ENGLAND V DISABILITY

2026 Snapshot of attacks on disability rights

Featuring work by **Andrea Barrett, Melissa Parker, Dorothy Gould, Lilly Buonasorte, Anna Landre, Bee Gibson, Claire Andrews, Eilis Boyle, Jon Abrams, Kate Charmichael, Li Brady, Louise Page, Mouse Goodwin, Nicole Lacey, Pollyanna Chamberlain, Richard Amm & Rick Burgess.**

Content warning for topics discussed: suicide, sexual assault, hate crime, state violence, social murder, etc.

Disabled people in the United Kingdom (UK) have endured relentless attacks on their rights and opportunities on multiple fronts. Many hard-won freedoms have been steadily rolled back in recent years. This document summarises some of these policies that have either been proposed or successfully enacted. Disabled people are often used as the testing ground for future policies, so being aware of what is happening to them has broader implications for the rights of other groups. During the Holocaust, many of the procedures developed on disabled people were later applied to wider populations. More recent examples include bank account surveillance systems, which are laying the groundwork for more extensive population-wide surveillance. Following the 2008 financial crash, attacks on disabled people's rights intensified. In 2016, the United Nations (UN) found that the UK was engaged in "grave and systematic" violations of disabled people's rights, and linked these actions to a significant number of excess deaths. In 2024, the UN follow-up report to the inquiry declared that the UK made "no significant progress" on implementing the inquiry's recommendations regarding independent living, social security, and an adequate standard of living. Now, in 2026, things have only gotten worse. This zine cannot adequately cover every front of attack or the rapid changes currently taking place, but it aims to provide a broad snapshot of the situation in England in the Summer of 2026.

DWP Deaths & Culture by Nicole Lacey — Evidence compiled by Disability News Service (DNS) exposes a decades-long culture of denial and neglect within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as well as repeated and knowing decisions that have placed disabled people's lives at risk. DWP staff have disclosed the use of unofficial sanction targets, and at times tactics that have caused psychological harm to claimants to push people to abandon their claims. This allowed job centre staff to report higher rates of claimants stopping receipt of out-of-work benefits. Over the past two decades, evidence has emerged of a culture of aiming for particular numbers of sanctions,

discussing claimants with disdain and pushing disabled people into work with disastrous - sometimes fatal - consequences on their health. Work coaches have also described being bullied into forcing claimants with severe mental illness to attend work-related meetings for the staff to meet their meeting targets. Numerous deaths have been attributed, at least in part, to DWP actions, through Prevention of Future Death (PFD) reports and coroner's reports at inquests into the deaths of disabled people, both through physical deterioration and suicide. A 2015 study by the National Institute for Health Research linked 590 suicides associated with the reassessment process across a 3-year period. Several disabled rights groups alongside experts including coroners, professors and doctors have repeatedly called on the DWP to improve their methods of collecting and reviewing medical evidence. They have highlighted the risks involved in using inexperienced assessors and decisions made without input from any medical professionals involved in an individual's treatment and support. Recommendations intended to improve the safety of the assessment system have been ignored or hidden, or otherwise accepted without adequate follow-up, with subsequent actions being unchecked or implementation records being destroyed.

Universal Credit (LCWRA) Cuts by Andrea Barrett — In 2025 cuts to Universal Credit (UC) were pushed through. Specifically, these cuts relate to the health component of UC; the Limited Capacity for Work and Related Activities (LCWRA) payment. Only those too sick to work are eligible for LCWRA and it has been reduced by 50% by the Universal Credit Bill 2025. Since 6th April 2026, when the bill came into effect, when at least 30% of disabled people were classed as meeting the poverty threshold, the LCWRA payment has been halved from £429.80/month to £217.26/month for the sickest and most unable to earn a living. This impacts quality of life at the level of basics. It means more disabled people are unable to afford to eat regular meals and to pay rent. In theory, claims made before the change are protected from cuts. However many disabled people remain uncertain about what will happen when their claims are reviewed. Incorrect decisions to end benefits are all too common, and when

an award is later reinstated, it may incorrectly be treated as a new claim with a new start date. This raises serious questions about how secure the protection for existing claimants will be in practice. And for those putting in LCWRA claims since the start of the 2026 financial year, be it currently disabled or abled and yet to develop life-limiting conditions, the result is an arbitrary loss of more than £212 each month. Ministers allege that these UC cuts incentivise work, yet they also simultaneously and secretly cut the Access To Work programme by 66% behind the scenes. The LCWRA UC cuts policy is blatant ableism, and it is increasing financial deprivation and inequality amongst the most vulnerable in society. These cuts occur at a time when there is ample reason for an increase in people needing social security: since 2020, the rates of disablement due to Long Covid, and almost all other conditions, have increased. The decision to cut LCWRA should have provoked widespread outrage. People with the most severe illnesses and the fewest opportunities to earn an income have had their already inadequate support reduced during a cost-of-living and inflation crisis. Instead, the abandonment of the proposed PIP cuts, combined with persistent anti-disability propaganda in the media, has obscured this devastating reality.

PIP cuts by Melissa Parker — In March 2025, the government announced plans to overhaul the benefits system. The proposals included measures to restrict eligibility for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), the main disability benefit in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to freeze the health-related element of Universal Credit. The rebellion against the cuts was ferocious. Beth O'Brien, from Crips Against Cuts London, said, "This is nothing short of an assault on the dignity and rights of Disabled people in the UK. A group of disabled celebrities, including Rosie Jones and Ruth Madeley, came together to urge the government to scrap the "inhumane" benefits cuts and urged people, many of whom did, to write to their MPs. It also led to TV appearances, radio appearances, the massively successful hashtag #TakingThePIP and opinion pieces which gave voice to how disabled people felt about, and feared, the cuts. Cherylee Houston wrote for The Guardian, "I am in tears reading the stories of what might happen if

