

# **Breaking Down Barriers**

**– Labour’s manifesto  
for disabled people**

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## **Foreword**

Marsha de Cordova

This manifesto proudly lays out Labour’s transformative plans for disabled people – to ensure that every person is empowered to participate fully and equally in society.

‘Breaking Down Barriers’ sets out to build a society according to the social model of disability, removing the barriers facing disabled people to accessing independent public services, education, employment, transport, justice and housing. We will honour our commitment to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD), signed by the previous Labour government in 2009. We will do this by incorporating the UN CRPD into UK law, working with disabled people every step of the way.

In the past nine years, the Conservative and Lib Dems have created a hostile environment for disabled people.

They have unleashed an austerity programme that systematically denies disabled people the vital support that they are entitled to, from Universal Credit to cuts to social care.

In 2016, a United Nations report labelled austerity as responsible for “grave” and “systematic” human rights violations

against disabled people. This was repeated this year, when the UN rapporteur on Extreme Poverty likened the Department for Work and Pensions to a 19th century workhouse. But the Conservative government has shamefully buried their heads in the sand to this reality.

We are proud that the Labour Party is the only party with a manifesto developed by and for disabled people, according to the principle of 'nothing about you without you'. Labour in government will embody that principle, empowering disabled people and enhancing our voices. Every policy decision and every pledge will be co-produced by, with and for disabled people.

This is how we will build a transformative movement, capable of reshaping disabled people's lives and capable of demolishing the hostile environment framework that marginalises so many in Britain today.

# Introduction

Labour is the party of equality and diversity. Labour believes that society should enable everyone to flourish. Fairer societies are better for all of us.

That is why the next Labour government will bring about real change, creating a fairer, more equal and diverse society in which disabled people are able to live independent lives and treated with dignity and respect.

A Labour government will usher in a new era of equality, inclusion and citizenship. An era in which 'nothing about us without us' is at the heart of government.

Everyone should have the right to participate fully in society without fear of discrimination, prejudice or isolation.

Achieving that goal is at the core of Labour's vision for a fairer society. After nearly a decade of Tory austerity there is much to do.

Disabled people have endured nine long years of cuts, which have been shamefully advocated by some on the basis of stigma and prejudice.

The Conservative Party - acting in partnership for five years with the Liberal Democrats - oversaw a punitive assessments and sanctions regime that has seen thousands of people die within six months of being declared 'fit to work.'

Accessibility funding has been scaled back. Support services in our schools, hospitals and local authorities have been lost. The Remploi factory network was closed down. Access to workplace justice was deeply impaired by the introduction of discriminatory employment tribunal fees.

The UN's investigatory committee found that the Government had committed 'grave or systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities,' including by pushing through policies that it knew would have 'an adverse impact on persons with disabilities.'

Shamefully, the Government has not implemented the committee's recommendations or seriously engaged in the process. The EHRC has also warned that social security changes since 2010 have had:

"A particularly negative, disproportionate and cumulative impact on the rights to independent living and an adequate standard of living for disabled people."

Austerity has made existing inequalities worse.

Disabled people are significantly more likely to live in low-income households. Disabled people still earn less than comparable workers who are not disabled, and the disability employment gap has remained stubbornly wide.

Discrimination is a lived reality for many disabled people. One in five disabled workers have had a job offer withdrawn after

disclosing their disability to a prospective employer. Reported disability hate crime against disabled people by increased by 37% in the last year alone.

Labour supports the social model of disability. This means that people are disabled by economic, social, cultural, physical and attitudinal barriers which must be removed. This principle is at heart of our approach and it will be embedded across all parts of a Labour government.

Labour is determined to advocate for and implement these positive policies that will help break down the barriers that hold disabled people back.

Together we can build a more just and equal society.

# **Social security**

The Conservatives have created a hostile environment for disabled people. A culture of prejudice and distrust has been promoted to justify deep and cruel cuts to our social security system and our public services.

Labour will end this hostile environment.

We will create a social security system that seeks to end poverty and provide people with security and dignity. Labour will make us as proud of our social security system as we are of the National Health Service.

Disabled people and their families are more likely to be living in poverty than non-disabled people, and the numbers living in absolute poverty have grown.

We need to break the link between disability and poverty as part of a Labour government's fight to end the poverty that has become endemic. A Labour government will end in-work poverty in its first term, and halve foodbank use in its first year.

The Tories' cruelty has made the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) a symbol of fear for disabled people. Time and again disabled people have had to fight through the courts to receive the support they are entitled to. The government is having to carry out seven reviews to identify ill and disabled people who were wrongly denied support.

