

# Every **Story** Matters

## Every Story Matters Record: Bereavement In Brief

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry is an independent public inquiry examining the response to and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic to learn lessons for the future. The Inquiry is divided into separate investigations known as modules. Each module is focused on a different topic with its own public hearings. Following the hearings, a module report is published which contains findings based on all of the evidence and the Chair's recommendations for the future.

## How Every Story Matters fits into the Inquiry's work

This summary covers one of the Every Story Matters records for Module 10, examining the experiences of bereavement during the pandemic.

The record brings together people's experiences shared with us:

- online at [everystorymatters.co.uk](http://everystorymatters.co.uk);
- in person at public events across the UK;
- at virtual and in-person listening events that were designed in consultation with bereaved people; and
- in-depth interviews with people who were bereaved during the pandemic.

Stories are analysed and brought together into a specific Module 10 record about experiences of bereavement. The record has been entered into evidence for Module 10. Bereavement is also covered in other Every Story Matters records including Module 3 (Healthcare) and Module 6 (Adult Social Care Sector).

Every Story Matters is neither a survey nor a comparative exercise. It cannot be representative of the entire experience of the UK, nor was it designed to be. Its value lies in hearing a range of experiences, in capturing the themes that have been shared with us, quoting people's stories in their own words and, crucially, in ensuring that people's experiences are part of the Inquiry's public record.

Every Story Matters closed to new submissions in May 2025. The records for Module 10 analyse every experience shared with the Inquiry online and at our Every Story Matters listening events up until this date.

Some of the stories in this record includes descriptions of traumatic loss, death, bereavement and grief. They may be distressing to some and readers are encouraged to seek help if necessary. A list of support services is provided on the [UK Covid-19 Inquiry website](#).

## Introduction

The Module 10 bereavement record reflects the experiences which contributors have shared with the UK Covid-19 Inquiry about the death of someone close to them during the pandemic, highlighting the deep emotional and practical challenges that continue to affect their daily lives.

### The death of a loved one during the pandemic

- Contributors experienced ongoing and profound feelings of anger, sadness and guilt that they could not be with or comfort their loved ones at the end of their life. Many are devastated that their loved one may have felt abandoned at the time they most needed support and love from family and friends.
- Many bereaved people described replaying decisions in their mind and asking themselves whether they could have done something differently at the end of their loved one's life. This guilt and regret has made it difficult for many people to process their grief.
- As the pandemic progressed, some bereaved people were able to visit their loved ones in hospitals, hospices and care settings before they died. Visits were often through a window, or while wearing PPE, which was heartbreakingly impersonal and cold and often added to feelings of anger and guilt.
- Some people faced difficulties in obtaining death certificates and closing bank and utility accounts following the death of their loved ones. Many organisations were unprepared for the pandemic and their support for bereaved people was limited due to restrictions. This added further pain, frustration and difficulty for those who were bereaved.
- Many bereaved families shared how angry they are that pandemic restrictions were not followed by some politicians and other public figures, for example 'Partygate'. Contributors said this exacerbated the pain of not being able to honour their loved ones and grieve with others.

## Impact on funerals, burials, cremations and other end of life ceremonies

- **Impact on planning funerals or other end of life ceremonies:** During the pandemic, it often fell on a single family member or friend to arrange funerals, burials, cremations, or other end of life ceremonies. They had to navigate restrictions, speak to funeral directors, and organise services remotely, finding the process difficult, draining, and painful.
- **Impact of restrictions:** Throughout the pandemic, the restrictions that applied to funerals, burials, cremations and other end of life ceremonies changed quickly with limited notice and varied in different parts of the country. Changing guidance on social distancing and how many people could attend created confusion and frustration. This also sometimes led to conflict and strained relationships between family and friends. Social distancing measures meant those mourning were unable to sit together, touch or do simple things like giving family and friends a hug.
- **Impact of delays and backlogs:** The worry and strain caused by delays and uncertainty around planning funerals, burials, cremations and end of life ceremonies was deeply painful for many. The impact of delays was especially painful for communities where cultural and religious practices around death are time sensitive.
- **Financial impact of funeral costs:** The sudden death of a loved one from Covid-19 brought unexpected funeral costs that many families had not planned for. These expenses added financial worries and stress and some contributors told us about having to borrow money from family or friends and how guilty this made them feel.
- **Lack of choice and control:** Bereaved people reflected on being unable to hold a funeral or other end of life ceremony that was in line with their own or their loved one's wishes or religious beliefs, leaving them feeling powerless, despairing and with feelings of guilt.
- **Adapting funerals, burials, cremations and other end of life ceremonies:** To overcome restrictions on attendance, many families live-streamed services and remembrance events, allowing remote participation, providing comfort and enabling some to say goodbye. However, many felt live streaming did not allow them to be fully part of the funeral, burial, cremation or other end of life ceremony. They often said they felt disconnected and that watching remotely did not provide the same opportunity for them to grieve and say goodbye.