these further cuts go ahead, which is why I've joined forces with others to demand action." The government ultimately won the vote on its benefits bill by 75 votes, but only after making a series of last-minute concessions. Ministers had already watered down their plans once by reversing some cuts to universal credit and protecting current claimants of personal independence payment (PIP) from stricter eligibility rules. However, some Labour MPs were still concerned that the new criteria for claiming PIP would come into force before the recommendations of a review could be implemented. Fearing a humiliating defeat, the government announced a further U-turn, saying it would not change PIP rules until it had time to consider the review's conclusions. The last-minute changes leave the government's Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill gutted some of its most harmful measures. Disability Rights UK said, "Make no mistake, this floundering and chaos from the Government is a direct result of the steadfast work of Disabled campaigners and our allies," continuing, "through our collective campaigning, we made them drop billions of pounds worth of cuts." James Taylor, executive director at the charity Scope, told the government that the right thing to do was to "engage with disabled people". Currently as of July 2026 the Timms Review into PIP has occurred with a report released, declaring PIP "not fit for purpose" due to the DWP's dehumanising treatment of claimants and PIP assessment failing to capture disabled people's struggles. The fight is far from over. However, the disabled community has shown that, by organising and using its considerable collective power, it can lessen the impact of the measures the Labour Party appears determined to inflict on disabled people.

Access to Work by Kate Carmichael — Although the proposed cuts to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) would have affected disabled people both in and out of work, significant developments have also taken place around the government's "best-kept secret": the Access to Work scheme. It is often described as a secret because public awareness of the scheme remains relatively low; a 2013 survey found that nearly half of disabled adults had not heard of it. The government's Access to Work scheme is a programme that helps

disabled people start or stay in work. There are major failings in the system, including extraordinarily long wait times. As of mid-2025, self-employed applications face 59-week waits, while PAYE applications wait 35 weeks, and reconsideration decisions take 17 weeks. National media outlets have also reported a pattern of Access to Work case managers imposing unofficial cost-cutting measures. These have resulted in inconsistent decisions, unauthorised funding reductions and cuts to renewed awards averaging 53%.A well-publicised example is the case of disabled artist Jess Thom from Touretteshero. For 15 years, she used her experiences to help others with the support of Access to Work. Despite no changes to her disability or work, her support was cut by 61%, forcing her to stop working. Thom questions why Keir Starmer describes the system as 'indefensible, economically and morally.' She describes fighting for her job under Labour as "humiliating" with "dangerous implications for us all." While her award was reinstated on appeal, many others lack the resources to fight such cuts. More recently, Dan Biddle, the most injured victim of London's 7/7 bombings, faces losing his job and home, and Lee Ridley has joined in supporting Access to Work but criticising "delays, cuts, and bureaucracy" in the current ineffective and worsening system. There were credible leaked reports of upcoming structural changes, including the elimination of most support worker roles, a one-year grant limit, and a cap of 35 hours per week for interpreters. While new information in July 2025 confirmed these proposed changes were not government policy (and were buried), there is continued concern that these leaks indicate the future direction of policy. Access to Work is a scheme that other countries envy, and Thom, Ridley and Biddle believe that it "can be glorious, and it's worth fighting for." Campaigns are now under way to resist harmful changes to the scheme. Disability inclusion specialist and broadcaster Dr Shani Dhanda has established the Access to Work Collective, which highlights the scheme's positive impact, exposes the damaging consequences of poor implementation and calls for far greater government accountability.

Public Transport by Claire Andrews — Disabled people across the UK should be able to travel with freedom and confidence, yet disabled

people still cannot access transport in the same way as non-disabled people. For those of us who rely on public transport, the barriers are widespread. Three out of four railway stations in the UK do not have step-free access, while some metro systems require passengers to give three hours' notice to use a ramp. A bus may have 58 passenger seats, but only one wheelchair space, and older vehicles often lack visual and audio announcements. There is a concessionary bus pass scheme that disabled people can't use before 9:30 am, impacting their ability to take part in education and work, and recent research highlighted that nearly one quarter of disabled people have no idea this scheme even exists. For car owners and drivers, there is not a single public charging point for electric vehicles across the whole UK that meets the government's own accessibility standard. Yet within 10 years, an estimated 1.35 million disabled drivers are expected to be wholly or partly dependent on public charge points. Current positive changes in policy are being led by disabled people and advocates from within our communities, such as Sophie Morgan's recent work around 'rights on flights' which highlighted the poor experiences of people in air travel. As the Chair of the Transport Committee, Ruth Cadbury, recently said: "Across the transport system, accessibility for disabled people must be recognised as a human right rather than a 'nice to have'. Failures should be seen as discrimination, not merely as a customer service issue. A change of mindset is needed at all levels among providers, regulators and enforcers." Ageing infrastructure, inadequate investment, poor policymaking and a failure to co-produce meaningful solutions directly with disabled people means bus, rail, metro, taxi and active travel systems continue to exclude us. 2025 will mark 30 years since the Disability Discrimination Act was passed in the UK, yet many of us still can't just turn up and get on a train, tube or bus. We should see this as the failure it is and demand better.

Motability Cuts by Li Brady —Recent changes to the Motability Scheme have placed further restrictions on disabled people's mobility. The annual mileage has been set to 10,000 miles. On the surface, this may not seem too extreme a move, but disabled people often need to attend far more medical appointments than non-disabled people.

It therefore stands to reason that many disabled drivers are likely to exceed the national average annual mileage. The scheme compounds this inequality by charging for additional mileage. This creates yet another financial burden for disabled drivers, many of whom already face higher living costs and barriers that non-disabled drivers do not have to consider. The existence of this charge is troubling in itself, but recent Motability changes have also increased the fee for exceeding the mileage limit. The scheme has explained these limitations and fees away by stating that it is now more expensive to run due to the government's tax changes from the most recent autumn budget. As a result, the burden of covering these costs has been passed on to the very people the scheme is intended to support, many of whom rely on Motability precisely because of the financial barriers to purchasing and running a vehicle. Motability should stand as support for Disabled people's independence, but instead, like many of our so-called "benefits", it has become just another measure the government uses that denies disabled people even a basic quality of life.

The Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill: The Criminalisation of Advice Services by Lilly Buonasorte — The Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 22 January 2025 and has since progressed to the House of Lords. It has two main areas of focus: granting the Public Sector Fraud Authority (PSFA) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) greater powers to investigate, enforce and recover alleged fraud. Many of us disabled people receive benefits through the DWP, including Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA), Carer's Allowance and Universal Credit. The contents of this bill are deeply concerning and could significantly affect disabled people's lives, as well as the work of advice services and disability organisations. How does the new bill expand the definition of fraud? Under the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill, fraud includes cases in which a person: (a) commits fraud; (b) assists or conspires in the commission of fraud; or (c) encourages the commission of fraud through dishonest or false representations made to obtain benefits. The bill would also amend

the Social Security Administration Act 1992 so that a person could commit an offence by: (a) encouraging or assisting another person to commit an offence; or (b) providing guidance on how to commit an offence. These provisions threaten to criminalise both disabled benefit claimants and the organisations and advice services that help people complete benefit forms. During House of Commons proceedings, the term “sickfluencer” was repeatedly used as an example of “assisted benefit fraud” that the bill is intended to prevent. Sickfluencer is a derogatory term used to describe social media users who offer advice on navigating the disability benefits system and accessing government support, particularly through online platforms. Whilst conservative MP Rebecca Smith, one of the main proponents of the Bill, makes the distinction between “legitimate organisations… for example, the work of Citizens Advice, which we all know provides an invaluable service to the most vulnerable in society” and “step-by-step guides posted on forums that are intended to encourage people to commit this fraud (House of Commons Twelfth Sitting, 2025)”, the distinction is arbitrary. Most advice services provide step-by-step support with completing forms. They do so not to facilitate fraud, but because the benefits application process relies on narrow categories and often illogical decision-making criteria that make it inaccessible to many claimants. Under the guise of tackling fraud, the bill risks criminalising the essential work of translating complex bureaucratic systems into language that disabled people can understand and use.

The Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill — Increased Police Powers Granted to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) by Lilly Buonasorte - Through the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is seeking greater powers to investigate, enforce and recover alleged fraud. The proposed powers include the following: 1. Investigation: The bill would give the DWP legal authority to compel third parties, including banks, local authorities, employers and landlords, to provide information about claimants suspected of fraud. The bill refers to this power as an “Eligibility Verification Notice”. This would significantly expand the DWP’s surveillance powers. 2. Enforcement:

DWP investigators would be able to apply for warrants under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE), allowing them to enter and search premises and seize evidence. This would grant certain DWP employees powers similar to those held by the police 3. Recovery: The bill would allow the DWP to recover overpayment debts without first obtaining a court order, through what is termed a “direct deduction order”. It would also enable the DWP to apply to a court to temporarily disqualify a claimant from holding a driving licence until the debt had been repaid. These measures would allow the DWP to recover money from claimants without requiring the matter to be fully tested through the usual court process. Importantly, research organisations, disability groups and MPs have raised concerns about the increased surveillance and criminalisation of benefit claimants during House of Commons hearings. Representatives from JUSTICE and Big Brother Watch have highlighted the potential for bias in the algorithmic and data-analytic tools used to detect fraud, as has already been seen in countries including the Netherlands and Sweden. Representatives from the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People have also criticised the absence of adequate equality impact assessments within the bill. They have warned that false-positive fraud flags could have serious consequences for disabled claimants, both materially and psychologically.

Accessible housing by Mouse Goodwin — Housing in Britain today is in crisis, with disabled people amongst those most keenly affected. Millions of disabled people are trapped in a system that doesn’t meet their basic needs, and this problem has continued to grow since 2019. Since the start of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, more people have become disabled. The latest figures show 1 in 4 people in the UK are disabled, and currently over 20% of all homeless people in the UK have a disability or long-term health condition. Millions remain on social housing waiting lists, with waiting times for some areas exceeding 45 years – this means a disabled person could be left waiting their entire life for a home. Those waiting are forced to live in so-called “temporary accommodation” for months or years on end, unable to refuse even inaccessible options for fear they will be deemed “intentionally

homeless" and removed from the register. Often, social housing units are in states deemed not fit for human habitation, but reports go unheard by councils and landlords, resulting in further disablement and even death. For those trying to buy a home, only 9% of homes meet minimum access standards, and even fewer are suitable (or even adaptable) for wheelchair users. The situation is no better for new build homes – accessibility targets are not being met because they are self-enforced, making them essentially optional for building developers. For those ineligible for social housing but unable to afford a mortgage, the booming private rental sector remains the only option. However, many disabled people are excluded from the rental market because landlords refuse to accept tenants who receive housing benefit. Although rules theoretically prohibit "No DSS" policies, they have done little to prevent widespread discrimination against disabled people, migrants and other marginalised groups. Many disabled people are also trapped in unsuitable homes, unable to use essential facilities such as bathrooms or kitchens as landlords refuse to make the adaptations needed to make these properties safe and functional. Housing is the bedrock of our society, and without safe and accessible homes, disabled people are unable to attend work and education, live independently, engage with their communities, or even survive. More than a decade of austerity has created the current housing crisis. Further austerity is not the solution.