Social security is a right – and people who need to access support should not be vilified as ‘skivers’ or ‘scroungers’. Labour will rebuild our social security system so that it is there to support all of us when we need it. This will mean changing the culture of the DWP, which we will start on day one by replacing it with a Department for Social Security that is supportive and enabling, instead of demonising people not in paid employment.



# Universal Credit

Universal Credit has been a vehicle for cuts, and nowhere is that clearer than in the experience of disabled people. Labour will immediately end migration onto Universal Credit. In the medium-run we will scrap it and replace it with a system co-produced with disabled people and dedicated to dignity, universalism and ending poverty.

We will start developing this system from the very first day a Labour government is in office. But we can't replace UC overnight. So we will also implement an emergency package of reforms to mitigate some of the worst features of UC while we develop our replacement system.

We will end the five week wait by introducing an interim payment based on half an estimated monthly entitlement. We will end the punitive sanctions regime, immediately suspending all sanctions and removing the claimant agreement.

The evidence is clear that sanctions do not work. Sanctions damage people's health and well-being – and the result is to leave people further from the labour market. We will ensure that employment support is positive not punitive.

We recognise that the way sanctions have been levied on people has not only been cruel, it has often been unnecessarily intrusive and at times humiliating for people.

The single payment in Universal Credit has come under fierce criticism for putting women at risk of financial coercion and control, with disabled women more at risk.

Urgent changes Labour will make to Universal Credit include protecting women in abusive relationships by splitting payments and paying the child element to the primary carer. We will make it easier for people to manage their living costs by introducing fortnightly payments and paying the housing element directly to landlords.

While Labour's policy of delivering free full-fibre broadband by 2030 will benefit many disabled people, we recognise that the DWP's "digital only" policy is discriminatory. We will officially end the "digital only" approach and recruit 5,000 new social security advisers.

We will abolish the Bedroom Tax that is causing such hardship for so many.

Social security is also supposed to help disabled people cope with the additional costs and disadvantages they face. But the Tories have cut back that support to inadequate levels.

There is no equivalent of Enhanced Disability Premium or Severe Disability Premium in Universal Credit. That means the many disabled people not in paid employment and living without a formal carer can potentially lose out by around £180 a month on transferring to Universal Credit.

After repeated legal challenges and pressure from campaigners, including Labour, the government has been forced to compensate those severely disabled people who have already lost out in transferring to Universal Credit, but not at a level that fully reflects the loss they have suffered.

Labour believe disabled people and those who are ill should receive the support they need to lead full, independent lives.

As a start we will:

- Increase Employment and Support Allowance by £30 per week for those in the work-related activity group;
- Raise the basic rate for disabled children to the level of Child Tax Credits;
- Ensure that severely disabled people without a formal carer receive extra support to enable them to meet the extra costs they inevitably face by introducing a self-care element as part of our emergency reforms to Universal Credit. Equivalent of Severe Disability Premium, this will provide support to people that require additional support and do not have a paid carer.

We will support those who look after others, bringing Carer's Allowance into line with Jobseeker's Allowance.

# Assessments

The current system is not working and needs to end. We need a system that delivers for disabled people. Labour will end the privatisation of assessments and bring them in-house.

We will scrap the dehumanising Work Capability Assessments and Personal Independent Payment (PIP) assessments, which are not fit for purpose. Just last year the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into Work Capability Assessments for Employment Support Allowance and PIP assessments found widespread failures:

“Large sums of money have been paid to contractors despite quality targets having been universally missed. The taxpayer has spent hundreds of millions of pounds more checking and defending DWP decisions based on the contractors’ reports.”

Yet despite the widespread concerns about these assessments, the government announced earlier this year it would extend the contracts with the very same companies currently carrying them out.

We need a framework that engages with medical evidence and takes into account the barriers in society facing disabled people. Labour will work with disabled people’s organisations to develop a replacement to the current assessments based on a personalised, holistic assessment framework that provides each individual with a tailored plan, building on their strengths and addressing barriers. Assessments need to be more responsive,

particularly for claimants with progressive and fluctuating conditions.

We will end the pointless stress of reassessments for people with long-term conditions that prevent them from working.

We will help reduce household costs by offering free prescriptions for all and free basic dentistry, building on the NHS's founding principles.

# **Accessing paid employment and other opportunities**

Disabled people deserve a fair deal at work. We will support disabled people who want to move into paid employment, removing the barriers that government has put in their way and challenging the discrimination disabled people face in the workplace.

