NI BENEFITS NAVIGATOR

NORTHERN IRELAND · DFC

Free NI PIP Guide

Northern Ireland

From NI Benefits Navigator

A calm, plain-English walk through the whole PIP journey in Northern Ireland — from the first phone call to the decision, and what you can do if you disagree with it.

Educational guidance for Northern Ireland, where benefits are administered by the Department for Communities. Plain-English information about an administrative process — not legal or welfare-rights advice.

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NI BENEFITS NAVIGATOR

What this guide is — and what it is not

THIS GUIDE IS

- An explanation of how the PIP process works in Northern Ireland — the stages, the forms, the deadlines, and who does what
- A plain-English translation of the official terminology
- A pointer to where you can get free, qualified, independent help in NI

THIS GUIDE IS NOT

- Advice about your individual claim, or an opinion on what you are entitled to
- A prediction of your outcome — nobody honest can promise you a result
- Legal or welfare-rights advice — for that, we signpost you to qualified NI advisers at the end

Everything in this guide is based on official Northern Ireland sources — nidirect and the Department for Communities. Where a fact could change (rates, deadlines, statistics), we checked it against the official source before publishing. If something about your situation feels complicated or high-stakes, please talk to a qualified adviser — the free NI options are listed near the end.

Before we start: you are not doing this wrong

If you are reading this, you are probably somewhere in the PIP process — thinking about claiming, staring at a form, waiting for a brown envelope, or holding a decision you don't understand.

The process feels overwhelming for almost everyone. That is not a personal failing. It is a long, form-heavy administrative journey with its own vocabulary, and nobody hands you a map at the start.

This guide is that map. It won't make decisions for you, and it can't promise outcomes. What it can do is make sure that at every stage you know **where you are, what is happening, and what comes next**. That alone removes a large share of the stress.

One important thing before anything else: **PIP in Northern Ireland is not the same system as in England, Wales or Scotland.** It is run by the **Department for Communities (DfC)** — not the DWP — and several details (phone numbers, forms, the appeals body) are NI-specific. If you have read guides written for Great Britain, some of what they say will not match your experience here. This guide is Northern Ireland only.

SECTION 01

Starting a claim: who runs PIP in NI, and how to begin

Who administers PIP in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, Personal Independence Payment is administered by the **Department for Communities (DfC)**, through the **PIP Centre**. Assessments are carried out by a health professional working for the assessment provider on DfC's behalf; in NI the assessment service provider is **Capita** (named on nidirect as the PIP assessment provider for Northern Ireland).

The basics of PIP

- PIP is for people **aged 16 or over** who have difficulties with daily living or getting around because of a health condition or disability.
- The official guidance says you should have had these difficulties **for at least three months** and expect them to last **for at least another nine months**.
- PIP is **tax free**, paid **every four weeks**, and **not affected by your income or savings**. You can get it whether you are in work or not, and alongside most other benefits.

The current weekly rates (2026/27, per nidirect)

COMPONENT	STANDARD RATE	ENHANCED RATE
Daily living part	£76.70	£114.60
Mobility part	£30.30	£80.00

You can be awarded either component, or both, at either rate — that is decided at the end of the process, not the start.

How to start a claim

You start a PIP claim in NI by **contacting the PIP Centre**:

- **By phone: 0800 587 0932**
- By post
- By sign language — a video relay service is available through the PIP Centre

There is no fully online claim start in NI — the phone call is the normal route.

What to have ready before you phone

The DfC asks you to have the following to hand when you call:

- Your full name, date of birth, address and postcode
- Your National Insurance number
- Your bank or building society account details
- A daytime contact number
- Your GP or health professional's details

- Details of any time spent in hospital, a care home or hospice
- Your nationality or immigration status
- Details of time spent abroad, if you have been abroad for more than four weeks
- Details of any pension or benefits from EEA states or Switzerland

None of this call is about how your condition affects you in detail — that comes next, on the form. The call establishes the basics of your claim.

