and medicines that I wouldn’t normally buy to ensure my family and myself could cope should we catch the virus. There are three disabled people in my household of four. Two are very disabled. I also bought home-schooling items to make up for lost education which amounted to a fair bit as my daughter has learning difficulties and the other is ASD. I bought things to keep them occupied with sensory items, etc. Medicines included pain relief, cough and cold remedies, Vix, plug in air purifiers, Lemsips, and multivitamin and minerals. I also bought soft and easily digestible foods for the children and ones that are easy and quick to cook as my disabilities prevent me from making meals in general and if I got ill, I’d need easy things to microwave for example.”

Managing the mental health impact of the pandemic and lockdown:

“I’ve also had to spend extra money on activities for the household to assist with mental health due to stress.”

“Found the need for carer to come in more due to stress and impact on mental health.”

Travel and transport

10% of respondents specifically emphasised additional costs related to travel or transport.

Reasons for this included:

Having to reduce risks by taking taxis to get shopping, medication, or go to medical appointments:

“I can't risk taking public transport anymore so have had to take a taxi to get my medication which is 45 mins each way... also have to get taxi to shops.”

“Taxis for medical appointments such as blood samples as buses not running or reduced service. Appointments were essential and not cancelled by surgery. Taxi for other things, to shops, when a bus would normally be taken.”

Needing to pay for people to collect shopping and medication:

“Extra expenses for people to do my shopping and pick up prescription drugs for me as I am advised not to go outside as I am at high risk from the coronavirus as it could be fatal as I have COPD.”

“Paying people to go to the shops as I cannot do it myself and there are no delivery slots available.”

“Had to pay fuel costs for person getting my shopping and as they've had to go more frequently to find things the costs have been high.”

What difference would an extra £20 a week mean?

Most respondents told us that getting an extra £20 a week would make a real difference to them. In this current health emergency, no-one should be having to choose between eating or washing, or be unable to afford the medications they need to stay well.

It would mean people could afford the essentials: