

# LGBTQ+ Homelessness policy briefing

## Summary

LGBTQ+ homelessness is widespread. Nearly half of LGBTQ+ adults surveyed for this study have experienced homelessness over their lifetime, including a fifth within the last year. Risk of homelessness was high among LGBTQ+ adults. Yet confidence in public homelessness services is low. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of inclusive services and trust when addressing specific needs of LGBTQ+ subgroups. Concerns were raised about the strength of commitment to LGBTQ+ equality in current service provision. Recommendations include, developing evidence-based 'good practice' guidance for services, including a quality mark to assure LGBTQ+ individuals of safe, inclusive support, local authorities proactively and visibly addressing LGBTQ+ homelessness, ensuring targeted and inclusive services to meet the specific needs of marginalised LGBTQ+ people. Specialist services, especially for young LGBTQ+ people, were also identified as important.

## Introduction

Homelessness is an extreme form of social marginalisation which has long been believed to be especially prevalent among LGBTQ+ people. However, to date, studies have mainly been small-scale and localised, and often confined to certain subgroups (especially those under the age of 25). Additionally, understandings of homelessness used in research do not map onto legal and policy understandings of homelessness, which makes estimating service demand tricky. Also, existing studies have tended to focus on the problems rather than solutions, making them of limited use in making meaningful, community-led, recommendations.

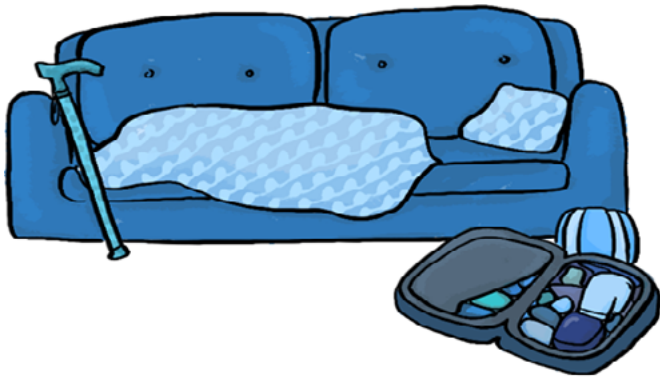
We draw on evidence from the largest LGBTQ+ housing specific survey to date, and stakeholder consultations based on the results of this survey, to make four recommendations to address / alleviate LGBTQ+ homelessness. The survey itself looked at recent and lifetime homelessness experiences, current risk factors for imminent homelessness, and likely help-seeking behaviour if they were to become homelessness.



## Research overview

We surveyed 1119 LGBTQ+ people aged over 18, from across the UK, on their experiences of housing and homelessness, between June 2022 and January 2024. Questions asked about recent and lifetime homelessness experiences, current risk factors for imminent homelessness, and likely help-seeking behaviour in situations of homelessness. The questionnaire was designed as a general population survey and was not targeted at those who had experienced homelessness or poor housing.

The survey found that nearly half of LGBTQ+ adults had had at least one experience of homelessness (following the UK legal definition). A fifth had been homeless in the last year. Over a fifth had at least one risk factor for homelessness in the next year. However, LGBTQ+ people demonstrated low levels of confidence in statutory services, with less than a third willing to seek help from their local authority if they became homeless. Reputation of services in terms of LGBTQ+ inclusion, was critical for most in willingness to seek help.



Subsequently through focus groups we consulted on the findings of the survey with 51 stakeholders, either people with lived experience of homelessness as an LGBTQ+ person, and/or working in the homelessness and housing sector (including specialist LGBTQ+ services), and/or representatives of LGBTQ+ organisations. We also solicited written feedback to the report from stakeholders.

The stakeholder consultation emphasised trust and service awareness were critical issues for engagement with homelessness services. Stakeholders felt that it was important that services were both generally inclusive, and specifically targeted at certain LGBTQ+ subgroups. Those we spoke to identified a lack of trust and confidence in general services to deliver change. There was concern that services often engaged in 'rainbow-washing' – a surface commitment to LGBTQ+ equality – but that the mechanisms required for meaningful delivery were not present. Measures that might make a difference included role-appropriate training (rather than general 'awareness' training), regular, transparent engagement with LGBTQ+ communities over service provision, and sensitive and appropriate data collection. At the same time, we understood from those running services that they were often confused about how exactly to engage with, and remain engaged with, LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness.



Stakeholders were also concerned that LGBTQ+ services were often niche and specific. One implication of this was that LGBTQ+ specific services tended to be absent or patchy outside large urban areas, and that certain groups – especially those older than age 25, trans and non-binary individuals, those from minority ethnic groups and provision suitable for disabled people – tended to be very limited. Finally, stakeholders stressed the importance of retaining funding for existing specialist LGBTQ+ services, notably youth services. Our survey also identified that, among those under 25, specialist services tended to be seen as especially helpful.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Addressing LGBTQ+ homelessness requires a dual strategy in which inclusivity across all services is improved, alongside protecting targeted LGBTQ+ support. To achieve this, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Development of evidence-based guidance, including a quality mark, for LGBTQ+ inclusive services, for all services engaging with homeless (and at-risk of homelessness) populations. This would establish best practice for inclusive and safe services for LGBTQ+ people, and build trust between LGBTQ+ people and service providers.
2. Implementation of a 'no-wrong door' policy for homeless LGBTQ+ people, to ensure that they are not overlooked. This means that all services interacting with homeless people should be aware of the specific requirements and experiences of homeless LGBTQ+ people and have strategies in place to ensure swift referral to services that can help. This would ensure better access to services and reduce the risk of disengagement.
3. While broad inclusivity is vital, there is also a clear need for targeted services to meet the needs of certain groups of LGBTQ+ people, especially those under 25, trans and non-binary individuals, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Specialist hostels and advice services should be available to meet the needs of these groups
4. The lack of reliable data on LGBTQ+ homelessness needs to be addressed. The benefits of monitoring need to be made explicit, and attempts made to carefully co-design with the community a workable and acceptable process that is inclusive, and it put into practice based on principles of dignity and wellbeing.

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\*All above information comes from the [LGBTQ+ Housing and Homelessness Survey 2022-23](#) by Edith England and Neil Turnbull.

\*\*All above illustrations are by [Andy Thornton](#).