SECTION 02

The journey at a glance: a "where am I?" map

The NI PIP claim is a four-stage journey. Wherever you are right now, you are at one of these points:

1 **Stage 1 — The phone call.**
You contact the PIP Centre (0800 587 0932) and the claim is registered.

2 **Stage 2 — The form.**
You are sent the **"How your disability affects you"** form (also called the **PIP2**). You have **one month** to return it. This is where you explain how your condition affects your daily life.

3 **Stage 3 — The assessment.**
A health professional working for the assessment provider on DfC's behalf considers your claim. This can be **in person or over the phone**.

4 **Stage 4 — The decision.**

A **PIP case manager** at the DfC looks at everything — the assessor's report and the information you provided — and makes the decision. You get a decision letter explaining it.

After Stage 4, there are two further possible stages, only if you disagree with the decision:

5 **Stage 5 — Mandatory Reconsideration (MR).**

You ask the Department to look at the decision again. Deadline: **one calendar month** from the date on your decision notice.

6 **Stage 6 — Appeal.**

If the MR doesn't change things, you can appeal to an **independent appeal tribunal** through **The Appeals Service (NI)**. Deadline: **one calendar month** from the date of your Mandatory Reconsideration Notice.

Keep this map in mind as you read. Every letter you receive belongs to one of these stages, and knowing which stage you are at tells you what happens next and which clock, if any, is ticking.

SECTION 03

The PIP2 form: what it is really asking

The form's official title — **"How your disability affects you"** — is the most useful sentence in the whole process, because it tells you exactly what the Department wants.

Not what your condition is called. Not what a textbook says about it. **How it affects you, personally, in day-to-day life.**

Good days and bad days

The official NI guidance explicitly asks you to explain how your condition affects your daily life **"on both good and bad days"** and over a range of activities. This matters because many people fill the form in as if describing their best day — often out of habit, pride, or simply because that's how we talk to strangers. The form is asking for the honest full picture: the good days, the bad days, and how often each happens.

The assessment framework behind the form works on a "majority of days" principle — the DfC's own handbook explains that a description of difficulty applies where it reflects your situation **on more than 50% of days** over a 12-month period. You don't need to calculate anything; the practical takeaway is simply that **how often** you have difficulty matters as much as **how bad** it is at its worst. Say both.

The word behind every question: "reliably"

Underneath every activity the form asks about sits one question: can you do this **reliably**? The DfC's NI PIP Handbook defines reliably as whether you can do the activity:

- **Safely** — "in a manner unlikely to cause harm to themselves or to another person, either during or after completion of the activity"
- **To an acceptable standard**
- **Repeatedly** — "as often as is reasonably required"
- **In a reasonable time period** — no more than twice as long as the maximum period that a non-disabled person would normally take

This is the single most misunderstood part of the whole process. Most people read a question like "Can you prepare a meal?" and answer the literal question: *technically, yes*. But the question the system is actually asking is: can you do it safely, to an acceptable standard, as often as you need to, in a reasonable time — without harm, exhaustion, or unacceptable results?

"I can cook, but only by leaning on the counter, and afterwards I need to lie down for an hour" is a very different answer from "yes" — and it is the fuller, truer answer.

What the form covers

The form works through daily living and mobility activities. Per the DfC handbook, the daily living activities include preparing food; eating and drinking; managing therapy or monitoring a health condition; washing and bathing; managing toilet needs; dressing and undressing; communicating; reading; mixing with other people; and managing money. The mobility activities cover planning and making journeys, and moving around.

The deadline

You have **one month to return the form**. If you genuinely cannot meet that deadline, contact the PIP Centre — extensions can be requested. Do not simply let the deadline pass in silence: an unreturned form can end a claim.

SECTION 04

Describing your situation clearly

You do not need special vocabulary, and you must never exaggerate. The strongest form answers are simply **specific, honest, and complete**. Here are the wording principles that make the difference — these are principles of clear description, not a scoring formula.

Principle 1 — Describe what actually happens, not a label.

