

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Mr **GRO-A**
Chair
Haemophila NI

GRO-A

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST, BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 2556
Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

Our ref: SUB-0729-2021

Date: 2 July 2021

Dear **GRO-A**

I wrote to you on 25 March 2021 to notify you about a number of positive reforms I had decided to make to the NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme.

The reforms came about following work across the four UK Health Departments, along with the Cabinet Office, intended to achieve greater parity of financial support across the UK schemes.

I am writing again to provide you with an update on the implementation of these reforms and to seek your assistance in setting up a working group to take forward further reform.

On 1 March 2021, I announced annual financial support to non-infected bereaved beneficiaries at 75% of the rate their infected spouse would have been entitled to. As a result of the agreement with my counterparts announced on 25 March 2021, the bereaved will now be entitled to 100% of their infected partner's rates for the first year, with 75% in subsequent years, to be backdated to 1 April 2019. This means that for Northern Ireland, all eligible bereaved beneficiaries on the scheme will receive appropriate arrears for 2019/20, whilst those bereaved who joined the Scheme after 2020 or whose spouse / partner died during the course of 2020/21 will also receive appropriate arrears.

I also announced higher lump sums for Hepatitis C Stage 1 (increasing from £20,000 to £50,000) and HIV (now set at £80,500). Arrears will also be paid to the estates of a beneficiary who died after 25 March 2021, where there was no spouse or partner who would be entitled to the bereaved rate.

Finally, in terms of lump sums, the £10,000 bereavement lump sum, which has been provided since the NI Scheme was established in 2017, will also now be payable to the Estate of the deceased in cases where there is no living spouse or partner.

These arrears will be paid to all eligible beneficiaries in July 2021.

The second issue I wanted to address is the introduction of enhanced support payments for eligible Hepatitis C Stage 1 beneficiaries. As part of the parity agreement announced on 25 March 2021, I agreed to introduce this provision on the NI Scheme in line with rates paid in England and backdated to 1 April 2019. There is a commitment by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in England to provide funding at least until the end of the current financial year. Before these payments can be made a delivery model will need to be put in place to assess eligibility. I want to take this work forward in consultation with your organisations as I believe this will be the best way to identify any issues or problems at an early stage and I will be better informed in making my decision on the most appropriate delivery model.

As part of this work I intend to conduct a targeted consultation with infected blood stakeholders. It is not necessary to conduct a full public consultation due to the very small numbers who will be affected by this new policy. In order to coordinate this work, I propose to set up a working group, to meet in a virtual capacity under the current circumstances, which would provide a platform for the sharing of valuable knowledge and insights and assist with the policy development process. I would like the group to have representation from each of the main haemophilia groups in Northern Ireland (Haemophilia NI, Families and Friends of Haemophilia NI and the Haemophilia Society).

To progress development of the policy, officials will draft a consultation document, in liaison with the working group, which once agreed will be issued to all NI Scheme beneficiaries for response. I believe it is important that all scheme beneficiaries, including those who will not be directly affected by the new policy, are given an opportunity to respond to how we allocate public funding to provide this support.

Following initial responses to the consultation document, I would expect the working group to agree a number of options to be submitted to me for final decision.

In terms of timescale, once the working group is established, I would expect that the consultation process should take no longer than eight weeks. The Cabinet Office Paymaster General has asked that Devolved Administrations implement the parity agreement announced on 25 March by the end of 2021. We will seek to meet this timescale if at all possible but you have my assurance that payments will be backdated regardless.

I would be grateful if you would discuss this proposal within your organisation and **nominate one or two individuals who would be best suited to act as a spokesperson representing your organisation on the working group**. Ideally the nominated representatives would include a Hepatitis C stage 1 beneficiary, stage 2 beneficiary and a beneficiary who became infected through blood transfusion to help ensure all perspectives are represented. Please email ibit@health-ni.gov.uk by 16 July 2021 with the names and contact details of your nominations for the working group. The working group will also include representatives from the Belfast HSC Trust, Business Services Organisation and my Department.

Meanwhile, officials in the health departments in England, Scotland and Wales are also working to implement the changes for their respective schemes, to achieve greater parity across the UK. Importantly, I have also agreed with the other UK Health Ministers that any future changes to any scheme will require four nations' consultation.

Yours sincerely

GRO-C

Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health

cc Mr

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Working for a Healthier People

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Co-chairs

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Minister of Health

Working for a Healthier People

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Haemophilia Society

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Working for a Healthier People

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I would be grateful if you would discuss this proposal within your organisation and **nominate one or two individuals who would be best suited to act as a spokesperson representing your organisation on the working group**. Ideally the nominated representatives would include a Hepatitis C stage 1 beneficiary, stage 2 beneficiary and a beneficiary who became infected through blood transfusion to help ensure all perspectives are represented. Please email ibit@health-ni.gov.uk by 16 July 2021 with the names and contact details of your nominations for the working group. The working group will also include representatives from the Belfast HSC Trust, Business Services Organisation and my Department.

Meanwhile, officials in the health departments in England, Scotland and Wales are also working to implement the changes for their respective schemes, to achieve greater parity across the UK. Importantly, I have also agreed with the other UK Health Ministers that any future changes to any scheme will require four nations' consultation.

Yours sincerely

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Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health

Working for a Healthier People

To NI Scheme Members

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST, BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 2556
Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:

Our Ref: SUB-0729-2021

Date: 5 July 2021

Dear Sir / Madam

In September 2020 I wrote to all beneficiaries of the Northern Ireland Infected Blood Payment Scheme at that time inviting you to take part in a survey to help me understand how you feel about the support available to you through the Scheme and to help me identify areas for improvement. I am very grateful to all of you who provided a response to the questionnaire and I understand that this may have been difficult for you given what you have been through.

