

Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in East Hertfordshire

November 2022



**citizens
advice**

East Herts

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Executive Summary

This report will look at how Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claimants in East Hertfordshire were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and consider the significance of PIP within the context of the current Cost of Living crisis. This is achieved by looking at national data, data for East Hertfordshire, and the data collated about the clients of Citizens Advice East Hertfordshire who have come to us for help from March 2019 to August 2022. PIP is the most common benefit and tax credit issue on which clients sought our help over this period.

This shows that PIP is a problem nationally and locally with issues including the complexity of claiming PIP, the inadequacy of telephone health assessments, delays with receiving money, mandatory reconsiderations having to be made and then subsequently being overturned on appeal amongst others.

This causes severe financial pressures and stress and impacts on other requirements such as not being able to renew a much-needed blue badge, leading to further financial costs and stress.

Introduction

People with a disability or a long-term health condition between the ages of 16 and 64 in the UK are entitled to Personal Independence Payments (PIP)¹. PIP is non-means tested meaning it is not dependent on income, (un)employment nor savings. It can also be accessed in addition to Employment and Support Allowance or any other benefits². The amount of PIP a person receives is determined by the assessment of two components: daily living and mobility³. Daily living includes activities such as: preparing food, washing and bathing, communicating verbally and others. Mobility activities are: planning and undertaking journeys and moving around. The payments can be worth up to £157 a week but are dependent on the claimants' abilities to perform these daily activities. Overall PIP aims to help claimants complete or help to cover the costs of everyday tasks.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-independence-payment-statistics-to-april-2022/personal-independence-payment-official-statistics-to-april-2022>

2 [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/sick-or-disabled-people-and-carers/pip/#:~:text=Personal%20Independence%20Payment%20\(PIP\)%20is,don't%20affect%20your%20eligibility](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/sick-or-disabled-people-and-carers/pip/#:~:text=Personal%20Independence%20Payment%20(PIP)%20is,don't%20affect%20your%20eligibility)

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-independence-payment-fact-sheets/pip-handbook>

