

Annex 5H: Carer's Allowance and Attendance Allowance compared

In the early days of the Government Digital Service (GDS), the digital transformation programme from 2013-2015 took on 25 exemplar service (re)design projects – “transforming major transactional services to make them digital by default and simpler, clearer and faster to use”¹ – to show Departments what could be done. One of these 25 services was Carer's Allowance,² which is for people with unpaid caring responsibilities.

The service redesign of Carer's Allowance was a success,³ cutting the nearly 400 questions on the form down to the bare minimum that were actually required, resulting in a far more straightforward online process that thereby delivered a policy intent “to support carers [...] not to treat them as near criminals, and suspect them every step of the way.”⁴

A huge amount of care is provided by partners and loved ones, and it is Government's policy intent to support that care provision and the people who provide it. (Not least because it is far less costly to the State than equivalent care being provided by third parties.) And while Carer's Allowance is money given to those who *provide* care, if you *require* a carer – i.e. if you need someone to attend to your needs – the money available is the Attendance Allowance.⁵

If Carer's Allowance has shown what good service design can be, Attendance Allowance and its print-off PDF-only, 29-page, 52-section “interactive claim form”⁶ provides the quintessential comparison of an unreformed service.

Nothing changed. Indeed if anything, over the same time period, DWP added *more* questions.⁷

And seven years after carers were provided with a better service, Attendance Allowance **still** treats applicants who fill it in as near criminals and suspects them every step of the way⁸ – instead of presenting as eager to help, while needing to check a few things first.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gds-transformation-programme-2013-to-2015>

² <https://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance>

³ <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2014/11/28/simpler-carers-allowance-digital-service-now-live/>

⁴ GDS Deputy Director Tom Loosemore: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBI5rRV8OfU> [time code 15:00]

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/how-to-claim>

⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/998878/aa1-interactive-claim-form.pdf

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/attendance-allowance-claim-form#history>

⁸ For those on short end-of-life care pathways, the most in need, a hospital or hospital will handle it for them, so there is limited push for reform from groups who would otherwise be highly affected. Related to this, digitisation must not shift that burden to the individual.

Policy priorities

Digital government is at heart about choosing who is helped, and who is left behind.

We cover the variety of requirements around newborns in another document, but there is no good reason why the Attendance Allowance AA1 form – or the paper NCC1 form,⁹ to which we also refer in Annex 7 – remain as they are, other than the evident fact that no-one in Government seems to feel these people are worth helping.

Unsurprisingly, the numbers of people affected by Carer's Allowance and Attendance Allowance are broadly similar. According to DWP's latest statistics:¹⁰

*"The total number of people claiming Carer's Allowance (CA) at February 2021 was **1.3 million**, the same as at February 2020. Of the total number claiming Carer's Allowance, 28% (370,000) were entitled to the benefit but do not receive payments."*

*"At February 2021, there were **1.5 million** Attendance Allowance (AA) claimants, a decrease of 95,000 from February 2020. 1.4 million claimants were receiving a payment and 100,000 (7%) were entitled to the benefit but not receiving payment."*

And the support available is broadly equivalent: £67.60 a week for Carer's Allowance, and £60 or £89.60¹¹ a week for Attendance Allowance.

What policy underlies the decision not to do a service redesign that has been successfully applied to one of these benefits, but not the other?

Complexity can and does accrete in services over years, to the detriment of both service users and officials – but when this accretion undermines the policy intent of that service and makes the user experience of it toxic, the case for redesign is compelling.¹²

As long as the service design commitment of continual improvement exists,¹³ an interim step can always be putting a digitised version of the paper form process online now, which also gets *some* initial benefits for those who need to fill the forms in now.¹⁴

And what does it say about the Government's 'digital' priorities when doing so would measurably improve both official workflow and the experience of those receiving care and those caring for them, at a cost that is a tiny fraction of the annual budget of either benefit?

⁹ See Annex 5M at <https://medconfidential.org/2020/universal-credit/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dwp-benefits-statistics-august-2021/dwp-benefits-statistics-august-2021>

¹¹ If you need help or supervision throughout both day *and* night, or if you are terminally ill.

¹² Most notably the first question on the Maternity Grant application, covered in the opening to Annex 7.

¹³ Which is the key principle of service design: learning more as the service runs.

¹⁴ Hopefully the GDS forms work moves in this direction, which unlocks financial savings for departments: <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2021/11/17/why-we-think-online-html-forms-are-usually-better-than-document-based-forms-in-government/>