

Women's Census

Life Off The Streets women's workstream



The Life Off the Streets Executive Board brings together partners key to tackling rough sleeping in London. It is jointly chaired by the Deputy Mayor for Housing and by London Councils. It is supported by the multi-agency Life Off the Streets Core Group which works to operationalise the programme's strategic objectives.

The Life Off the Streets women's workstream is a sub-group working to determine, drive and manage activities intended to ensure that rough sleeping is prevented for women – and where that fails that rough sleeping is a rare, brief and non-recurrent experience.

Women's Census

The women's workstream has been tasked with organising a women's street count/census which aims to better capture data about the extent of women's rough sleeping.

The methodology used will differ from the normal snapshot count in recognition of the fact that women sleep rough less visibly and are less likely to come into contact with outreach teams as a result.

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Why a women's census



Why is this work needed?

Women are under-represented: Research, lived experience and the experiences of services tell us that women are some of the most vulnerable within the rough sleeping and homeless population, yet we also know that women are under-represented in rough sleeping statistics and provision.

Key data sources used to understand homelessness come from street count figures based on recording practices which are not adapted to women's patterns of homelessness. It follows that if services are commissioned based on this data, they will not be meeting the needs of those who are not captured in this data.

There are also particular risks to women who are experiencing forms of rough sleeping:

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Methodology



1. Outreach

Outreach services will be asked to deliver gender-informed outreach sessions using insight into where and when women more commonly rough sleep. Outreach will include at least one daytime session during census week.

2. Survey

Services likely to encounter women who are rough sleeping (ranging from day centres, women's services, health services) will be asked to complete a simple, anonymised survey over a set period of a week to identify women they believe are currently rough sleeping or at immediate risk of rough sleeping.

3. Streetlink

Streetlink will be asked to note all calls relating to women reported as potentially rough sleeping over the census period.

4. Housing Options

We will ask Housing Options services in a selection of boroughs to note the number of women presenting over the census period who say they are rough sleeping or at immediate risk of rough sleeping. We are considering whether this data can be obtained directly from HCLIC to reduce the reporting burden for LAs.

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Impact of rough sleeping and homelessness

- Rough sleeping and homelessness have a severe impact on physical and mental health, in turn making it more difficult to exit homelessness.
 - Research conducted by Groundswell has found that 74% of women who are homeless have a physical health issue and 64% experience mental health issues (compared with 21% of women in the general population). One-third of the women surveyed by Groundswell had had to use emergency medical care because of their mental health.
- Women experiencing rough sleeping face high levels of serious violence, which can cause lasting harm.
- The average age of death for women in the rough sleeping population is 43 – four years younger than men, even though within in the general population, women consistently have a longer life expectancy than men.
- Health difficulties and homelessness are closely linked: poor or declining health can be a contributing cause of homelessness and homelessness can severely prevent and hinder recovery.



Contact with services

- Women experiencing or at risk of homelessness are unlikely to come into contact with homelessness services first – it is more likely they will attend health and other services.
- This means that women are missing from data collected through contact with housing and outreach services – it is therefore harder to evidence the need for services for women, putting more pressure on voluntary and health services to support women with increasing levels of need.
- Conversely, many women who have been experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping for an extended period may not have seen a health professional in a very long time.
- By the time women do reach homelessness and rough sleeping services, they are more likely to present with problems that are more entrenched or have escalated significantly.
- **Through this census, primary care services can therefore play a vital part in contributing to the picture of homelessness and helping to evidence the need for more services for women.**



How can health be involved?

- We would like to ask health services to be involved in the survey, recording simple and anonymised information about numbers of women at risk of homelessness and in touch with their services within the space of a week. Example questions on the next slide.
- To do this, we would appreciate help to get accurate and comprehensive lists of the services who should be involved
- We also need local areas and teams to be involved: can you help us to get them on board, or put us in touch with local teams who can support delivery of the survey?
- Could you be a coordinator for your area or service type to help us deliver census week?

Any help you can spare would be enormously appreciated! This can be a strong example of cross-sector working which can positively impact our shared client groups and shared systemic challenges.

Example survey questions



The survey will ask minimal and ideally unintrusive questions, and we will provide guidance on completing the survey.

Survey questions are likely to include something like the following:

- How old were you on your last birthday? (do not need to record DOB)
- Where you did you stay last night?
- How would you describe your ethnicity?
- How is your health in general? (options to select from)
- How many times have you been homeless?
- Has someone at this service or another service already asked you these same questions?

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What next?



- The census methodology is being refined with input from academic advisers and specialist outreach services. The census design, data analysis and resulting report is being supported by Praxis Collab.
- Once confirmed, we will produce guidance for services to support delivery of outreach and survey answers.
- Once methodology and dates are fully confirmed, we will hold information and training sessions prior to census delivery.
- **Delivery date:** Provisional date to deliver this census is across the week of 19th-23rd September

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Lead group



The census is being planned and delivered by the Life Off the Streets women's workstream and is being led by a sub-group of the following people and organisations.

Please do contact us for more information and to get involved via the following:

- **Eleanor Greenhalgh**, Women's Development Unit Manager, Solace
 - e.greenhalgh@solacewomensaid.org
- **Lucy Campbell**, Head of Multiple Disadvantage - Service Transformation, SHP
 - lcampbell@shp.org.uk
- **Stephanie Ratcliffe**, Head of Migrant and Advice Services, St Mungo's
 - stephanie.ratcliffe@mungos.org
- **Niamh Kehoe**, Women's Development Unit Coordinator, Connection at St Martin's
 - niamh.kehoe@cstm.org.uk
- **Michelle Binfield**, Rough Sleeping Programme Director, London Councils
- **Usman Iqbal**, Strategy Lead, Relevancepoint .

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