

## **Written evidence from Sue Ryder (DBB0002)**

### **About Sue Ryder**

Sue Ryder supports people through the most difficult times of their lives. For over 65 years our doctors, nurses and carers have given people the compassionate and expert care they need to help them live the best life they possibly can. We take the time to understand what's important to people and give them choice and control over their care. We see a future where our palliative and neurological care reaches more communities; where we can help more people begin to cope with bereavement; and where everyone can access the quality care they deserve.

Across the UK we have six hospices and associated community palliative care services, one standalone community palliative care service and four specialist neurological centres. We also provide bereavement support via our Online Bereavement Community and Online Bereavement Counselling, in addition to that provided by our family support teams in our hospices.

### **Proposal for a draft Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2021**

Sue Ryder welcomes the proposed Remedial Order. We believe it meets the procedural conditions for making a RO and successfully addresses the legislative incompatibility with Article 14 ECHR identified in the Supreme Court case of *McLaughlin* and the High Court case of *Jackson*. If the changes proposed in the RO are made, the legislation governing Widowed Parent's Allowance and Bereavement Support Payment would be compatible with Article 14 ECHR.

Nonetheless, given bereavement following the death of a partner is often extremely stressful, upsetting and can lead to physical and mental health issues, ways to improve the existing Bereavement Support Payment to minimise stress and financial hardship ought to be found. For instance, arbitrary time limits for applying for the payment and receiving the payment should be extended or be made more flexible.

### **In Sue Ryder's view, the following changes still need to be addressed:**

- Extend the claim deadline to two years or pay out automatically. A bereaved person is likely to still be coming to terms with their loss in the first three months and applying for benefits during that period can often feel like too large a task.

- Extend the 18 month payment period or make it more flexible to allow for individual circumstances.
- Change the rules regarding entitlement to a deceased partner's state pension: if someone is too young for the state pension but their partner is receiving it when they die, the bereaved partner should be eligible at that point for the state pension their partner was receiving; if the partner who dies was not yet eligible for the state pension, at least some of what they would have received should be paid to the bereaved partner from that point.
- Improve awareness of the payment, sharing easy to understand information with all bereaved people and routinely highlighting information to all parties that come into contact with bereaved people, for instance when someone registers a death, or via arrangement with funeral directors.
- Simplify and centralise all the practical aspects of handling a death, including benefits and financial assistance.
- Extend the 'Tell Us Once' mechanism for government agencies to all areas and all agencies and explore the possibility of extending to other organisations such as utility and insurance companies.
- Address the issue of funeral poverty through a more concerted effort to engage with the industry. Agree a standard cost of a basic funeral, which would then be covered by the funeral payment where people are eligible. If this is not successful a legislative approach should be sought to end funeral poverty.

*02/09/2021*