



Personal Independence Payment: assessment thresholds and consultation

Aspire provides practical help to people who have been paralysed by spinal cord injury. Paralysis is permanent and there is no cure. Many of those we work with are wheelchair users and recipients of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Disabled people incur additional costs as a direct result of their condition or impairment simply doing things that many take for granted. The Disability Living Allowance helps people to meet some of these additional costs. Aspire welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback to the Personal Independence Payment assessment thresholds and consultation document.

- Q1. Under Activity 7 – Communicating, clearer guidance and description is needed on ‘accessing written information.’ People with higher level spinal cord injuries may have limited finger dexterity and experience difficulty in opening an envelope. Handling paperwork can also be difficult without using aids and appliances. Aspire believes this should be clearly recognised in the assessment.
- Q2. For all activities in the Personal Independence Payment assessment, more examples would be helpful as this would clarify many queries on how individuals will be affected by each assessed indicator.

On Activity 4 – Bathing and Grooming, greater emphasis needs to be placed on safety and whether people can safely bathe and groom with or without help and supervision. In addition, there also needs to be a clearer description indicator on whether people can safely bathe and groom without aids and appliances.

On Activity 6 – Dressing and Undressing, Aspire believes that the points allocated for D and E should be the same. If someone cannot dress either their upper body or their lower body independently, it still means that if they were to go out, they would be dressed inappropriately.

- Q3. Aspire would like to reiterate the point made in our consultation response to the Personal Independence Payment initial draft of assessment criteria document on Activity 11 – Moving Around. Under this activity in the assessment, wheelchair users who require physical support to move are awarded more points which count towards the assessment. If an individual purchases a lighter wheelchair, or aids that make using a wheelchair easier such as e-motion wheels, they will accumulate fewer points on their assessment, which could affect their overall entitlement. Aspire would like to highlight that even if an individual has a

wheelchair that empowers them to be more independent, they still incur additional costs associated with their impairment.

For example, wheelchair users have fewer practical transport options available to them. It can be difficult for a wheelchair user to use public transport when carrying heavy or bulky items as designated wheelchair spaces do not take luggage into account and cars and taxis are costlier than public transport. Those who purchase hand controlled cars often have to purchase larger vehicles which are more expensive as cheaper, smaller vehicles may be unsuited to their needs due to interior space and the size of the doors. Those in rural areas fare particularly badly with public transport options because of 'pressure to direct funding towards more urbanised areas because that was where the 'big wins' were.'¹

Unfortunately, people are often provided with a wheelchair that does not meet their needs. Wheelchairs provided by the NHS are often too heavy and can hinder an individual's rehabilitation and affect their ability to reintegrate back into society. For this reason, many purchase a wheelchair that better matches their needs. According to Aspire's research, forty-six per cent of people with spinal cord injury change the type of wheelchair they use within a year of being discharged.² No aid or adaptation lasts forever and additional financial costs are involved with maintenance and replacement. Aspire believes that it would be wrong for people to be penalised for having a wheelchair that meets their needs, and that the extra costs associated with being a wheelchair user should be recognised.³

- Q4. Under the assessment criteria for mobility activities, there is a danger that individuals who use crutches on a permanent basis to get around will not have their impairment recognised. A better example can be used for 11C to recognise people who can walk with an aid for 50 metres but may need a period of rest before they can continue.
- Q7. 'To a reasonable standard' needs to be clarified. Compared to an individual without an impairment would be a better way for explaining 'reliably'. 'In a timely fashion' must clearly incorporate and include recovery periods.

In a previous consultation on DLA reform, Aspire has expressed the opinion that it is difficult to assess the impact of these proposed changes whilst more details of a potential new assessment are not available.⁴ Therefore the information revealed in this document which sets out the points thresholds for Personal Independence Payment is welcome. However, more information is still needed on the actual payment rates for the components of Personal Independence Payment so that we can assess what these changes will mean to people in terms of income.

¹ Commission for Rural Communities (2009) Rural Accessibility – Best practise case studies.

² Rose, Lona and Ferguson-Pell, Martin (2002) Wheelchair Provision for People with Spinal Cord Injury: 1, in British Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation, Vol9, NO. 10.

³ Aspire (2011) Personal Independence Payment: initial draft of assessment criteria.

⁴ Aspire (2011) Disability Living Allowance Reform: Consultation Response.

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