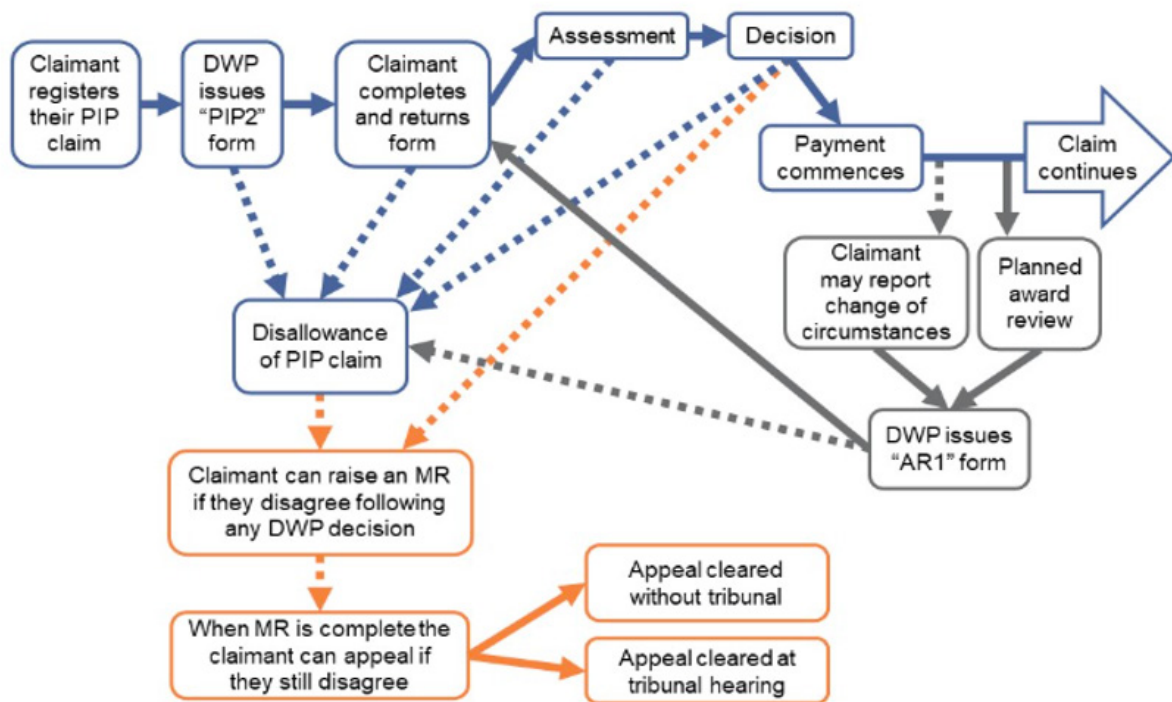


Figure 1: Summary of a Customer Journey for PIP⁴

Figure 1 shows the complicated application process for PIP. Claimants are able to raise a mandatory reconsideration (MR) if they are unhappy with the amount of PIP they receive or if they are rejected. If the MR is not accepted the claimant can also appeal the decision. Once the application process is completed and the claim approved, claimants can expect to receive payments every 4 weeks⁵.

(N.B. In March 2020 all face-to-face assessments for disability benefits were suspended as part of the DWP response to the risks posed by Covid-19. Telephone assessments were introduced instead. Face-to face disability assessments for PIP resumed May 2021. Telephone assessments continued where considered suitable).

However, in July 2022 the Guardian published the article “five-month disability benefits delay causing hardship, say Citizens Advice”⁶. National Citizens Advice found that processing delays from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) for PIP led 150 people per hour contacting National Citizens Advice regarding this. It was thought that high demand following the end of COVID-19 governmental support in conjunction with COVID-19 related long-term illness as well as workforce shortages had created this significant backlog.

4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-independence-payment-statistics-to-april-2022/personal-independence-payment-official-statistics-to-april-2022#Summary-of-Customer-Journey>

5 <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-have-your-benefits-paid>

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jul/06/five-month-disability-benefits-delay-causing-hardship-says-citizens-advice>

This report also finds that there are other issues surrounding PIP based on the clients of Citizens Advice East Hertfordshire.

As a result of the Department for Work and Pension's backlog, "Dave" had his review postponed by 8 months. This led to complications when applying for his blue badge. Dave had to pay £10 for an 8-month period instead of the 3 expected years. The delays have cost Dave extra money and caused additional stress.

National context

As at April 2022, 3.0 million people were registered as PIP claimants, 35% of which receive the highest level award⁷. In this quarter, ending April 2022, there were 200,000 registrations and 210,000 clearances for new claims, which are the highest levels since PIP began in 2013. Significantly, there were 27,000 clearances⁸ for change of circumstances and 71,000 clearances for award reviews as well as 85,000 cleared MRs.

This shows how the PIP claiming process is difficult and inadequate. Because the initial form is so complex, often claimants feel the wrong decision has been made and then must undertake the process of an MR which is often subsequently approved after appeal. Nicola Lyons, Research and Campaigns Officer at Citizens Advice County Durham noted that the application process for PIP is challenging⁹. For this reason, many applicants contact Citizens Advice to help them successfully apply or appeal a decision for PIP. The latest release of PIP data from DWP for the quarter to July 2022 shows 29% of MRs for claimants in East Herts resulted in a changed award.

Furthermore, there is the question of whether PIP payments are enough for people with disabilities to live off, in the context of soaring energy prices and increasing cost of living. In May this year the Government announced that 6 million people with disabilities will receive a one-off payment of £150 from the 20th September. This additional payment, along with the other announced governmental monetary support, aims to help disabled people on low incomes during the current cost of living crisis¹⁰.

PIP in East Hertfordshire

In East Hertfordshire 11.1% of the working age population claims disability benefits¹¹. DWP statistics show that for the quarter ending April 2022, there were 7,215¹² PIP registrations in East Hertfordshire. Figure 2 shows how this is broken down into areas across the district with the highest levels of PIP registrations in Bishop's Stortford Central and Ware Trinity.

