

Stop the Scandal: the case for action on mental health and rough sleeping

Briefing for MPs

November 2016

About our research

Stop the Scandal: the case for action on mental health and rough sleeping investigates how national and local government and the NHS can build effective services to put an end to the mental health crisis on our streets.

During August and September 2016, we conducted 21 in-depth interviews with St Mungo's clients with a history of rough sleeping living in five London boroughs and in Bristol.

We also made 248 Freedom of Information requests to local authorities and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in areas with high levels of rough sleeping. Our requests asked about the mental health services targeted at people sleeping rough that were commissioned locally in each area.

Our findings

- Our Freedom of Information requests to commissioners in England revealed that **mental health services actively targeting people sleeping rough are commissioned in only 32 per cent of the areas where 10 or more people are sleeping rough on any one night.**
- Poor mental health is a cause and a consequence of sleeping rough. The majority of the people we interviewed had problems with their mental health before they slept rough.
- Almost everyone we interviewed told us their mental health deteriorated while they were street homeless. **Eight of the 21 people we interviewed told us about a time they had attempted or considered suicide.**
- People with mental health problems fall through gaps in legislation and local services. **People at risk of sleeping rough, including people with mental health problems, are regularly found not to be in priority need and are offered little meaningful assistance.**
- Specialist mental health services for people sleeping rough can provide effective assessment, treatment, service coordination and referrals for people sleeping rough, but these are not available in all areas with high levels of rough sleeping.

Given the overwhelming evidence that mental health problems disproportionately affect people who are homeless, it is a scandal that so few areas have locally commissioned services designed to meet the mental health needs of people sleeping rough.

What are we calling for?

St Mungo's **Stop the Scandal** campaign is calling on the Prime Minister to lead **a new national strategy to end rough sleeping**. As part of this, the government must meet its commitment to improve mental health services for homeless people, invest in specialist homelessness mental health support and strengthen legislation to help more people who are at risk of sleeping rough.

St Mungo's clients have also written to Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health, to request an urgent meeting about funding for specialist homeless mental health services.

Following our investigation into mental health and rough sleeping, we have developed the following **recommendations for government, local commissioners and health professionals:**

- There should be specialist homeless mental health services in all areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping and arrangements with mainstream teams in other areas so they can reach out to people on the streets.
- The Prime Minister should lead a new strategy to end rough sleeping, including funding to help local areas deliver specialist homeless mental health services.
- The ministerial working group on homelessness should produce a detailed plan for improving mental health services for homeless people, including steps it will take to ensure specialist homeless mental health services are available in all areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government should continue to support efforts to improve the homelessness legislation via the Homelessness Reduction Bill and fund its implementation.
- The Department of Health should work with NHS England to ensure planned improvements to community mental health services including crisis care – stemming from the Mental Health Taskforce report – take into account the needs of people sleeping rough.
- Government ministers should instruct research bodies to prioritise research into effective mental health treatment for people with multiple needs.
- Local councillors and commissioners must take responsibility for ensuring everyone can access the mental health support they need and for ensuring they understand the case for specialist services.
- Health professionals, including GPs and mental health practitioners, must take responsibility for ensuring they have a good working knowledge and understanding of homelessness and rough sleeping.

How can you help?

Read our new report, *Stop the Scandal: the case for action on mental health and rough sleeping*.

Pledge your support for our Stop the Scandal campaign by using our template press release for MPs and sharing our research on social media using #stopthescandal

Support our clients with their request to meet Jeremy Hunt by sending him a letter or a tweet to ask him to make time in his diary.

Ask DCLG and Department of Health Ministers to take forward our recommendations by writing to them and asking questions in Parliament.

Support the Homelessness Reduction Bill by attending the Report Stage and Third Reading debate in January.

For more information, please contact:

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