

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Health

INFECTED BLOOD FINANCIAL SUPPORT

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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.