

The UK Commission on Bereavement – Bereavement is everyone’s business
Briefing for Parliamentarians

Bereavement is a universal experience, yet we know that the circumstances of each death, and the support received by those left behind, makes everyone’s experience different.

Working in partnership with several UK charities, and with researchers leading an academic study on the issue, the [UK Commission on Bereavement \(UKCB\)](https://bereavementcommission.org.uk) was established in June 2021 to explore these issues and make recommendations to better support bereaved people. The previous Government committed to a formal response to the Commission’s recommendations, and in order to take meaningful action it will be critical that the Government deliver on this

In October 2022, the UKCB published a major new report: Bereavement is everyone’s business: <https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/ukcb-findings/>

Key findings from the report

- Many people are not getting the right support at the right time, with potentially serious consequences in all areas, from health and wellbeing to education and employment, and even long-term economic outcomes.
- The Commission has set out a vision for how to improve the support people receive throughout bereavement focused on equipping communities to support people through a bereavement; ensuring better support and information at every touchpoint; and securing adequate and appropriate financial and formal emotional support to all who need it.
- Achieving these changes will require concerted action throughout society, with strong leadership from people with the most power to enact change – those in national governments.

Recommendations for government

The UKCB is calling on each UK Government to:

Establish and deliver a cross-departmental strategy for bereavement. This must:

- encompass all aspects of public policy affecting bereaved people
- draw on learning from the pandemic to set out how people (public, communities, and workforce) will be supported in future mass bereavement events
- set out the responsibilities of national and local government, health and care commissioners and other statutory bodies
- address inadequacies in support for racially minoritised communities, and others who are particularly poorly served.

Deliver a ringfenced package of funding to transform bereavement support over the coming 5 years with a particular focus on better supporting racially minoritised communities, and other people and groups who are currently underserved.

As well as service delivery, the funding to transform services must cover:

- quality improvement, including training and tailoring of support
- improvements in assessment, signposting and referral mechanisms to mental health services to people affected by complex grief
- local and national collaboration
- research, data collection and evaluation
- innovation in practice, including trialing new approaches to signposting support and piloting proactively offering bereavement support to specific underserved and vulnerable groups.

For more information and to discuss the recommendations please contact:

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House of Lords Oral Questions, 9th November 2022

Bishop Sarah's question on the order paper:

The Lord Bishop of London to ask His Majesty's Government what steps they plan to take in response to the report by the UK Commission on Bereavement, *Bereavement is Everyone's Business*, published on 6 October, which found that over 40 per cent of respondents who wanted formal bereavement support did not get any.

Suggested Supplementary Questions for Peers

Cross-departmental strategy for bereavement:

Bereavement is Everyone's Business demonstrates that many people are not getting the right support at the right time, with potentially serious consequences in all areas, from health and wellbeing to education and employment and even long-term economic outcomes. Will the Government therefore commit to a cross-departmental strategy for bereavement that recognises support following bereavement as a human right?

Workplace bereavement policies:

While many people receive excellent support from their employer when someone close to them dies, many respondents to the UK Commission on Bereavement's consultation experienced an absence of support from their employers.

One woman told the Commission that, after the death of her husband, she had no contact from her work, they didn't acknowledge her or the death of her partner, all they asked was 'when are you coming back to work?'

Another bereaved woman, whose mother had died of a stroke, said: "I didn't get any support from my bosses. Out of sight, out of mind." Does the Minister agree that all employers must have an up-to-date bereavement policy? Will he encourage his colleagues in relevant government departments to publish guidance on minimum standards and best practice for large, medium-sized and small employers?

Economic impact:

The experience of a bereavement touches on all aspects of people's lives, including financial matters, whether that be due to the impact on their income, perhaps due to the death of a partner, or by affecting their ability to work. In light of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, how is the Government working to ensure that people are not pushed into poverty when they suffer a bereavement?

Reducing the taboo on grief:

We know that friends, families, neighbours, and faith communities all have the power to provide excellent - and for many people sufficient - support to those going through a bereavement. But we also know that, far too often, grief is seen as a 'taboo' with people being uncertain or afraid to talk about it. The UK Commission on Bereavement found that over a quarter (28%) of adults receive no support from family and almost half (46%) receive no support from friends following bereavement. Does the Minister agree that more must be done to increase understanding and normalise conversations about death, dying and bereavement?

Resourcing cross-sector bereavement campaigns:

The UK Commission on Bereavement has ascertained that funding amounting to just 6p per person could develop cross-sector, collaborative initiatives for bereavement - similar to public health campaigns reducing mental health stigma such as Time to Change and See Me.

Will the Government commit to working with networks of charities, academics, community-based organisations and faith groups, to explore how such initiatives could be used to transform conversations about death, dying and bereavement in the UK?

Inequalities in bereavement support:

The UK Commission on Bereavement's report shows that, as in many areas, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing underlying issues, particularly systematic insensitivity to minority religious and cultural needs following a bereavement. One woman in her 30s whose father died of Covid told the Commission: "As an Asian Muslim I was constantly told by 'support' that I must be finding it hard to think about Christmas without my dad, but they totally bypassed Ramadan and Eid."

Does the Minister agree that professional bodies and employers of anyone whose role brings them into contact with bereaved people must ensure they have bereavement training that is culturally-informed, and contextually tailored, so that they can offer people appropriate support regardless of gender, race, religion, sexuality or age?

Pandemic impact:

The UK Commission on Bereavement's report has shown how the pandemic profoundly disrupted the way people experienced the death of a loved one. Among respondents to the Commission's consultation who were bereaved during the pandemic, 65% had limited contact with their loved ones before they died, while 54% said they were unable to say goodbye as they wanted.

The Commission has also calculated that 6.8 million people were bereaved in the UK in 2020 and 2021 compared to 6.1 million in 2018 and 19, with 750,000 additional bereavements. What assessment has the Government made of the impact of these additional bereavements?