

Drug and alcohol dependency

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Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) drug strategy is for all claimants on any benefit with a dependence on any drug or alcohol within Great Britain.

DWP support for claimants who are dependent on drugs or alcohol is through partnership working with service providers.

DWP's policy for supporting claimants with drug or alcohol dependency is to refer claimants to structured treatment and recovery services as a part of an active route to work.

Department for Work and Pensions support

While working with a claimant, it may become clear that they need additional support. It is important to ask them and to record their needs to make sure the support is available every time they need it.

Recording this information ensures that we are aware of the details of any treatment that the claimant is receiving that may have an impact on work, training and attending appointments. See the 'Related contents' links on this page for details about recording this information.

Support may be put in place on a one-off basis, for a short, medium or long period of time, or for recurring periods, depending on the claimant's needs.

If agreed with the claimant, a voluntary referral to a local treatment provider should be made to discuss their dependency issues and treatment options. See the 'Related contents' links on this page for details about making and recording this voluntary referral.

Use the District Provision Tool to access a range of provision and specialist partner organisations who are available to advise and support people with drug or alcohol dependency.

If a claimant is homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, we must also consider a referral to the local authority under 'Duty to Refer'. For further information, see [Homelessness and at risk of homelessness](#) and the 'Related contents' links on this page.

Money guidance

When considering a claimant's circumstances, additional support is available for financial advice or online self-service help.

Money guidance is available for claimants who may have difficulty managing a single household payment, housing costs or being paid monthly. There are different levels and types of money guidance based on a claimant's needs.

Alternative Payment Arrangement

Drug and alcohol dependency is a 'tier one' factor to consider the need for one or more Alternative Payment Arrangement based on individual circumstances.

Alternative Payment Arrangements (including a Managed Payment to a Landlord and More Frequent Payment) can be considered at any point during the Universal Credit claim.

For further information, see [Money guidance and Alternative Payment Arrangements](#) and Tier One and Tier Two factors.

Structured treatment

Structured treatment is defined as:

- treatment in the community with attendance at regular sessions undertaken as part of a care plan (prescribing, structured day programmes and structured psychosocial interventions, such as counselling, therapy-advice, information and harm reduction can be classed as structured treatment if they are part of a care plan)
- residential treatment, in-patient treatment and residential rehabilitation (treatment should include arrangements for further treatment or aftercare for clients finishing treatment and returning to the community)

As part of the care planning process during treatment, people are encouraged to address the needs that relate to their substance misuse and agree goals, including those related to education and employment.

Some people will continue to have regular support meetings or treatment that they will need to engage in and discretion can be used to tailor their claimant commitment and work plan as required.

Housing costs and residential treatment

For a claimant who is absent from home due to receiving residential substance misuse structured treatment, housing costs can continue to be paid for their home while they are temporarily absent. This is for up to 6 months if they intend to return home after treatment.

Switching-off work availability and work-related activities

Whilst a claimant is in structured treatment, the work availability and work search requirements must be switched-off for up to 6 months from the start date of their treatment. See [Switching-off work availability and work-related activities](#).

This is to enable the claimant to recover and to prevent sanctions being inadvertently applied.

A claimant can only have one period in any rolling 12-month period, calculated from the last day of any previous drug and alcohol-related switch-off.

Under this provision, the switch-off of work availability and work search requirements only occurs following written evidence from the treatment provider. The claimant is still required to participate in Work Focused Interviews while requirements are switched-off. They may also be required to undertake work preparation activity.

For further information, see [Compulsory switch-off of requirements \(easement\) for claimants receiving treatment for drug and alcohol dependency](#).

If a claimant:

- is not in structured treatment, or
- will soon begin structured treatment, or
- has recently finished structured treatment

we can consider tailoring the claimant commitment and work plan or, applying the domestic emergency easement if the claimant's circumstances make it unreasonable to expect them to comply with requirements. For further information, see [Discretion to switch-off requirements, easements](#).

The claimant commitment must be reviewed when the work-related requirements are re-started and requirements must be tailored

appropriately, taking into account the circumstances and capabilities of the claimant.

Referral for a Work Capability Assessment

The Medical Services Referral System (MSRS) mental health flag is set for claimants with drug and alcohol dependency when referring for the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). If a mental health flag is set, the claimant will continue on the WCA journey even if they do not return a completed questionnaire.

Treated as having limited capability for work

Once referred for a WCA, a claimant can be treated as having limited capability for work if evidence is provided that they are undergoing or recovering from medical or other treatment as a patient in a hospital or similar institution (for 24 hours or more).

This includes residential programmes of rehabilitation for the treatment of drug or alcohol dependency. See Treated as having limited capability for work guidance for further information.

Employment support

A claimant with drug or alcohol dependency is eligible for early access to the Work and Health Programme and Pioneer.

In England, claimants who are in treatment for drug or alcohol dependency can be offered support from the Individual Placement and Support for Drugs and Alcohol Dependency programme. The programme is being expanded across all local authority areas.

For a list of current areas, see Individual Placement and Support for drugs and alcohol dependency in the DPT.

Sanction referrals and decisions

The Sanctions Assurance Framework is in place to make sure we are reaching informed and reasonable conclusions.

It includes protection for claimants with complex needs, vulnerabilities, and health conditions, and allows case conferencing and checking to assess if switching-off requirements should have been applied.

See the 'Related contents' links on this page for further information about the Sanctions Assurance Framework.

Access to Work

A claimant with drug or alcohol dependency may be eligible to participate in Access to Work. For further information, see the Access to Work intranet page.

Further information

Drug and alcohol dependency is complex and the claimant may have other needs. See the following guidance:

- Complex needs overview
- Homelessness and at risk of homelessness
- Mental health
- Domestic abuse
- Care leavers
- Prisoners
- Suicide and self-harm
- Support for claimants with health conditions
- Protecting claimants at risk
- Keep Customer Interactions Safe (KCIS)

This is not a complete list.