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# THE FINANCIAL WELLBEING OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE UK

## QUICK READ

The UK [Money and Pensions Service](#) says that "financial wellbeing is about feeling secure and in control. It's about making the most of your money from day to day, dealing with the unexpected, and being on track for a healthy financial future." Financial wellbeing is essential to delivering the [United Nation's](#) vision of "the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and [...] full inclusion and participation in the community".

In this study, we spoke to disabled people in the UK to find out what 'financial wellbeing' means to them and the difficulties they face in trying to improve their financial wellbeing. We used the information to help us measure the financial wellbeing of disabled people in a survey. The 815 disabled people who took part in the survey were members of a UK-wide research panel of approximately 3,500 people run by the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC), which is broadly representative of the wider disabled population.

This study is important because it:

- Is designed with the help of disabled people so that it reflects their views, experiences and priorities for improving financial wellbeing (something that has not happened before).
- Looks beyond the generic label of 'disabled' to examine if and how financial wellbeing differs by demographic factors such as age and income as well as the number and type of impairments that someone has.

## Key findings

Many disabled people in the UK are struggling financially, with some even finding it difficult to afford food and other basics:

- Three-in-ten (27%) disabled households are in serious financial difficulty, compared to one-in-ten (11%) of non-disabled households.
- Nearly one-in-three (29%) disabled people said that 'it is a constant struggle' to meet their bills and credit commitments.
- A third (33%) said they were struggling to pay for food or other necessary expenses.

Age, income and type of impairment all help explain the differences in disabled people's financial wellbeing. Working age disabled adults reported significantly worse financial wellbeing than those of pensionable age on all financial wellbeing measures. Disabled people on the lowest incomes, those in receipt of benefits and those not undertaking any paid work also had higher levels of financial difficulty.

In addition, our analysis shows that disabled people with the following impairments had significantly higher odds of financial difficulty than disabled people overall:

- Physical mobility impairments
- Learning difficulties
- Mental health conditions
- Multiple health conditions
- Conditions that affect one's appearance
- Disabilities acquired suddenly
- Chronic fatigue
- Non-visible conditions (inc. mental health and chronic fatigue)
- Memory-related conditions

Lack of money is having serious negative impacts on disabled people's mental and physical wellbeing, when they are already living with often complex, multiple health conditions. In the last six months:

- A half (52%) of survey respondents had been unable to keep their home warm and comfortable.
- A third (32%) had avoided going to the dentist or receiving dental treatment as a result of the cost.
- A quarter (25%) had cut down or stopped receiving medical services that they had been paying for – such as counselling or physiotherapy.

As a result, 45% of disabled people said that their financial situation was making their mental health worse, while 40% said this was true of their physical health. For those on the lowest incomes, these figures rise further to 57% and 50% respectively.

## What needs to happen?

To help disabled people improve their financial situations, four things are needed:

- **Better access to employment for those who can work:** Three-in-ten (29%) working age disabled people felt they had been discriminated against by employers or potential employers because of their impairment. A quarter (26%) said that employers had failed to make reasonable adjustments for them.
- **A benefits system that provides a proper safety net:** Half (47%) of disabled people receiving Universal Credit were struggling to pay for food and other essentials, as were a third (35%) of those in receipt of Personal Independence Payment. Most (71%) disabled people who received benefits agreed that they had been made to feel guilty about applying for benefits, while 82% felt that uncertainty about benefits makes it harder for them to plan their future finances.
- **Targeted support to reduce the costs of disability:** Three-quarters of disabled people (75%) agreed that they have “particularly high costs” due to their impairment, such as high energy and water costs. These costs may amount to more than £1,100 per month, according to [research from Scope](#).
- **Access to essential services and advice:** Half of disabled people (53%) reported difficulties getting to a bank branch; and four-in-ten (37%) said they had problems getting to or using a cash machine. Most of our survey respondents said they had accessed advice or information on financial matters, but only three-in-ten of them (29%) were satisfied with the quality of the advice or information that was available.

There are examples of positive changes already happening on some of these issues that can make a difference if they are widely available and disabled people know about them. Just as important is the need to change the public conversation about disability and disabled people in the UK – who make up nearly one-in-four (24%) of our total population - in order to challenge negative narratives and harmful stereotypes.

## About this research

This research was a collaboration between the University of Bristol's Personal Finance Research Centre (PFRC) and the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC). It was funded by abrDN Financial Fairness Trust.

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