

MAKING SURE EVERYONE FINDS A PLACE TO CALL HOME

**Homelessness is an urgent and worsening public health issue, and no one should have to sleep rough on London's streets.
We urge all policymakers to:**

- 1 Urgently invest in affordable and suitable social housing for people with complex needs**
- 2 Invest in flexible mental health and addiction services for people with complex needs**
- 3 Ensure gender-specific support for women from commissioning to service design and delivery**

More people are seriously struggling with the cost of living and being pushed into crisis and having to sleep on the streets. We are also seeing increasing deaths of people while homeless. Many have often experienced abuse and trauma and been let down by the systems meant to support them – we urgently need to break this cycle.

10,053
people recorded
sleeping rough
in London

Whoever forms the next government must address homelessness as an urgent public health issue. Through our work supporting the most vulnerable people in our society, we have highlighted the following three key areas that will make the most impact on rough sleeping.

1. Urgently invest in affordable and suitable social housing for people with complex needs

A shortage of affordable, supported tenancies creates a bottleneck that runs across the whole support system. In our area, demand for accommodation from rough sleeping support services vastly outweighs supply. This further excludes already marginalised rough sleepers with very complex needs – services are overwhelmed. Hostels need to be a genuinely short-term option (for weeks, not months or years). Until there is more accommodation available in the system, this dire situation will continue.

The Government must:

- Increase the proportion of the budget for social housing to provide homes for those who are most vulnerable or on the lowest incomes.
- Adequately fund supported housing for people with complex needs
- Ensure there are regulations and reporting mechanisms to guarantee adequate standards in supported housing.

2. Invest in flexible mental health and addiction services for people with complex needs

Cases of child cruelty and neglect are on the rise. We know that early experiences of abuse lead to lifelong trauma for the individuals and severe mental health problems. If these are not addressed, they can end up on the street as adults with undiagnosed, untreated and severe mental health problems. Drugs and alcohol can be a coping mechanism, carrying risk of addiction and further harm. Yet co-existing substance use and mental health needs are a key barrier to accessing siloed support services. Many of our clients have had either little or no contact with any mental health professional in their entire lives.

45 YEARS

the average life expectancy of someone experiencing homelessness in England and Wales, compared to 81 in the general population.

The Government must:

- Develop and adequately fund appropriate and long-term treatment options for mental health and substance addiction (especially dual diagnosis), and remove barriers to access for people experiencing multiple disadvantage
- Develop a more holistic, coordinated system from national policy and cross-governmental working to frontline delivery
- Ensure detox is offered to anyone who needs it, as a form of harm minimisation, with flexible criteria and minimal barriers as well as choice.

91%

of our clients disclosed that they were using substances, yet 41% are not currently accessing any interventions

3. Ensure gender-specific support for women from commissioning to service design and delivery

Women experience homelessness differently to men and require a different response. Many women sleeping rough have experienced abuse and trauma. They are at extremely high risk of violence and experience constant risk of harassment. Many have multiple, complex needs as a result, and it's extremely challenging to find them appropriate accommodation that meets their needs. Women's homelessness is often undercounted, with services therefore often designed for men by default.

The Government must:

- Fund more women-only spaces, including drop-in and accommodation, as well as specialist workers
- Include specialist accommodation for women with complex needs as part of any wider accommodation strategy
- Ensure their approach to ending homelessness is gender-informed in all areas.

We know what works to fight homelessness, and it is now more vital than ever to take these steps. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to share the expertise of our staff and clients and address these challenges to design a system that works. Please contact katy.parker@cstm.org.uk if you would like to discuss any of these points further.