

cyrenians

**A MANIFESTO FOR
ENDING HOMELESSNESS
IN SCOTLAND**



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SCOTTISH GENERAL ELECTION - AND BEYOND

THE PROBLEM

Homelessness in Scotland is spiralling out of control. According to the latest statistics 38,674 adults and 15,046 children were assessed as homeless in 2024/25.

That's 0.9% of Scottish citizens, struggling to access one of the most fundamental of human needs. And that's just the people who are represented in the statistics – we know that many people, the 'hidden homeless', are falling through the cracks.

In 2024, the Scottish Government declared a housing emergency and since then we have begun to see additional – although not enough - funds assigned to building affordable housing.

While this will help address the housing emergency - we cannot build our way out of homelessness.

More housing does not eradicate the problem at its root because it is not always a lack of housing that has forced someone into homelessness.

A significant proportion of people who were made homeless cited relationship breakdown in their former home as the reason. Another significant number of people were made homeless after being discharged from hospital, prison, or care. These are people who are at a crossroads in their lives, perhaps without money or the support systems required to build themselves back up or repair relationships. It's at these points that people are at most risk.

Simply building more housing also does not account for the fact that 51% of the households made homeless last year had either one or more support needs, including problems with mental and physical health, and addiction. It can be very difficult to maintain a tenancy, if the housing you are assigned is not close to community or built with those support needs in mind.

These are all problems with tried and tested solutions, but without sustained investment in those solutions – in addition to, not instead of an emergency response – people will continue to present as homeless, face extended stays in temporary accommodation and face the decline in health and wellbeing that often follows being declared homeless.

We need more housing, but if we are truly to end homelessness it is vital that our next Government needs to take a 'Public Health Approach to Homelessness' by understanding, investing in, evaluating, and scaling up prevention services that we know work.

Homelessness is everyone's problem and has long lasting consequences. It is time we saw it as a public health issue – and acted accordingly.



WHO ARE WE?

Since the 1960s, Cyrenians has been working with people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the South East of Scotland. More recently, we have expanded our work across Scotland and have been working to influence local and national policy, drawing on our decades of experience and targeted participation with the people who use our services and staff.

As a result, this manifesto is entirely informed and driven by the 47 services we deliver for people either experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Our perspective is a unique one. The breadth of services we offer have helped us amass a broad understanding of the drivers of homelessness and how to combat them.



Our services can be split into three categories.

Prevention

For example, our cook school in Leith where people come together to build both community and crucial life skills.

Early Intervention

Like our Key to Potential service, that works with young people who have disengaged from school, supporting them towards a positive destination

Support into a home

Such as our supported safe accommodation for women feeling domestic abuse.

What every one of our services represents is an intervention on the often complex journey into, or out of, homelessness. On a daily basis, we see how the right support at the right time in the right place can disrupt any inevitability of homelessness.

With this in mind, we want to urge policy makers to understand homelessness is as much a symptom of poverty, missed opportunity and siloed decision-making, as it is a problem with a lack of housing. The following suggestions would bring Scotland closer to taking a 'public health approach' to homelessness prevention. This approach will shift focus from a crisis response to a preventative approach, from guesswork to data-driven interventions, and from segregated work patterns to collaborative cross-sector-thinking.

This has been written in reference to both our work in communities and with Public Health Scotland.

THE SOLUTION

The following are asks that we believe could make a significant difference. However it is important to note that a lot of what we have outlined is a version of what already has been agreed to in the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan - but those ideas urgently need implemented.

We strongly believe that Scotland does not need new solutions – what it needs is consistent investment in – and evaluation of – what we already know works.

The following asks are extrapolated from our own experiences running services which offer prevention, early intervention, and support into a home. These asks are also designed to move us closer to the goals contained within the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, which will be referenced alongside each ask.



A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO DATA

ASK: Build a fuller, more accurate picture of homelessness in Scotland by improving data collection methods.

COST: Variable.

Many of the people we work with, are not accounted for in the bi-annual statistics released by the Scottish Government. As it currently stands, people are only counted as part of the number of homeless presentations if they've had an assessment, which does not account for the 'hidden homeless' - students who are couch surfing for example.

Devising ways for this data to be logged, would better inform the action that needs to be taken and could be part of plans to 'improve the homelessness data collection' as outlined in the Ending Homelessness Together Action plan ([page 13](#)).

“ In order to solve homelessness, we first need to understand the nature of the problem. The Government can only allocate the appropriate resources if we have an accurate measure of the scale of demand and the current system does not give us sight of the extent of the emergency. The current figures on homelessness in Scotland are taken from the HL1 data, and that is based upon the completion of a homelessness assessment. But what about the people who, for whatever reason, do not complete an assessment?

