

Advocacy Feature

Disability Related Expenditure Assessments (DRE)

Following my own personal experience of DRE assessments I wanted to attempt to share what I have learned from my own experiences in the hope it can help guide others through this process a little more easily. I really appreciate how it can seem quite daunting firstly trying to understand what is needed and secondly how to get the correct information together, especially when you feel so ill and struggle to cope with the basics never mind any further extra demands on you.

The Department of Health define disability related expenditure as “any reasonable additional cost that the service user incurs due to a disability or condition”.

When you are assessed as needing care at home the local authority i.e. social services will also assess you financially as to your ability to pay a contribution towards the cost of your care. The amount you are asked to contribute can vary tremendously across the country.

More local authorities are now including disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA) or the severe disability premium in means-tested benefits as part of your income. This can then have the potential to considerably increase the amount you are asked to contribute toward your care costs if previously your disability benefits were excluded as income from such a financial assessment.

The Government has issued guide lines to local authorities and advised them to make local policies adhering to government guidelines. Some of these recommendations as far as I understand are as follows.

The assessment itself:

- Should be made as easy as possible for the service user to understand and complete.
- Assistance should be given to help service users complete the assessment.
- Assessments should normally be carried out by a personal interview in the user’s own home because the full list of possible eligible items allowed by a local authority can be very confusing without suitable explanation.
- The assessment process should be flexible enough to deal with the differences in needs of individual users.
- They should support self-assessment by the service user as much as possible taking a holistic view of the user's financial and personal needs.
- It should consider what is needed to support the user to maintain their independence.
- It should ensure that the charge assessed is reasonable.
- Benefits advice should normally be offered as part of the assessment.

Working out what might be eligible as DRE

If you have been ill or disabled for a lengthy time it is easy to forget what it is like to buy normally, without a long term illness or disability.

So it's worth thinking of what you would have done previously. Then, against this background, try to look at everything you spend money on or use now, and ask yourself:

- are you doing it in a way to meet a need arising from any of your disabilities or illnesses?
- are you are having to buy a more expensive or different item because that has a specific quality you need - as compared to what you would normally have needed or paid for if healthy?
- is there any other cheaper method of meeting your need?

This might seem like an effort, but it can be done gradually each time you spend money and will soon give you the information you need. Even if you are not well enough to file and sort out any receipts it is worth just keeping all your receipts together. If you are able to file the ones used on disability items separately that will make it a bit easier if you do need to refer to them at any time.

It is helpful when you next have your care needs assessed or reviewed that you have difficulties resulting in need for disability purchases documented, and aim to include these items as equipment or needs identified in your care plan. This clarifies the need more easily (but is not essential). For example, Velcro can be a normal purchase, but if used to hold cutlery to an arm splint to enable you to be more independent when eating then it becomes disability equipment.

It can also help to complete a table/list with headings:

Item description and associated costs	Weekly or monthly costs	brief comment to explain particular need
Privately purchased Personal care		
Privately purchased Domestic support		
Respite care and/or Day care		
Social support needs		
Emotional support needs		
Continence Toileting needs		
Medication needs		
Community Alarms		
Equipment You have bought		
Equipment maintenance Costs		
Clothing		
Food		
Additional heating/Fuel costs		
Water costs		
Home maintenance		
Gardening		
Wear and tear generally		
Travel		
Holiday costs		
Any Other costs		

If you feel the outcome of assessment is incorrect ...

You can put this in writing (post or e-mail) to the assessing team stating briefly why you think it is wrong and ask them to reassess. If still unhappy after this you can appeal again through the local authority's complaints procedure. The assessor will be able to give you information on how to do this.

If you still feel the outcome is incorrect and will leave you in poverty then it's worth looking into further advocacy to assist you.

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)

Wales 08444 77 20 20 England 08444 111 444
Scotland 0808 800 9060 Northern Ireland 028 9023 6522
TextRelay users should call 08444 111 445

NB: Calls to 0844 numbers are charged at five pence per minute from a BT landline and may cost considerably more from mobile and other phones.

Or check your local bureau's contact details on line:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk (England and Wales)

www.cas.org.uk (Scotland)

www.citizensadvice.co.uk (Northern Ireland)

On-line Self Help Guide from Citizen's Advice:

www.adviceguide.org.uk

Disability Law Service

National advice line is available Mon to Fri 10am - 5pm

Telephone: 020 7791 9800

Minicom: 020 7791 9801 /

e-mail: advice@dls.org.uk

39-45 Cavell Street, London, E1 2BP

www.dls.org.uk

Community Legal Advice

Free and confidential legal advice in England and Wales, available to people who are eligible for legal aid.

(The websites below provide a legal aid eligibility calculator.)

Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm; Saturday 9am to 12:30pm

Telephone: 0845 345 4 345

Minicom: 0845 609 6677

Text: 'legalaid' and your name to 80010

www.gov.uk/community-legal-advice

On-line advice www.claonlineadvice.justice.gov.uk

Christians Against Poverty

Specialist knowledge in debt management. Can advise and support you with debt problems. They do not give you money but the means to get back on track. They really do want to help and understand how frightening being in debt is. You do not have to be a Christian to get help.

Tel: 01274 760720 info@capuk.org www.capuk.org

Citizens Advice Bureaux (details as above) can also assist with advice if you are struggling financially or in debt.