

Working with those who live street based lives

What can homelessness look like?

Sleeping Rough: This is the most visible form of homelessness. It is when someone is sleeping on the streets.

Temporary Accommodation: This could be unstable accommodation such as a B&B, Hostel or another temporary home.

Sofa Surfing: This can also be known as 'hidden homelessness'. It involves moving between friends or relatives homes.

What can you do?

- **Advocate**- this could be supporting letters for benefits or housing applications.
- **Be curious & respectfully challenge** service refusal and risky decisions. Acknowledge that the person may have had negative experiences with services.
- **Understand the persons history**, what they are saying with their behaviour.
- Think about **other sources support**, such as risk panels, statutory services & use of multi-agency meetings.
- **Think about capacity** including **executive capacity**. Professionals observation of the individuals ability to apply decisions in real world settings is key in evidencing lack of executive function.
- Where there are concerns about **lack of engagement** or **fluctuating capacity** professionals should consider a flexible approach, meeting the individual at different times to find out when they are most likely to engage or have capacity. Including when and where is best for them.
- **Information and Assessments** should be integrated and shared between services wherever possible so that the individual does not have to keep repeating their story.

Multiple Exclusion Homelessness (MEH)

People have experienced MEH if they have been 'homeless' including experience of temporary/unsuitable accommodation as well as sleeping rough, and have also experienced one or more of the following other areas of 'deep social exclusion':

- **'institutional care'** (prison, local authority care, mental health hospitals or wards);
- **'substance misuse'** (drug, alcohol, solvent or gas misuse); or participation in
- **'street culture activities'** (begging, street drinking, 'survival' shoplifting or sex work)."

(Fitzpatrick et al., 2011.)

What are the risks?

There are often assumptions that homelessness is a 'lifestyle choice'. However...

- People sleeping on the street are nearly 17 x more likely to have been victims of violence.
- In June 2022 domestic abuse victims accounted for 17% of households who met statutory homeless criteria
(Statutory Homelessness April to June(Q2) 2022: England)
- For those who sleep rough, the average age at death is:
Male: 45.9 years old
Female: 41.6 years old
- In 2020 38.5% of deaths of homeless people in the UK were due to drug poisoning. This is still the most common cause of death.
- Alcohol specific causes were second and suicide being the third.
(ONS,2021)



The Challenges

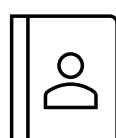
- **Refusal to engage in assessment:** Is the individual unwilling or unable to engage?
- **Executive Capacity:** The individual could give coherent answers to questions but it becomes clear from their actions that they are unable to implement their decisions.
- **Alcohol Dependence:** Chronic dependent drinkers may not have a diagnosed mental illness; but they are functionally mentally disordered at a level where choice is largely removed from the equation. (Mike Ward & Michael Preston-Shoot, 2020).
- **Complex Trauma:** Many individuals who present as homeless have experienced complex trauma. This can lead to difficulties with engagement and relationships, feelings of persecution, low tolerance or frustration and substance abuse. All of which may be influences on self-neglecting behaviours.
- **'Lifestyle choice':** Professionals should be mindful not to rely on service user choice and self-determination to manage conflict in public policy and law with the result that some individuals do not receive appropriate support.

Contact details:

OSAB@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Worried about an adult?

[How to report concerns - Oxford Safeguarding Adults Board \(osab.co.uk\)](http://www.osab.co.uk)



Resources

[Adult safeguarding and homelessness: a briefing on positive practice | Local](#)

[Mental Health Service Interventions for People Sleeping Rough - Pathway](#)