- Less clear: *"I struggle with washing."*
- Clearer: *"I can't stand in the shower for more than a couple of minutes, so I sit on a plastic stool. Twice in the last month I've had to shout for my daughter to help me out."*

The first sentence tells the reader nothing they can picture. The second describes a real scene.

Principle 2 — Say how often, not just how bad.

- Less clear: *"Some days are bad."*
- Clearer: *"On roughly four or five days a week, the pain is bad enough that I don't cook and eat toast or cereal instead."*

Frequency is central to how the framework works. "Sometimes" and "occasionally" give the reader nothing to work with; "most days", "about half the time", "two or three times a week" do.

Principle 3 — Include the cost of doing the thing.

If you can do an activity but it takes a long time, causes pain, wears you out, needs rest afterwards, or produces a poor result — say so. "I can, but…" answers are where the reliability picture lives.

- Less clear: *"I can dress myself."*
- Clearer: *"I can dress myself, but buttons and socks take me a long time because of my hands, and getting dressed takes twenty minutes and leaves me sore."*

Principle 4 — Mention help, prompting and aids, even the informal kind.

People routinely forget to mention help because it has become normal life. If someone reminds you to take medication, opens jars, checks on you in the bath, drives you because you can't face the bus, or if you use a stool, a rail, a stick — that is all part of the honest picture.

Principle 5 — Don't self-reject.

Many people leave sections blank because "other people have it worse" or "I don't want to make a fuss." The form is not a competition and modesty is not accuracy. If a question touches something you genuinely have difficulty with, describe it plainly.

Principle 6 — Never exaggerate.

This is not just an ethical point; it is a practical one. The honest, specific truth is coherent and consistent across your form, your evidence and your assessment. Exaggeration is not — and inconsistency undermines a genuine claim. Your true situation, described fully, is enough. Tell it exactly as it is.

If writing is hard for you, it's fine to have someone else physically write your answers, or to attach extra sheets. What matters is that the content is yours and true.

SECTION 05

Evidence that helps

The DfC is explicit about what kind of evidence helps them, what might help, and what does not. Their guiding sentence is worth quoting: *"We do not need to see general information about their condition – we need [to] know how they are personally affected."*

EVIDENCE THE DFC SAYS WILL HELP

- Reports from health professionals involved in your care — specialist nurses, community psychiatric nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, GPs, hospital doctors, physiotherapists, support workers
- Care or treatment plans
- Hospital discharge letters or outpatient clinic letters
- A statement of special educational needs

- A certificate of visual impairment
- Test results — scans, diagnostic tests, audiology
- Your current repeat prescription list

EVIDENCE THAT MIGHT HELP

- Photographs or x-rays
- Letters about other benefits
- Letters from people who know you — **but only if** they add something about how your condition affects you that isn't already on your form

EVIDENCE THE DFC SAYS DOES NOT HELP

- General fact sheets about your condition that aren't about you personally
- Appointment cards or letters (times, dates, directions)
- Information about tests you are going to have
- Fact sheets about your medication

The pattern in all three lists is the same one that runs through the form: **evidence about you and your daily life helps; generic information about your condition doesn't.** A repeat prescription list is on the "helps" list because it is concrete evidence about you. A printout about your diagnosis is not, because it describes the condition, not your life.

Send copies of what you already have or can reasonably get. You are not expected to commission reports or delay your form waiting for the perfect document — and remember the one-month clock.

SECTION 06

The assessment

What it is

At Stage 3, a **health professional working for the assessment provider on DfC's behalf** considers your claim, to help work out the level of help you need. The assessor does not decide your claim — they write a report for the DfC case manager who does.

Formats

Per nidirect, assessments in NI can be **in person or over the phone**. Your appointment letter will tell you the format and arrangements for yours.

