



IHPE Position Statement: Homelessness

Key Information

- Homelessness is a global public health issue and in many countries the number of homeless people is rising.
- In some countries the issue is reaching a crisis point.
- Homelessness is not a new phenomenon. In the UK, for example, the first laws related to homelessness were passed in the fourteenth century.
- There are a range of structural, interpersonal and individual factors that can contribute to a person becoming homeless including inadequate affordable housing, immigration policies, social security policies, unemployment, family breakdown, domestic abuse, mental health issues and drug misuse.
- Armed conflicts are an important cause of homelessness.
- The risk of homelessness is higher for those leaving institutional settings such as prisons, psychiatric hospitals, child welfare, or the military.
- Homelessness is associated with a higher prevalence of infectious diseases (e.g. HIV, and hepatitis C), non-communicable diseases, physical disability, mental disorders, and substance misuse compared with the housed population. There is an increased risk of premature mortality.
- Individuals without safe and secure accommodation are some of the most vulnerable in society.
- Accidental injuries, physical and sexual assaults are important contributors to the morbidity and mortality of individuals who are homeless.
- Homeless people face barriers to accessing primary healthcare, leading to a higher rate of attendance at emergency departments.
- Secure housing provides a stable base from which individuals and families can rebuild their lives. It can contribute to a range of important

benefits including shelter, health, access to employment, access to welfare support and engagement with services.

- Both housing and homelessness are unevenly distributed, with inequalities between different groups and different geographical areas.
- In a few countries (e.g., Finland) and a few areas within some countries there are examples of success in relation to this public health issue.
- There is evidence that homelessness can be addressed through clear, consistent national or state-wide strategies, as well as local services tailored to communities which can promote engagement and trust.

Statement

1. The Ottawa Charter is very clear. The fundamental conditions and resources for health are: peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice, and equity.
2. IHPE believes that affordable, accessible, safe and secure housing is a basic human right for all people.
3. IHPE commits to advocating to make the issue of homelessness more visible.
4. IHPE asserts that prevention and lessening of homelessness and its health harms is best addressed by positive action on the structural, interpersonal and individual causal factors.
5. Governments need to put in place a comprehensive, long-term strategy. This would include: an increased supply of appropriately located affordable housing; converting suitable buildings into accommodation; more security of tenancies; financial measures to cover the rising cost of housing; access to welfare and benefits to cover housing costs and, free, accessible support services for vulnerable people.
6. Adequate affordable housing should be made available for individuals being discharged from certain key settings. Interventions should target and support high risk groups such as individuals leaving the child welfare system, hospitals and the criminal justice system.
7. Governments must focus on actions to decrease poverty along with targeted programmes, in particular dealing with domestic abuse and programmes across sectors working with shelters, safe houses and other NGOs (non-governmental organizations).
8. In general, IHPE supports a "Housing First" model where a secure tenancy is arranged first and then other problems that individuals have can be more readily dealt with. This is in contrast to the traditional "Treatment First" model where certain ill health issues are targeted before stable housing is offered.

9. The historic underfunding of homelessness support services should be addressed. Adequate funding is needed to tackle this important public health issue.
10. There is a need for provision of primary health care which can be accessed by those in temporary accommodation or living on the street. This may be through a dedicated service, practice nurses or outreach services.
11. At a local level a multi-agency response is needed to deliver a range of services for the homeless population. This would include health services, community workers, social care and the police working together.
12. There is a need for rapid assessment and support for individuals' mental health among those who are homeless or in housing situations that are not stable and secure.
13. Public services should actively challenge prejudice and discrimination towards homeless people.

References

Andersen L. Addressing homelessness after prison release. Comment. Lancet, 8(10), E744-E745, Oct 2023.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(23\)00181-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(23)00181-0/fulltext)

Clare N, Iafrati S, Reeson C, Wright N, Gray C, & Baptiste H. A house is not a home: housing disadvantage, homelessness, and modern slavery, Journal of the British Academy, 2023; 11: 83–93.

<https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/011.083>

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publishing/journal-british-academy/11/a-house-is-not-a-home/>

Crisis. #HealthNow peer research report: Understanding homeless health inequality in Birmingham. London Crisis, 2021.

