

Disabled pensioners get benefits lift

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HUNDREDS of thousands of disabled pensioners will no longer have to undergo “unnecessary” repeat benefit assessments, Amber Rudd will say today as she takes inspiration from her father’s struggles with blindness.

Around 270,000 disabled pensioners will not have to have their personal independence payment awards regularly reviewed every two or three years.

Ms Rudd, the Work and Pensions Secretary, in a speech for the charity Scope, will say the commitment forms

part of a wider package of measures intended to “level the terrain” for disabled people.

Ms Rudd will draw on her own family experience of disability. In highly personal remarks, she will say how she and her family coped with her late father blindness for nearly four decades.

“My father became blind in 1981. For 36 years his blindness was a normal part of my family’s life. I reflected on my father’s lack of sight and how it affected his life and the lives of those who loved him, as I considered my role in supporting disabled people.

“Disabled pensioners have paid into

our system for their whole lives and deserve the full support of the state when they need it most.

“This Government, therefore, intends to change the landscape for disabled people in Britain: to level the terrain and smooth their path.”

Mr Rudd, a Second World War pilot who later worked as a journalist and as a stockbroker, died aged 93 in May 2017, when Ms Rudd was campaigning in the general election.

A source close to the minister said she wanted to ensure that pensioners claiming personal independence payments (PIP) retained their “dignity” in

old age, rather than have to prove their disability had not changed.

In other measures, Ms Rudd will say the Government is looking to merge work capability assessment and PIP assessment services to bring a more “joined-up” approach to claimants.

She will also say that she intends to review the Government’s goal to see one million more disabled people in work by 2027.

“People with disabilities and health conditions have enough challenges in life; so my ambition is to significantly improve how the Department for Work and Pensions supports disabled people

and those with health conditions,” she will say. “Progress has been made, but we need to do more to close the gap between our intentions and disabled people’s experiences.

“The benefits system should be an ally. It should protect disabled people and ensure that the assistance it provides arrives in the right place to those who need it most.”

Mark Hodgkinson, chief executive for Scope, welcomed the news but said: “Disabled people also want to see action taken to scrap counterproductive benefit sanctions. They make it harder for disabled people to get into work.”