## Bereavement support

- **Awareness of bereavement support:** Many contributors said they were given little or no information about bereavement support services and had to use the internet, social media and personal networks to find support groups, counselling and other resources.
- **Experiences of formal support:** Contributors told us that even when they were able to access bereavement support services, these often did not meet their needs. Virtual services meant support often felt distant, with calls and video sessions failing to be a replacement for the connection of in-person interaction.

- **Experiences of accessing and using bereavement support:** Contributors said that the demand for bereavement support during the pandemic overwhelmed existing services, leading to long waiting lists and delayed access to help, or in some cases, people being unable to access services at all. The increased reliance on virtual appointments made it very difficult to get any help for people with limited digital access or skills, or who were uncomfortable with technology. We heard that even when services were accessed, they often did not meet their needs as they did not take into account the specific circumstances of the pandemic. Counsellors were not trained for pandemic bereavement and were themselves learning how to support people whose loved ones had died at this time.
- **Peer support groups:** We heard how peer support groups of other people bereaved during the pandemic became a vital source of help and comfort for many bereaved people during the pandemic. Contributors described finding solace in connecting with others who understood the specific challenges and emotions they felt after the death of a loved one during the pandemic.
- **Support from family and friends:** Contributors shared how important their informal support networks were during the pandemic. However, those who did not have family close by, or were shielding or living alone, said they struggled without social support and physical contact.
- **Providing bereavement services:** People with experience of delivering bereavement support during the pandemic described an unprecedented surge in demand which led to significantly increased workloads and immense pressure on staff. They said services struggled to keep up with the number of people needing support, with staff working long hours and giving up their free time to provide the help that was needed.

## Longer term impact of bereavement

- **Social isolation:** Many contributors told us that they struggled to process their grief because of how isolating the pandemic was, particularly for those who lived on their own. Some shared how they welcomed isolation after their loved one's death, feeling protected from the outside world as they grieved by not having to interact with others or speak about their loss.
- **Financial impact:** Many people told us that the death of a loved one brought long term financial strain, especially when the main income earner died. Many expressed stress and anxiety over finances and family care.
- **Carers who died during the pandemic:** Bereaved people told us that when a loved one who had been in a caring role died, they faced immediate stress and uncertainty. The sudden and unexpected caring responsibilities placed on them following the death of the primary carer, led to many suffering long term mental health issues and struggling to find time to grieve.
- **Prolonged grief:** Bereaved people shared how restrictions ending meant they experienced their grief in new and traumatising ways. For many contributors, resuming social interaction after a period of isolation forced them to relive their loss.

## Lessons to be learned

- Bereaved people suggested several lessons, with many emphasising how vital it is that the UK Covid-19 Inquiry leads to justice and accountability for the decisions that were made.
- Some contributors suggested meetings with healthcare professionals following a death in future pandemics. These meetings would allow families to get answers about the death of their loved one, supporting their understanding and helping them to process their grief.
- Many contributors said that future pandemic restrictions and guidelines for funerals, burials, and end-of-life ceremonies should prioritise care and compassion for bereaved people, with less stringent restrictions. This would help people process grief and feel less alone.
- In the future, contributors would like improved guidance regarding available bereavement support. This includes better signposting and the provision of tailored bereavement services.
- Many contributors highlighted the importance of remembrance and commemoration for their loved ones, advocating for local and national days of mourning.

To find out more or to download a copy of the full record or other accessible formats, visit: <https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/every-story-matters/records/>