



ProxyAddress[®]

Addressing Homelessness Survey

Findings of UK-wide Research
into Public Views, Perception, and
Experiences of Homelessness

22nd October 2020

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Summary

Context

To accompany the launch of its pilot in Lewisham, London, ProxyAddress has undertaken new UK-wide research. This study and its findings join the award-winning research already undertaken in the formation of ProxyAddress and serve to help us continually try to understand the challenges being faced by the UK's most vulnerable people.

Both the pilot and this research find themselves being undertaken in extraordinary times. Since the spread of COVID-19, dangerous precarity is being experienced by thousands as the economic impacts of the pandemic begin to take hold.

The unprecedented response by the UK Government in housing rough sleepers has been a silver lining amidst the tragedy of the crisis. However, it should not be forgotten that rough sleeping - while the most urgent situation within homelessness - also represents the minority of homeless cases.

Many thousands more find themselves in temporary accommodation or sofa surfing - and the problem looks set to grow. 500,000 households have already been pushed into rent arrears as a result of the economic impact of the pandemicⁱ with 45,000 households expected to be pushed into homelessness as a resultⁱⁱ. And the 1.1 million people in 'wider homelessness' (those who are at risk of becoming homeless or with unresolved housing needs)ⁱⁱⁱ also face a critical precipice.

If the Government is to meet its commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024^{iv}, it needs to not only provide relief to those who are already sleeping rough but also implement robust prevention measures to prevent those subject to other forms of homelessness - and those at risk of joining them - from being pushed into rough sleeping over the coming months.

Findings

This research for ProxyAddress provides vital new insight into the scope, impact, and perception of homelessness in the UK post-Covid-19 outbreak.

Key findings include:

- Homelessness is almost universally considered to be a serious issue with 1 in 4 people of the opinion that it is one of the most serious issues the country faces
- Around half of people think that little is being done to help prevent homelessness
- A majority of people underestimate the scale of homelessness in the UK today
- More than 1 in 20 people think it likely that they will experience homelessness in the next six months, rising to 1 in 10 for under-35s
- Around 1 in 12 people have been evicted at some point in their lives
- Homelessness is pervasive across the UK with 1 in 5 people knowing at least one person who has been homeless in the past 3 years, rising to 1 in 3 for under-25s
- If just 25% of those who would 'definitely consider' donating their address did so, ProxyAddress could provide every person facing homelessness in the UK with a stable address

Introduction

ProxyAddress

By 2018, the leading cause of the UK's growing homelessness problem had become the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy*. All too often, this milestone represents a watershed moment, introducing additional and unnecessary obstacles that prevent early recovery and can trigger a downward spiral into entrenchment and, with it, the development of serious issues relating to mental health or substance abuse.

The ultimate goal of any intervention into homelessness is to help an individual make the journey back to health, independence, and mainstream society. This requires access to support services, the avoidance of stigma, and the opportunity for recovery – in each case, a challenge best faced early.

Returning a homeless individual to stable housing is the ideal solution, but the current crisis of both public housing provision and private housing affordability ensures that any housing-based initiative able to cater to all types of homelessness will take some time to arrive. In the meantime, thousands of people are becoming homeless and entering the path to entrenchment. An interim solution is needed: an approach for tomorrow which can make use of existing infrastructure to bring about immediate change and help those in need before their needs escalate.

The ProxyAddress project aims to provide this early intervention by tackling a pivotal issue for those facing homelessness: the severance from key services following the loss of a permanent address. The system uses existing data to provide a stable 'proxy' address throughout this period of instability which can then be used to access services regardless of location or how often the user moves.

Methodology

New polling was commissioned by ProxyAddress and undertaken online by Kantar with fieldwork undertaken between 20-24 July 2020.

The survey was composed of 1,000 UK participants with a weighted sample, nationally representative across age, gender, and socio-economic group.

Gender

Male	48%
Female	52%

Age

18-24	11%
25-34	17%
35-54	33%
55-64	16%
65+	24%

Socio-Economic Groups

ABC1	54%
C2DE	46%

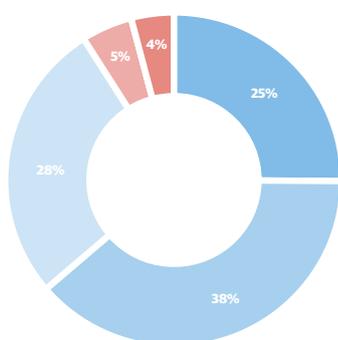
Rounding

Percentages shown in the charts and tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. They were worked out using unrounded figures.

