# **Bereaved families continue to wait for Essex mental health inquiry**

Terms of reference have yet to be approved by ministers, leaving relatives frustrated

Bereaved relatives have accused ministers of dragging their feet over an inquiry into the death of almost 2,000 patients across NHS mental health trusts in [Essex](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/essex).

The inquiry has still not started more than eight months after the announcement that it would be [relaunched with beefed-up powers](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/28/inquiry-mental-health-deaths-essex-nhs-trusts-given-legal-powers).

In June last year, the government gave in to [pressure from families](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/apr/07/essex-mental-health-inquiry-pointless-without-legal-powers-say-families) and the then chair of the inquiry, granting it legal powers to compel witnesses to give evidence. In December, the new terms of reference were sent to ministers, setting out what the inquiry will investigate.

But the terms of reference have yet to be approved by ministers, leaving relatives frustrated, with another “unnecessary” death reported a few weeks ago.

Melanie Leahy, whose son, Matthew, died at the Linden Centre in Chelmsford in 2012, said: “I know that this inquiry, the first of its kind nationally, if carried out in a timely and comprehensively investigative manner, it has the power to prevent more deaths, not just in Essex but all over the UK.

“Why am I and all the other bereaved families and injured individuals still waiting? Worse, why are we being met with such callous and terrifying indifference? Why are our legal team being ignored? We can only conclude that our government simply does not care. If the government continues to drag its feet in this way then they must be held to account for their failings. If there are more deaths during this interminable wait, this government needs to be held responsible.”

The inquiry initially launched on a non-statutory basis in January 2021 to investigate deaths at the Essex partnership university [NHS](https://www.theguardian.com/society/nhs) trust and its predecessors between 2000 and 2020. It was established after a 2019 investigation by the parliamentary and health service ombudsman that found numerous failings in the events surrounding the deaths of Matthew Leahy, 20, and another young man named only as Mr R.

Priya Singh, a medical negligence senior associate at Hodge Jones & Allen, which is representing scores of families, called the delay “shocking”, saying: “The terms of reference are still waiting to be finalised by the government. Why?

“Whilst waiting for meaningful progress, yet another unnecessary death occurred a few weeks ago of a loved one whist under the care of Essex partnership university NHS foundation trust.”

A Department of [Health](https://www.theguardian.com/society/health) and Social Care spokesperson expressed sympathies to the bereaved families and said it took the investigation extremely seriously. They said: “Baroness [Kate] Lampard has undertaken a consultation of its terms of reference, and this is now being considered.”