

Preventing and protecting people facing homelessness from COVID-19

National Governments and local councils should take urgent action to ensure that people facing homelessness are able to access self-contained accommodation, which includes access to a private bathroom. This should include assistance from national government both logistically and financially to procure hotel style accommodation to meet the increased need.

To achieve this the following measures should be taken:

Ensure that there are no legal barriers to accessing self-contained accommodation for people facing homelessness

- Anyone who is at risk of, or is already homeless, should be considered automatically eligible for a rehousing duty to ensure that they are provided with self-contained accommodation, which includes access to a private bathroom. This will require the suspension of a number of legal tests. We urge national governments to take the necessary measures to ensure that there are no legal barriers in place.
- The homelessness legislation in England and Wales requires applicants to demonstrate that they have a local connection, are in a priority need category, are eligible for assistance, and are not intentionally homeless. These legal tests currently stand as a bar to ensuring that everyone who is homeless is provided with temporary and settled accommodation. We urge national governments to take the necessary measures to ensure that there are no legal barriers in place. The Westminster Government should also suspend NRPF/eligibility criteria to ensure that people who are at risk of homelessness, or are already homeless, and do not have recourse to public funds, qualify for housing and homelessness assistance and therefore an offer of self-contained accommodation.
- The Scottish homelessness legislation does not require applicants to demonstrate that they are in a priority need category in order to qualify for temporary and settled accommodation, but other tests do still apply. We therefore recommend that the Scottish Government and local authorities suspend the local connection, eligibility and intentionality tests for homeless applicants by the relevant branches of government and homeless households can access to qualify for self-contained accommodation.

Ensure that people sleeping rough and living in hostel and shelter accommodation have rapid access to health care assistance to test for, and treat cases of, COVID-19

- As a matter of urgency, local councils should demonstrate how they are going to proactively ensure that people are tested and have access to healthcare. As a minimum, plans should include the following
 - o Commissioned outreach teams should coordinate with healthcare professionals to engage in active case finding (i.e. proactive testing of people facing homelessness) on the streets and in hostel and shelter accommodation.

- Plans should be put in place to provide for immediate triaging so that people who have not contracted the virus can be supported safely and kept out of communal air space.
- Local authorities should ensure that frontline workers in homelessness organisations and local authority staff are recognised as an emergency service as part of their response to COVID-19.
- The Westminster Government should ringfence a proportion of the £5bn fund announced in the Budget to fight COVID-19 for local authorities to help deliver these measures.

**As a matter of urgency, national governments and local councils should also ensure that people facing financial hardship are not left facing homelessness as a result of the impact of COVID-19
To achieve this the following measures should be taken:**

Prevent people from becoming homeless from the private rented sector

- National governments should take measures to ensure that renters are not put at greater risk of eviction and homelessness as a result of COVID-19
- The Westminster and Welsh Government should temporarily suspend the use of Section 21 evictions and Section 8 evictions. Countries and cities across the world are already taking these steps. San Francisco have issued a city-wide moratorium on evictions through an executive order that will last 1 month initially. Similar measures have been taken in Austin, Boston, Santa Monica and some other counties in Florida and Texas. Seattle have announced they will be introducing a ban on evictions. The Scottish Government has already said that it is “actively considering” measures to prevent tenants from being evicted because of financial hardship as a result of COVID-19.
- The Westminster Government should ensure that local governments in England, Scotland and Wales are provided with additional Discretionary Housing Payments to help assist tenants who are facing difficulties paying their rent as a result of the impact of COVID-19.

Take measures to ensure that Universal Credit does not place people at increased risk of homelessness and supports people struggling financially during this period

- The Department for Work and Pensions should take measures to ensure that the five-week waiting period for households to receive their first Universal Credit payment is removed to ensure that people are not pushed to the brink of homelessness.
- The Department for Work and Pensions should temporarily suspend conditionality and sanctioning for jobseekers who miss an in-person Jobcentre Plus appointments, or other face-to-face requirements, to allow people to take the measures necessary to self-isolate. A major study conducted for Crisis showed that homeless people are twice as likely to be sanctioned than the general population.¹
- The amount of Universal Credit someone receives can be reduced to pay off money owed to the Department for Work and Pensions, and debts and loans from companies. These are called deductions. Deductions are set up by reducing the standard allowance of Universal Credit. For people experiencing homelessness, and those at risk of

¹ Beatty, E., Beatty, C., Casey, R., Foden, M., McCarthy, L., Reeve, K. (2015) Homeless people’s experiences of welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions. London: Crisis.

homelessness, current deduction rates can leave them in a challenging financial situation. This adds to the pressure on incomes that leads to homelessness and prevents people experiencing homelessness from resolving their situation. This will inevitably be further exacerbated by the pressures of COVID-19. We would therefore recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions temporarily suspend deductions to alleviate the financial pressures on households.