

Homelessness and COVID-19: an overview of equality considerations arising from COVID-19 and its impact on homelessness in Scotland

A framework to address the disproportionate risk and impact of COVID-19 amongst vulnerable communities

“The risk of homelessness, and the COVID-19 pandemic, is not distributed equally. Combined, the potential impact on people affected by homelessness was concerning and so we needed to set out clearly how to mitigate worst impacts.”



Maggie Brunjes, Chief Executive,
Homeless Network Scotland

What was the emerging need?

People experiencing homelessness already face many barriers to accessing health and social care services.

COVID-19 has resulted in a rapid change to the way services are being delivered. Social distancing measures and restrictions on face to face contact have meant many services have moved to new remote models of care and engagement and this has the potential to exacerbate health inequalities for the most vulnerable people in our communities.

The risks and impacts of COVID-19 do not affect everyone in the same way. Evidence around the effects and impacts of the virus clearly show a disproportionate impact to those already experiencing disadvantage. It is therefore important to consider the additional impact on the protected characteristics of people experiencing homelessness to ensure that we are able to design and deliver health, social care, housing and homeless services that are sensitive to the needs and rights of people accessing the services they require.

Homeless Network Scotland recognised the need for a structured approach to considering equalities needs for people experiencing homelessness and developed an equalities impact framework to be considered when planning, designing and delivering services.

Homeless Network Scotland

Homeless Network Scotland began life in the 1980's as the Glasgow Council for Single Homeless. The initial focus was to bring together statutory and voluntary organisations to address the accommodation and social care needs of single homeless people.

As rights for single people increased, the organisation widened its remit to support everyone affected by homelessness and changed its name to the Glasgow Homelessness Network. The network played a key role ensuring the lived experience of people was central to the delivery of Glasgow's hostel closure programme.

Since then, and as a member of the Scottish Governments Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group, the organisation has played a key role in helping to design a new approach to homelessness in Scotland and this nation wide remit was reflected in the renaming of the organisation to Homeless Network Scotland.

Today, Homeless Network Scotland works to create the policy and systems needed to resolve homelessness. As a network, it creates opportunities for people living and working with homelessness to connect, learn and act on it to help end it for good

Insights into how health and wellbeing needs are being met in an equitable way during COVID-19

What has been done to meet the emerging needs?

Homeless Network Scotland along with the support of a panel of expert reviewers from across the third sector, health, housing and academia have developed an **equality impact framework** to consider the additional impacts of COVID-19 on people experiencing homelessness in Scotland.

The framework is aimed at planners, policy officers and decision-makers within the Scottish Government, health, social care, housing, local authorities and the 3rd sector to help direct and signpost organisations and to act as a useful guide to inform the delivery of policy and services during and after the pandemic.

The framework identifies the additional impacts of COVID-19 and the mitigating actions organisations can take across all of the protected characteristics contained within the Equalities Act 2010 to ensure inclusiveness when accessing services:

- pregnancy and maternity
- religion/belief
- gender
- age
- socio-economic status
- disability
- LGBTQ+, and
- race.

The framework goes a step further and also provides guidance and information in relation to additional groups not included in the current protected characteristics that should equally be considered when planning for and delivering services:

- veterans
- people leaving prison
- people seeking asylum, and
- people who are being trafficked.

Want to find out more?

You can download a copy of the framework by visiting:

<https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Equalities-Homelessness-and-Covid-19-v270420-PUBLISHED.pdf>

If you are interested in exploring something similar in your area or to find out more, please get in touch: hcis.phh@nhs.net

Why was this important to produce and how can organisations use the framework to ensure the impacts of COVID-19 on different groups are considered?

It was important to produce this framework because homelessness, and the pandemic, have a disproportionate impact on people at the sharpest end of social and economic inequality. Combined, this created concerning potential conditions for people affected by homelessness in Scotland.

Careful consideration of the impacts on protected groups who also experience homelessness will help organisations provide services that are person centred and mindful of the needs of the people they are trying to serve. This can help to remove the historic barriers to accessing services previously experienced by people in our most vulnerable communities.

The framework can be used to inform how services are planned for and designed to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible for all. It outlines the priorities to be considered, the additional impacts particular groups may face due to COVID-19 and provides guidance on how organisations can mitigate against these additional impacts when planning and delivering services.

This framework assists local and national organisations to tailor and target decisions, actions and resources with due consideration to protected characteristics. It encourages and highlights how organisations can go beyond the first 'homeless label' to personalise responses that are sensitive to existing inequalities.

Several hundred downloads of the framework have been made from organisations in Scotland and beyond. It has fed into the Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee evidence sessions and the work of the Minister appointed action group on homelessness.



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