**PRESS RELEASE**

16th October 2013

Immediate release.

**THE IRISH HOSPICE FOUNDATION CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO REVERSE DECISION TO SCRAP THE  BEREAVEMENT GRANT**

* **peace of mind of older people affected -**

The Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) has today (16th October) called on the government to reverse its decision to scrap the bereavement grant.

Over 80% of the 29,000 deaths in 2012 were of people over the age of 65. This cut to the bereavement grant represents a burden on older people's pockets and on their psychological security concerning funeral arrangements and peace of mind.

It is estimated that up to 10 people are affected by each death.  Therefore, about 290,000 people were newly bereaved in Ireland in 2012.

Orla Keegan, Head of Education, Research and Bereavement, stated: “ The death of a loved one – whether a partner, child or parent - is one of the most challenging life events that a citizen has to deal with.  It is also a particularly vulnerable time for the people and families affected.  The benchmark of any society is the way in which it takes care of its most vulnerable citizens.  Therefore the decision by the Government to universally cut the bereavement grant in the budget raises serious ethical questions about the type of society it is creating and specifically how it treats its citizens at one of the most vulnerable period of their lives.”

Bereavement support begins with practical help and sound information in the aftermath of a death and at the time of the funeral.  Any systematic societal approach to bereavement care must begin with such support, including financial aid.

Ms Keegan added: “Additional stress, such as financial worry, at a vulnerable time may well impede or interfere with how people cope with bereavement over time and certainly such stress can impact on decision-making.   We are concerned that people may be compromised or constrained in the choices they make over a very short period around a death of a loved one.”

She continued: “From research in other countries we know that there are significant financial costs associated with bereavement - particularly in later life widowhood. For example, one study noted an 18 month time lag for older widows to return to the financial status they had prior to their husband’s death.   We believe cutting the bereavement grant will add to these types of burden in an unacceptable way for people bereaved in Ireland.  It may also put more pressure on charities who will face requests for support.  While we are told there is a fiscal saving, the ultimate cost associated with this blanket abolishment is high - the loss of our identity as a caring society. “

In its response to the Budget 2014, the IHF also stated that the medical card facility for people at end of life should be preserved.

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