There is an urgent need for action in this area. The employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people has been closing at a snail's pace and means as a country we are losing out by failing to harness people's potential. Not only are disabled people less likely to have a paid job but when they do, disabled people earn substantially less than their non-disabled peers. This is unacceptable.

One in four employers admit that they would be less likely to hire a worker who is disabled, and seven in ten workers with a neurodivergent condition report experiencing discrimination at work.

Labour will halve the disability employment gap by supporting employers to retain disabled employees. We will bring back specialist employment advisors.

We will introduce a government-backed Reasonable Adjustments Passport scheme to help people move between jobs more easily, building on the work published by the TUC.

Labour will recommend that the Equality and Human Rights Commission develops a new Code of Practice on reasonable adjustments which will set out clearer guidance on the meaning of 'reasonable' and include timescales for implementation to end the long and distressing delays experienced by disabled workers.

Labour will give statutory rights to workplace equalities representatives and set up a Royal Commission to bring health (including mental health) and safety legislation up to date.

We will place legal requirements on employers to report on and act to close disability pay gaps. We will also introduce equality audits that cover more than just pay on each protected characteristic in the Equality Act, requiring organisations with over 250 employees to report annually on the number and proportion of disabled people they employ.

We will update the Equality Act to introduce new specific duties including disability leave, paid and recorded separately from sick leave.

Labour will give everyone the right to work flexibly unless the employer can show that the nature of the job prohibits it, which is anticipated to particularly benefit disabled workers.

We will give trade union equality representatives statutory rights to improve their ability to challenge discrimination in the workplace and to ensure best practice policies are implemented instead.

We will work with trade unions and employers to raise awareness of neurodiversity – a term covering but not limited to autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia – in the workplace, in public services and across wider society.

Labour's plans for a Workers' Protection Agency will provide people with greater support in enforcing their rights at work.

Working with disabled people's organisations and trade unions, Labour will review support for disabled people to find and stay in work. This will include exploring how we can expand, strengthen and better promote Access to Work support. It will also include evaluating the delivery of Access to Work and how people first qualify for the service, periods between assessments, and ensuring it is integrated with other services and the social security system.

Labour values the role of supported employment and specialist employment services, and we will continue to review how best to promote this important sector of the economy.



# Education and training

The current system is failing disabled children and young people. As the Education Select Committee recently warned, to get the support learners need “parents and carers have to wade through a treacle of bureaucracy, full of conflict, missed appointments and despair.”

Losing out at this stage in life can have serious life-long consequences. We will address the disability education gap, which stops disabled children and young people fulfilling their potential. And we will replace the flawed Education, Health and Care Plan assessment, which has been used to restrict access to support.

Local authorities are increasingly refusing to fund the costs of adapting foster or adoptive parents’ homes to meet the needs of disabled looked-after children. This is contributing to the national shortage in foster families. Labour would introduce a small fund to cover the cost of these adaptations alongside a clear national standard.

We will tackle the discrimination against disabled children and young people in accessing education, including in free schools and academies. We will end the fragmentation and marketisation of our school system by bringing free schools and academies back under local democratic control.

Labour is committed to addressing the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) funding crisis. We will provide the

necessary funding to support children and young people who hold Education, Health and Care Plans and those who receive SEND Support. We will invest in the early years workforce including Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs).

Labour will deliver a strategy for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) based on inclusivity, and embed SEND more substantially into training for teachers and non-teaching staff at all levels of education, so that staff, children and young people and their parents are properly supported.

Children and young people with special education needs and disabilities are particularly at risk of exclusions and informal 'off-rolling.' Labour would remove perverse incentives for schools to let pupils fall out of the system by making schools accountable for the outcomes of pupils who leave their roles. We will properly regulate all education providers, including those that offer Alternative Provision (AP).

We will also address issues with skilled support and resourcing, and ensure effective transitioning to adult services.

Labour will make sure that the Modern Apprenticeship programme is open to all, and increase the numbers of disabled trainees included in the programme and completion rates. Targeted bursaries will be available to women, BAME people, care leavers, ex-armed forces personnel, and disabled people to encourage them to take up climate apprenticeships – the STEM of the future.

Labour will place a duty on all higher education institutions to ensure that their courses are accessible to disabled students. Labour's commitments to scrapping tuition fees and bringing back maintenance grants will make higher education more accessible. Labour is also committed to restoring the Educational Maintenance Allowance and to ensure fair and sustainable funding for Further Education. The principles set out in this manifesto will also apply to lifelong learning.

# **Participation in society and communities – living an independent life to the full**

## **Universal public services**

Labour are committed to ending cuts, rebuilding and expanding our public services and putting them back in public hands.