The worsening accessible housing crisis by Richard Amm — The UK government is failing to meet existing needs for accessible housing. Around 124,000 people are on council waiting lists for accessible homes, while approximately 400,000 wheelchair users are living in unsuitable accommodation, often facing waits of several years.. In 2023, the Lewisham Disability Commission found that 25% of disabled people did not have access to a bath or shower in their own homes, while 10% did not have access to a usable toilet. This suffering is being caused by a lack of planning, and the situation is likely to become significantly worse. There are no plans to meet the increasing needs for accessible housing. 80% of the buildings that will still be in use in 2050 have already been built, while 70% of the new homes expected

to be constructed over the next ten years will not be required to meet any accessibility standard. In addition, 80% of councils build no accessible housing at all. Due to an aging population, the number of elderly people is expected to double in the next 20 years, and will constitute a quarter of the overall population by 2040. To meet this demand, the government needs to double the number of accessible homes, hospitals and care homes. Building new accessible homes is not the only solution. Adapting existing properties can also help, although council-funded adaptations can take up to three years to complete. Around 65% of adaptations involve installing level-access showers, while 10% involve ramps. Building homes that are accessible and adaptable from the outset reduces the average cost of later adaptations by approximately £9,000. For every pound spent on adapting a home, an estimated seven pounds is saved in care costs. Adaptations allow disabled people to remain in their own homes and can delay entry into far more expensive residential care by an average of four years. The average council spends 61% of its budget on social care. Building more accessible homes could therefore improve disabled people's independence and quality of life while also creating significant long-term savings.

Social Care Charging Unmasked: My Reflections on the Human Cost of Charging by Jon Abrams — Over many years of supporting Disabled people with social care charges, I have come to see it for what it is: a tax on disability. Again and again, I have worked alongside Disabled people who are already managing poverty, ill health, exclusion and the extra costs of daily living, only to be met by a social care charging system that creates even more pressure. A system intended to provide support instead often creates fear, confusion and distress. What stays with me most is not the policy language or the legal framework, but the human impact. I have seen disabled people receive demands for large backdated charges without ever having been given a clear explanation of how those charges were calculated. I have seen people facing threatening letters, long delays, poor communication, and processes so complex that they become overwhelming. For many, the experience is not simply frustrating. It is exhausting, humiliating and harmful to their

mental health and wellbeing. The harsh reality is that disabled people already face unavoidable extra costs. Heating, transport, laundry, equipment, therapies, specialist food, incontinence products, digital access and support with daily life all cost money. They are essential to living safely, with dignity and some level of independence. In theory, the system recognises this through Disability-Related Expenditure. In practice, I have seen how difficult it is for disabled people to claim. In practice, I have seen how difficult it can be for disabled people to make a claim. People are expected to identify every additional cost, keep receipts, provide highly personal information and explain why each item is necessary. Even then, councils may reject expenses, apply blanket policies or fail to explain their decisions properly. Too often, Disabled people are not even told that they have the right to claim Disability-Related Expenditure in the first place. The result is that many Disabled people pay more than they should, and some are pushed further into poverty because of it. Others disengage from support altogether because the process feels too punitive. After years of seeing this up close, my view is clear: the current charging system is unfair, inaccessible and fundamentally harmful. It should be abolished. Social care should enable disabled people to live their lives, not force them into debt, distress and deeper inequality.

Assisted Dying by Melissa Parker — The 2025 Assisted Dying Bill aimed to allow terminally ill people with mental capacity to choose an assisted death. It was defeated in Parliament by 330 votes to 118.. Labour MPs were divided on the issue: Keir Starmer spoke in favour, advocating for a free vote amidst strong opinions. Some members, like Lyn Brown, expressed concerns about older people being coerced or feeling like a burden, while others, like George Howarth, viewed assisted dying as a rational choice for those who do not want to be a burden on loved ones. Disability rights advocates, including Lady Grey-Thompson and groups like Not Dead Yet, opposed the bill. They warned it could place vulnerable people at risk and create opportunities for abuse. Liz Carr expressed fears that inadequate safeguards could result in people's lives being ended without their consent. Critics argued that the legislation risked devaluing disabled lives and increasing

the likelihood of coercion, particularly among people experiencing mental distress or those who already felt that they were a burden. Over 350 disabled organisations formed a coalition against the bill, emphasising that disabled people should be supported to live. Some Labour MPs proposed amendments intended to protect vulnerable groups, including a measure that would have prevented health professionals from initiating conversations about assisted dying with minors. Concerns were also raised about the bill's evidence base, the speed of its passage through Parliament and the possibility of a slippery slope. Critics feared that eligibility could eventually be extended to people with non-terminal conditions, as has happened in some other countries. Disabled people's opposition was strong, with offline protests, social media campaigns like #AssistUsToLive, and personal stories shared to persuade MPs of the risks. Disabled MPs generally voted against the bill. Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown warned that legalising assisted dying could subtly influence societal attitudes toward disabled and elderly people. Overall, the debate exposed deep divisions. Supporters emphasised individual autonomy, while opponents focused on the risks of coercion, inadequate safeguards and harm to vulnerable people. The issue remains highly contentious, with the right to personal choice weighed against the need to protect those at risk of coercion or harm.

Assisted Dying Update by Anna Landre — Although the Terminally Ill Adults (Assisted Dying) Bill ran out of time in the House of Lords in April 2026, it has returned once again this year. Lauren Edwards, the first-term Labour MP for Rochester and Strood, won the Private Members' Bill ballot and, under considerable pressure from pro-assisted-suicide lobbyists, chose to reintroduce an almost identical bill in the new parliamentary session. The only differences were three minor amendments agreed in the House of Lords. Edwards also suggested that the Parliament Acts could be used to pass the legislation and indicated that any further amendments to the existing, flawed bill would be rejected, as the Parliament Acts require the same bill to be reintroduced. Many Labour MPs and political commentators warned that this decision would reignite divisions within an already struggling

Labour Party. Edwards is also widely considered likely to serve only one term because of the vulnerability of her parliamentary seat. Then, in July 2026, Keir Starmer stepped down as Prime Minister and Andy Burnham took office. He went on record stating that an assisted-suicide bill should not be considered until palliative care is fully funded across the UK. He argued that introducing assisted suicide without first ensuring access to proper end-of-life care would leave people without a genuine choice and could lead some to choose suicide because adequate care was unavailable. With this statement by the PM, the bill is expected to fail at its second reading on 11 September.