Audio recording

nidirect (checked 21 August 2026) states: *"Your assessment will be audio recorded to keep a correct record on file."* You can ask for a copy of the recording at the time of the assessment or afterwards. If you do **not** want your assessment recorded, you can tell the health professional before the appointment, at the start, or at any time during it — and nidirect confirms this *"will not affect the result of your assessment."*

One honest caveat: not every official page describes recording the same way — the DfC's handbook still describes recording as something you can request, with your invitation letter explaining how. The official pages are catching up with each other. The practical step is simple: **check your appointment letter for how recording works for your assessment type, and raise it at the start if anything is unclear.**

You can also ask for a copy of the **assessment report** — the DfC handbook confirms claimants can request this. More on why that matters in the next section.

Preparing — calmly

You cannot revise for an assessment, and you shouldn't try to perform. The preparation that actually helps is administrative:

- **Re-read a copy of your PIP2 form** before the appointment. The assessment is connected to what you wrote; refreshing your memory keeps your account consistent — which it naturally will be, because both are the truth.
- **Have your medication list and key dates to hand.**
- **Plan for the format.** For a phone assessment, somewhere quiet where you can speak freely. For in person, think through the practicalities of getting there and say so honestly if the journey itself is difficult.
- **Consider having someone with you** — many people find it steadying, and a second memory of what was said is useful.
- **Answer as the whole of you, across good and bad days** — not as you are managing in that single hour. If you are asked "can you…", the honest answer often starts with "it depends" — and it is fine to say so, and to describe both kinds of day.

The assessment is not a test you pass or fail on presentation. Your job in the room is the same as your job on the form: describe your real situation, specifically and honestly.

SECTION 07

The assessment report and the decision are two different things

This distinction saves a lot of confusion later, so it gets its own short section.

- The **assessor** examines and writes a **report**, with recommendations.
- The **case manager** at the DfC reads that report **alongside everything else** — your form and your evidence — and makes the **decision**.

nidirect describes it this way: a PIP case manager will consider **all** the information, including the report from the health professional working for the assessment provider on DfC's behalf **and the information you have given**. The case manager then writes to you *"with a clear explanation of how it was made."*

Two practical consequences:

1. **The assessment is important, but it is not the whole claim.** Your form and evidence sit on the same desk as the report.
2. **If you later disagree with the decision, you can ask for a copy of the assessment report.** Comparing what the report says with what you said is a normal, legitimate part of understanding a decision — sometimes a report does not reflect what you told the assessor, and you are entitled to see that for yourself.

SECTION 08

The decision

The decision arrives as a letter. It will tell you:

- What you have been awarded, if anything — which component(s), at which rate
- **When your claim will end and whether it will be reviewed** — awards are periodically reviewed to make sure you are getting the right support
- **What to do if you do not agree** with the decision

Whatever the outcome, do three things before anything else:

1. **Note the date on the decision letter.**
   If you disagree, the one-calendar-month clock for the next step runs from that date — not from the day you read it or the day you finish being angry about it.

2. **Read the explanation section**
   even if it is hard reading. Understanding *how* the decision was made is the foundation for any next step.

3. **File the letter safely**
   with the rest of your claim papers (see the record-keeping section below).

If the decision is what you hoped for: the letter tells you the amount, and your award will be reviewed at some point to make sure it is still right — keep your papers, and tell the DfC straight away if your circumstances or condition change.

If it isn't, the next section is for you.

SECTION 09

If you disagree: Mandatory Reconsideration, then appeal

Disagreeing with a decision does not make you a troublemaker. Reconsideration and appeal are built-in, formal stages of the same system — used by thousands of people in NI. Whether to use them is entirely your decision; what follows is how they work.

Step one: Mandatory Reconsideration (MR)

You cannot go straight to an appeal. First, you must ask the Department to look at the decision again — this is called a **Mandatory Reconsideration**.

