

NUMBER OF PEOPLE ON INCAPACITY BENEFIT FOR DRUG OR ALCOHOL ADDICTION DOUBLES UNDER LABOUR TO 100,000

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The number of people claiming benefit for drug and alcohol addiction has doubled to 100,000 under Labour (file picture)

More than 100,000 drug addicts and alcoholics in the UK are claiming sickness benefits because they are unfit to work.

Official figures out today showed that the 101,300 recorded in 2007 was more than double the 48,700 when Labour came to power in 1997.

Conservatives said payouts of incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance due to alcohol and drug abuse are costing the country more than £400 million a year, with a total bill over the last decade of £3.8 billion.

Shadow work and pensions secretary Chris Grayling said: "These figures yet again show how Labour cannot get to grips with our welfare system.

"(Work and Pensions Secretary) James Purnell likes to talk tough about welfare reform, but Labour's record over the last 10 years shows they have failed."

Mr Purnell said reforms unveiled in February will require drug abusers to take action to deal with their problem or lose benefits.

"We are not just talking tough, we are acting on this issue," said Mr Purnell.

"Employment Support Allowance, which is replacing incapacity benefit, will require drugs misusers to attend a discussion with a specialist or face having their benefits cut.

"Once again, the Tories have sent out a press release which says absolutely nothing about what they would do to tackle this issue."

The figures were released in a written response to a parliamentary question by work and pensions minister Anne McGuire.

They showed that a diagnosis of alcoholism was recorded on the medical certificates of 51,410 working age sickness benefit claimants last year, while drug abuse was mentioned on 49,890.

Mrs McGuire said many alcoholics and drug addicts also have other medical problems, such as mental illness, which prevent them from working.

"Entitlement to incapacity benefit is not linked to any specific diagnosis or condition," she said.

"Entitlement, which is assessed by the Personal Capability Assessment, depends on the effect that a person's condition has on their ability to carry out a number of activities relevant to work.

"Most people with drug or alcohol dependency also have other conditions, such as mental illness; and it is these other conditions which result in entitlement to benefits."

[http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-23473666-
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