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In the event of your death, the NHS Pension Scheme may provide for your family or a person you have nominated. You can nominate someone to receive a lump sum on death benefit if you die using the lump sum on death benefit nomination forms. If you have a partner, but are not married or in a civil partnership, you may also be able to nominate them to receive an adult dependants pension using a separate form. You can also cancel or change a previous nomination. Lump sum on death benefit nomination forms There are different lump sum on death benefit nomination forms depending on what type of member you are. Read the guidance attached to each form before completing it and sending it to us to make sure you are completing the correct form. If your scheme membership started on or after 1 April 2008 or continued after 31 March 2008, you should complete: Lump sum on death benefit nomination (DB2) (PDF: 324KB) If your scheme membership ended before 1 April 2008, or you are a Pension Credit member and your Pension Sharing Order (PSO) was implemented before 1 April 2000, you should complete: Lump sum on death benefit (DB1) (PDF: 213KB) A pension credit member is a person that became a member of the NHS Pension Scheme through a Pension Sharing Order (PSO) that provides them with a share of their former spouse or civil partner's pension benefits in the Scheme. If you are a Pension Credit member, and your Pension Sharing Order (PSO) was implemented after 1 April 2000, you should complete: Lump sum on death benefit nomination form (DB2 PC) (PDF: 276KB) If you are a Scheme member in your own right, as well as a Pension Credit member, you will need to complete both the DB2 and DB2 PC forms if you wish to nominate someone for both pensions. If you only submit one form, we will treat your nomination as only covering your pension or pension sharing order as appropriate. You can find more information on Ask Us. Adult dependants pension forms To nominate a partner to receive an adult dependants pension after you die, see: Partner nomination form (PN1) (PDF: 291KB) Do not complete this if you: are married in a civil partnership your membership ended before 1 April 2008 are a Pension Credit member only You should only complete the form if your scheme membership started on or after 1 April 2008 or continued after 31 March 2008. Amending an existing nomination If you wish to amend an existing nomination you must submit a new nomination form. Any previous nomination will be replaced with your new instructions. You should use the correct nomination form for your circumstances. Cancel an existing nomination Existing nomination cancellation (NOM1) form (PDF: 235KB) Only complete this form if your scheme membership started on or after 1 April 2008 or continued after 31 March 2008. Do not complete this form if you wish to amend an existing nomination. The number of beneficiaries you can nominate will depend upon the pension scheme that you are in: classic pension scheme: You can only nominate one person or organisation/alpha, nuvos, premium and classic plus: You can choose as many nominees as you want/You also decide how to split the lump sum between your nominees/You are also able to nominate a charity, organisation or business. You can check your existing nomination on the Pension Portal/and your Annual Benefit Statement (ABS). 2015 Remedy (McCloud) For classic members moved to alpha on 1 April 2022: they are now able to make a nomination in favour of more than one individual so they can update/ make a new nomination if they would like to. Post roll-back: Any members who have been rolled back into classic and had made a nomination for death benefit whilst in alpha (for more than one individual), this is valid for the Remedy period service and no action is required to update previous nominations. No Nominations If we do not hold a valid nomination for you, we will pay your lump sum benefit to your personal representative(s). This is the person or people who deal with your financial matters after your death. A death benefit lump sum does not form part of your estate. The amount payable to your nominees will depend on your employment circumstances upon your death: If you're still working: The lump sum payable is at least 2 years salary/It is not payable if you have partially retired or you're already in receipt of a pension from the scheme. If you've left, retired, partially retired or are taking other Civil Service pension benefits: The lump sum is worked out differently from the description above/Find out more information in the scheme guides. To ensure that we have the correct information required when arranging your Death Benefit Nomination, please check the following before submitting your form: If you're classic, have you nominated only one nominee? Does the percentage of lump sum allocated to each of your nominees add up to 100%? Have you signed and dated your form? Has a witness signed and dated your form on the same date you signed and dated it? If printing the form, have you used black ink and CAPITAL letters? Have you included your name, address and National Insurance number? REMEMBER: Keep your death benefit nominees details up to date with us, so we can get in touch with them quickly in the event of your death. Published 15 January 2025 10 min read This article describes how