Systemic neglect of healthcare provision for Covid by Andrea Barrett — In 2026, Covid continues to circulate, with multiple peaks each year, and remains highly transmissible. Most people still have no access to vaccines, free testing or antiviral treatment. This widespread lack of access to protective measures and treatment can be understood as a form of systemic neglect. A key consideration is how Covid, as a vascular disease, has the capacity to hit every part of the body, and accelerates the development of other illnesses. At least 1 in 10 infections lead to long-term health issues including severe disablement, and the risk increases with each additional infection. For all of the 2020s, there have been continuing staggered cuts in eligibility despite access to interventions being key for reducing harm. Covid vaccines were made available to all in 2021 and twice yearly. Throughout the 2020s, eligibility for protective measures and treatments has been progressively restricted, despite their importance in reducing harm. In 2021, Covid vaccinations were available to everyone, with doses offered twice a year. Between 2022 and 2026, eligibility was reduced every six months, excluding growing numbers of people, including those considered clinically vulnerable. These restrictions have largely been justified through a narrow financial assessment of cost-effectiveness. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has not taken the costs of hospitalisation and long-term illness caused by Covid into account, focusing only on health costs arising within the first 28 days after infection. Flow tests (LFTs) are increasingly less effective at picking up positives for newer variants

and are not being updated. Currently, the remaining way for select clinically vulnerable people to get LFTs for free (select pharmacies) is not safely accessible. Eligibility for antiviral treatment is now largely restricted to those who are most severely immunosuppressed, e.g. organ transplant recipients and people with blood cancers. Even those who qualify face substantial barriers. Bureaucratic gatekeeping can cause delays that push eligible patients beyond the limited window in which treatment must begin. The UK also failed to order Evusheld, a pre-exposure prophylaxis monoclonal antibody (PrEP MAb) intended for people who are so clinically vulnerable that they cannot produce antibodies in response to vaccination, despite its use in other countries. Another MAb, Sotrovimab, was obtained as an antiviral treatment for severely immunosuppressed people who cannot take Paxlovid because of serious drug interactions. As of July 2026, supplies are running out, with no plan to reorder them. Hospitals still do not have universal masking guidance even as the Covid Inquiry made repeated recommendations between 2023 - 2026 for NHS policy to be updated to reflect realities of airborne transmission. This includes fitted FFP2+ masks, ventilation (opening windows and doors), HEPA air filtration with plentiful air changes and sick people isolating themselves from others.

Disability Hate Crime is on the Rise by Louise Page —
(Content warning: sexual assault) Fuelled by government rhetoric and amplified by the media, disabled people have faced a dramatic rise in hate crime over the past six months online and in person. We now live in a world where guests on semi-mainstream news channels can advocate for disabled people to be “starved” or “shot”. This climate has been created, in part, by the language used by politicians. When politicians dehumanise us and reduce our lives to employment statistics, and when the public is told that protecting our basic human rights leaves less money to address child poverty, there are real-world consequences. Disabled people are seen as legitimate targets for hostility, abuse and violence. I know all about hate crime because I have been subject to violence numerous times in the past due to my disability. This has included sexual assault, stalking and being groomed

as a teenager. Perpetrators have targeted me in the past both because my disability makes me vulnerable, and because they see disabled people as less than human. I have also been unable to seek legal justice for these crimes against me, because the justice system itself is prejudiced against disabled people; specifically, it tends to refuse to believe disabled people when we report crimes that have been committed against us. For example, when I have reported my sexual assault to professionals, they tend to respond with disbelief that someone would want to have "sex" (it wasn't sex- it was rape) with a disabled person. Now that the government has stirred up even more hate against disabled people, I am scared to leave my house for fear that I will once again be subject to violence.

Marriage equality and disability marriage penalty by Bee Gibson — The UK's 2014 decision to extend marriage freedom to LGBTQI+ communities was fundamental, yet marriage equality is far from achieved. A country that financially penalises disabled people for marrying or living with a partner cannot claim to champion equality. Although benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) are not affected by the marriage penalty, current UK policy means that disabled people on means-tested benefits, including Universal Credit, face the risk of financial penalties when marrying, entering a civil partnership or cohabiting. Under current UK policy, their joint income and savings are assessed when a claim is made or amended, often resulting in a reduction or complete loss of benefits. This can be disastrous in the lives of disabled people. Life simply costs more when you are disabled. The 2025 Disability Price Tag report by Scope estimated that disabled households require an extra £1,095 each month for needs such as medical equipment, higher energy bills, and other specialist support. Such statistics exemplify how the disability marriage penalty will, and does, push disabled people into poverty and precarious financial positions. A further concern is the risk of violence that is exacerbated by the marriage penalty. Disabled people are already more vulnerable to abuse, and often experience higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPA). The financial entrapment that can occur as a consequence of being forced to rely on a partner's income for

survival can increase the risk of IPA. Disabled people also have further barriers in accessing support, and the financial dependence on a partner can make it harder to escape abuse. The current system is unfit for purpose. It forces disabled people to choose between marriage or cohabitation and their financial independence. It is time for the government to prioritise disabled voices, and to listen to the disability organisations that are calling for the abolition of the disabled marriage penalty. If the UK is to further eliminate inequalities, disabled people must be free to choose the form their relationships take, including marriage or cohabitation, without fearing the loss of their financial independence or means of survival.

SEND Education by Pollyanna Chamberlain — Inclusion Emergency is a piece of performance activism created by Chickenshed Theatre and shared with educational settings to explore who and what is "missing in education". It highlights a growing crisis of inclusion. This year, Education Secretary Bridget Philipson said that improving the inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) would be a priority in her plans to reform education in England. Proposals have included treating all teachers as SEND teachers and incorporating more SEND support into initial teacher training. A £740 million capital investment has also been allocated to mainstream schools to create more accessible classrooms, and an education white paper is due to be published this autumn. But are these changes really enough to combat an 'inclusion emergency'? Such ill-feeling and disregard of disabled individuals has been shown by the benefits disaster – can a white paper on SEND reforms really heal a hostile atmosphere? When families are already stressed about changing benefits, it is vital that parents can have confidence in an education system, there to support their child. Yet, parents are worried that an increased reliance on mainstream teachers for SEND support rather than specialists will put too much pressure on teachers and deny the support children need. This pressure could be made worse by proposals to restrict Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) so that they apply only to children attending special needs schools. An EHCP is a legal document setting out the educational, health and care needs of a disabled person under the age of 25. These

plans are essential in helping young people access the support they require. However, advisors to the Department for Education have been questioning whether EHCPs have a place in mainstream education at all. Removing statutory support from disabled children in mainstream schools would be a policy of exclusion, not inclusion. Every child's needs are different. No amount of general training or improvements to classroom accessibility can fully replace an individual statutory assessment and the support it secures. Combined with the hostile environment created by Labour, removing statutory protections would mean that disabled children continue to be "missing in education".