The NHS needs to be more accessible for disabled patients. However since 2010 there have been sharp cuts: in England the number of NHS Community Learning Disability nurses has fallen by 50% and the number of Community Mental Health nurses has fallen by 37%.

A Labour government will provide an additional £1.6 billion a year to ensure new standards for mental health are enshrined in the NHS constitution, ensuring access to treatments is on a par with that for physical health conditions.

Our £845 million plan for Healthy Young Minds will more than double annual spending on children and adolescent mental health services, and we will implement in full the recommendations set out in the independent review of the Mental Health Act, so that people are given choice, autonomy and the treatment they need.

Cuts to local authorities and the services they provide have been deep – there is an urgent need to invest and rebuild our

communities. Social care has long been under-funded and many people rely on unpaid care. The support that is made available too often does not respect the human rights of disabled people. This needs to change.

We will build a comprehensive National Care Service for England that will provide community-based, person-centred support, underpinned by the principles of ethical care and independent living. A Labour government will provide free personal care, initially in making sure older people have their personal care needs met, with the ambition to extend this provision to all working-age adults.

We will also invest in other social care packages to support both older people and working-age adults living independently in their own homes. We will develop additional care packages that will support autistic people and people with learning disabilities to move out from inappropriate inpatient hospital settings and provide support in their own homes.

# Access to Justice

The Labour Party has a proud history of supporting disabled people in their fight for equality. We will challenge stigma and discrimination wherever it is found.

Labour will ensure disabled people have the same access to justice as non-disabled people. We will strengthen the Equality Act in order to reflect the social model of disability, empower disabled people to be confident in challenging all forms of discrimination and prejudice, wherever it occurs. Under Labour there will never be a reintroduction of the Tories' fees regime for employment tribunals.

We will incorporate disability hate crime into law and ensure that under the Istanbul Convention, disability hate crime and violence against disabled women is reported annually, and put in place comprehensive national actions plans.

Labour will restore early legal aid advice, recruit hundreds of new community lawyers and build an expanded network of law centres, and halt court closures and cuts to staff which have hindered disabled people's access to justice.

# Housing

Labour will build more accessible and disabled-friendly new homes as part of our affordable housing programme, using the 'lifetime homes' standard a condition for homes, enshrining criteria for accessible and inclusive housing design, including wheelchair accessibility.

Given the high incidence of mental health problems amongst those who are homeless, ensuring that homeless people with mental distress are supported will be an integral part of Labour's commitment to end rough sleeping within five years.

# Transport

Improving the accessibility of public transport services is a key aim of Labour's plans for transport reform.

Labour will end the discriminatory practice of Driver Only Operation on the railway, guaranteeing a second member of fully trained staff on all trains to assist boarding so that older and disabled rail passengers can travel when they want with dignity, without booking ahead.

More than 3,000 bus routes have been cut since 2010. Labour will boost investment in our bus services, reversing the cuts to bus routes implemented by the Tories that have left many who rely on bus services isolated.

As well as expanding bus services we will ensure that all new buses will be talking buses (offering audio-visual announcements). Labour will give local authorities greater regulatory powers including over fares, allowing them to establish municipal bus companies and protect community routes will raise standards across our bus services. This will make public transport more accessible for disabled and older passengers.

We will also reform taxi and private hire services to set national minimum accessibility standards so more disabled people can make use of these services.



# **Participating in fully in cultural and political life**

Labour will undertake a review in partnership with disabled people's organisations of sports, arts and leisure venues to determine how access to people with different conditions and impairments can best be improved.

Labour will adopt a British Sign Language Act – giving BSL full legal recognition.

We need to increase disabled people's political representation in this country. Labour will continue to lead the way in the political representation of disabled people, through the policies we develop as a party and seek to implement in Government. As a party Labour will adopt accessible selection processes at local, regional and national levels of political office.

We will also ensure reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates in recognition of the additional costs that they face. We will consider how to ensure increased diversity at all levels, including the judiciary and elected Mayors.

# Conclusion

This election is a chance to deliver the real change people need. For disabled people it is the chance to choose a government that is dedicated to breaking down barriers and confronting prejudice - a government that has a vision of a more just and equal society, and a plan to build that society brick by brick.

Our vision is one in which, thanks to thriving public services and a social security system that genuinely looks out for people, everyone has access to the essentials of a good life. It is one in which everyone is treated equally and with respect. And in which society doesn't make things harder for some than it is for others.

We will only achieve this vision by making sure everyone has a voice. Under Labour, change will not be something that happens to disabled people, it will be something that is led and shaped by them. The future is yours to make, with a Labour government that will be on your side.

**Vote  Labour**

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