<https://groundswell.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Crisis-and-Groundswell-HealthNow-Birmingham-research-March-2021.pdf>

Fazel S, Geddes J R and Kushel M. The health of homeless people in high-income countries: descriptive epidemiology, health consequences, and clinical and policy recommendations. Lancet, 2014;384:1529-40

doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61132-625390578

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)61132-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)61132-6/fulltext)

Fondation Abbé Pierre and FEANTSA. 8th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2023.

https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/2023/OVERVIEW/Rapport_EN.pdf

Fransham M, Dorling D. Homelessness and public health BMJ 2018; 360:k214
doi:10.1136/bmj.k214

<https://www.bmj.com/content/360/bmj.k214>

Groundswell. Knowing where to turn: access to mental health support whilst experiencing homelessness. London: Groundswell, 2022.

<https://groundswell.org.uk/2022/launch-of-our-new-peer-led-research-knowing-where-to-turn-about-access-to-mental-health-support-whilst-experiencing-homelessness/>

Henderson R. The government's antisocial behaviour action plan risks exacerbating the homelessness crisis BMJ 2023; 381 :p1267
doi:10.1136/bmj.p1267

<https://www.bmj.com/content/381/bmj.p1267>

Hertzberg D, Boobis S. The unhealthy state of homelessness 2022. London: Homeless Link, 2022.

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/unhealthy-state-of-homelessness-2022-findings-from-the-homeless-health-needs-audit/>

House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts. Homeless households: eleventh report of session 2017-2019. House of Commons, 2017.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/462/462.pdf>

Johnstone L. & Boyle M. with Cromby J, Dillon J, Harper D, Kinderman P, Longden E, Pilgrim D, & Read J. The Power Threat Meaning Framework: Towards the identification of patterns in emotional distress, unusual experiences and troubled or troubling behaviour, as an alternative to functional psychiatric diagnosis. Leicester: British Psychological Society, 2018.

<https://explore.bps.org.uk/content/report-guideline/bpsrep.2018.inf299b>

Lancet Public Health. Homelessness in Europe: time to act. Editorial. Lancet, 8(10), E743, Oct 2023.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(23\)00224-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(23)00224-4/fulltext)

Lester P. Eradicating Homelessness in Finland. PD&R Edge, 2023.

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-international-philanthropic-071123.html#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20Finland's%20commitment,global%20leader%20in%20combating%20homelessness.>

Marmot M, Allen J, Boyce T, Goldblatt P, Morrison J. Health equity in England: the Marmot review 10 years on. Feb 2020.

<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

Neil K E, Watson M C and Lloyd J. IHPE Position Statement: Alcohol. Altrincham: Institute of Health Promotion and Education, 2023.

<https://ihpe.org.uk/resources/position-papers/>

Shelter. Preventing homelessness. Why a strategic approach and early intervention can stop people losing their homes. London: Shelter, 2016.
https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/preventing_homelessness

Sleet DA, Francescutti LH. Homelessness and Public Health: A Focus on Strategies and Solutions. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Nov 6;18(21):11660. doi: 10.3390/ijerph182111660. PMID: 34770173; PMCID: PMC8583397.
<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/21/11660>

Swift L. Get Housed. A Brief History of Homeless Law. How To Challenge and Win Local Authority Homeless Decisions. (Accessed 6/11/2023)
<https://gethoused.co.uk/history/>

United Nations. Homelessness and human rights. Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing. (Accessed 6/11/2023)
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/homelessness-and-human-rights>

Watson M C, Tilford S, Neil K E. IHPE Position Statement: Ethics and Health Promotion. Altrincham: Institute of Health Promotion and Education, 2022.
<https://ihpe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/IHPE-Position-Statement-Ethics-and-Health-Promotion-20th-Nov-2022.pdf>

Wilson W, Barton C. Statutory homelessness (England). London: House of Commons, 2022.
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01164/SN01164.pdf>

World Health Organization. Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. Copenhagen: World Health Organization, 1986.
<https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/enhanced-wellbeing/first-global-conference>

World Health Organization. Housing and health guidelines. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2018.
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550376>

Lead Authors: Michael C. Watson
Anne Whitcombe
Institute of Health Promotion and Education
<https://ihpe.org.uk/>
@InstituteHPE
16th November, 2023

<p>Citation: Watson M C, and Whitcombe A. (2023) <i>IHPE Position Statement: Homelessness (November 2023)</i>. Lichfield, Institute of Health Promotion and Education.</p>
