

A consensus statement on the use of sanctions in the benefits system and entitlement to personalised support

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The use of sanctions in the benefits system and entitlement to personalised support

We believe that everyone living with a mental health condition should be supported to attain financial security. Whether they need the support of the social security system or help when they would like to return to or gain paid employment, no one should have to struggle to make ends meet as a result of their mental health problem. Yet too many people lose their jobs or are denied opportunities in the labour market because of a mental health condition. And too often our social security system treats people with insufficient dignity and humanity. Combined, these issues can exacerbate or contribute to mental health problems.

We believe that anyone living with a mental health condition has a right to be supported to work if they want to, and to live out of poverty.

The psychological and health benefits of good quality work are well documented. Unemployment is a cause of psychological distress, including significantly increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as reduced feelings of wellbeing and self-esteem. The financial insecurity associated with unemployment and insecure, low-paid work can also lead to unmanageable debt, having to use food banks, homelessness, families with children and young people growing up in poverty, and other distressing and damaging consequences.

No one with a mental health condition, however, should ever be mandated to look for work, or to face the threat of having their benefit payments reduced. Neither conditions nor sanctions have been shown to work or to be safe for people with mental health difficulties, and as a result we believe they should be stopped.

No one should be left in poverty because they have a mental health condition. We pledge to work together to achieve an end to the harm we have seen that sanctions can cause, and a start towards a meaningful entitlement to effective support, based genuinely around the needs of each person.