

# Benefits advice for people with HIV

This advice is for people with HIV who are on benefits, applying for benefits or considering taking paid work which could reduce their entitlements to benefits. It is designed to help people find out their entitlement and how best to manage applications, reviews and appeals. It offers online, written, interactive and phone options for getting help because different people may find different ways of getting the information helpful.

## General Advice

- **Get expert advice or do your research** before making or changing a claim
- **Find out other people with HIV's experiences**, particularly with assessments and about how to answer questions appropriately
- **Keep copies of all correspondence with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)**. If you must do something over the phone rather than in writing, make notes of the call and the date. Records and letters seem to go missing very easily.
- **Open and answer all letters from the DWP/JobCentre immediately**, or as soon as possible. A lot of people lose entitlement because they can't face dealing with the bureaucracy; there are people who can help you with this
- **Always appeal if a decision is unfair or based on wrong information**. Many people win a better decision on review or appeal because many initial decisions are poorly informed. Make sure you appeal within the deadline given. Again, expert help is available with this.
- If your **doctor** is likely to be asked to contribute a report on your health, it is a good idea to discuss this with them in advance, if they are likely to be asked to contribute a report on your health, or at least let them know this may happen
- You might also want to **keep a diary of how your health impacts on your daily life**, especially if you find the impact of HIV changes from day to day or week to week. This will help you respond to the questions asked in assessments.
- Always **check that any information you are using is up to date** as benefits are changing fast.

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## Sources of information and help

### Online

- ▶ [www.directgov.uk](http://www.directgov.uk) is the Government site which explains benefits and entitlement and is a good place to start.
- ▶ [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk) has a useful benefits entitlement checker online.
- ▶ [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) is the national website for Citizens Advice Bureaux, who are often the best local source of information on benefits generally. However, in some areas of the country they may not be experienced with HIV.
- ▶ [www.disabilityalliance.org](http://www.disabilityalliance.org) is the main source of benefits information relating to disability.
- ▶ [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk) has latest and upcoming developments on benefits and HIV flagged up, but for individual advice THT (Terrence Higgins Trust) encourage people to call THT Direct (below) or email [info@tht.org.uk](mailto:info@tht.org.uk).
- ▶ [www.nat.org.uk](http://www.nat.org.uk) also has details of the latest developments in benefits as they relate to people with HIV.
- ▶ <http://benefits.tcell.org.uk/> is a website run by and for people with HIV, with a lot of benefits-related information and tips.
- ▶ Your **local HIV organisation** may also have benefits advice online.
- ▶ Always **check that any information you are using is up to date** as benefits are changing fast.

### Phone

**THT Direct** (0845 12 21 200) can give first line advice on benefits and for in- depth support they will refer people to a local agency or CAB. THT Direct is shortly moving to a freephone system but currently calls are at local rate. THTD can also refer to a range of other services for people with HIV from a local agency. THT's information and advice is accredited by the Information Standard, the Legal Services Commission and The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner.

### Interactive online

- ▶ <http://benefits.tcell.org.uk/> has interactive message/discussion boards where people can compare their experiences and get advice from people who've been through the assessments and interviews themselves.
- ▶ [info@tht.org.uk](mailto:info@tht.org.uk) links in to the advisors on THT Direct and can answer queries online.
- ▶ [www.myhiv.org.uk](http://www.myhiv.org.uk) is a new website, designed by people with HIV and managed by THT, which has a lot of support information for people with HIV including discussion boards where you can share concerns and ask for advice from other people with HIV on any topic.