Neurodiversity: ADHD, assessments and 'overdiagnosis' by Eilis Boyle — In recent years, neurodiversity has come increasingly under the spotlight. More people are speaking openly about conditions such as ADHD, yet the condition remains widely misunderstood and heavily stigmatised. Popular public narratives, reinforced by some politicians, focus on the supposed economic and social costs of "overdiagnosis". This fuels dismissive attitudes towards ADHD and, in some cases, outright denial of its existence. By extension, it also undermines the legitimacy of neurodivergent people's experiences, identities and support needs.. At the same time, people with ADHD are struggling to access basic support. Unmet need is widespread across the UK, and access remains deeply unequal. Women and girls, as well as people from minoritised and marginalised groups, are less likely to receive timely recognition, diagnosis and support.. Although ADHD diagnosis rates have risen in recent years, experts consistently challenge claims of overdiagnosis. Instead, they point to ongoing underdiagnosis and undertreatment. Those seeking assessment and treatment face deplorable waiting times. In June 2025, the Independent ADHD Taskforce reported waits of more than 4 years for children and more than 8 years for adults seeking NHS services. For many, a diagnosis is not just a route to treatment, but an important part of their self-understanding and acceptance. This desperate situation is pushing many towards private health providers. We are now witnessing what the ADHD Taskforce called a 'two-tier access to services, diagnosis and treatment', divided between those who can afford to pay and those

who cannot. This further deepens existing inequalities. Those unable to pay are left without recognition or appropriate support while facing increased risks of poor educational outcomes, unemployment, suicidal behaviour and other consequences associated with untreated ADHD. The narrative of “overdiagnosis” legitimises a culture of suspicion, stigma and personal blame. This threatens the neurodivergent community and distracts from systemic failures in ADHD support.

Mental Health Bill by Nicole Lacey— The UK government’s Mental Health Bill 2025 has been criticised for breaching the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It denies the full enjoyment of human rights to people experiencing mental distress or trauma, autistic people, and people with learning difficulties. In particular, the bill does not do enough to address the detention of disabled people or establish a plan for reducing and ending institutionalisation. The World Health Organisation and United Nations 2023 publication highlighted that ‘there is no evidence that coercion facilitates access to mental health care’ and ‘coercive practices violate a person’s right to liberty and security’. Crucially, the bill does not adequately protect the most discriminated against and those of us who experience multiple forms of discrimination. This includes a lack of focus on anti-racism measures - Black people are currently around 4 times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act, while people from BAME backgrounds are also hugely overrepresented in mental health detentions by the police, community treatment orders and repeated detentions. The bill also does not do enough to prevent people who have learning disabilities and autism from being institutionalised, despite many years of activists’ campaigning and commitments from the government. A major problem in the production of the bill has been the lack of consultation with, and active involvement of, disabled people and disabled people’s organisations. It also fails to establish a role for user-led organisations within the Act itself. Campaigners who have raised concerns have been ignored and dismissed.

Further update on the Mental Health Bill by Dorothy Gould, founder of Liberation — Liberation has campaigned continuously against this bill. The UK government was unwilling to address Liberation's serious concerns, so we appealed directly to the Committee for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or UNCRPD. An international user-led group called Transforming Communities for Inclusion, or TCI, supported us in doing so. The government has signed up to the UNCRPD, but is not implementing it effectively. UNCRPD Committee members not only invited Liberation to make a presentation about our concerns, but also took action. A letter was sent to the government on the Committee's behalf, raising serious questions about the bill. Because user-led groups were also able to respond, Liberation sent the Committee further information. TCI submitted material supporting Liberation's position. In its own response, the government defended its position. For example, it asserted that the Bill's continuing authorisation of involuntary detention in hospital and forced treatment complied with the UNCRPD. The government argued that someone could not be detained solely because of a disability, but only if they also presented a serious risk to themselves or others, and only when hospital treatment was considered essential. This attempt to justify coercion on the basis of risk does not stand up. As the World Health Organisation and the UN have both said, there is no adequate evidence that involuntary hospitalisation and forced treatment are even effective. (See their 2023 publication on Mental Health, Human Rights and Legislation, pp 15-16, Box 2.) Instead, these forms of coercion breach human rights, cause immense harm and bypass other approaches that are proving effective. In their reply, UNCRPD Committee members made it clear that they did not accept the government's arguments. Their response strongly upheld Liberation's concerns about the bill's breaches of the UNCRPD. This was hugely encouraging. Sadly, the bill nevertheless became law as the Mental Health Act 2025. However, Liberation will not give up. We will continue campaigning until UK law becomes non-discriminatory.

