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Swann announces increased payments for infected blood

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Health Minister Robin Swann has announced increased payments for beneficiaries of the Northern Ireland Infected Blood Payment Scheme.

The increased annual payments, made to people on the NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme who were diagnosed with Hepatitis C or HIV after receiving NHS-supplied infected blood or blood products, range from £18,745 to just under £45,000

(depending on diagnosis) and bring Northern Ireland's rates into line with England, where payments were increased significantly in April 2019. These increased payments will continue into future years.

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Minister Swann said: "When I took up post as Minister of Health in January of this year, the issue of support for those impacted by contaminated blood was an immediate priority for me. Having met with a number of people who have been infected and / or

affected, I am acutely aware of the considerable impact that this has had on their lives and the suffering they have had to endure physically, emotionally and indeed financially. That is why I asked officials on 31 July to bring Northern Ireland in line with England. Following the necessary approvals on Friday, we can now progress this as a matter of urgency.

"I know that in recent months the COVID-19 pandemic has added greatly to the concern already felt by many in this community and therefore I am pleased to deliver this very positive news. It is my sincere hope that this increased financial support, representing an additional annual funding commitment of £1.1 million by my Department, provides ongoing financial certainty for a group of people who have suffered tremendously."

In January, Minister Swann stated his intention to carry out a three phase review to reforming the Infected Blood Payment Scheme (NI) to ensure it best meets the needs of all beneficiaries. Referring to phase 1 of the review, Minister Swann said: "The payments I announced in January and March of this year ensured infected beneficiaries on the NI scheme were no worse off in terms of financial support on the scheme than their counterparts in England for the 2019/20 financial year. In addition, I was able to secure additional funding within my Department's budget to make payments to non-infected widows and widowers on the NI Scheme.

"These developments took place within just three months of the restoration of the NI Executive and whilst my budget did not allow for a permanent uplift in rates in line with England at that time, the interim payments were intended as an immediate measure to address the gap caused by the uplift in England in April 2019 and to alleviate the financial hardship endured by people infected and/or affected by contaminated blood.

"I was keen to build on this progress and despite significant pressure on my Department responding to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, phase 2 of the review of the NI Scheme has continued, considering other aspects of the scheme in addition to annual payments to infected beneficiaries.

"I have clearly said previously that my support is there for those affected by infected blood. I will continue to strive to ensure they get the support they need and deserve. I am delighted to be able to announce this significant uplift in rates and I hope that this financial support will go some way to mitigate the harms and afford the best means to live as normal a life as possible.

"Beneficiaries will receive written confirmation of the details of their new uplifted payments in the coming weeks."

In addition to the uplift in rates to those infected beneficiaries on the NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme, Minister Swann also announced his intention to conduct a survey of all scheme beneficiaries in Northern Ireland, to seek feedback on other support provided both financial and in terms of psychological support.

Minister Swann said: "When I met with groups of those infected and /or affected by contaminated blood earlier this year, I said that I wanted to take their views on board in the ongoing review of the Scheme. It is important that they are involved in this work and that I understand their views on the support currently provided and what further support might be needed, to ensure that our financial support scheme best meets the needs of our people here in Northern Ireland.

"The purpose of the survey is to seek the views of all beneficiaries currently registered on the NI Scheme, as I want to give fair and equal consideration to the needs of all of those who have suffered as a result of infected blood, recognising the impact this has had

on their lives, including the non-infected bereaved beneficiaries of the scheme, who have also suffered a significant impact.”

The results of the survey will be analysed to identify any additional reform needed as part of phase 2 of the review. Phase 3 of the review will consider further reform of the scheme to address recommendations from the UK-wide Infected Blood Inquiry, chaired by Sir Brian Langstaff and sponsored by the Cabinet Office.

Notes to editors:

1

- . Before heat treatment of blood products was introduced in 1985, and a test for hepatitis C was developed and introduced in 1991, 4,675 people with haemophilia in the UK were infected with hepatitis C as a result of NHS-supplied blood products during the 1970s and 1980s. Epidemiological estimates suggest that up to 28,000 others may have been similarly infected with hepatitis C by whole blood transfusions in the UK.

2

- . Over the same period, approximately 1,200 people with haemophilia and 100 other individuals were infected with HIV by NHS-supplied blood products or blood transfusions in the UK before the introduction of heat treatment of blood products, and the development and introduction of a test for HIV in 1985. Some of these patients were co-infected with both hepatitis C and HIV. It is estimated that up to 3,000 of these people have died of their infections.

3

- . Since 2017, each UK country has had its own infected blood payment scheme. Details of the NI scheme were announced in December 2016 – further information is available on the [DoH website](https://www.gov.uk/news/michelle-oneill-announces-improved-financial-support-people-affected-by-contaminated-blood) ([/news/michelle-oneill-announces-improved-financial-support-people-affected-by-contaminated-blood](https://www.gov.uk/news/michelle-oneill-announces-improved-financial-support-people-affected-by-contaminated-blood)).

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- . The NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme is administered on behalf of the Department of Health NI by the Business Services Organisation (BSO). Further information on the scheme is available on the [NI Direct website](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/infected-blood-payment-scheme) (<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/infected-blood-payment-scheme>).

The NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme includes regular monthly or quarterly payments; lump sums, discretionary one-off grant payments; annual winter fuel payments and income top-ups. Different support schemes operate in other UK regions.

5

- . The regular payments were made at the same level in Northern Ireland and England until April 2019, when the UK Government announced significant increases in regular payments in the English scheme. This created a divergence with Northern Ireland and no extra monies were allocated to Northern Ireland as a result of the increase in England.

6

- . The uplift in rates represents an ongoing funding commitment of £1.1m annually and has been made possible by an additional £1m of ring-fenced funding announced in the 2020/21 Budget, with the remaining balance being made up from within the Department's overall budget baseline.

The new 2020/21 annual payments for NI will increase as follows:

- Hep C stage 1 will increase from £4,166 to £18,772;
- Hep C stage 2 will increase from £18,745 to £28,476;
- Hep C stage 1 co-infected will increase from £22,911 to £38,646;
- Hep C stage 2 co-infected will increase from £37,491 to £44,748;
- Mono HIV will increase from £18,745 to £28,476.

7

- . The survey will be sent to all beneficiaries currently registered with the NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme and will seek feedback on a number of areas, including:
 - Financial support for the bereaved;

- Income top-ups;
- Winter fuel payment;
- Discretionary support;
- Enhanced support for Hepatitis C stage 1, and;
- Psychological support.

8

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9

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10

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