

# Infected Blood Payment Scheme (NI) Newsletter

Issue 3 – March 2024

## Welcome

Welcome to the third edition of the Infected Blood Payment Scheme (NI) newsletter. This edition provides a message from the Health Minister, Robin Swann, an update on your new payment rates for 2024/25, as well as the latest developments on the NI Scheme and the Infected Blood Inquiry (IBI).

## Message from the Health Minister

On 3rd February, devolved government was restored in Northern Ireland, after two years without an Executive. Robin Swann resumed his role as Health Minister, after previously serving in this position from January 2020 to October 2022. Minister Swann said:



***“I was honoured to return to the role of Health Minister and remain as ever committed to supporting those who suffered as a result of receiving NHS-supplied contaminated blood and blood products”.***

During his first week back in post, Minister Swann met with the Minister for the Cabinet Office John Glen MP and the other UK Health Ministers to discuss the issue of compensation. Minister Swann said:

***“I sought assurance from the UK Government that the Victims and Prisoners Bill will be amended by the Government to extend to Northern Ireland to ensure any compensation scheme established is UK-wide. I also asked the Cabinet Office Minister to take steps to ensure that Northern Ireland and the other devolved administrations are involved in work to prepare to respond to the Inquiry’s final report”.***

In March, the Minister met with representatives of the Haemophilia Society, Haemophilia NI and Families and Friends of Haemophilia NI to discuss the Infected Blood Inquiry’s final report, compensation and other issues affecting the community. He said:



***“As we approach the publication of the Inquiry’s final report in May and the Victims and Prisoners Bill continues to progress through the stages in the House of Lords, it was important that I took time to meet with those representing the infected blood community in Northern Ireland. I assured attendees that those who have been infected and or affected in Northern Ireland continue to have my full support”.***

## 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, and the UK Government has now confirmed that payment rates will increase by 6.7% for 2024-25.

From 1 April 2024, the new rates will be:

Payment Description	2024/25 NI annual rate (100%)	2024/25 NI annual rate (75%*)
Hepatitis C stage 1	£22,905	£17,179
Hepatitis C stage 1 (enhanced)	£34,736	£26,052
Hepatitis C stage 2	£34,736	£26,052
Mono HIV	£34,736	£26,052
Co-Infected (HIV and HCV stage 1)	£47,150	£35,363
Co-Infected (HIV and HCV stage 2)	£54,590	£40,943
Co-Infected enhanced (HIV and HCV stage 1 enhanced)	£54,590	£40,943
Winter fuel	£659	N/A

*\* The 75% rates applies to bereaved beneficiaries from year 2 onwards. As a result of the UK Parity Agreement, ministers decided that all UK infected blood support schemes would pay 100% of the deceased infected beneficiary's rate for the first year, followed by 75%, of the amount of which the late infected beneficiary was in receipt at the time they passed away, in subsequent years.*

## Payment dates

Your payment dates for 2024 are as follows:

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

## Infected Blood Inquiry latest news and updates

### Inquiry Final Report

In September 2023, the Chair of the Infected Blood Inquiry (IBI), Sir Brian Langstaff, announced that the final report has been delayed and was expected to be published in March 2024. However, in January Sir Brian announced that the final report would be published on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024. Sir Brian said:

*“I am sorry to tell you that the report will be published later than March. That is not what I had intended. I am acutely aware of the need for the Report to be available as soon as possible. When I reviewed the plans for publication, I nonetheless had to accept that a limited amount of further time is needed to publish a Report of this gravity and do justice to what has happened.*

*The Inquiry’s final recommendations on compensation were published in April 2023. My principal recommendation remains that a compensation scheme should be set up with urgency. No-one should be in any doubt about the serious nature of the failings over more than six decades that have led to catastrophic loss of life and compounded suffering.”*

The launch of the report will take place at Central Hall Westminster and will be streamed live online. For more information, please visit the IBI [website](#).

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

## Psychological Support

We recognise that the publication of the Inquiry's final report may cause some distress for those who have been infected and or affected and we felt it was important to remind you that a dedicated regional psychological support service is available for individuals (18 years and above) who have been infected/ or affected as a result of receiving contaminated blood. The service is also available for family members.

The service is provided by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSC) and run by clinical psychologists who are specifically trained and professionally qualified to help people with a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties connected to their life circumstances.

The following leaflet, produced by the Clinical Psychology Service, has more information: <https://bit.ly/3IL7meN>. For more information, please contact the Clinical Health Psychology Department on 028 9615 5867.

## Victims and Prisoners Bill

An amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill, was passed with cross-Party support in the House of Commons in December 2023, and will require a single UK-wide compensation Scheme to be set up within three months of

the Bill becoming law.

The Bill is now in the House of Lords, but currently only applies to England and Wales. At the meeting with Minister Swann and the Scottish and Welsh Ministers in February, the Minister for the Cabinet Office John Glen MP provided a commitment that the UK Government will amend the Bill at the Report Stage to ensure a compensation scheme is UK-wide.

Health Minister Robin Swann wrote to John Glen MP after this meeting to thank him for this reassurance as this would enable him to seek the agreement of the NI Executive and NI Assembly.

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

## **Further update from UK Government**

At the latest debate on the Victims and Prisoners Bill in the House of Lords on 26 February, Earl Howe said:

*“I repeat the words of my honourable friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office who said in December: ‘The victims of the infected blood scandal deserve justice and recognition. Their voice must be heard, and it is our duty to honour not only those still living and campaigning but those who have passed without recognition’.*

*I met the Minister for the Cabinet Office to discuss these matters. My right honourable friend assured me that this is indeed his highest priority, and I undertake to the Committee that I will continue to work closely with him ahead of the next stage of the Bill”.*

## 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 &amp; 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.**

## **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.**

## Contacts



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<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Department for Communities</b> Causeway Exchange 1-7 Bedford Street BELFAST BT2 7EG	<b><u>MAKE THE CALL HELPLINE</u></b> Phone: <a href="tel:08002321271">0800 232 1271</a> Email: <a href="mailto:makethecall@dfcni.gov.uk">makethecall@dfcni.gov.uk</a>  If you receive <b>only Housing Benefit</b> : Phone NI Housing Executive: <a href="tel:03448920902">0344 892 0902</a> (8.30am to 5.00pm)
<b>Money Advice</b>	<b>NI Direct</b>	Phone: <a href="tel:08005872750">0800 587 2750</a> Online: <a href="http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/finance-support">www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/finance-support</a>
<b>Psychological Support</b>	<b>Clinical Health Psychology Department</b> Level 9A, Outpatients Centre, Royal Victoria Hospital BELFAST BT12 6BA	Phone: <a href="tel:02896155867">028 9615 5867</a>
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<b>Stakeholder Group / general policy queries</b>	<b>Infected Blood Inquiry Team</b> Department of Health NI C4.8 Castle Buildings Stormont Estate BELFAST BT4 3SQ	Phone: <a href="tel:02890520764">028 9052 0764</a> Email: <a href="mailto:ibit@health-ni.gov.uk">ibit@health-ni.gov.uk</a>