

Infected Blood Payment Scheme (NI) Newsletter

Issue 2 – January 2024

Welcome

Welcome to the second edition of the Infected Blood Payment Scheme (NI) newsletter. This edition provides an update on the support you may be entitled to, as well as the latest developments on the NI Scheme and the Infected Blood Inquiry (IBI).

Hepatitis C (HCV) stage 1 (enhanced) support

HCV stage 1 enhanced support payments have been available since June 2022 to provide help with living costs to improve quality of life for stage 1 beneficiaries who experience additional long term physical or mental health symptoms arising from a history of HCV infection or its treatment which further impact the ability to carry out routine daily activities.

When introducing this new financial support, the Health Minister decided that, until 30th June 2023, all new eligible applications for enhanced support would be backdated to 1st April 2019. Reminder letters were sent to beneficiaries ahead of this cut-off date. From now on, successful applications for HCV stage 1 (enhanced) support will be payable from the date of application.

Please contact the Scheme for more details if you think you may be eligible.

Contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Interim compensation payments to estates

In August 2022, the UK Government announced that it had accepted the recommendation in the IBI's first interim report (July 2022) that £100,000 interim compensation payments would be made to all existing beneficiaries of the four UK devolved financial support schemes.

Sadly, after this announcement was made, there were a number of Scheme beneficiaries across the UK who subsequently passed away before the payments were made in October 2022. The UK Government decided that in these cases, the £100,000 interim compensation could be paid to the estates of those beneficiaries.

This required amendments to regulations to ensure the payments were disregarded as capital in the calculation of social security benefits. The 'Social Security (Infected Blood Capital Disregard) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2023' came into force in August 2023 and payments were made to eligible estates across the UK in September 2023.

Increase to NI Scheme payments for 2024-25

The payment rates on the four UK devolved infected blood support schemes increase each year in line with inflation. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate in September is normally applied.

When the devolved administrations receive official confirmation from the UK Government (UKG) of the rate to apply, the NI Scheme will write to all beneficiaries to confirm the new 2024-25 payment rates.

Payment dates

Your payment dates for 2024 are as follows:

Friday 12 th January	Friday 10 th May	Friday 13 th September
Friday 9 th February	Friday 14 th June	Friday 11 th October
Friday 15 th March	Friday 12 th July	Friday 15 th November
Friday 12 th April	Friday 9 th August	Friday 13 th December

Discretionary Support

Discretionary one-off grants are a form of financial support that Scheme beneficiaries* (excluding bereaved beneficiaries) may apply for to cover the cost of certain essential items or services. The purpose of discretionary support is to provide additional, time-limited financial support to beneficiaries in order to address immediate needs which:

- (a) are having a direct effect on an individual's independence, **and**;
- (b) have been brought about **as a direct result of their infection and / or its treatment** and are otherwise unable to be met.

Grants are available for the following:

<i>Accommodation adaptations</i>	<i>Accommodation repairs</i>
<i>Car repairs</i>	<i>Dental costs</i>
<i>Hospital travel costs</i>	<i>Mobility aids</i>
<i>Motability deposits</i>	<i>Respite break</i>
<i>Specialist bed and/or mattress</i>	<i>Pre-payment of infected beneficiary</i>
<i>Reimbursement of funeral costs*</i>	<i>HCV Stage 2 funeral plan</i>

* funeral costs grant may be claimed by the person arranging the funeral for the deceased Scheme beneficiary.

You must apply for the grant **before** committing to payments for any items or services. Other supporting evidence may be required. Please contact the Scheme for more details.

Second Scheme Survey

In July 2023, we conducted a second survey to get your feedback on the support provided through the NI Scheme.

The survey was sent to all 106 beneficiaries registered with the Scheme at the time of issue and a total of 59 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of just over 55%, which is similar to our previous survey in Autumn 2020. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey.

The full report has been published on the Department of Health website at: www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/infected-blood-payment-scheme-ni-survey-2023. You should have received an email link or hard copy of the report. Please contact the Scheme Manager if have not yet received this.

Contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Website Improvements

The Department of Health NI and the Business Services Organisation (BSO), which administers the Scheme on behalf of the Department, have been working to update and improve the information on the DoH NI, NI Direct and BSO websites. It is expected that these improvements will be completed by January 2024. For the latest updates please visit:

DoH NI: www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/infected-blood-payment-scheme-ni

NI Direct: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/infected-blood-payment-scheme

BSO: <https://bso.hscni.net/directorates/financial-services/infected-blood-payment-scheme-ni/>

A reminder on a few important things

Are you getting the support you are entitled to?

The Infected Blood Payment Scheme (NI) provides financial support to people who were infected with HIV and/or hepatitis C following treatment with NHS blood, tissue or blood products in Northern Ireland. Support is also available for bereaved spouses, civil partners and long-term partners. The NI Scheme offers various types of financial support, including:

Lump sum payments on registration *Annual winter fuel payments*
Regular monthly or quarterly payments *Discretionary one-off grant payments*

Please contact the Scheme Manager if you feel you should be getting more support from the Scheme or have any other questions.

Contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Tax and benefits

When the four UK devolved financial support schemes were set up in 2017, legislation was passed to ensure that payments received from the Schemes were exempt from income tax. Therefore, if you live in the UK, income tax is not deducted from the payments you receive from the NI Scheme.

This exemption only extends to the monthly / quarterly payments from the NI Scheme or interim compensation payments from the UKG.

Any return from investing those sums is not exempt from tax.

Once any money from the NI Scheme or interim compensation from UKG is invested, any interest received on that investment will be taxable in the normal way and should be declared in tax returns and self-assessments.

You should seek independent financial advice.

Payments from the NI Scheme are not taken into account when applying for any of the following means-tested benefits from the Department for Communities (DfC):

<i>Income Support</i>	<i>Housing Benefit</i>
<i>Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)</i>	<i>Employment & Support Allowance (ESA)</i>
<i>State Pension Credit</i>	<i>Universal Credit</i>

However, you must still declare to DfC any payments you receive from the NI Scheme or interim compensation from the UKG.

If you don't tell DfC about payments received, means-tested benefits may be affected. We can help by providing you with a letter to confirm payments you have received from us and inform the DfC to disregard our payments to you. If you have any problems, let us know.

Money advice

The NI Scheme does not provide financial advice, however the NI Direct Finance Support Service supports people who live in Northern Ireland and need short-term financial help.



For advice about how you can save money on your energy bills, insurance and other costs, please contact the NI Direct Finance Support Service.

Contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Are you interested in joining our Stakeholder Group?

Last year, we set up a Stakeholder Group to support cooperation and engagement between Government and those affected by contaminated blood.



If you are a NI Scheme beneficiary or are affected in another way, or if you represent a relevant organisation or charity, you could play an important role in discussions on how we can improve the support provided on the NI Scheme.

If you are interested in joining, please send a short letter or email to DoH NI at: ibit@health-ni.gov.uk setting out your personal experience and understanding of the issues and why you think you could play a role in the Group.

Alternatively, you could ask someone to do this on your behalf.

Don't forget to keep your details up to date ...

Don't forget to let us know about any change of circumstances, for example if you move address or change your bank account.

The NI Scheme Manager would be happy to give advice and assistance over the phone.

Contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Infected Blood Inquiry latest news and updates

Joint communiqué

In June 2023, a four nations meeting took place involving the Cabinet Office, UK Health Ministers and the DoH NI Permanent Secretary. Following the meeting, a joint communiqué was issued in which the then Minister for the Cabinet Office (MCO) Jeremy Quin MP said:

“The UK Government’s position that there is a moral case for compensation to be paid was welcomed and Ministers and the NI Permanent Secretary look forward to working together in considering the recommendations in the Infected Blood Inquiry’s second interim report to enable a response as soon as possible after the Inquiry concludes.”

For more information, please visit the UKG [website](#).