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-independence-payment-statistics-to-april-2022/personal-independence-payment-official-statistics-to-april-2022#what-you-need-to-know>

8 Clearances include decisions (awards and disallowances) and withdrawals

9 <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qBHpa5D3PtjxIh5rT-E0SFv9ajzTYLf9nUJiyMZUg98/edit>

10 <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/aug/23/disabled-people-150-cost-of-living-payment-september>

11 <http://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/documents/s55927/Appendix%20A%20-> page 2 (East Herts Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy July 2020)

12 PIP Quarterly Statistics to April 2022, Stat-Xplore

Total PIP Registrations across East Hertfordshire

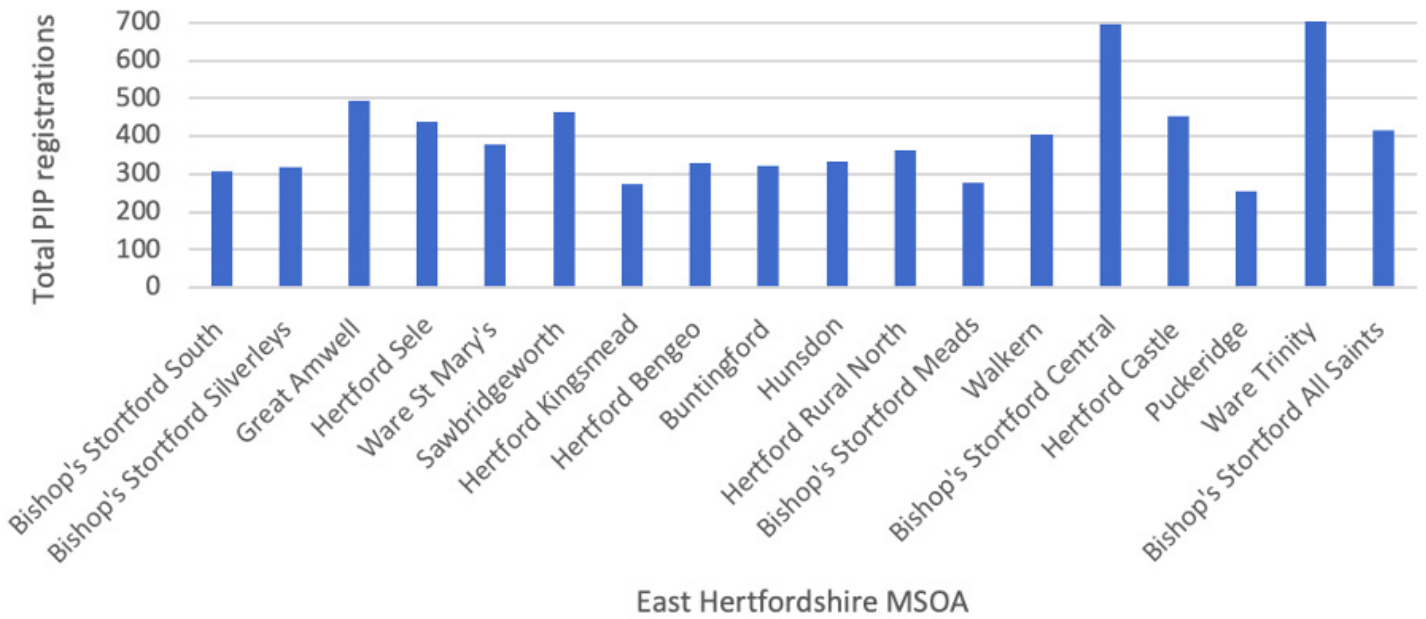


Figure 2: PIP registrations across East Hertfordshire April 2022

PIP clients helped by Citizens Advice East Herts

Year on year Citizens Advice East Herts receives calls regarding PIP, more than 1,200 people contacted us for help with PIP in the period covered by this report. PIP is the most common issue of clients asking for advice on Benefits and Tax Credits It accounted for 23% of all Benefits & Tax Credit issues between March 2019 and February 2022. We see a similar trend with PIP making up 24% of enquiries in the six months between March and August 2022. Please see Figure 3.

