

tightly means-tested, it is clear that most beneficiaries would qualify for fringe benefits.

This supposition is supported by current invalid pensions statistics: in June 1984, of 240 574 invalid pensions, 219 616 held the PHB card. (This proportion may, of course, fall as the result of the assets test).

**Costs and savings**

If progression to invalid pension became automatic after a set period on sickness benefit, extra costs would be incurred; but this would be offset by the fact that many sickness benefit recipients already receive supplementary rent allowance. Consider, too, the enormous financial savings if most appeals against rejection of invalid pension claims disappeared as the incentive to appeal (to gain fringe benefits) would disappear.

There would then be 2 simple tests at the medical reviews which would have to be built into the system. First, 'Is this person fit or unfit for work now?' Second, 'How long has this person *already* been unfit for work?'

**Inequities of present scheme: the need for reform**

The present system humiliates the individual: previously hard working men and women, who through sickness have lost their jobs, should not have to prove the degree of their incapacity - or to prove, in the minds of many, that they are not malingering.

Once incapacity for work has been established, a periodic review can determine whether the individual is still incapacitated - and if this incapacity lasts for more than a period to be determined, I do not believe this country cannot afford to pay (those who are eligible) just a little extra in the form of fringe benefits and other pensioner concessions. If these people had not had an accident or had not become sick they would still be in the workforce - which is where the overwhelming majority want to be.

If something like I have suggested could be done, there would only be a fraction of the number of medical appeals there are at present. Savings in administrative cost would be enormous. Many appellants would be saved months of anxiety. Tribunal members would be relieved of the near impossible task of assessing the invisible and of foretelling the future.

I think we, as the SSAT, should accept the Minister's invitation and seek reform of a system which holds men and women (and their children), not only for month after month but often for year after year, with no hope of reprieve, in the necessitous circumstances imposed by the low level of sickness benefits, while denying them

even the slightly ameliorating advantages of fringe benefits and pensioner concessions.

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# Statistics

A year ago we noted the decline in the number of new social security appeals: (1985) 25 SSR 308; and suggested that this decline would turn out to be temporary. The figures reproduced below bear this out. In the 6 months to April 1986, 388 new appeals were lodged, compared to 252 in the same period a year ago. The number of outstanding appeals has risen from 690 in April 1985 to 944 in April 1986.

Another distinct trend (probably linked to those outlined above) is the fall in DSS concessions: 39 in the 6 months to April 1986, compared to 123 in the same period a year ago. AAT decisions are also down: from 117 to 65 in the two periods—possibly a reflection of the increasing complexity of social security appeals.

	Nov. 85	Dec. 85	Jan. 86	Feb. 86	Mar. 86	Apr. 86
Applications lodged*	51	68	73	55	80	61
Decided by AAT	12	17	8	8	7	13
Dismissed	1	2	0	0	0	0
Withdrawn	9	8	5	1	4	1
Conceded	8	6	8	5	5	7
No jurisdiction	4	2	4	1	1	3
Lapsed	0	0	0	0	0	0
Awaiting decision at end of month	723	756	804	844	907	944

**\*Applications lodged: type of appeal**

Unemployment Benefit	4	8	6	1	5	9
Sickness Benefit	1	1	3	3	5	2
Special Benefit	0	4	0	1	1	2
Age Pension	5	3	3	5	6	2
Invalid Pension	18	19	21	17	36	13
Widows Pension	2	2	3	2	3	4
Supp. Parent's Benefit	1	1	5	2	2	5
Handicapped Child Allow.	4	6	6	5	4	1
Family Allowance	2	1	8	5	15	
Freedom of Information	1	2	0	0	1	1
Assets Test	11	18	10	12	14	14
Other	2	3	8	2	2	3

**State where application lodged**

ACT	1	0	1	0	0	0
NSW	16	30	12	13	28	22
NT	0	0	0	0	1	0
Qld	4	1	12	3	3	3
SA	5	10	13	11	11	13
Tas.	0	2	3	2	3	1
Vic.	18	11	25	20	23	15
WA	7	14	7	6	11	7