Framing homelessness during coronavirus

What is framing homelessness?

To end homelessness for good, a powerful new big idea must replace old notions of poor choices and inevitability. By telling a new story about homelessness we can build public support and political commitment for the action and change evidence tells us are needed to end it.

'Framing' means using evidence to help guide the choices we make when telling stories about homelessness. Framing helps us decide **what to emphasise**; **how to explain things**; and **what to leave out**.

Why is framing important now?

Weaving effective framing into our communications during the coronavirus outbreak helps get action now – and helps to build public support and political commitment for ending homelessness for good.

Based on recommendations from the FrameWorks Institute on framing during coronavirus, and evidence from Crisis' Reframing Homelessness research, here are three framing strategies to use:

1 Emphasise our inter-connection and inter-dependence across society

We know that describing how connected we are in society helps people see homelessness from a collective, societal perspective. It is also a powerful way to frame coronavirus. It is a way to talk about people who are often marginalised by systems - and who we need to include at all times, but especially now.

In practice:

This outbreak affects each and every one of us in society. We are being reminded just how connected we all are, and how much we all depend on each other.

This outbreak makes it clear that each and every person's health is intertwined – no-one should be left out of containment measures, no matter where they are.

What hurts one of us, hurts us all. Making sure everyone has a safe and secure home is the right thing to do – and it benefits us all.

We have the most impact when we work together.

2 Take special care not to activate harmful othering beliefs

Emphasising the 'vulnerability' of people facing homelessness risks confirming strongly held beliefs that they are inherently different and distant. Replacing 'vulnerable' with 'exposed' can express increased level of risk while connecting people facing homelessness with other groups who cannot practice distancing or isolation – key workers, people not able to work from home, others living in confined places. Adding 'most at risk' or 'threatened' can increase the strength of the message.

In practice:

People experiencing homelessness, particularly those rough sleeping, are amongst the most exposed and most at risk to the coronavirus.

To protect everyone's health, we need action to protect people who are most exposed to the coronavirus – this must include testing and access to housing.

Three times more likely to suffer from an acute respiratory disease, people facing homelessness are particularly exposed and threatened by this outbreak.

3 Use constant pressure to describe the effects of coronavirus – and emphasise homelessness can be prevented

We know the constant pressure metaphor is the most effective frame for describing the experience of people facing homelessness. Use it to frame the impact of coronavirus and give systemic solutions for prevention of homelessness.

In practice:

People are losing work, becoming ill, taking on caring responsibilities – coronavirus is exerting huge and sudden pressures on people already pushed to the brink by low wages and high rents.

People already under the constant pressure of low wages and high rents could be forced into homelessness by this outbreak – government can relieve the pressure and give people breathing room they desperately need.

Without a safe and secure home, the physical and mental health of people facing homelessness is under constant pressure - from inadequate healthcare, lack of nutritious food, the threat of eviction, and for those on the streets, the constant threat of violence.

If you found this guide useful and would like to learn more about framing homelessness, please contact **Catherine Ashford**, Strategic Communications Project Manager for the Framing Homelessness Project at catherine.ashford@crisis.org.uk.