Government urged to stop ‘dangerous’ Universal Credit rollout this week

Millions of people are set to be moved off legacy benefits and on to Universal Credit starting on Monday – a plan charities have deemed “too dangerous to continue”.

More than 20 charitable groups have written to the work and pensions secretary, Therese Coffey, asking her not to continue with the rollout unless the government can guarantee nobody’s income will be cut off during the process.

They say the incomes of more than 700,000 people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and dementia could be put at risk, with “devastating and life-threatening” consequences.

During the pandemic, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) had paused the process of moving people on benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance and Working Tax Credit on to the new system.

Claimants will be given a minimum of three months’ notice to make a **Universal Credit** claim, with the number of a helpline they can call.

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The DWP will be able to stop their existing benefits if they do not apply by the deadline.

In the letter, the groups wrote: “We believe that your approach for moving people receiving older benefits on to universal credit risks pushing many of them into destitution.”

More on Universal Credit



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The government aims to move all claimants to the new system by the end of 2024.

Paul Farmer, chief executive of Mind and a signatory, said the plans could leave people with mental health problems with no income.

“Those too unwell to engage with the DWP could be left unable to pay their rent, buy food, or pay their rising energy bills,” he said.

“The DWP should halt this process.”

He said putting the incomes of hundreds of thousands of people at risk during a cost of living crisis is “completely unacceptable”.

Millions still on old benefits amid struggle to register online

DWP research from 2018 found that nearly a quarter of people with long-term health conditions were unable to register a claim for Universal Credit online, while 54% said they needed more help setting up the claim.

There are still 2.6 million households on legacy benefits, about half of whom receive the main sickness benefit, Employment and Support Allowance.

A further million receive tax credits, while 200,000 receive Income Support and another 100,000 receive Jobseeker’s Allowance.

The government’s analysis suggests 900,000 people will be worse off after moving to universal credit, while 1.4 million will be better off by £220 a month.

A DWP spokesman said: “Over five million people are already supported by Universal Credit.

“It is a dynamic system which adjusts as people’s earnings change, is more generous overall than the old benefits, and simplifies our safety net for those who cannot work.”

The spokesman said top-up payments would be “available for eligible claimants” whose universal credit entitlement is lower than their legacy benefits.