

c/o National Bereavement Alliance
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For correspondence: apenny@ncb.org.uk

Dear Baroness Hallett

We are writing to express our concern that support for bereaved people is not included in the draft Terms of Reference for the Covid-19 public inquiry, and to make the case for its inclusion.

Bereaved adults and children have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. Many have been bereaved in sudden and shocking ways; many have been unable to be with their loved ones as they died, whether from Covid-19 or another cause, during a time of great national fear and insecurity. Infection control measures have severely restricted the support available from friends, family and usual social networks, leaving many bereaved people desperately lonely. Those from disadvantaged and deprived communities have experienced particularly heavy losses. These experiences at the end of life and into bereavement have led to higher than usual levels of distress and difficulty, with over half of respondents to ongoing survey research showing high or severe levels of vulnerability in their grief[1].

The pandemic increased the numbers of people needing more formal support provided by bereavement services. It also disrupted access to this support, and the way in which it was funded and delivered. While there are many examples of extraordinary effort and creativity across the statutory, private and voluntary sectors during the pandemic, many bereaved people have been left without the practical, financial and emotional support they needed, and continue to need. 56% of survey respondents bereaved during the pandemic who had sought support from bereavement services faced difficulty in accessing this, for reasons including limited availability and long waiting lists[2]. Unaddressed grief leads to prolonged distress for children and adults, and impacts on wider society, health and social care services and the economy.

It would be an inexplicable and deeply disappointing omission if the public inquiry did not directly investigate the bereavement support provided during the pandemic. We recommend that

- *'Practical, financial and emotional support for bereaved children, young people and adults'* is included in the list of central, local and public health decision-making and its consequences and/or
- *'Provision of support for children, young people and adults bereaved during the pandemic'* is included in the list of the response of the health and social care sector.

These inclusions would ensure that bereaved people's experiences of support are not side-lined, and would inform vital future planning for future mass bereavement events.

Yours sincerely

Jane Woodward	Executive Director	AtaLoss.org
Nicola Clarke	CEO	Balloons
Ann Chalmers	Chief Executive	Child Bereavement UK
Kate Baxter	Chief Executive	Children's Bereavement Centre
Steven Wibberley	CEO	Cruse Bereavement Support

Ann Hurcomb	Registered Manager	Great Oaks Hospice
Catherine Betley	Managing Director	GriefChat
Mike Diss	Service Coordinator	Haringey Bereavement Service
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John Palmer	Director of Policy & Communications	Independent Age
Dr Cecilia Hughes	Chair of Trustees	Jigsaw SE
Claire Powell	Bereavement Support Manager	Jigsaw4u
Jane Robinson	Manager	Leeds Bereavement Forum
Beth French	Director	Let's Talk About Loss
Fiona Reynolds	Loss and Bereavement Specialist	Loss & Bereavement Counselling & Services
Dr Sam Royston	Director of Policy and Research	Marie Curie
Alison Penny	Coordinator	National Bereavement Alliance
Jean Watkins	Director, Head of Bereavement	National Bereavement Service
V Lander	Owner	Solent Ventures
Mary Parry	Trustee	space2grieve
Joanne White	Counselling Services Manage	St Barnabas Hospice
Beverley Radcliffe	Director	The Coroners' Courts Support Service
Stephanie Patrick	Chief Executive	WAY Widowed and Young
Fergus Crow	CEO	Winston's Wish

Notes:

[1] Selman L et al (2022) Factors associated with higher levels of grief and support needs among people bereaved during the pandemic: Results from a national online survey. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2022.02.07.22270593v1>

[2] Harrop, E et al (2021). Support needs and barriers to accessing support: Baseline results of a mixed-methods national survey of people bereaved during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Palliative medicine*, 35(10), 1985–1997. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02692163211043372>

