



Penny Mordaunt is calling for payouts to finally be made over the scandal that dates back to the 1970s

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Penny Mordaunt: Pay out on blood scandal

Commons leader criticises Sunak for delays in compensation for victims of worst NHS disaster

Caroline Wheeler and Harry Yorke

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Rishi Sunak has been criticised by a member of his cabinet over delays in paying compensation to the victims of the contaminated blood scandal, the worst treatment disaster in NHS history.

In written evidence to the infected blood inquiry, Penny Mordaunt, the leader of the Commons, said it was “better to deal with this matter as soon as practically possible”. She added: “The quicker we address the wrongs that have occurred and

provide proper, fair, uniform financial support to all those infected and affected the better.”

Mordaunt also revealed that two letters she sent to Sunak during his time as chancellor demanding a speedy resolution to the compensation arrangements had gone unanswered.

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She told him on July 13 2020 that it was “inevitable that the government would be likely to pay out substantial damages to all those affected, and that it was sensible to start preparing for this now”.

Mordaunt added in her evidence: “It was my opinion that if we started preparing for it and working out a compensation scheme, this would demonstrate that we, the government, recognised the seriousness of this disaster and the severe impact that this was having and had had on so many victims and their families, partners etc, and that we were taking active steps to progress matters.

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“I wanted concurrent activity in this area. I did not want the inquiry to conclude and then us to have to start another year or more’s work on a scheme. I wanted to avoid every possible delay for those infected and affected.”

It comes days before the prime minister and the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, are due to give evidence to the public inquiry, which is examining how thousands of British patients in the 1970s and 1980s were given NHS blood products infected with deadly diseases.

Sir Brian Langstaff, the inquiry chairman, took the unusual step of reconvening the hearings amid complaints that the government was dragging its feet over payments. He is understood to be frustrated by government inertia while victims die at the rate of one every four days.

Mordaunt commissioned an independent report on the proposed compensation framework when she was paymaster general in 2020. Despite a pledge by the government to respond to the review when it was published in June last year, it has not done so.

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Mordaunt will also give evidence to the public inquiry on July 24. Figures published by the inquiry estimate that 1,350 people were infected with HIV, of whom more than 1,000 had died by the end of 2019. Another 26,800 people are estimated to have contracted hepatitis C, of whom 1,820 had died from causes related to the disease by 2019.

The government has made interim payments of about £400 million to those infected and their bereaved partners. However, Langstaff has since said that the interim payments should be extended to “recognise deaths to date unrecognised”, including parents and children. Action was “necessary to alleviate immediate suffering”, he said.

Jeremy Quin, the Cabinet Office minister, told MPs that the government would act at “pace” to “deliver resolution”, but said that Langstaff’s recommendations would have financial implications.

Hunt has held several meetings in the Treasury to discuss compensation packages for the victims. This week, he and Sunak are expected to discuss options before they appear before the inquiry.

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The Treasury estimates total payouts from the scandal could range between £5 billion and £22 billion. The drastic variation arises because the two reports on the scandal approach compensation differently.

Three groups are involved: the living who are infected; the estates of those who have died; and the “affected” — the loved ones of victims. The Treasury is attempting to work out how compensation can be made fairly. While living victims are

Hunt's priority, sources say the Treasury has accepted that there has to be "parity" in the compensation.

In written evidence, Hunt admitted the scale of the financial challenge, angering victims who feel the value of their lives should not be appraised like a spreadsheet.

"Treasury officials are working closely with [the Department of Health and Social Care] and Cabinet Office to ensure that any fiscal or economic implications of a compensation scheme are duly considered as one of many factors informing a final decision," he said.

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