You were sent a copy of the report of the findings of the survey and this is also available on the Department's website at: www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/infected-blood-payment-scheme-ni-survey-report. Following consideration of the survey feedback, on 1 March 2021 I announced annual financial support to non-infected bereaved beneficiaries of the Scheme at 75% of the rate their infected spouse or partner would have been entitled to. Meanwhile, work continued across the UK health departments on options for reform to achieve greater parity of financial support across the four UK schemes.

As a result of an agreement with the other UK Health Ministers, on 25 March 2021 I announced several further changes to the NI Scheme. A copy of that announcement is included at **annex A** in this letter. If you are entitled to any additional monies, the BSO will write to you directly to set out the details of your entitlement.

I also want to highlight for you the work I am commencing on the introduction of enhanced support payments for eligible Hepatitis C Stage 1 beneficiaries. As part of the parity agreement announced on 25 March 2021, I agreed to introduce this provision on the NI Scheme in line with rates paid in England and backdated to 1 April 2019. This will of course require a process to be put in place to assess eligibility. I want to take this work forward in consultation with all of you to ensure that you have your say on this important additional provision on the NI Scheme. I propose to set up a working group, to meet in a virtual capacity under the current circumstances, which will assist with the policy development process. I would like the group to have representation from each of the main haemophilia groups in Northern Ireland (Haemophilia NI, Families and Friends of Haemophilia NI and the Haemophilia Society) and have written separately to these organisations to request nominations to the working group.

To progress policy options, officials will develop a consultation document, together with the working group, which once agreed will be issued to all NI Scheme beneficiaries for response. I believe it is important that all scheme beneficiaries, including those who will not be directly affected by the new policy, are given an opportunity to respond to how we allocate public funding to provide this support.

Following initial responses to the consultation document, I would expect the working group to agree a number of options which will be submitted to me for a final decision.

In terms of timescale, once the working group is established, I would expect that the consultation process should take no longer than eight weeks.

While I understand that this issue may not directly affect all beneficiaries, I would be very grateful if you would consider responding to the consultation when you receive it as your views are important to shaping how this policy is put into practice. If you would like to be more involved and are interested in participating in the working group please contact the Scheme Manager, Colin Murray on [tel:02895 363817](tel:02895363817) or e-mail: colin.murray@hscni.net, or alternatively e-mail the Department directly at: ibit@health.ni.gov.uk by 16 July 2021. Please note that there will only be a limited number of places available on the group to keep the numbers manageable.

Yours sincerely

GRO-C

Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Department of Health

INFECTED BLOOD FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Published on 25 March 2021.

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): This statement provides an update on UK four nations' cooperation to achieve greater parity of financial support for those infected and/or affected by contaminated blood across the UK.

On taking up post as Health Minister in January 2020, I announced a Review of the Northern Ireland Infected Blood Payment Scheme. This work has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and to date, I have introduced reforms which have brought NI infected beneficiaries into line with their counterparts in England and I have announced annual financial support to non-infected bereaved spouses and partners on the NI Scheme.

Alongside the NI Review, my Department has been working closely since April 2019 with the Cabinet Office and Health Departments in England, Scotland and Wales to explore how to achieve greater parity of support across the four UK infected blood schemes, recognising that the integrity of the schemes developed under devolution should be respected and ensuring that any reform would not leave a beneficiary worse off than their counterpart in another part of the UK.

In January 2020 the UK government reaffirmed its commitment to resolving the disparities in financial support for infected beneficiaries in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as addressing broader issues of disparity, including support for non-infected bereaved spouses and partners.

Subject to funding from HM Treasury, I have agreed to implement a number of changes to the NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme, which are intended to achieve greater alignment in financial support across the UK schemes. The reforms are as follows:

- payments for non-infected bereaved spouses or partners will increase from 75% of the deceased beneficiary's annual payment to an automatic 100% of the deceased beneficiary's payment in the first year, with 75% payable in subsequent years. This is in line with the policy in Scotland and will be backdated to 1 April 2019;
- the introduction of enhanced support payments for eligible Hepatitis C Stage 1 beneficiaries, in line with rates paid in England and backdated to 1 April 2019 - subject to a model being developed in consultation with stakeholders;
- the £10,000 bereavement lump sum, which has been provided since the NI Scheme was established in 2017, will also now be payable to the Estate of the deceased in cases where there is no living spouse or partner, in line with the

position in England and Wales. This will be backdated to 1 April 2017, meaning all eligible beneficiaries currently registered on the Scheme will receive the appropriate payment in arrears;

- the lump sum payment to a Hepatitis C Stage1 beneficiary will increase from £20,000 to £50,000, with the additional £20,000 payable if a stage 1 beneficiary moves to stage 2. The total lump sum payable for Hepatitis C beneficiaries remains at £70,000. This policy is in line with the position in Scotland and will be backdated to 1 April 2017, meaning that all eligible beneficiaries currently registered with the Scheme will receive this additional payment in arrears;
- the lump sum payment to a HIV beneficiary will increase from the current range of payments up to maximum of £80.5k (depending on circumstances) to an automatic £80.5k, backdated to 1 April 2017, meaning all eligible beneficiaries currently registered with the Scheme will receive any appropriate additional payment in arrears subject to the lump sum amount previously received.

The Health Ministers in England, Scotland and Wales have also agreed to reforms to similarly adapt their respective schemes.

Beneficiaries will continue to receive their current payments until the changes can be made.