discretion works and how a nomination form (expression of wish) can be used to let the scheme administrators/trustees know the individuals wishes as to whom death benefits should be paid to. Our article on Discretion describes what discretion is and when it may be used. In her Autumn 2024 Budget statement, Rachel Reeves announced the governments intention to bring unused pension funds and death benefits within the value of an individuals estate for inheritance tax purposes from 6 April 2027. More detail can be found in our article Inheritance tax on pension death benefits from April 2027. The following article is correct based on the current legislation and takes no account of the governments proposed changes. Key facts: Generally, paying death benefits at the discretion of the scheme administrator/trustees will mean benefits are not included in the value of the estate and therefore do not increase the inheritance tax liability. An individual can provide a nomination/ expression of wishes form to the scheme administrator/trustees to let them know who they want their benefits paid to, but this is not binding on the scheme administrator/ trustee. Once a plan is set up under discretion, the individual cant subsequently choose direction under that scheme. Beneficiary drawdown, if available under a plan, can only be offered to a dependant or a nominee of the deceased. In this article we explain what direction means when applied to the payment of pension death benefits and the reasons why you would use that rather than discretion. Read more about Death benefits: Discretion The government announced it's intention to bring pension funds and death benefits within the value of an individuals estate for inheritance tax purposes from 6 April 2027. This article looks at this further. Pensions are not usually included in the estate for inheritance tax. However, there are certain circumstances when the value of the death benefits will count towards any inheritance tax (IHT) payable by the estate. Read more about How inheritance tax might work on transfer. The information provided below on our current understanding of the relevant legislation and regulations and may be subject to alteration as a result of changes in legislation or practice. Also it may not reflect the options available under a specific product which may not be as wide as legislations and regulations allow. All references to taxation are based on our understanding of current taxation law and practice and may be affected by future changes in legislation and the individual circumstances of the investor. 6 April 2025 Key points Completing a nomination (also known as an expression of wish) helps guide the scheme trustees when deciding who death benefits should be paid to. Nominations can be changed by simply completing a fresh version. A nomination can ensure that all death benefit options are available to the beneficiary - especially those who aren't dependants. On death before age 75, certain lump sum death benefits are tested against the 'lump sum and death benefit allowance', whereas death benefits paid as a pension are not. Reviewing nominations at age 75 can ensure that death benefits can be paid tax efficiently. Lump to the following sections of this guide: The trustees or scheme administrators of a money purchase pension will typically have discretion over the payment of death benefits - unless a nomination has been made. The scheme rules will determine the range of possible beneficiaries. This will typically allow payments to family and friends, trusts which the settlor created during their lifetime, trusts created in the scheme member's will and charities. Individuals potentially have the choice of a lump sum or a pension (via income drawdown, a lifetime annuity or a scheme pension) whereas nominated charities and trusts can only receive lump sums. However, the options for individuals may be limited by what the scheme will allow or examples can facilitate income drawdown and very few DC schemes would allow a dependent's scheme pension, but a lack of a nomination can sometimes restrict the options where death benefits are to be paid to a non-dependant. The importance of a nomination A nomination form (or a letter of wishes) allows the pension scheme member to tell the trustees/administrators who they would like to benefit on death. The nomination helps to guide scheme administrators/trustees with their decision making. They will complete their own investigations following the member's death and use their discretion. But often they will follow the instructions in the nomination unless there's good reason not to. Dependants and nominated individuals will have the choice of a lump sum or a pension, whereas nominated charities and trusts can only receive lump sums. For non-dependants, nominations can be crucial - if they haven't been nominated, but the trustees or scheme administrator decides that they should benefit, then sometimes their only option is a lump sum. This is because, if the deceased had nominated another individual (or a trust or charity) or a dependant, then the trustees or provider cant allow anyone else to use the funds for pension purposes. However, the existence of a dependant is only relevant on the death of the original member. Its not relevant when paying death benefits from beneficiary's drawdown funds. Example - Darren and Clare