

## Government's inadequate assessment of the impact of cuts to disabled people is allowing the true human cost of austerity to go undetected

**Eugene Grant** argues that the government needs to start analysing the aggregate impact of a variety of spending cuts to disabled people, because serious and lasting damage is currently being done.



"It is simply not possible to deal with a budget deficit of this size without undertaking lasting reform of welfare", **asserted the Chancellor**, George Osborne, setting out the Government's own self-styled 'Emergency Budget' in June 2010. He then proceeded to set out £11 billion worth of cuts to Britain's welfare budget; another £8 billion was announced in the Spending Review a few months later.

Since October 2010, disability charity **Scope** and the independent think tank **Demos** have explored the impact of the Government's welfare reforms on disabled people and their families. That month we published the first in a series of reports – *Destination Unknown*. We modelled the impact of several of the welfare changes on the incomes of four 'typical' (according to the benefits they received) disabled households. We could calculate and predict the financial impact of the shift in benefits indexation from the more generous Retail Price Index to the lower Consumer Price Index. Aggregating these losses and others, we concluded that 3.2 million disabled people would lose £9 billion during this Parliament.

And yet, the real impact of the cuts could not be fully captured in a one-off report. Furthermore, focusing on cuts to benefits income alone did not show the full effect; disabled people and their families were being hit from all sides – as local services were reduced or closed and wider changes – to pensions, social care provision, fuel prices, etc. – came about. And so we expanded the breadth – to include another, sixth, household with a social care user – and depth of our research – to include more qualitative data and stories from the families themselves to show how they were coping.

We revisited our case study families every six months for two years. The latest, and final, report is **out today**. And while the **IFS points out** that 80 per cent of the cuts are still to take effect, already we can see the fallout. Our analysis shows that families with a disabled child – like Aisha, a four year old girl who's story is one of those we follow in our report – have, as a group, lost around £30 million since the Government initiated its cuts to welfare and other support.

**Our report series** showed that, over time, our families experienced declining mental health, increased levels of anxiety and depression, and fear for the future. The retrenchment of state services and support – as statutory and charity provision is cut – is beginning to leave many families with nowhere else to turn. Perhaps most concerning is that the impact of the cuts are diminishing the capabilities of many disabled households to participate in family and civic life. Our households were becoming more and more isolated and feeling the strain on family ties. The physical and emotional toll on informal carers was becoming clearer.

This report should be a wakeup call to the Government. That it has embarked upon such a sweeping programme of reforms renders its current practice of impact assessment – analysing the aggregate impact of one reform at a time – inadequate. Rather it should look at the cumulative effects of several reforms happening all at once, and how these impact upon disabled people and their families. Without this change, the human cost of austerity will go undetected and policy will be all the worse for it.

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.*

## About the author

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