

Guide to meeting your MP



If you feel strongly about the changes to financial support to widowed parents and their children, you might like to think about going to see your MP.

MPs have already voted to approve the changes (by 292 to 236 votes) but you can still raise concerns with them ahead of 6 April 2017 when the new Bereavement Support Payment will be introduced.

How to arrange a meeting with your MP

The best way of arranging a meeting with your MP is to telephone their office and book an appointment at one of their constituency surgeries. This is most likely to be on a Friday or Saturday.

To find out who they are and how best to contact them, visit the Parliament website www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps which should have a link to their constituency website. The surgery locations and timings may be on their constituency website.

What to take with you

- A print-out of our 1-page briefing (see below)
- A copy of any correspondence you've already had with your MP on this issue
- If you like, you can take details of how many widowed parents in your local area are likely to be affected by this each year. You can look this up here <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/research/local-statistics.aspx>

What to do in the meeting

- Explain why this issue is important to you. That might be because of your personal experience, or the experience of a friend of yours
- Give them a very brief summary of the changes and why you think they are a problem, and give them a copy of the 1 page summary below.
- Explain clearly exactly what you want them to do, which is to **raise concerns about the changes with the responsible Minister for Welfare Delivery, Caroline Nokes.**
- Tell them if you will be doing any local media work on the issue and your meeting with them
- Try and get the name and email address of any staff accompanying your MP

Tips

- Remember that they may have personal experience of bereavement – don't assume they don't understand
- If you are already claiming Widowed Parent's Allowance, make it clear to them that you know you will not be affected, but you are doing this on behalf of the next generation of widowed parents
- Take a photo of you with your MP so that you can put it on Facebook/Twitter or use it for other publicity

What to do after the meeting

- Let local media know if you would like
- Post a picture of the meeting on Twitter/Facebook and tag WAY Widowed and Young and the Childhood Bereavement Network (we are @CBNtweets on twitter).
- Email and thank them for the meeting, copying in their staff member if you have contact details for them.

Summary of the changes for widowed parents

Old system:

- Based on the NI contributions of the person who died. For spouses and civil partners.
- **Bereavement Payment:** tax free lump sum of £2,000
- **Widowed Parent's Allowance:** taxable weekly benefit of up to £112.44 pw paid until youngest child no longer qualifies for Child Benefit, or the parent moves in with a new partner or remarries or reaches State Pension age.

New system:

- Will come into force for those whose husband, wife or civil partner dies on or after 6 April. Will not affect current claimants of WPA.
- Tax free lump sum of £3,500 and 18 x monthly tax-free payments of £350.

Key points

- We welcome that the new payment would be tax free, not taken into account for calculating means-tested benefits or the benefit cap, and that people will continue to get it if they move in /remarry
- BUT 91% widowed parents will be supported for a shorter time as the maximum payment period is being reduced from 20 years to 1.5 years (average current claim for WPA is 5-6 years)
- 75% widowed parents will be worse off (88% of those in work, 57% of those out of work) than they would have been under the current system, by up to £17,000 based on av. claim of 5/6 years. A minority will be better off as BSP won't be taken into account in the calculation of entitlement to means tested benefits.
- Those with younger children will be disproportionately badly affected as they can currently claim for longer (eg losing out by up to £31,000 if they would have received WPA for 10 years)
- Widowed parents with longer term income support needs will get this through Universal Credit BUT will have to meet 'conditionality requirements' to get this. These are based on the age of the youngest child:

Child's age	Conditionality requirements (adapted from www.citizensadvice.org.uk)
<1	No work related activity requirements
1-2	'Work-focused interview group'. This means you'll have to go to one or more work-focused interviews at the Jobcentre to help you plan for finding work in the future or to stay in work. You won't have to prepare for work, look for work, or be available for work.
3-4	'Work preparation group'. This means you might have to carry out the following types of activities: preparing for work, eg taking part in training or work experience - you won't have to search for work or be available for work; taking part in one or more work-focused interviews at the Jobcentre
Over 4	'All work-related requirements group'. You have to do all you can to find a job or a higher paid job. This includes looking for jobs, applying for jobs, going to interviews, etc. You have to be ready and available to take up work straight away. Remember to talk to your work coach about what activities are realistic for you. Eg you can ask to limit the hours you look for work because you have to pick your children up from school every day. Your work coach should consider requests & be reasonable.

- The likely result of the changes is that widowed parents will have to go back to work or increase their hours before their children are ready
- Most parents already get back to work within 18 months of bereavement and use their WPA to have the flexibility to meet their children's needs. The last thing we should be doing is interfering with that by putting them under pressure to find work or face sanctions
- The reforms would undermine parent's control over decisions about what is best for their family
- Bereaved children's mental health is closely related to their parent's availability and coping. The new system is likely to result in greater out-of-work benefit costs and use of stretched social care/mental health services
- Despite repeated assurances that this isn't intended as a cost-saving measure, the Government expects to save £100m a year from this benefit once it's up and running. The next generation of bereaved children will bear the brunt of these cuts.
- Cohabiting couples still won't be eligible for these payments, despite the Government saying that these changes are to modernise the system.