A major ruling on the meaning of deprivation of liberty has been made in mental capacity legislation by Dorothy Gould, founder of Liberation - In England, people given mental health diagnoses, people with learning difficulties and autistic people can all be deprived of liberty through the Mental Capacity Act 2005, as well as through the Mental Health Act 1983. Since 2014, 'deprivation of liberty' under UK mental capacity legislation has been defined by a legal ruling known as the Cheshire West judgement. This stated that people assessed as 'lacking mental capacity' should be considered deprived of their liberty if they were under continuous supervision and control and were not free to leave the place where they were living. This became known as the 'acid test'. As a result, many more cases required legal agreement, creating long delays throughout the process. This year, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland challenged the Cheshire West judgment in the Supreme Court, and the Court has now overturned it. The Court decided that the Cheshire West judgment had wrongly interpreted Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). It ruled that a much broader, 'multi-factorial' test should be used to decide whether someone has been deprived of their liberty. It also ruled that people who 'lack capacity' can give valid consent to losing their liberty in a hospital, care home or community setting if they are aware of their environment and have a basic ability to indicate whether they are happy with it. This ruling will also apply in England. One major concern is that people who experience restrictions that no longer count as deprivations of liberty will lose the protections they currently have under Article 5(1) of the ECHR. More fundamentally, the ruling remains non-compliant with the UNCRPD. It still fails to recognise disabled people's entitlement to legal capacity, meaning the right to have and exercise equal legal rights. It also fails to recognise the UNCRPD's call for a complete end to involuntary detention in hospitals and other institutions, as well as an end to forced treatment. Liberation will therefore continue fighting for full human rights.

Stop Oxevision by Anonymous — As disabled people, we're under constant surveillance. From DWP snooping through benefit claimants' bank statements, to health services monitoring how many times we

go to A&E or call 111, those who are meant to support us find new and endless ways to quantify how much of a burden we present. Amongst recent technological advances, digital technology and AI have increasingly been positioned as a solution to broken health and social care systems. This is being used to justify further cuts to funding that was never adequate in the first place. The use of monitoring technologies in particular – including video cameras, wearable trackers, and sensors that track someone as they move around and use items in their home – has expanded exponentially in recent years. Under the guise of safety, independence and privacy, these technologies are often used to justify reducing disabled people's care or other resources, raising concerns regarding safety, consent and data protection. The Stop Oxevision campaign began in 2022 in response to growing concerns about the use of Oxevision in mental health wards. Oxevision is a video camera-based alert system used in psychiatric hospital bedrooms, prison cells, police custody suites and care homes. It involves a camera and infrared sensor. Under specific and limited circumstances, it can take pulse and breathing rate readings. Despite promises of 'safety ', it also allows nurses (or prison guards) to watch patients remotely from an office. Oxevision has often been used against patients' consent, and even without their knowledge. It has concerning implications for safety and the quality of care. It may retraumatise patients and worsen their mental health. Oxevision is currently a key focus in the Lampard Inquiry - a public inquiry investigating the deaths of over 2,000 patients under mental health services in Essex - having been linked to the deaths of inpatients. As always, we call on this Labour government to listen to, and believe, disabled people; to work with us in addressing ableism; and to halt their own actions which further oppression, injustice and violence towards disabled people. Despite promises of 'security' and 'efficiency' in an age of AI, surveillance is not safety.

Face mask ban at protests: disabled people's access to democracy under attack by Andrea Barrett — The Crime & Policing Bill came into effect in the UK on 29 June 2026. It contains clauses banning the wearing of face masks at protests and in the surrounding area for 24

hours afterwards. The human rights group Liberty has raised concerns about how this might impact certain groups like the disabled, clinically vulnerable and immunosuppressed, who are more likely to make use of face masks as mitigations to prevent infectious disease spread when mixing in crowds. The impact of the ban is that people who wish to attend a protest masked, as well as those simply going from A to B in a mask, will be penalised for protecting their health: “Failing to remove a face covering when required to by a uniformed police officer - authorised by Section 60AA - is a criminal offence. If convicted, you are punishable with: up to 1 month’s imprisonment; a fine of up to £1000.” - Liberty. There is uncertainty about whether provisions in the Equality Act 2010 concerning reasonable adjustments and disability aids, such as masks, would override the Policing and Crime Bill 2026. This question is something this author, who has taken legal action in relation to the right to wear a mask when voting, is on a quest to find out. She has contacted lawyers and legal academics and is awaiting their thoughts. At present, the responsibility would fall on disabled people to take legal action following an arrest and retrospectively argue that a mask-related application of the new Policing and Crime Bill 2026 was unlawful. As such, the new legislation affects disabled people’s access to democracy. The parliamentary Human Rights Joint Committee that is undertaking an inquiry into this bill accepted submissions from advocacy groups until 13 May 2026. This inquiry may have the scope to introduce amendments to the bill. It is vital that committee members are lobbied to consider thoroughly an Equalities Impact Assessment examining the bill’s effects on disabled people.

Labour and the disabled voter by Melissa Parker— Much has been made of Labour’s policy decisions and conduct since it took power, and this has left many disabled voters vowing never to vote for the party again. Many disabled people, and therefore many disabled voters, are angry. Distrust of Labour is hardly new. Disability Rights UK’s page, ‘Labour’s Betrayal of Those in Greatest Need’, outlines how successive Labour governments have betrayed disabled people. However, the tone has changed, not least because disabled people expected better from a Labour government. By attempting to cut PIP, which we should

remember is an in-work benefit, Labour has created a schism. It appears to be suggesting more strongly than ever that disabled people have only conditional value. Paula Peters, from Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), said any Labour MPs who voted for the cuts would lose their seats. She said at a protest: “Let’s tell these MPs: the gloves come off. We turn the anger into action, and we’re not going to back off.” It isn’t just prominent figures within the disability community that said this, but ordinary disabled people, as one person commented on a forum, “What self-respecting disabled person would bother with Labour now?” Joy Dove has also attended some of the protests. She provides a vital, flesh-and-blood reminder of what government callousness can lead to. For eight years, she has fought for justice for her disabled daughter, Jodey Whiting, who took her own life in February 2017 after the Department for Work and Pensions mistakenly removed her out-of-work disability benefits. Joy memorably said, “DWP, you killed my daughter, and I don’t want it to happen to anybody else.” Then there are the disabled people who voted for Labour at the last general election, at the very least hoping for a reprieve from years of Tory austerity. Amongst them, Neil, included in a Guardian article on cuts, said, “I really didn’t think Labour would be so heartless. I had to close my membership; I just couldn’t support them any more. From a personal point of view, I feel like a scrounger; that’s how the Labour party has made me feel. And it’s not fair; we’re just trying to live life as best we can.” Taking the PIP, also launched a campaign against the benefits cuts. “We’ve launched this campaign because we refuse to stay silent while vital support, which allows disabled people to live with dignity, autonomy and inclusion, is under threat. The government’s proposal will devastate over 3.2 million disabled people and their families, pushing us deeper into poverty.” As Cherylee Houston wrote for The Guardian, “Labour is taking the Pip—and disabled people have had enough.” It was also significant that Disability Labour - the Labour Party’s official disabled people’s affiliate organisation said that it had “grave concerns” about the reform to disability benefits. Surely, all of this will impact how disabled people vote at the next election. As one disabled Twitter user put it, “What would persuade 16 million disabled people to ever vote Labour again?” “Never again,” said another. After