Findings

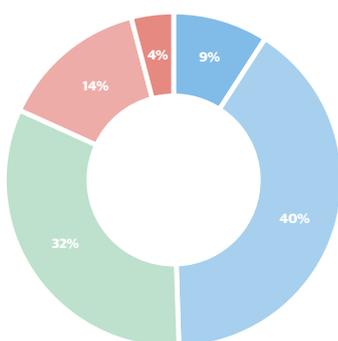
Views on the issue

Given the rise in homelessness over the past decade and more recent efforts to tackle homelessness in response to COVID-19 what is the public's attitude towards homelessness in the UK today?



Over 90% of people consider homelessness to be a serious issue

- It is extremely serious and one of the most important issue the country faces
- It is very serious, although not the most important issue
- It is quite serious, but there are other more pressing concerns
- It isn't too serious an issue
- It isn't a serious issue at all



Around half of people felt that 'little' or 'almost nothing' was being done to prevent homelessness

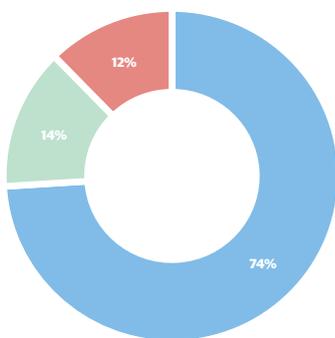
- Almost nothing is being done to prevent homelessness
- Little is being done to prevent homelessness
- A reasonable amount is being done to prevent homelessness
- A lot is being done to prevent homelessness
- Everything is being done that can be reasonably expected

The vast majority of the UK think that homelessness is a serious issue with 1 in 4 people considering it to be one of the most important issues the UK faces today. Despite this, nearly 1 in 10 people say that 'almost nothing' is being done to prevent it around half say that 'little' or 'almost nothing' is being done.

Perception of the issue

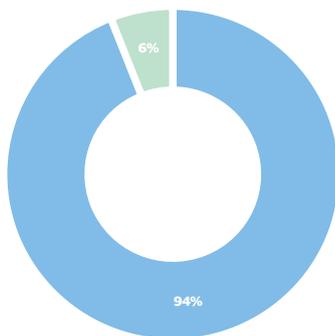
Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness but there are a wide range of situations that constitute homelessness, including staying in temporary accommodation and sofa-surfing. In all, it is estimated that there are around 320,000 people who are homeless in the UK today^{vi} with around 1.1 million people subject to 'wider homelessness'^{vii} - those who are not yet homeless but are at tangible risk of becoming homeless or who have unresolved housing needs

With the issue of homelessness deemed to be serious and with it thought that little is being done to prevent it, are these views based on a realistic estimation of the scale of homelessness or has recent coverage of efforts to house rough sleepers in response to COVID-19 inflated perception of the scale of the problem?



Three quarters of people underestimate the number of people who are homeless today

- Underestimate
- Correct
- Overestimate



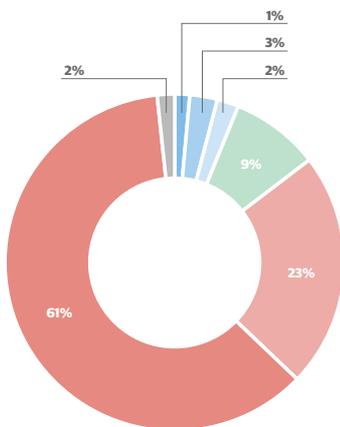
More than 9 out of 10 people underestimate the number of people at risk of homelessness

- Underestimate
- Correct

Despite the held view of homelessness as a serious issue and one which more needs more prevention, this viewpoint is actually based on an underestimation of the problem. Were the accurate numbers of those facing homelessness better known, views on the severity of the situation may be even stronger.

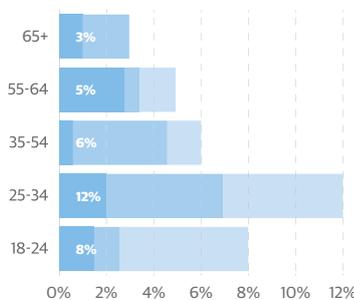
Personal experience & expectations

Getting accurate statistics on the number of people facing homelessness is inherently difficult. Transient populations, hidden types of homelessness, and stigma all contribute to the challenge. However, these statistics also suffer from another issue: they only provide a snapshot of how many people are experiencing homelessness at one time. With homelessness often bringing long-term physical and mental health consequences, a lifetime estimate is an important consideration to understanding the reach of its effects across the UK. With that in mind, how many people have experienced homelessness before or think they will soon?



