# **20,000 people off work in the UK every month for mental ill health**

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DWP figures reveal thousands of people a month are assessed as unable to work because of mental health problems

Thousands of people in the UK are being deemed incapable of any work every month due to mental health problems, figures have shown.

According to official data published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), at least 20,000 incapacity benefit claims are for mental health problems – making up more than two-thirds of the total.

Previous figures have shown that mental health and learning disabilities are among the main contributors to disability benefits, which are paid regardless of whether someone can work. But until now, there had been no such data for incapacity benefits paid through universal credit when people struggle to work.

DWP figures show that 2 million people are receiving universal credit health benefits, up 400,000 in a year, with 69% of them judged unfit for any work.

Of all the assessments made in the last two years, 69% involved “mental and behavioural disorders”. Back and joint problems were cited in 48% of claims, while nervous diseases such as chronic pain and metabolic problems such as diabetes and obesity were each cited in 15%.

Heart disease and other circulatory problems and digestive illnesses were cited in more than 20% of cases. Cancers and some terminal illnesses are thought to be underrepresented in the data, which does not yet cover all claims.

Claimants have 2.7 health conditions on average, prompting experts to warn that there is no quick fix for a benefits bill that is surging as a result of increasingly complex illnesses. Officials stress that the data does not distinguish which is the primary driver of illness.

Christopher Rocks, of the [Health](https://www.theguardian.com/society/health) Foundation thinktank, said the data “reinforces the increasing importance of mental health on people’s ability to work”.

“Ill health is driving the rise of people on out-of-work benefits and having a significant impact on the economy,” he said, calling for “tailored support” rather than government crackdowns on jobseekers.

“Some recent government measures are a step in the right direction but can be scaled up and go further,” he said. “However, measures that restrict benefit entitlement for people with work-limiting health conditions risk being counterproductive.”

Nil Güzelgün, of the mental health charity Mind, said the data “highlights the acute need for mental health support”, citing the 1.9 million people on waiting lists for NHS mental health treatment.

“People would love to work if they had access to the mental health support they need but that support just isn’t there,” she said. “People need to be offered tailored support from experts if they are to return to work, not threats of losing what little money they currently have to live on.”

A DWP spokesperson said: “Our landmark welfare reforms will cut the number of people due to be put on to the highest tier of incapacity benefits by over 370,000 and instead give them personalised support, while our chance to work guarantee will enable people to try work without fear of losing their benefits.”