Life insurance and cancer

Cancer detection and treatments are improving all the time. As a result more people are surviving cancer or living for years following a diagnosis. Insurance is very much part of our lives today. At some point you may wish to purchase life insurance. Getting life insurance is important because you may want to provide some finances for your family in the event of your death or have a loan or mortgage paid off. This factsheet deals with life insurance, especially if you are applying for a mortgage.

Trying to get life insurance can be difficult if you have had any type of cancer in the past. Even though it can be hard to get, it is not impossible. This factsheet offers advice on how to go about it and may help to reduce any frustrations you might have.

Insurance companies (insurers) in Ireland
Companies that offer life insurance are still very cautious about doing business with someone who has had a cancer diagnosis. It seems there are no definite guidelines when it comes to providing life insurance for people in this situation. Each application is looked at on an individual basis. Most insurers will not offer a policy to someone who is still having treatment for cancer.

When is the best time to apply for life insurance?
It is best to begin your application right away if you are thinking of purchasing a property or want to get life insurance. In some cases it may take at least 2 to 3 years after a cancer diagnosis to get insurance.

What should I do?
- Make some general enquiries with a number of insurance companies first for your own information.
- Discuss your situation with your hospital consultant. You will then have some idea of the medical opinion that he/she will give the insurer.
- Get a financial adviser or insurance broker. Brokers can be very useful as they can contact a large number of insurers and get the best policy for you. Usually you do not have to pay them as they get commission from the insurance company when you take out a policy. They can also give advice on how to get serious illness cover and income protection cover.
- Be careful when choosing a financial adviser or broker. Ask people you trust to recommend someone. It is important that you feel comfortable and are able to talk to an adviser or broker.
- A useful list of independent financial advisers/brokers is available from the Professional Insurance Brokers Association (PIBA) at www.piba.ie or Tel (01) 4020 250 and the Irish Brokers Association at www.iba.ie or Tel (01) 6613 067.
- Tell your financial adviser or broker all relevant information about yourself. This includes your medical history and your general circumstances.
• There is a waiver that you can sign in some situations which allows you to get mortgage approval without having life insurance. This waiver is a letter or a form that you sign, saying that you are aware of what it means to not have life insurance. Talk to a mortgage broker who can contact lending institutions for you to see if they will accept this waiver. Not all lending institutions will accept it.

What kind of information will insurers need?
Insurance companies have different ways and views on offering life insurance policies to cancer survivors. Your financial adviser or broker will advise you about this. Usually insurance companies write to your hospital consultant and ask for information about:

• The type and grade of cancer you had
• The length of time since your last treatment
• Your prognosis.

The insurance company may ask for a medical examination too. Don’t be surprised by this as it is a fairly common practice. From 31 December 2005 insurance companies cannot by law look for genetic tests results from anyone applying for life insurance (Part 4 of the Disability Act, 2005). However, insurance companies can still request family history details.

Will my diagnosis affect the cost of the premium?
Yes. In general you will have to pay higher premiums. In some cases there may be a 50% loading but it will be reduced after a period of time.

What if my application is turned down (declined)?
• In the case of a mortgage, give the letter of decline to your bank or building society (lending institution). It will be up to them to approve your application for a mortgage or not.
• Talk to your financial adviser or broker for more advice, especially about a waiver.
• Write to the insurance company and ask why it was turned down. You can argue in support of your application.
• If you make an application and it is turned down, other insurance companies have a right to know. This will influence their decision in turn.

Can I make a complaint?
If you are not happy with the service you have been given, you should complain to the financial adviser, broker or salesperson that arranged your policy. Your policy document will have details of the complaint procedure. You can also contact the Financial Services Ombudsman’s Bureau at Locall 1890 882 090 or website www.financialombudsman.ie

For further information, please contact:

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<th>Insurance Information Service</th>
<th>Irish Cancer Society</th>
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<tr>
<td>Irish Insurance Federation</td>
<td>43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tel: (01) 6761 914</td>
<td>Freefone: 1800 200 700</td>
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<td>Website: <a href="http://www.iif.ie">www.iif.ie</a></td>
<td>Website: <a href="http://www.cancer.ie">www.cancer.ie</a></td>
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