

**PRESS RELEASE****23 October 2024****Covid-19 Inquiry: Disability Rights UK and Disability Action Northern Ireland criticise Government for “deliberately failing to distribute to those in need” in pandemic**

Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) Disability Rights UK and Disability Action Northern Ireland have today addressed the Covid-19 Inquiry, where their counsel, Danny Friedman KC, criticised the government’s economic response to the pandemic for failing Disabled people across the United Kingdom.

In their statement at the Preliminary Hearing in London for Module 9 of the Inquiry, which will focus on the economic interventions taken by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations in response to the pandemic, the DPOs directly challenged the prevailing narrative portraying the government’s economic response as an ‘*unprecedented*’ and ‘*progressive*’ success.

They highlighted that despite a £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit, no equivalent support was extended to the 2 million, largely Disabled people, on legacy benefits. Additionally, the DPOs raised serious concerns about the economic support provided to the care sector, noting the absence of a top up of the £67.25 Carer’s Allowance in England and the troubling reality that the average wage for paid carers was just over £9 an hour. There was also a continued reliance on unpaid and low paid labour to provide care and other essential services, without which the care sector would have likely collapsed. Carers UK have estimated that unpaid carers contribute a staggering £162 billion each year but despite this, many continue to feel undervalued and underappreciated.

The DPOs said that when he appeared before the Inquiry in Module 2 of the Covid-19, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak failed to give a complete answer as to why more funding had not been made available to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the care sector. They called on the Inquiry to complete its investigation of this topic in Module 9 by calling senior Treasury officials and ministers to account for government failures.

The DPOs asserted that the lack of financial support for Disabled people only served to exacerbate the economic hardships they already faced as a result of a decade of austerity which had diminished their financial stability, access to services and well-being. The DPOs are concerned that without fundamental change such detrimental policies are destined to persist under the newly elected Labour government.

These submissions come at a time when Disabled People’s Organisations continue to advocate for greater involvement in economic policy making and enhanced provisions for Disabled people. They hope that this module of the Covid-19 Inquiry will provide a critical opportunity to ensure that the government’s pledge to ‘build back better’ genuinely addresses the specific needs of Disabled people, rather than once again leaving them behind.

**Kamran Mallick CEO of Disability Rights UK said:**

“Module 2 of the Inquiry clearly showed Government disregard for Disabled people, with a failure to monitor our situation, engage with representative organisations or plan for our

needs. These themes are again apparent in Government economic planning, with no consideration of the need to provide increased investment to social care services no analysis of the additional costs of food, energy, transport and support incurred by Disabled people and no recognition of the disproportionate impact of job losses on Disabled workers.”

**Nuala Toman at Disability Action Northern Ireland** said:

“The economic impact of COVID-19 pushed disabled people even further to the fringes of society. Disabled workers faced disproportionate economic and health risks, including a higher likelihood of working in industries impacted by shutdowns and in roles which had greater exposure to Covid-19. Disabled people were ignored and overlooked throughout the economic response to the pandemic, to such an extent that we were explicitly excluded from key parts of the financial response as demonstrated by failing to increase the personal allowance of legacy benefits in line with the uplift to universal credit.”

### **Notes to editors**

DANI and DR UK are represented by a team at Bhatt Murphy led by Shamik Dutta and Caleb Simpson with counsel Danny Friedman KC of Matrix Chambers and Kate Beattie of Doughty Street Chambers. Covid-19 Inquiry Module 9 will look at and make recommendations on the economic interventions taken by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The final hearings are set to take place in Autumn/Winter 2025.

DR UK and DANI’s recent work to achieve enhanced financial support and equality for Disabled people across the UK includes the following:

The Disability Poverty Campaign Group’s [pre-budget statement](#) which raised concerns about further cuts and called on the government to invest in necessary social infrastructure.

[How the ‘degrading’ PIP system left Disabled people ‘numb’ and ‘broken’](#)

[DR UK letter](#) to Alison McGovern, Minister for Employment, regarding the lack of Disabled voices in the new Labour Market Advisory Board

[Disability Poverty Campaign Group statement](#) on Winter Fuel Payment changes

DANI [statement](#) on cuts to core grant funding from the Department of Health

DANI [response](#) to APPG on poverty and the inadequacy of social security.

DANI [response](#) to the Department of Health budget Equality Impact Assessment

DANI [response](#) to the Department for Communities budget Equality Impact Assessment

DANI [response](#) to the Department for Infrastructure budget Equality Impact Assessment

The situation facing unpaid carers in the UK is set out by Carers UK [here](#)