

Health and Equity Impact Assessment (HEIA)

Assessing Homelessness Impact



West Midlands
Combined Authority

This simple guide will help you assess the potential impact of your proposed policy or practice change through the lens of preventing and relieving homelessness.

This guide has been developed as part of the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce's work to embed homelessness prevention across the WMCA's policies, strategies, programmes and decision-making. You can find out more about our work on the WMCA website: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/wmhtf>

The Homelessness Taskforce's ambition is to **design out homelessness**, in all its forms. Our focus is to help prevent homelessness wherever we can rather than just on managing it once it has happened. You can find out more about designing out homelessness by reading our short briefing paper: [designing-out-homelessness-briefing-paper.pdf \(wmca.org.uk\)](#)

What is homelessness?

Many people associate homelessness with perhaps the most obvious and visible form of it i.e. rough sleeping; and are not aware of the full extent and depth of the issue. Rough sleeping is one of the most extreme manifestations of homelessness. However, it is neither the only nor the most common form. When you are completing your HEIA, it is important that you consider all the forms of homelessness noted below, and capture any that apply in the HEIA:

Homeless at home – households whose homes are overcrowded, not fit for habitation. For example, young families having to live with parents because they cannot afford their own home.

Temporary Accommodation – households (including single people, couples, and families) in a night shelter, hostel, hotel, refuge, unsecured tenancies etc. For example, a woman and her children fleeing domestic abuse and living in a women's refuge, families who have lost their tenancy and can't find a new tenancy and are housed by the local authority in a temporary let.

'Sofa surfing' and other unstable housing such as intermittent hospital or prison stays. For example, a young person who has been asked to leave home by their parents and ends up sleeping at the homes of various friends, having to move on to new friends every few days.

Rough sleeping, squatting – people who have no home and are bedding down on the street, in their car or any other place not designed for habitation.

Who is affected or at risk?

The risk of becoming homeless is not equally distributed throughout the population. Some groups and communities are at much higher risk of homelessness than others. For example, we know that people from Black British/Black African/Black communities are overrepresented in homelessness services and are at greater risk than other communities.

Women fleeing domestic abuse are one of the groups most vulnerable to becoming homeless and make up at least 20% of households in temporary accommodation.

Those on benefits or low / insecure incomes are at risk, poverty is a critical factor and the tighter the local housing market, which generally means higher rents, the greater the impact of low incomes.

Unmet or undiagnosed mental and physical health needs can significantly increase a person's risk of homelessness.

A less deficit-based approach to thinking about the risk of homelessness is to focus on the reasons people **do not become homeless** even when there have been major setbacks or 'shocks' across their life course. These protective factors include the following:

- Sufficient income and resources
- Secure tenure / accommodation
- Strong and supportive social networks and family relationships
- Access to health care and support
- Knowing where to get help
- Having the capacity to navigate public service systems

Much of the Taskforce's work is focused on strengthening these protective factors to reduce the risk of homelessness.

In short, families and individuals whose protective factors have been weakened are more vulnerable to homelessness, while those whose protective factors are strengthened are less vulnerable.

If there is an identifiable intersection with someone or groups of people who are [protected in the Equality Act](#), when undertaking your HEIA and considering the potential impacts on homelessness of your proposed policy or practice change, please note this in the HEIA.

Why do people become homeless?

At a structural level, one of the most significant drivers of homelessness is the chronic shortage of affordable, good-quality housing, limiting people's ability to establish and maintain a stable, secure and safe home.

However, homelessness is rarely caused by a single factor. It is usually the result of a combination of structural pressures and individual circumstances, including reduced or weakened protective factors, such as:

- Insecure or low income
- Lack of affordable decent homes
- Isolation and weak or limited social networks
- Poor mental and physical health
- Experiencing domestic abuse

The consistent top three reasons for people seeking help with homelessness are:

1. Ending of a tenancy in the private rented sector

2. Relationship breakdown
3. Friends and family no longer able or willing to accommodate

So, when considering your HEIA you can reflect on the outcomes of your proposed changes in terms of the impact on protective factors, structural issues, inequalities and how these might be interacting.

What is the scale of the issue in the WMCA region?

The data that is currently collected relating to homelessness focuses on those households that are already homeless or are approaching their local authority for help. Clearly this does not give us any insight into those at risk of homelessness who either don't contact their local authority or those who are vulnerable but not at immediate risk.

High level data for the last quarter of 2025 suggests that in that period:

- Over 4,300 households approached their local authority for help
- Over 7,100 households were in temporary accommodation
- 158 people were rough sleeping (on the night of the autumn count)

For the most up to date data contact Homelessness@wmca.org.uk

The Positive Pathways Model

We suggest you read our briefing paper on the Positive Pathways Model ([positive-pathways-model-briefing-paper.pdf \(wmca.org.uk\)](#)) and you may also find the aforementioned paper on Designing out Homelessness ([designing-out-homelessness-briefing-paper.pdf \(wmca.org.uk\)](#)) helpful.

Questions to ask as part of your impact assessment:

Is our proposed change/policy/project going to:

- Strengthen or weaken people's protective factors?
- Which part of the Pathway are we likely to be impacting on?
- Can we maximise our impact at the start of the Pathway (Universal Prevention)?
- Are we targeting those most at risk?



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