- **Deadline:** you must apply **within one calendar month of the date on your decision notice**. The time limit can be extended in **exceptional circumstances**, and a late request will need reasons — but treat one month as the real deadline. Missing it can mean you may not be able to appeal at all.
- **How to request it (NI):** contact the PIP Centre **by phone (0800 587 0932)** or **by letter**, or you contact the office that made the decision — nidirect directs you to "the appropriate Jobs and Benefits office or Benefits Office that made the decision" — or download and complete form **MR2(NI)**; the address to use is on your decision letter.
- **What happens:** the decision is looked at again, along with anything further you provide. You then receive a **Mandatory Reconsideration Notice (MRN)** telling you whether the decision has changed. Keep this document — you need it for any appeal.

For honest expectation-setting: NISRA's monthly statistics (November 2025) (the most recent month checked when this guide was written — more recent figures may be available on the NISRA PIP statistics pages) showed 890 MRs cleared in that month, with 75% resulting in no change to the award — so roughly one in four changed at this stage — and an average processing time of 40 calendar days. Those figures are for a single month and move over time, but the shape is worth knowing: **many decisions do not change at MR, and the MR stage exists partly as the doorway to the independent appeal that follows.** An unchanged MR is not the end of the road.

Step two: appeal to an independent tribunal

If the MR does not resolve things, you can appeal to an **independent appeal tribunal**. In Northern Ireland, appeals are administered by **The Appeals Service (NI)** — not the GB courts service.

- **Deadline:** your appeal must be **received by the Appeals Service within one calendar month from the date of the Mandatory Reconsideration Notice**.
- **How:** complete the appeal form **NOA1(SS)** — you can complete it online, download it, or request a form from the Appeals Service — or appeal by signed letter.
- **The hearing:** benefit appeals are heard by an independent tribunal. Hearings can be face-to-face at venues across NI, or held remotely using teleconference and video technology.
- **Contacting The Appeals Service (NI):** Cleaver House, 3 Donegall Square North, Belfast BT1 5GA; also Omagh Library Building, 1 Spillars Place, Irishtown Road, Omagh BT78 1HL. Telephone: 028 9054 4000. Email: Appeals.Service.NI@communities-ni.gov.uk.

Two things worth knowing about the appeal stage, honestly sourced:

- The tribunal is **independent** of the Department. It looks at the case fresh.
- Law Centre NI's analysis of the official NI appeal statistics for 2024–25 found PIP appeal success rates of 66.6% for in-person hearings and 57.9% for remote hearings — and notably higher (70.9%) where a **representative** was present. Those are last year's figures, not a promise about any individual case. But they support one practical, non-controversial point: **if you reach the appeal stage, it is well worth contacting a qualified NI advice service about representation** — the free options are listed in section 12.

One more time, because the two deadlines are the most unforgiving facts in this guide:

> **MR: one calendar month from the date on the decision notice. Appeal: one calendar month from the date on the Mandatory Reconsideration Notice.**

SECTION 10

Record keeping: your claim file

A single folder — paper or digital — quietly makes every later stage easier. If a decision is ever queried, reconsidered or appealed, the person with organised records is in a far calmer position than the person excavating a drawer.

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST — KEEP IN YOUR CLAIM FILE

MY PIP CLAIM FILE — CHECKLIST

- [ ] Date I phoned the PIP Centre to start the claim: ______________
- [ ] Photocopy or photos of my completed PIP2 form (every page)
- [ ] Date I posted the PIP2 form: ______________
- [ ] List of evidence I sent, with dates sent
- [ ] Copies of every piece of evidence sent
- [ ] Every letter received from the PIP Centre / DfC (keep the envelopes too)
- [ ] Assessment appointment letter
- [ ] Date and format of my assessment: ______________
- [ ] My notes made just after the assessment (who, what was asked, how long)
- [ ] Copy of the assessment report (if requested)
- [ ] The decision letter — DATE ON THE LETTER: ______________
- [ ] MR request — date made and how (phone / letter / MR2(NI)): ______________
- [ ] Mandatory Reconsideration Notice — DATE: ______________

- [ ] Appeal form NOA1(SS) — date sent: ____________
- [ ] Notes of every phone call: date, time, who I spoke to, what was said

Three habits that repay the effort many times over:

1. **Copy the PIP2 before you send it.**
   You will want to re-read it before the assessment, and it is the reference point for everything that follows.

