

Guide to meeting your MP

Significant changes have been made to financial support for widowed parents and their children, which will leave many families supported for shorter and with less money. These affect anyone bereaved on or after 6 April 2017. If you, like us, feel strongly about these changes, you might like to visit your MP.



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 relevant Minister: Kit Malthouse MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Work & Pensions**
- Tell them if you will be letting any local media know about the meeting
- Try and get the name and email address of any staff accompanying your MP so you can follow up with them

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 (WPA):** taxable weekly benefit of up to £112.44 pw (value in 2016-17) 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 introduced 6 April 2017 (does not affect those already claiming WPA)

- **Bereavement Support Payment (BSP):** for those whose spouse or civil partner dies on or after 6 April.
- Higher rate paid to those with children: tax free lump sum of £3,500 & 18 x monthly tax-free payments of £350.

Key points

- We welcome that the new BSP is 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 under WPA to 1.5 years under BSP (the average claim for WPA lasted 5-6 years)
- 75% widowed parents will be worse off (88% of those in work, 57% of those out of work – see blue row in the table below) than they would have been under the old system, by up to £17,000 based on average claim of 5-6 years. A minority of widowed parents will be better off, as BSP won't be taken into account in the calculation of means tested benefits. The table is adapted from the government's calculations about which groups do better or worse:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/208850/130626-ad-hoc-bereavement-benefits.pdf

	% who are better off under changes			% who are worse off under changes		
	Those in work	Those out of work	All	Those in work	Those out of work	All
Those with children (WPA group)	12	43	25	88	57	75
Those without children, 45+ (BA group)	30	51	40	70	49	60
Those without children, <45 (BPT group)	100	100	100	0	0	0
All	43	62	52	57	38	48

- 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, or face sanctions. Conditionality requirements are based on the age of the youngest child (adapted from www.citizensadvice.org.uk):
 - **Under 1:** no work related activity requirements.
 - **Child aged 1:** 'work focused interview group': widowed parent must go to one or more work focused interviews at the JobCentre to help plan for finding work in the future.
 - **Child aged 2:** 'work preparation group': widowed parent must do activities to prepare for work eg attend training, do work experience, go to interviews with the work coach at the Jobcentre.
 - **Child aged 3:** 'all work-related requirements group': widowed parent must do all they can to find a job or a higher paid job, including looking for jobs, applying for jobs, going to interviews etc. They must be ready and available to take up work straight away but can ask to limit the hours they look for work to fit in with school.
- 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 give them 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 undermine parents' 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 is not intended as a cost-saving measure, the Government expects to save £100m a year from this benefit. 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.