are married and have an adult daughter Amy. Darren dies without making a nomination for his SIPP death benefits. As Darren has a surviving dependant (Clare) the options available to the SIPP administrators are for: Clare - beneficiary's drawdown, annuity or lump sum Amy - lump sum only Amy would have been eligible to take beneficiary's drawdown had Darren nominated her prior to his death. So, although the death benefit option under Darren's scheme are lump sum, annuity or income drawdown, this doesn't mean that all beneficiaries will have all the options available to them - this is dependent on the death benefit nominations made by Darren. TIP - By getting the nominations right, and naming all beneficiaries, the scheme member can ensure all beneficiaries have both the lump sum and pension options. If a non-dependant beneficiary has not been nominated, the only option will be a lump sum if there is a surviving dependant or someone else who has been nominated. Dependants who have been nominated will have the choice of whether to take a lump sum or a pension, typically via beneficiary's drawdown (if offered by the scheme) or an annuity. If a lump sum is paid out to a beneficiary, it will be in the beneficiary's estate. If its then invested, the funds may be subject to income tax and capital gains tax on future investment returns. Beneficiary's drawdown allows pension wealth to remain within the pension wrapper. There's no tax on income and gains from investments within the pension fund and the value of the pension funds is (until April 2027) outside the beneficiary's estate for IHT. Income can be taken as and when the beneficiary needs it. Beneficiaries don't need to be age 55 or over to access the death benefits. The removal of the lifetime allowance has resulted in a change to the taxation of death benefits for those with large pension pots. Lump sums will remain tax-free up to the available lump sum and death benefit allowance (LSDBA) - the standard LSDBA is 1,073,100, but those who have transitional protection will have a higher allowance. Any excess above the LSDBA will be subject to income tax at the beneficiary's marginal rate. The LSDBA is a test on certain tax-free lump sums paid during the members lifetime and on death before age 75. So, when testing lump sum death benefits, any tax-free lump sums paid to the member will reduce the available LSDBA. Lump sum death benefits from funds crystallised before 6 April 2024 are not tested against the LSDBA. For more detail on LSDBA testing, see our technical guide Lump sum and death benefit allowance (LSDBA). Where the death benefits are used to provide a pension, it is not tested against the allowance, and it will remain tax-free regardless of the size of the deceased members fund. Where lump sum death benefits would exceed the available LSDBA, beneficiaries should consider beneficiary's drawdown as the whole fund will remain tax-free for the beneficiary and lump sums can be taken from the drawdown funds at any time. Currently, inheritance tax can also be another motivation for considering beneficiary's drawdown. It's not unusual for couples to nominate everything to the survivor on the first death, but this might not be the most tax efficient option. If paid as a lump sum to the survivor, it will form part of their estate for IHT. Beneficiary's drawdown keeps pension funds under the pensions regime and therefore currently outside the estate for IHT. However, the tax treatment of the death benefits from the beneficiary's drawdown on second death will be based on the age of the survivor when they die. This means, for example, that where the original member died before age 75 and their spouse inherited the funds as beneficiary's drawdown, any withdrawals will be free of income tax. But if the spouse then dies after reaching age 75, the tax position changes and the benefits paid to their beneficiaries will then be subject to income tax. TIP - If the surviving partner is unlikely to need all of the deceased's pension during their lifetime, consider skipping a generation (or two) with some or all of the death benefits. This can allow future generations to access all the funds tax-free if the member dies before age 75. Alternatively, use a bypass trust to receive a tax-free lump sum from which the surviving partner is able to benefit from. From April 2027, most unused pension death benefits will be included in the deceaseds estate for IHT purposes. Dependants scheme pensions and charity lump sum death benefits to a qualifying charity will not be included. Benefits paid to a spouse or civil partner will qualify for the spousal exemption. Although the legislation is not yet in force, this is likely to impact how individuals make nominations going forward. If death is after age 75, the death benefit is taxable at the beneficiary's marginal rate (or 45% if paid to a trust). Lump sums will be added to the beneficiary's other income in the tax year and taxed at the appropriate rate. Beneficiary's drawdown is only taxed when the beneficiary withdraws income from their inherited pot. Making nominations, therefore giving all beneficiaries the lump sum and pension options can help reduce the amount of tax payable. Example - Angela's father, Martin, died aged 78. She has been nominated to receive a death benefit of 75,000. Angela has income of 25,000 for the tax year (2025/26). If Angela took it as a lump sum she would pay tax of 24,946 (25,270 at 20% plus 49,730 at 40%) giving her a net benefit of 50,054. If Angela took beneficiary's drawdown and withdrew the fund over three tax years at 25,000 a year, she would pay no higher rate tax on the beneficiary's drawdown (75,000 @ 20% = 15,000) saving her 9,946. By accessing as a lump sum, the whole amount is assessed in a single tax year with only one personal allowance available and the potential of paying tax at a rate higher than they would normally expect to. Using beneficiary's drawdown means that tax can be spread across many tax years. The beneficiary has some control over when withdrawals are taken to maximise tax allowances and limit the amount of tax payable. As mentioned above, pension death benefits are typically outside of the deceaseds estate for IHT purposes. However, from April 2027 most unused pension death benefits will be included in the individuals estate for IHT purposes. Any IHT due will be deducted before calculating any income tax liability. Dependants scheme pensions and charity lump sum death benefits to a qualifying charity will not be included. Benefits paid to a spouse or civil partner will qualify for the spousal exemption. Although the legislation is not yet in force, this is likely to impact how individuals make nominations going forward. Nominating a bypass trust A bypass trust allows a member to select their own trustees who are more likely to fully understand their situation and carry out their wishes. Paying lump sum death benefits to a trust allows the member's chosen trustees to determine how the lump sum is eventually distributed. This additional control may be welcome for those with a more complicated family situation, such as where there are children from a previous marriage or relationship. Example - Craig and Sonia are married. Craig has two children from a previous relationship, Imogen and Saul. Sonia also has a daughter, Summer, from a previous marriage. Craig has established a bypass trust and nominated that his SIPP provider pays a lump sum to this on his death. He has written a letter to the trustees of his bypass trust explaining that he would like them to ensure that, in the event of his death, Sonia has sufficient income to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle, but upon her death that all the remaining capital is held for his two children, Imogen and Saul. Had Craig opted to nominate Sonia for beneficiary's drawdown, she would be able to choose what happens to any remaining funds on her death, allowing her to nominate Summer as the beneficiary, rather than Imogen or Saul. Lump sums paid to a beneficiary, rather than Imogen or Saul, would be subject to inheritance tax. If it is treated as income in the hands of the beneficiary with a reclaimable tax credit. Example - Joan nominated that her SIPP should be paid to her bypass trust on death. She died at age 80 and her SIPP was valued at 200,000. The lump sum death benefit will be subject to tax at 45% = 90,000. This will be deducted by the pension provider and the amount paid to her bypass trust will be 110,000. The trustees will only have 110,000 to invest for the beneficiaries. Joan's trustees decide to make a payment out of the trust to her son Steve. The trustees pay 5,500 to Steve. This is grossed up to 10,000 to reflect the 45% tax already paid. Steve has other income of 30,000 for the year. So, the 10,000 payment will be taxed at 20% = 2,000. As it was paid with 4,500 tax credit, Steve can reclaim 2,500 from HMRC. The credit for the tax already paid is intended to put bypass trusts beneficiaries in a similar position as if they had received beneficiary's drawdown. However, the amount available for the trustees to invest is only 55% of the death benefits and this will affect the investment returns within the trust and ultimately what the beneficiaries may receive. From April 2027, the payment of a lump sum to a bypass trust will be included in the deceaseds estate for IHT purposes. Nominating a charity Death benefits can only be paid to a charity if the member has nominated one. The scheme administrator cannot use their discretionary powers to pay money to a charity - discretion can only be used to pay to individuals or trusts. Making a nomination There is no prescribed way to make a nomination. Most pension providers will have a standard nomination form available for members to complete, but many will also accept a letter from the member explaining their wishes regarding the death benefit. Whatever way the nomination is made, the wording should make the members wishes as clear as possible, so that the trustees/administrators understand what the member would like to happen in the event of death. Scheme members wanting to give their beneficiaries the option to take income drawdown should provide their nomination for general purposes only. We accept no responsibility for the content of these websites, nor do we guarantee their availability. Any reference to legislation and tax is based on Aberdeen's understanding of United Kingdom law and HM Revenue & Customs practice at the date of production. These may be subject to change in the future. Tax rates and reliefs may be altered. The value of tax reliefs to the investor depends on their financial circumstances. 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