1. Introduction

The National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society (NASS) is the only UK charity dedicated to supporting people with ankylosing spondylitis and axial spondyloarthritis (AS). NASS has decided to make this submission to ensure that the specific needs of people with AS are taken into account.

2. Executive summary

- Additional frontloaded NHS funding welcomed for people with ankylosing spondylitis and axial spondyloarthritis (AS).
- Cuts to welfare funding will have a serious impact on the quality of life of people with AS.
- Housing shortages could have a serious and direct impact on the health and safety of people with AS on lower incomes.
- Cuts around welfare and housing are short-sighted and will only put further strain on the NHS.

3. Health

The additional frontloaded funding will be of benefit to people with ankylosing spondylitis & axial spondyloarthritis (AS), particularly with an emphasis on additional diagnostic tests, helping to reduce the 8.5 year delay in diagnosis.

Additional outpatient appointments are also very welcome, with many people with AS currently seeing a rheumatologist once a year or less (35%) and many having not had physiotherapy at all in a 12 month period (60%), a service vital to the management of AS.

4. Welfare Reform

As there is already a lack of understanding of ankylosing spondylitis & axial spondyloarthrititis (AS) and the impact that it has on people’s lives, many find themselves declared fit for work, AS being referred to simply as a ‘back ache’. The progressive nature of AS and the long term impact it can have on people’s lives is not fully considered.

Combine this lack of understanding with cuts in funding and there is a very serious risk that people with AS will find it increasingly difficult to claim disability benefits which could leave them destitute and desperate.

In addition to this, 73% of those who were declared fit for work did not feel they were given adequate help to get back to work\(^1\) leaving them in a perpetual circle of financial instability.

---

\(^1\) Benefits Survey 2014-2015, Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance, [www arma uk net](http://www arma uk net), January 2015
5. Housing

Currently many people with ankylosing spondylitis & axial spondyloarthritis (AS) are on low income and can often only afford social housing. In the future it is a concern that many will only be able to afford shared accommodation with affordable accommodation for those on low incomes being rapidly removed.

Shared accommodation in most cases would mean a shared fridge. Anti TNF medication for AS must be stored in the fridge at a certain temperature and so there is a real safety risk to those who are living in shared accommodation where the temperature may be more difficult to control. A lack of affordable accommodation could have a serious and direct impact on the health and wellbeing of people with AS on lower income.

6. General comment

The government continues to cut funding in welfare and housing, targeting the most vulnerable in our society. Such short sighted policies will further widen the social gap in our society but also pose a real threat to the sustainability of the NHS – less money and worse living conditions lead to an inability to self manage conditions such as ankylosing spondylitis and axial spondyloarthritis (AS). This in turn leads to more GP appointments and more inpatient admissions causing further burden to the NHS.

20 January 2016