2. **Write a short note straight after the assessment**
   while it is fresh — what was asked, what you said, roughly how long it took.

3. **Log every phone call**
   date, time, name if given, and what was said. One line is enough.

SECTION 11

Reviews and staying on the right footing

A PIP award is not necessarily forever, and that is by design. Two things to hold onto after a decision:

- **Your award letter tells you when your claim will end and if it will be reviewed.** Claims are periodically reviewed to make sure you are getting the right support. A review is not an accusation — it is routine. When one arrives, the same principles apply as at the start: describe your current situation specifically and honestly, across good and bad days, and keep copies of everything.
- **Tell the DfC straight away if things change** — official guidance says to report a change in your personal circumstances (name, address, doctor) or in how your condition affects you, whether the level of help you need has gone up or down. Reporting changes promptly protects you.

Keep your claim file open — the folder you built during the claim is exactly what makes a future review straightforward.

SECTION 12

Where to get qualified, independent help in NI

This guide explains the process. For advice about *your* situation — what to write, whether to challenge a decision, representation at an appeal — talk to a qualified, independent adviser. In Northern Ireland, this help is free:

01

Make the Call (0800 232 1271)

the Department for Communities' own freephone service, which checks you are receiving all the benefits, supports and services you are entitled to. You can also request a callback through nidirect. It costs nothing and there is no downside to a check.

02

Advice NI (freephone 0800 915 4604)

free, independent advice across Northern Ireland, including benefits (see adviceni.net for current contact routes). Advice NI's network can help with forms, MRs and appeals.

03

Law Centre NI

provides legal support on social security matters in Northern Ireland and publishes analysis of the NI appeal statistics cited in this guide (lawcentreni.org).

04

Your local independent advice centre

most towns in NI have one; Advice NI can point you to your nearest.

If you take one action from this section: **if you are heading to an appeal, contact an advice service about representation.** The 2024–25 NI figures showing higher success rates where a representative was present are the strongest single piece of evidence in this guide about the value of qualified help.

SECTION 13

Where you are now

Come back to this page whenever you feel lost. Find your stage; the guide section for it is listed alongside.

IF YOU ARE…	YOU ARE AT…	SEE SECTION
Thinking about claiming	Before Stage 1	1
About to phone / just phoned	Stage 1 — the call	1
Holding the PIP2 form	Stage 2 — the form (one-month clock)	3, 4, 5
Waiting for / preparing for assessment	Stage 3 — the assessment	6, 7
Waiting for the decision	Between Stages 3 and 4	7, 8
Holding a decision letter	Stage 4 — the decision	8
Disagreeing with a decision	Stage 5 — MR (one-month clock)	9
Holding an MR Notice	Stage 6 — appeal (one-month clock)	9
Awarded, thinking ahead	Review horizon	11

However far you are through this journey, the work is the same at every stage: know where you are, know the deadline if there is one, describe your real situation honestly and specifically, and keep your papers. That is the whole method. It is not complicated — it is just never explained in one place.

You've now seen the whole map. That puts you ahead of most people who start this process.

One more resource, if you want to go deeper

This free guide covers the journey. Many readers tell us the hardest part is not the process but the blank space on the form — knowing *how* to turn their daily reality into clear written answers, question by question.

That is what our paid resource, the **NI PIP Answer Bank**, is for: worked examples of clear, honest answer-writing for the "How your disability affects you" form, built specifically for Northern Ireland. No scripts, no magic words, no promises about outcomes — just the craft of describing a real situation well, shown in depth.

If that would help you, you can read about it here:

NEXT, IF YOU WANT IT

NI PIP Answer Bank

nibenefitsnavigator.com/pip-answer-bank

And if the free guide is all you need — that is a perfectly good outcome, and we are glad it helped.

Whatever stage you are at, you now know the road. Take it one stage at a time.

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