

Macmillan Welfare Reform Bill Briefing



Purpose: **To brief Peers ahead of the Committee Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill**

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Introduction

This briefing sets out Macmillan's position on the Government's Welfare Reform Bill ahead of the Committee Stage in the Lords. While we recognise the need for reform of the welfare system, we strongly support calls for changes to the Bill.

We are asking Peers to support amendments tabled by Lord Patel and Baroness Thomas of Winchester and to speak out against measures that risk leaving thousands of people undergoing a potentially life-threatening illness without critical financial support at a time when they need it most.

Macmillan's priorities for Committee Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill in the House of Lords

1. **Opposition to imposing a time limit on how long an individual can claim Employment & Support Allowance (ESA)**

ESA is a benefit for people who are out of work because of illness or disability. Following a 13 week assessment stage – during which the claimant undergoes the Work Capability Assessment – if they are assessed as eligible for ESA they will either be placed in the Support Group or the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). In the Support Group there are no conditions on receiving the benefit. In the WRAG the claimant will be expected to do certain work-related activities in order to receive the benefit.

There is currently no limit to the amount of time a person can remain in either the ESA Support Group or the WRAG. The Welfare Reform Bill will limit the amount of time someone in the WRAG is eligible to receive ESA on a contributory basis to 12 months. Thereafter, a means-test will apply. Twelve months is not long enough for many cancer patients to get back to work.

Lord Patel has tabled an amendment, supported by Baroness Lister and Lord Crisp which call for Clause 51 of the Bill to be removed. Macmillan strongly supports this amendment. Lord Patel has also tabled amendments 73, which ensures that time-limiting contributory ESA for those in the WRAG is not applied retrospectively, 74 which ensures the assessment phase is not included in any time-limit of contributory ESA and 75 which ensures that any period of time-limiting contributory ESA restarts following any period a person spends in the Support Group.

Professor Jane Maher, Macmillan's Chief Medical Officer: *"In my experience one year is simply not long enough for many people to recover from cancer. The serious physical and psychological side-effects of cancer can last for many months, even years, after treatment has finished. It is crucial that patients are not forced to return to work before they are ready."*

Peers can show their support to cancer patients at Committee Stage by supporting the following amendments:

Clause 51 of the Bill amends the Welfare Reform Act 2007 to introduce a 12 month limit to the amount of time a person is entitled to contributory ESA for those in the Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG). **Lord Patel has tabled an amendment to see Clause 51 dropped from the Bill. Macmillan strongly supports this amendment.**

Lord Patel has also tabled amendments 73-75 which ensure that any period of time-limiting contributory ESA restarts following any period a person spends in the Support Group, ensure the assessment phase is not included in any time-limit of contributory ESA and that time-limiting contributory ESA for those in the WRAG is not applied retrospectively **Macmillan supports Lord Patel's amendments.**

2. Opposition to the extension of the qualifying period before a person can claim the Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

As part of the Government's proposals, a new Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will replace the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in providing financial support to help people meet the additional costs associated with their long term condition. Included in this change is an extension – from three to six months – of the qualifying period someone must wait before they are able to receive this support.

For people with cancer, where treatment and its debilitating effects can begin very quickly after diagnosis, support needs are often immediate. Macmillan believes people with sudden-onset, long-term conditions should be able to claim support as soon as their support needs arise. We are flatly opposed to increasing the qualifying period from three to six months.

The Government has said there is alternative financial support available to cover the immediate costs related to a person's disability or illness. However, much of this support, such as the NHS Healthcare Travel Cost Scheme, is means-tested whereas PIP will not be. Furthermore, Macmillan benefits advisers tell us that this alternative support often takes weeks or months to process. Cancer patients already find the three month wait difficult. The outcome of delaying payment by yet another three months will be that cancer patients who are struggling to pay their bills or mortgage payments will face more debt and more stress.

Peers can show their support to cancer patients at Committee Stage by supporting the following amendments:

Baroness Thomas of Winchester has tabled amendments 86A-D that propose to keep the qualifying period at its current level of 3 months rather than extending it to 6 months. Macmillan strongly supports Baroness Thomas's amendments.

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