Benefits and Tax Credits clients, East Herts

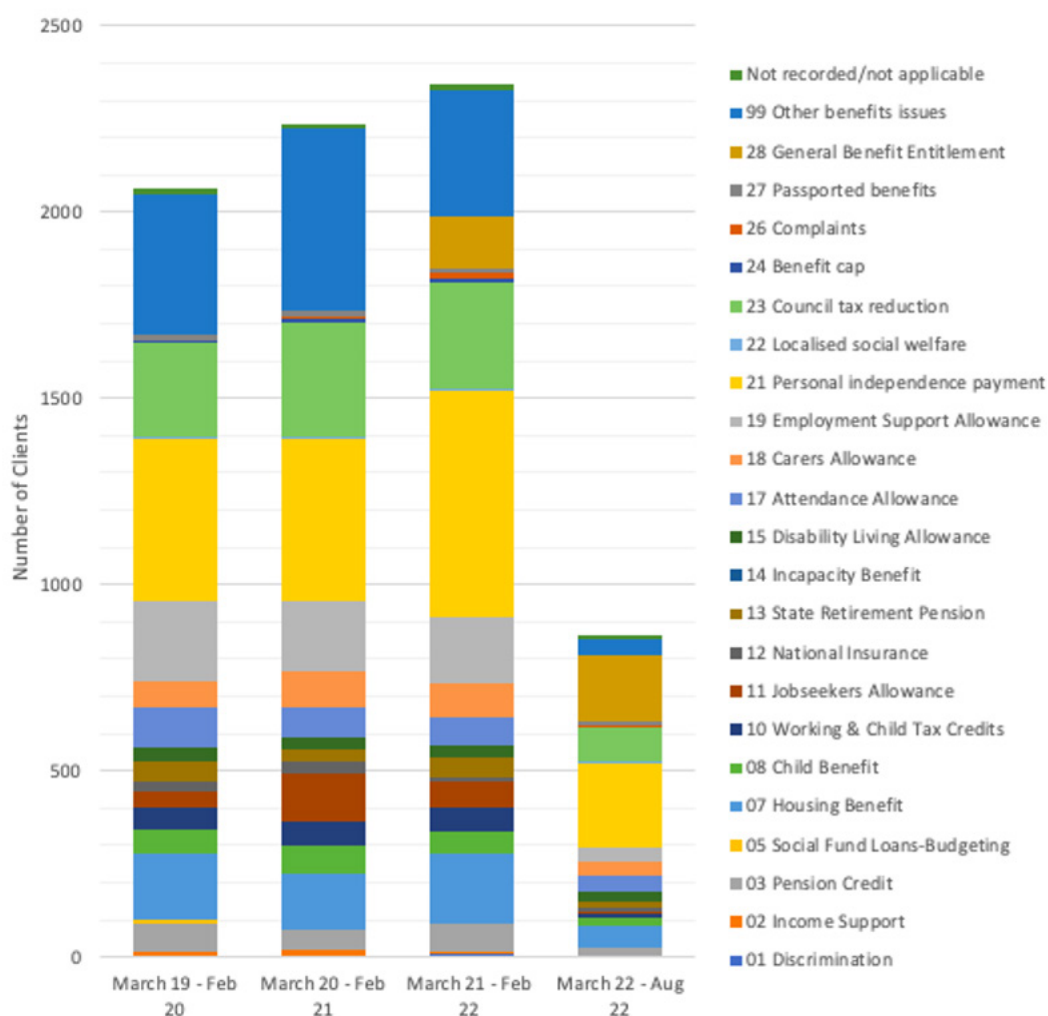


Figure 3: Data: Casebook report c3a: Issues P2b (using monthly data)

The number of clients seeking our help with PIP on a month-by-month basis from March 2019 to August 2022 shows a peak in November 2020. This corresponds with the announcement of Lockdown 2, and winter (with its associated higher cost of living due to having to heat homes, etc). There are also high levels from June 2021 to February 2022 with a drop after March 2022. This corresponds to face-to-face disability assessments for PIP resuming from May 2021. Please see figure 4.

