

## Long term Effect on Homelessness as a result of COVID -19 - “Economic Homeless”

- COVID-19 raises the real prospect of an escalation of homelessness. The ending of a private tenancy is the leading cause of homelessness and key workers at risk of contracting the virus have found themselves facing eviction because of fears of spreading the virus to landlords. Local authorities and provider organisations will have new types and increasing numbers of homeless to support as a result – the “economic homeless”.
- COVID-19 has led to reductions in incomes for many, particularly the self- and precariously employed. This has/will lead to housing payment arrears, which have/will lead to eviction or foreclosure. Mortgage-holders have a 3-month mortgage holiday; provisions to protect renters from eviction suspends the eviction processes for 3 months. In the face of a looming economic and housing crisis, all involved in the support of homelessness will be busier than ever and demands on these services will grow.

### Useful Information

#### SMART CJS COVID Advice for Rough Sleepers:

<https://smartcjs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-Advice-for-Homeless-Rough-Sleepers.pdf>

**NHS Guidance** <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>  
<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

**Drug treatment and COVID-19** <https://www.release.org.uk/blog/drug-treatment-and-coronaviruscovid19>

#### Harm reduction and COVID-19 for people who use drugs

<https://www.talkingdrugs.org/covid19-harm-reduction-for-people-who-use-drugs>

# SMART!

“Helping people to help themselves”

## Understanding the Homeless & Rough Sleeper Community and COVID-19

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**How does COVID-19 disproportionately affect the homeless?** Staying at home is not an option if you do not have a home. Homeless people have poorer existing health and frequently will lack the basic facilities that would enable them to reduce their risk to COVID-19 by isolating or washing their hands regularly. The closure of public services has adversely affected this group, as libraries, day centres and other amenities often host outreach and support activities.

Many rough sleepers will have other long term conditions like asthma, COPD and reduced immunity which increase their chances of developing serious complications from contracting COVID-19.

**Why does the homeless and rough sleeper community differ from most in society?** This group tends to live largely outside of societal norms, and many have chosen this lifestyle because of previous life experience or difficult and traumatic events and wanting to isolate or shut themselves off. Many have a dual diagnosis – so substance misuse disorders as well as mental health conditions. Whatever the reason for someone being a rough sleeper – they are another human being and deserving of our understanding, kindness and support.

**Why is hotel accommodation important for the homeless during COVID-19 pandemic?** Homeless shelters (like Somewhere Safe To Stay Hubs) are a high-risk environment due to the close proximity of residents and shared kitchen, social and washing facilities. This is why hotels providing stable accommodation with food and other basic supplies are so important to fund, support and maintain. These measures are preventing or slowing this group from catching and spreading the disease within the rough sleeping community, and beyond, as well as helping to keep them out of NHS critical care units.

**What does this mean in practice in terms of the COVID-19 restrictions?**

They are living often an isolated existence and are therefore more likely to break rules as they do not see themselves as part of society or the community any more. When you engage with someone who has been on a streets a while, you quickly realise that they have lost the knack of conversation, find it difficult to establish eye contact and cannot easily empathise with others or society. They may not have access to media and may not be aware of the reasons for lockdowns and rules to prevent the spread of COVID-19. All these factors mean that time, repetition and reinforcement are needed to comply with lockdown– particularly in a hotel environment where movements in and out are restricted and questioned.

**Substance misuse support services – an ideal opportunity to create access to the homeless?** 95% of rough sleepers have a substance misuse disorder. Many are not on any substitute prescription and will want to leave hotel accommodation in pursuit of both the means to buy and use illicit substances and alcohol. Local substance misuse services should be involved, embedded and offering scripts at the hotel to manage this group and provide them with a longer term route to dealing with addiction.

**How to reinforce understanding of new rules and emergency regulations?**

Whether due to ignorance, lack of exposure to mainstream media or just wanting to challenge being “told what to do” – it takes more time and patience for an entrenched rough sleeper to change their behaviour. The rules about gatherings, social distance and freedoms - take a lot of time to get used to. A lot of repetition, reinforcement and understanding the consequence of not following the rules needs to be done before behaviours begin to change. But change they will, with the support and perseverance of everyone.