Inquiry report

In September 2023, the Chair of the IBI, Sir Brian Langstaff, announced that the final report has been delayed and it is now expected to be published in March 2024. Sir Brian Langstaff said:

“When we completed the last hearings, the question I was most asked was when we would publish. I said it would be late autumn. I have been obliged to recognise that the sheer volume and scale of the material that needs to be explained, the weight of criticisms made of individuals and organisations, and the way we are legally required to deal with them, mean that this is simply not realistic. I wanted, and I know that Inquiry participants wanted, it to be earlier, but I must now say that we expect to publish in March”.

For more information, please visit the IBI [website](#).

UK Government Statement

In October 2023, the then Minister for the Cabinet Office Jeremy Quin MP made a statement about the delay of the Inquiry's final report, saying:

“The Infected Blood Inquiry Chair has announced that the Inquiry’s final report has been delayed from Autumn 2023 and will now be published in March 2024. I recognise the calls for urgency from those who have suffered and continue to suffer and I remain committed to responding to the Inquiry as quickly as the Government is able to do so. However, it is only reasonable that the Government’s response is fully informed by Sir Brian’s final report. The Government continues to fully support the Inquiry in its important work and is working hard to be ready to respond. I will update Parliament as soon as it is appropriate”.

For more information, please visit the House of Commons [website](#).

Victims and Prisoners Bill Amendment

An amendment (new clause 27) to the Victims and Prisoners Bill was put forward at the Report Stage by Dame Diane Johnston MP (Labour and co-Chair of the APPG on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood) and was passed in the House of Commons on Monday 4th December 2023.

The clause will require a single UK-wide compensation Scheme to be set up within three months of the Bill becoming law.

A second reading took place in House of Lords on Monday 18th December 2023 and the Bill is currently at the Committee Stage.

For more information, please visit the UK Parliament [website](#).

Further update from UK Government

In December, the new MCO John Glen MP (who replaced Jeremy Quin MP in the government reshuffle in November) updated Parliament. The Minister reiterated that the Government had accepted the moral case for compensation and is committed to bringing this matter to its conclusion. The MCO said:

“It is now a year on from the Government’s acceptance of the moral case for compensation and I understand the calls for urgency. I know that, from many of those infected and affected, there is anger and frustration with the Government’s response so far. The Inquiry’s recommendations are not without complexity and it would be inappropriate for the Government to prejudge the findings of the final report. For these reasons, the Government are not yet in a position to share any final decisions on compensation. However, Members on both sides of the House have made it clear that we must do right by the victims, and the Government recognise this. I am personally committed to making sure that we do that.”

The Government has committed to providing a further update to Parliament within 25 sitting days of the Inquiry’s final report, which is expected to be published in March.

For more information, please visit the UK Parliament [website](#).

Contacts



Infected Blood Payment Scheme	IBPS NI Business Services Organisation, Finance Directorate 2nd floor, 2 Franklin Street BELFAST BT2 8DQ	Phone: 028 9536 3817 Email: bsso.ibss@hscni.net
Benefits	Department for Communities Causeway Exchange 1-7 Bedford Street BELFAST BT2 7EG	<u>MAKE THE CALL HELPLINE</u> Phone: 0800 232 1271 Email: makethecall@dfcni.gov.uk If you receive only Housing Benefit : Phone NI Housing Executive: 0344 892 0902 (8.30am to 5.00pm)
Money Advice	NI Direct	Phone: 0800 587 2750 Online: www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/finance-support
Psychological Support	Clinical Health Psychology Department Level 9A, Outpatients Centre, Royal Victoria Hospital BELFAST BT12 6BA	Phone: 028 9615 5867
NI Health Minister (when in post)	DoH Private Office Room C5.10 Castle Buildings Stormont Estate Belfast BT4 3SQ	Phone: 028 9052 0643 Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk
DoH NI Permanent Secretary	Permanent Secretary Room C5.11 Castle Buildings Stormont Estate Belfast BT4 3SQ	Phone: 028 9052 0559 Email: permanent.secretary@health-ni.gov.uk
Stakeholder Group / general policy queries	Infected Blood Inquiry Team Department of Health NI C4.8 Castle Buildings Stormont Estate BELFAST BT4 3SQ	Phone: 028 9052 0764 Email: ibit@health-ni.gov.uk