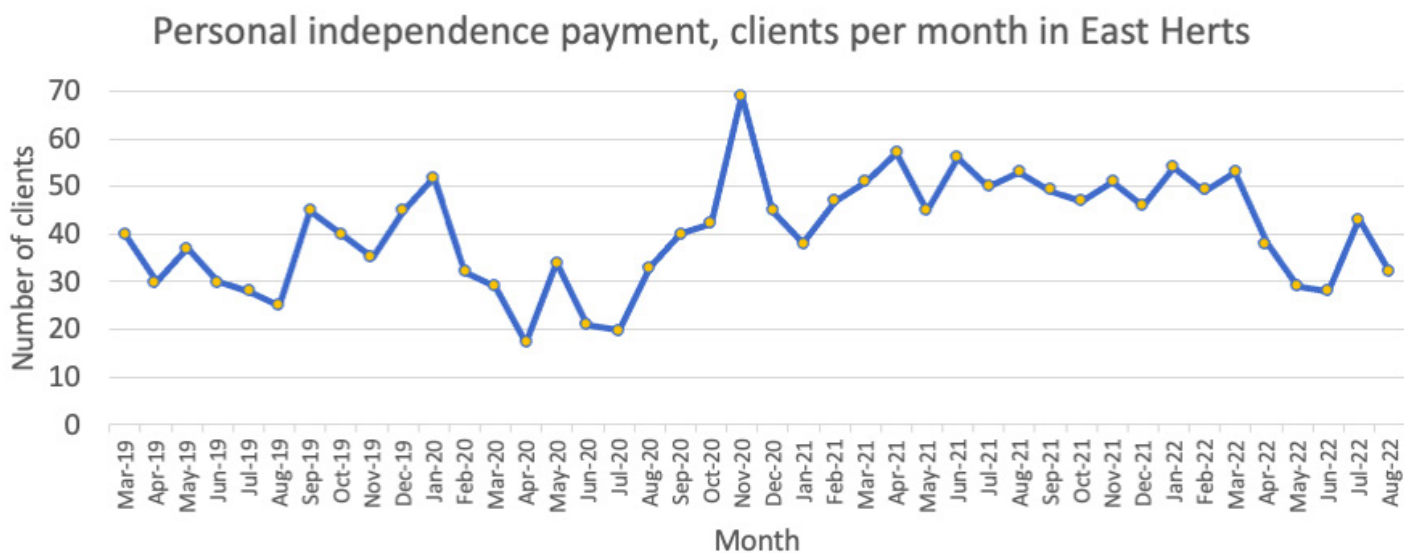


Figure 4: Citizens Advice East Herts clients seeking help with PIP

The pandemic impact shows higher rates of clients contacting us March 2020 – February 2021 than March 2019 – February 2020. However, enquiries for PIP were highest March 2021 – February 2022. This could be due to the impact of cost-of-living increases with people seeking more financial and also the backlog at DWP from Covid-19 as noted before.

March 2022 – August 2022 shows similar trends to years prior however it must be noted, as seen in Figure 2 that Citizens Advice East Herts tends to receive the highest influx of calls in the winter months. Based on the three years prior and Ofgem’s recent announcement of energy price increases it can be expected that calls will increase regarding PIP benefits.

“Anne” has been receiving PIP (and the preceding equivalents) for the past 10 years. Following a worsening in her medical condition Anne asked for an assessment to see if she would be eligible for a higher level of PIP. After a telephone assessment Anne had the daily living component of PIP removed, despite her medical condition being worse than before. This left Anne financially worse off, and our Adviser had to spend a great deal of time helping resolve this to get reinstatement of the correct payment.

Examining the type of help sought by our PIP clients shows (please see figure 5):

- Making and managing a claim and eligibility for daily living are the “top” reasons our clients seek our help for. These account for around 25% and 17% respectively, more than 40% of the total. This suggests that clients find the application process is - complicated and confusing. Therefore, they need the help and support of an Adviser to find out if they’re eligible and to complete the form correctly.
- Appeals and challenges are the next significant categories accounting for 16% to 24%.
- The mobility component is also significant at 10% to 14% of the total.
- The clients we helped with PIP issues had financial outcomes (where recorded) on average of £5,600¹³.