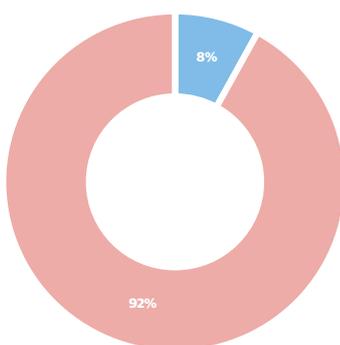
More than 1 in 20 people think it likely that they will be homeless within the next six months

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely or unlikely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely
- Prefer not to answer



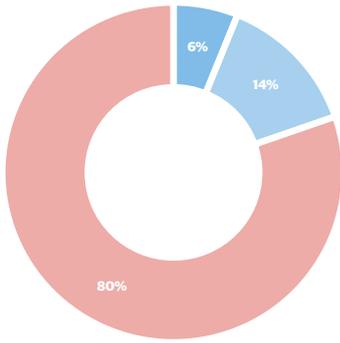
More than 1 in 10 people under 35 think it likely that they will be homeless within the next six months

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Quite likely



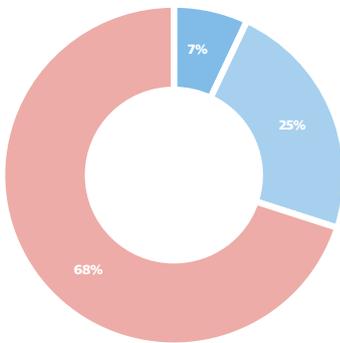
Around 1 in 12 people have experienced being evicted at some point in their lives

- Has experienced being evicted
- Has not experienced being evicted



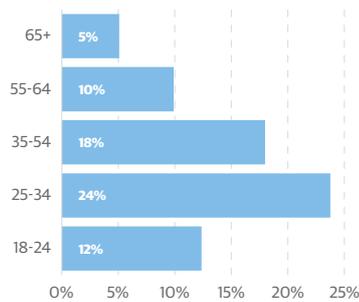
1 in 5 people know someone who has been homeless in the past 3 years

- Know more than one person who has been homeless in the past 3 years
- Know one person who has been homeless in the past 3 years
- Does not know someone who has been homeless in the past 3 years



A third of all under 25s know someone who has been homeless in the past 3 years

- Know more than one person who has been homeless in the past 3 years
- Know one person who has been homeless in the past 3 years
- Does not know someone who has been homeless in the past 3 years



Nearly 1 in 5 under the age of 55 have sofa surfed at some point in their lives

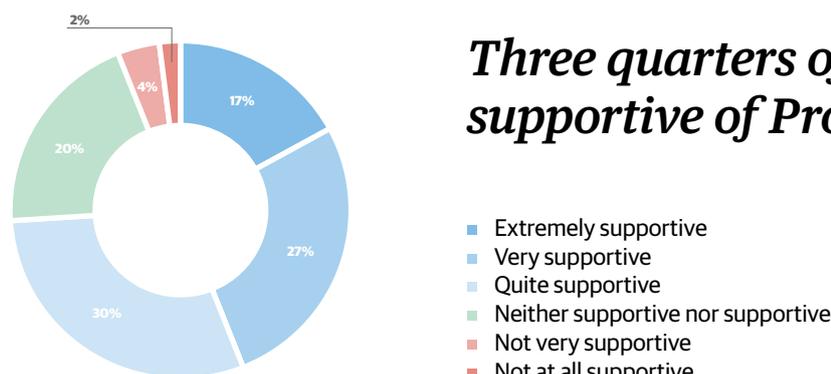
By moving to a lifetime estimate model, the pervasiveness of homelessness is clear. With around 1 in 12 having experienced eviction, 20% of people knowing someone who has been homeless recently, and 5% thinking it likely that they, too, will face homelessness soon, the burden of homelessness may be more widespread than previously thought.

