

# Deathbed weddings on the rise as cohabiting couples seek to safeguard finances.

*A leading family law specialist says the number of cohabiting couples who choose to marry at the end of life is on the increase.*

LEEDS, UNITED KINGDOM, November 28, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A leading family lawyer is predicting a rise in the number of cohabiting couples who choose to marry at the end of life, so as to avoid leaving their partner in the lurch after death.

On the death of a partner, unmarried couples in England do not have automatic rights to pensions, are liable for inheritance tax and are excluded from claiming some benefits.

In March this year, Sir Ken Dodd married his long-term partner, Anne Jones, two days before he died. In doing so, the beloved comedian saved his new wife from incurring inheritance tax on his estate.

Government statistics\* for this year show that in the three months to May 2018, 190 special licences were issued granting permission for urgent marriages and civil partnerships. These typically take place in hospitals but the licenses also cover prison-set ceremonies. In 2015 the quarterly average for urgent wedding licences was around 148.

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*Claire Glaister, Lake Legal*

[Claire Glaister](#) of [family law firm Lake Legal](#) believes the growth in deathbed weddings is inevitable and born out of panic: “The consequences of a death for unmarried couples could prove costly and very painful. Many will be oblivious to the lack of legal rights they have and the potential tax consequences they will face if they inherit. It’s likely that many last minute deathbed weddings are seen

as a way to protect the other partner or, as was seen with Ken Dodd and his partner Anne Jones, a very deliberate act timed to safeguard his ‘new’ wife’s financial entitlements on his passing.”

A recent landmark court case saw an unmarried mother win her case to potentially claim a Widowed Parent's Allowance. Mother-of-four Siobhan McLaughlin, from County Antrim, lived with her partner as an unmarried couple for 23 years, precluding her from claiming the benefit when he died. The ruling, which could potentially benefit thousands of families, does not alter the current eligibility rules for receiving bereavement benefits, which are paid only to people who are married or in a civil partnership, but it has brought the issue to the forefront of



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discussion.

Claire added: "There is absolutely nothing wrong with partners wanting to spend their lives together without formalising their relationship either religiously or in law, and this is becoming more commonplace. However, common law marriage is nothing more than a myth and where this starts to become really problematic is that the majority of cohabiting couples are unaware of their rights, or lack of rights, as a cohabitee, rather than as a spouse. This represents a potential minefield for anyone who is financially vulnerable or dependent in a non-marital relationship."

She adds: "A couple might have been living together for 12 months or 50 years but should one of them die, the remaining partner can often be left in a very vulnerable position. Unmarried couples who live together need to wake up and realise that they just don't have the same legal entitlements as married couples and then either put the necessary legal safeguards in place or take the plunge and get married."

Ends

\* HM Passport Office: May 2018

Notes to editors:

Lake Legal operates nationally from offices in Leeds. It was named 'Family Law Firm of the Year' in the Yorkshire Legal Awards and has earned recognition in the top tier of firms in both Chambers & Partners and the Legal 500.

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