all this, scrawled across some Guardian videos featuring disabled people is the phrase, “Voting Labour is my biggest regret.”

On the Horizon or, One Battle After Another! By Rick Burgess —
As neoliberalism decays into its terminal stage of fascism, disabled people continue to be consistently targeted by the state along with immigrants, asylum seekers, and trans people. War appears to be the elite’s recourse rather than co-operation over the climate crisis, and austerity remains in force for public services. Within this context, the next step of withdrawing public services is being readied. Upcoming overlapping reports, reviews, and legislative proposals include: The Timms PIP review was presented to Labour MPs as an exercise in co-production, but it is nothing of the sort. The Milburn review concerns young people who are not in employment or education, or NEETs. Alan Milburn is an old-school, pro-war Blairite. In his media messaging, he has particularly targeted young disabled people, despite their making up only a tiny proportion of NEETs. The Fonagy and Wessely review is designed to provide cover for the government to reduce support for neurodivergent people and people with ADHD, anxiety or depression. Wessely is notorious for defending the government over Gulf War syndrome and for heading the discredited DWP-funded PACE trial on CFS/ME. The Mayfield employment review has been completed and will also form part of the work-activation agenda. Each of these reviews has produced interim reports that amplify the desire of the media and political classes to cut social security. This political and media campaign has already contributed to the deaths of thousands of disabled people over the past two decades. Even among the recent positive signs concerning social care, including a proposed National Care Service that would be free at the point of need, commissioner Louise Casey has revealed an alarming lack of understanding of social security and disability.. We are trying hard to get them to follow our Roadmap to Independent Living. The continuing hostile environment towards immigrants and asylum seekers has a particular impact upon social care but also on disabled people who come here escaping persecution. The Terminally Ill Adults Bill is being re-presented to Parliament in an attempt to create legalised assisted death in this country. However,

it does not have the support of the new Prime Minister, who agrees that good palliative and end-of-life care must be in place instead. The key vote is on 11 September, when disabled people will converge on Westminster. A wall of denial and silence even as the Covid Inquiry exposes the criminal conduct of the government. Covid is ongoing and continues to disable people, yet it appears that we are being asked to completely forget about it. Effects of Cheshire West ruling on deprivation of liberty safeguards. Legislative proposals are also being developed to change the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system. Although these proposals adopt our language, they would reduce the availability of legally enforceable Education, Health and Care Plans and fail to address segregation meaningfully. With the withdrawal of trans healthcare and public segregation, disabled people are offering our toilets in solidarity to help people cope. However, much more must be done to challenge the influence of big money and restore and improve healthcare. The government continues to fail to build enough accessible housing, implement accessibility standards, or regulate the private rented sector and housing associations adequately. Public transport continues to fail in its duty to allow us simply to turn up and travel. Secretive changes to Access to Work continue, exposing the dishonesty of the government's work-activation agenda. Were the government sincere about making workplaces more accessible, it would strengthen Access to Work. Instead, it is destroying it. So we know for a fact that the work activation rhetoric is really just polite cover for the State that has decided it no longer wants to support as many disabled people as currently exist. Non-disabled people are controlling laws and resources disabled people need, and they are deciding the prospect of changing a disabling society is not to their tastes, and they would rather reduce our numbers through neglect, extreme poverty, and euthanasia. This will be the terrain for the next few years; as long as the dominant consensus political settlement remains, our lives and rights will be fragile and prey to the whims of non-disabled led institutions. Collective resistance and peer support are required; please join with others, and if there is no group or DDPO in your locale, think about forming one. Whether we like it or not, it has fallen to us to be warriors.

Would you like to know more?

GROUPS TO JOIN

Disabled People Against Cuts (National and local): https://dpac.uk.net/
Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People: https://gmcdp.com/
Find Disabled People's Organisations - https://dpomap.com/
Liberation : https://liberationrights.org.uk/
Disabled People's Human Rights Network

NEWS

The Disability News Service - https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/
Disability Rights UK - https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/
Benefits and Work: https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news
Archive: Deaths by Welfare - https://deathsbywelfare.org/
Journalist: https://www.thecanary.co/author/rachel-charlton-dailey/
Journalist: https://www.thecanary.co/author/hannah-sharland/
Journalist: https://www.theguardian.com/profile/lucy-webster
Journalist: https://www.theguardian.com/profile/frances-ryan
Journalist: https://www.katebelgrave.com/
Journalist: https://recoveryinthebin.org/
Journalist: https://x.com/LurgeeLife

BOOKS

The Department: How a Violent Government Bureaucracy Killed Hundreds and Hid the Evidence by John Pring (2024)
No More Deaths by Welfare by China Mills (2026)
The War On Disabled People by Ellen Clifford (2022)
Justice for Laughing Boy by Sara Ryan & Stephen Unwin (2017)
Capitalism and Disability: Selected Writings by Marta Russell (2019)
Disability a History of Resistance Disability by David Turner (2026)
The Shock Doctrine by Naomi Klein (2007)
Beautiful Lives: How We Got Learning Disabilities So Wrong by Stephen Unwin (2025)

Find more of our zines at linktr.ee/disabilityark