Reaction to ProxyAddress

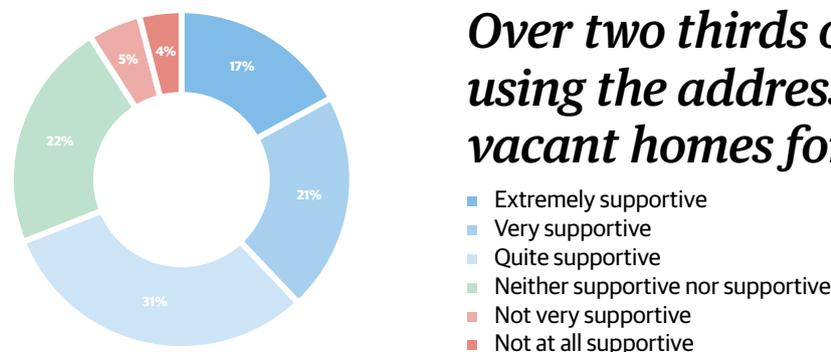
These findings show that the impact of homelessness is more pervasive than previously thought, with significant numbers of people carrying the burden of recent homelessness or expectations of facing it soon. Given the significant costs of relieving homelessness (each case of entrenched homelessness costs the public purse between £24-30,000 per year^{vii}, with over £1bn spent by local authorities on temporary accommodation last year in England alone^{ix}), innovative and cost-effective measures to enable early intervention are needed if more is to be done to prevent incidences of homelessness increasing further.

ProxyAddress uses duplicated address data to provide those facing homelessness with the necessary credentials to access vital services and support. By using existing resources, we enable local authorities to make early, cost-effective intervention before entrenchment takes place.

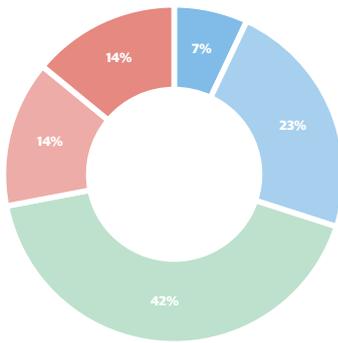
To gauge the public's reception to the initiative and the appetite for potential engagement, a short video explaining ProxyAddress was shown to survey participants ahead of being asked their views.



Three quarters of people are supportive of ProxyAddress



Over two thirds of people support using the addresses of long-term vacant homes for ProxyAddress



A third of people would consider donating their own address to ProxyAddress to help others

- Definitely consider
- Probably consider
- Not sure
- Probably not consider
- Definitely not consider

ProxyAddress appears to be broadly supported by the public as a method to prevent and relieve homelessness. By using only addresses provided with explicit consent from property owners including councils, housing associations, housing development construction sites, and private donations - including some of the 225,000 long-term vacant homes in England - there are more than enough potential ProxyAddresses for every individual facing homelessness in the UK today. Indeed, personal donations alone would provide a surplus of addresses - even if only 25% of those who would 'definitely consider' donating their address were to do so.

Endnotes:

- i. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/npto/pages/7372/attachments/original/1593549468/Gen_Rent_Recovery_plan_for_renters_July2020.pdf?1593549468
- ii. <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/homelessness-could-treble-without-coronavirus-home-retention-scheme-campaigners-tell-government-67013>
- iii. Bramley, G. for Crisis, *Housing supply requirements across Great Britain: for low income households and homeless people*, November 2018
- iv. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-new-action-to-eliminate-homelessness-and-rough-sleeping>
- v. House of Commons Briefing Paper No. 01164, *Statutory Homelessness in England*, 12 May 2020, p. 43
- vi. https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/320,000_people_in_britain_are_now_homeless_as_numbers_keep_rising
- vii. G. Bramley, *Housing Supply Requirements Across Great Britain for Low-Income Households and Homeless People*, May 2019
- viii. Department for Communities and Local Government, *'Evidence review of the costs of homelessness'*, August 2012, p. 4
- ix. https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/homelessness_crisis_costs_councils_over_1bn_in_just_one_year

Appendix

Survey questions

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness but there are a wide range of situations that are also described as homelessness. These include staying in temporary accommodation (including short-term stays at places such as night shelters, women's refuges, council-funded B&B's, and hostels) and so-called 'hidden homelessness' (staying on a family or friends' sofa to avoid sleeping rough).

1. First, which of these statements best represents your view on how serious an issue homelessness is in the UK?

1. It isn't a serious issue at all
2. It isn't too serious an issue
3. It is quite serious, but there are other more pressing concerns
4. It is very serious, although not the most important issue
5. It is extremely serious, and one of the most important issue the country faces

2. How many people do you think are currently homeless in the UK today, as defined above? You might not know, so please can you give us your best estimate.

1. Fewer than 50,000
2. 50,000 - 100,000
3. 100,000 - 300,000
4. 300,000 - 500,000
5. 500,000 - 1,000,000
6. More than 1,000,000

3. Which of the statements below best represents your views on how much is being done to prevent homelessness in the UK today?

