



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Welsh Infected Blood Support Scheme (WIBSS) Enhanced support**

DATE **March 2019**

BY **Vaughan Gething, Minister for Health and Social Services**

I am pleased to inform members of additional support for those infected with hepatitis C and / or HIV via contaminated blood or blood products. The significant impact of such infections on many individuals lives has been extensively discussed in the Assembly chamber.

It is accepted that beneficiaries of our ex-gratia payments scheme delivered through our partners at the Welsh Infected Blood Support Scheme (WIBSS) will have experienced significant mental health, well-being and post traumatic stress (PTS) associated with their experience of infection.

Officials have met with those directly affected, clinicians, the benefit advisers and counsellors at WIBSS to gauge their thoughts regarding additional means of support for all beneficiaries, particularly those at Stage 1 with life impacting complications arising from their hepatitis C infection.

Following these discussions I have agreed to make available the following enhanced support:

Firstly, there will be an enhanced payment, referred to as the Enhanced Hep C Stage 1+ Scheme payment, for those with existing Stage 1 hepatitis C who are suffering from mental health symptoms which they consider to be related to their being infected with hepatitis C and where the mental health symptoms that they are experiencing have an affect on their ability to carry out day to day activities. The enhanced payment will be equivalent to the current rate of payment for those at Stage 2, hepatitis C infection, which is £18,500 per annum. Where an application to receive the Enhanced Hep C Stage 1 + Scheme Payment is submitted by 23 April 2019, the payment will be backdated to 1 April 2018 or to the date that the individual first received the Stage 1 ex-gratia payment under WIBSS, whichever is the later.

The backdated Enhanced Hep C Stage 1 + Scheme Payment will therefore be paid to beneficiaries who currently have, or who had, Stage 1 Hepatitis C infection during the financial year 2018/19, who meet the relevant criteria and who submitted an application for this enhanced payment by 23 April 2019. This also extends to people who have died during the financial year 2018/2019 and where an application for the enhanced payment is made by the beneficiary's estate by 23 April 2019.

The proposed enhanced scheme for those at Stage 1 infection will be much simplified from that available across the border, with no requirement for medical input into the application process. Beneficiaries will simply be asked if they are suffering from any mental health symptoms that they feel are related to their infection from contaminated blood or blood products, the symptoms and whether they are affecting their ability to carry out day to day

activities. If this is the case, there will be no need for further assessment because the person has already been diagnosed with Hepatitis C from infected blood or blood products and this is already acknowledged as unjust.

Secondly, a structured assessment and personalised package of additional assistance will be offered to all those infected and their families as part of the new WIBSS psychological support arrangements. The need for such support has also been emphasised through the Infected Blood Inquiry and will form part of the overall package of holistic provision available.

In addition to these enhancements, WIBSS will adopt a revised and more open and transparent approach to the way the existing discretionary fund is administered. They will write to all beneficiaries informing them of the eligibility criteria and inviting them to apply. This support will further enhance the lives of those affected in a more regulated and equitable way and will be available in addition to the existing regular ex-gratia and income top-up payments.

I can also confirm that the suite of ex-gratia payments currently available to those belonging to WIBSS will see their payments rise in line with the Cost of Living Price Index including Housing (CPIH) as published in February 2019 from the 1 April 2019.

The Chair of the UK Infected Blood Inquiry, Mr Justice Langstaff, has recently met with Jackie Price-Doyle, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, and representatives of those infected and affected, and asked her to address the matter of inequitable financial payments across the UK infected blood support schemes. This arose from the stories of financial hardship people expressed to him during the preliminary hearings of the inquiry. There has

been understandable concern around this disparity in rates and following this meeting officials across the UK health departments agreed to work together to review the rates of ex-gratia payments and wider holistic services that are currently available, taking into consideration the proposal put forward by those infected and affected.

I will let you know the outcome of these deliberations in due course.