

Thousands of grieving relatives call for action to make closing accounts easier

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Campaigners want the Government to introduce a set of agreed standards for companies to meet when people close down loved ones' accounts.

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Tens of thousands of grieving relatives who have struggled with closing their loved ones' accounts are calling for an industry-wide standard to make it less bureaucratic and stressful.

More than 17,000 people have signed a Change.org petition calling for a bereavement standard to simplify the end-of-life administration required after losing a relative.

The petition was set up by Vicky Wilson who spent six weeks trying to close around 15 of her grandmother June's utility, bank, and subscription accounts after she died in September last year.

Ms Wilson and her mother Julie, from Easington, County Durham, called the arduous process, which involved waiting in phone queues for hours and fielding calls for documents, "an unnecessary and stressful burden".

They are calling for the Government to introduce a set of agreed standards for companies to meet when people close energy, insurance, phone, internet and social media accounts on behalf of someone who has died.

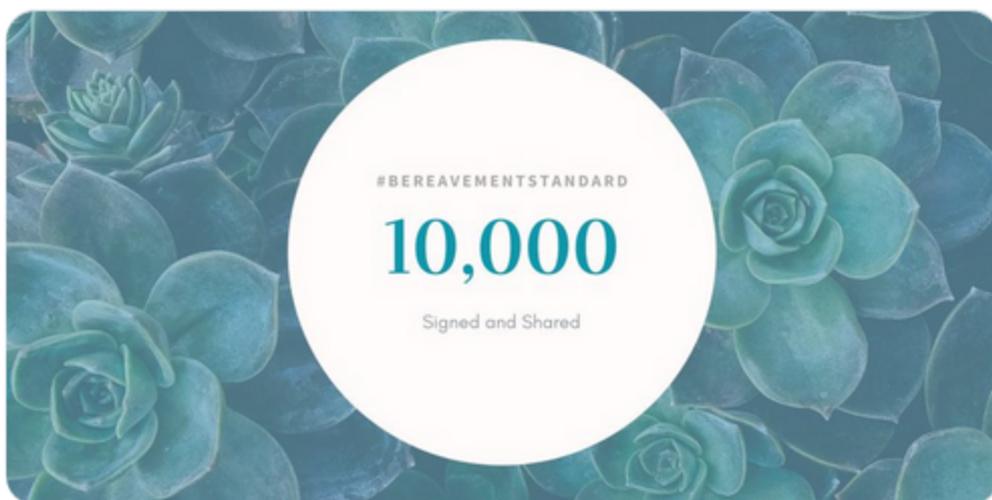
This would set a time limit for account closures, standardise paperwork and documents required, and ensure providers have dedicated bereavement channels in place.



Vicky Wilson
@VickySettld



Thank you to all those who have supported the [#BereavementStandard](#) petition thus far - every signature helps bring bereaved families a little closer to closure. Please share, and sign if you haven't already change.org/bereavementsta...



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See Vicky Wilson's other Tweets

It has been backed by Baroness Ros Altmann, a former minister at the Department for Work and Pensions who saw first-hand the benefits of the "Tell us Once" service when it was introduced in 2011.

This helped grieving families by allowing them to report a death to multiple Government and public organisations in one go.

A Death Notification Service also helps people notify banks and building societies of a death at the same time.

But there is no equivalent across the board for private companies.

Baroness Altmann said a standard would save companies time and hassle as well as making the process less complex for grieving next of kin.

The Conservative peer told the PA news agency: "At the moment there isn't a requirement for you to treat someone who is bereaved and trying to sort out affairs with compassion, with concern, with dignity, making it easier for them.

"It certainly feels to many people like they are trying to make it as hard as possible."

She added: "If we can get some of the big operators to sign up to this now, while there is pressure on staff and attention on bereavement anyway, it would be a very big help to a lot of bereaved families, and surely our society should be trying to do what it can to help in those circumstances."

The Government and regulators should "take the issue seriously and see what it is they could do to facilitate this", she said.

Ms Wilson, 33, said positive talks held in June and July with companies, charities, parliamentarians and regulators had revealed enthusiasm to get rid of unnecessary red tape amid the pressures from the coronavirus pandemic.

She has founded Settld, a new online account closure service which has received a Covid-19 Government grant.

She told PA: "It is a problem, businesses are really struggling – they've got reduced staffing, they've been forced to move to remote working patterns, but the ultimate impact on bereaved families is that things are taking a lot longer.

"So the process me and my mum went through, in light of what's happening now with Covid, was probably relatively straightforward, and even that we found difficult."

She added: "There's a safe environment now, in light of Covid, for people to reflect on the fact that, actually, bereavement is an area that didn't get a lot of attention before, but things need to be done differently and things need to be done better."

Sarah Gigg, director of nursing at the Sue Ryder charity, said companies should "exercise compassion" by adopting the standard.

She said: "When grieving, worrying about admin and navigating complex bureaucratic processes can be unbearable.

"It is also unnecessary – if companies simplified their processes, it would save those bereaved from hours of phone calls and sorting of paperwork.

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"In light of the coronavirus pandemic, which has led to an increase in the number of people grieving, it is vital we provide extra practical support."