1. Everything is being done that can be reasonably expected
2. A lot is being done to prevent homelessness
3. A reasonable amount is being done to prevent homelessness
4. Little is being done to prevent homelessness
5. Almost nothing is being done to prevent homelessness

4. With homelessness defined as above, do you know anyone who has been homeless in the last two or three years?

1. No
2. Yes, one person
3. Yes, more than one person

5. Which, if any of these, have you ever experienced? Please mention as many as apply.

1. Being evicted
2. Sleeping on a friend's or family's floor/sofa due to housing difficulty
3. Sleeping in council-allocated temporary accommodation
4. Sleeping rough
5. None of these
6. Prefer not to answer

6. For whatever reason, how likely do you think you are to experience homelessness in the next six months?

1. Not at all likely
2. Not very likely
3. Neither likely nor unlikely
4. Quite likely
5. Very likely
6. Extremely likely
7. Prefer not to answer

7. Separate from those who are already homeless, 'wider homelessness' refers to those who are not yet homeless but are at serious risk of becoming homeless or have unresolved housing needs. How many people do you think fall into this category today? Again, you might not know, so please can you give us your best estimate.

1. Fewer than 50,000
2. 50,000 - 100,000
3. 100,000 - 300,000
4. 300,000 - 500,000
5. 500,000 - 1,000,000
6. More than 1,000,000

At this point a short video, 'ProxyAddress in One Minute' was played to the participants

8. Overall how supportive are you of the ProxyAddress idea?

1. Not at all supportive
2. Not very supportive
3. Neither supportive nor unsupportive
4. Quite supportive
5. Very supportive
6. Extremely supportive

9. If it was not identified as yours - and there was no risk to the post, credit rating, or value of your property - would you consider offering your address to ProxyAddress to enable those facing homelessness to access support?

1. Definitely not consider
2. Probably not consider
3. Not sure
4. Probably consider
5. Definitely consider

10. How supportive are you of using the addresses of long-term empty homes (vacant for more than 6 months) as ProxyAddresses to enable those facing homelessness to access support?

1. Not at all supportive
2. Not very supportive
3. Neither supportive nor unsupportive
4. Quite supportive
5. Very supportive
6. Extremely supportive

Notes to editors

For videos, images, and press releases of ProxyAddress, please visit our Press Centre [here](#).

Press contact: Sarah Harrison

- Email: sarah@sarahharrisonpr.com
- Direct phone: +44 (0)07768372892

Chris Hildrey is available for interview.

- Website: www.proxyaddress.co.uk
- Twitter: [@chrishildrey](https://twitter.com/chrishildrey), [@proxyaddress](https://twitter.com/proxyaddress) Hashtag: #proxyaddress
- Email: hello@proxyaddress.co.uk
- Direct phone: +44 (0)207 459 4328

Notes to Editors

- Supporting information:
 - You can find answers to frequently asked questions about ProxyAddress [here](#).
 - You can watch the 'ProxyAddress in One Minute' introduction video [here](#).
 - You can read the award-winning white paper behind ProxyAddress [here](#).
- ProxyAddress organisation information:
 - ProxyAddress is a certified social enterprise with Social Enterprise UK
 - ProxyAddress was first imagined in 2017 by Chris Hildrey, an award-winning architect, while a Designer in Residence at the Design Museum
 - Working directly with those experiencing homelessness, Chris made his idea a reality – founding the social enterprise in 2018
 - ProxyAddress is headquartered in Clerkenwell, London
 - ProxyAddress is registered with the ICO in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act 2018
 - ProxyAddress is GDPR and Cyber Essentials certified under the IASME Governance standard
- ProxyAddress is guided by an advisory board consisting of:
 - Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor of London for Housing and Residential Development
 - Cat Drew, Chief Design Officer at Design Council
 - Chris Hancock, Head of Best Practice at Crisis
 - Elaine Draper, ex-Head of Customer Vulnerability and Accessibility at Barclays
 - Martin Coppack, Director of Fair by Design, Commissioner at Financial Inclusion Commission
 - Jeff Endean, Director at Cast Consultancy
- ProxyAddress will be participating in a pilot as part of the FCA's regulatory sandbox.
 - The regulatory sandbox allows firms to test innovative offerings in a live environment.
 - This pilot will test the ProxyAddress system's compliance with AML, KYC, and CFT regulations
 - More information on the FCA's regulatory sandbox can be found [here](#).
- ProxyAddress has been awarded the Royal Institute of British Architects' President's Medal for Research and a D&AD Impact Award for Humanitarian Aid. It has been named one of the Beazley Designs of the Year, one of Wired's '18 things that made the world a better place', a Big Issue Changemaker, a Social Good honouree at the Fast Company Innovation by Design Awards, and awarded an InnovateUK grant in support of its impact on the emerging and increasing needs of society during and following the pandemic.

With special thanks to Dave Phillips and Julian Bond for their assistance throughout this research