¹³ Casebook C2a: 121 clients with financial outcome recorded of £680,264

Breakdown of PIP enquiries, East Herts

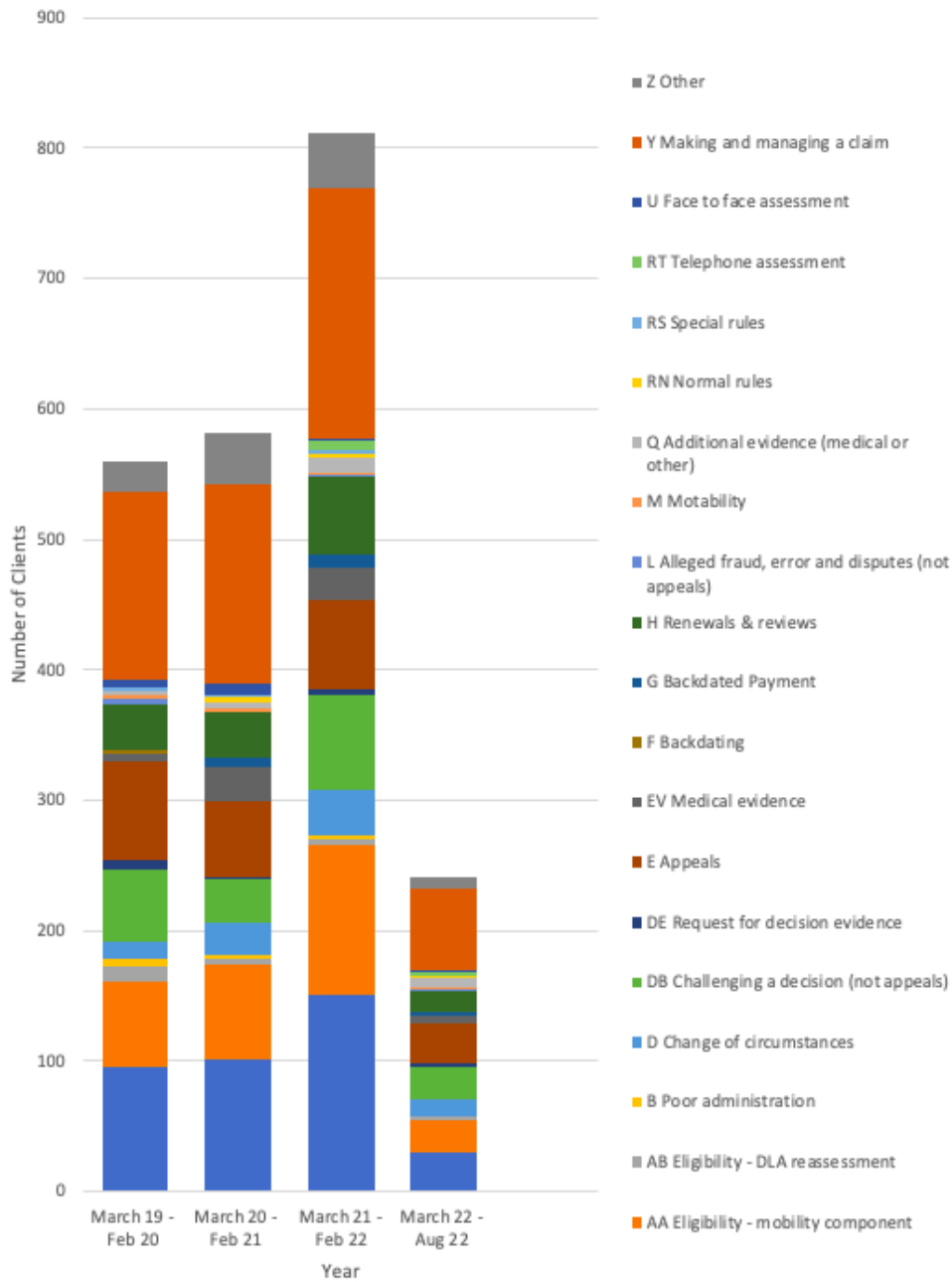


Figure 5 Data: Casebook report c3a - P3b using monthly data (Not recorded and not applicable removed from this dataset for clarity when presenting data)

Telephone (rather than in person) assessments of Clients by PIP assessors do not appear in large numbers as a separate issue in the data (although this may be because they are subsumed in the managing and making a claim category.) However, we are aware that this is a problem based on evidence forms completed by our Advisers.

When helping with “Barbara’s” PIP appeal, our Adviser saw that the telephone assessor noted in their observation report that Barbara did not sound to be in pain or discomfort; and that Barbara was able to hold her phone to her ear for the assessment. In reality, Barbara’s phone was on loudspeaker, to avoid the pain of holding the phone.

Conclusion and recommendations

Data collated about the clients of Citizens Advice East Hertfordshire who have come to us for help from March 2019 to August 2022 show that PIP is the most common benefit and tax credit issue on which clients sought our help.

We receive more enquiries in the winter months, with a peak seen in November 2020 during Lockdown 2. The most frequent type of help required has been help with making and managing a claim, eligibility for daily living and mobility, and appeals and challenges. We also know that telephone assessments are often contentious with advisers telling us about inaccurate assessment report conclusions.

Problems with PIP have been highlighted by National Citizens Advice¹⁴ and reported in the national press. Our experience locally at Citizens Advice East Herts supports this national picture.



¹⁴ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/welfare%20publications/Surveys%20and%20consultation%20responses/PIP%20and%20ESA%20Assessments%20Inquiry-%20Evidence%20from%20Citizens%20Advice.pdf>

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We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment.

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