We meet people every day through the delivery of Cyrenians services who fit into that category. There are people who are not assessed as homeless because there is no temporary accommodation. Then there are people who have housing that is not safe for them to occupy - perhaps because it needs repairs, or made accessible - so fall through the cracks. As a consequence of this broken system, we also work with people who have given up asking for support, as they feel there is little point in trying.

Until these people are properly recognised- they will continue to be let down by the systems designed to help them.

”
Mike Wright, Senior Service Manager at Cyrenians

A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING



ASK: Collectively build a longer-term approach to the monitoring and evaluation of homelessness prevention that enhances the understanding of its contribution and efficacy.

COST: We would expect 5% of the Prevention and Early Intervention fund to be dedicated to evaluation (see a 'Public Health Approach to Support').

A public health approach to any problem, relies heavily on evidence-based research. As it stands, many of the most effective prevention and early intervention services are run by small, community-based charities without resources to adequately evaluate the impact of what they are doing.

We ask that any grants allocated to organisations, must dedicate a percentage of that money to an evaluation team based within Central Government, who are able to oversee prevention projects and analyse impact on an ongoing basis.

Within The Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, it cites an ambition to 'test, learn from, and improve prevention services' ([page 28](#)). For this ambition to be realised, this work needs to be carried out over decades, not years. Building evaluation oversight into long term third sector grants – and ensuring guidance and resource is available for even the smallest organisations to do so – is instrumental to truly understanding the drivers of homelessness and the preventative measures that work.

Paul Johnston, CEO of Public Health Scotland, said:

“

A collective and shared approach to evaluating and measuring impact can ensure we make best use of existing data and evidence, reducing duplication and pressures on delivery organisations, and strengthen the evidence about which actions are most effective in helping to reduce homelessness in Scotland.

”



A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO SUPPORT



ASK: Set up a 'Prevention and Early Intervention Fund' which awards grants to services for a minimum of ten years.

COST: £50 million over 10 years.

People are at most risk of homelessness at transition points in their lives – whether that be when they are coming out of prison, being discharged from hospital, leaving school, breaking up with a partner, or completing rehab; it's at these points that people need support the most.

We are great champions of the prevention duties contained within the Housing Bill but these will only work if in every community, public sector workers have options of places to send people to. Services like mediation, financial advice, low cost counselling, and community projects where people can build relationships with like minded people.

We know there are projects like that all over Scotland – we just need to ensure that they are made available in every community and not at risk of disappearing as funding becomes scarce.

This ask would also bolster the 'gender-sensitive and targeted preventative pathways for the groups at particular risk of homelessness and rough sleeping' as identified in the Ending Homelessness Together Action plan ([page 28](#)).





Our Hospital In-Reach service - based in three hospitals in Edinburgh - works with hospital staff and patients to ensure that no one is discharged into homelessness. It is services like these that we hope can be replicated, learnt from, and scaled up, if this funding was made available.

Dr Robby Steel, Consultant Psychiatrist at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh said:

“In 20 years as a hospital consultant, Cyrenians Hospital In-Reach Service is the single most effective innovation I have seen. Sorting someone's health without sorting their homelessness is futile - their health will inevitably deteriorate. Everybody working in the hospital knows this and it is profoundly demoralising. Now we have a team who we can call - confident that they will use their knowledge, kindness and tenacity to solve the problems that previously went unsolved. Where previously I would discharge someone with a heavy heart, now I discharge them with optimism and the warm feeling of a job well done.”

A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO HOUSING



ASK:

Dedicate a proportion of Scotland's house building budget to community living and supported housing options tailored to the needs of those most vulnerable to homelessness.

COST:

For 10-20% of people, Rapid Re-Housing can only work with wrap around support. For this reason, we would like to see 10-20% of the Scottish Government's budget for social housing dedicated to supported living.

We wholeheartedly back calls for more social housing. However this alone will not solve the housing crisis. We know from the data, and through our decades of frontline work, that people who are in a 'transitional' point in their lives are most at risk of becoming homeless. This includes women leaving abusive relationships, young people coming out of care, and people leaving rehab or prison.

For many of these people, the otherwise proven 'Rapid Re-Housing' model is not the right option. Supported housing options tailored to people's specific experiences allow people the space to adapt to a new chapter in their life, gaining the confidence and inner stability they need to move forward into permanent accommodation.

For this reason, we would like to see options for community and supportive living more consistently available across Scotland.

By consistently funding supported accommodation, we will be actively working towards Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan's ambition to 'ensure there is a multi-agency approach to the allocation of specialist accommodation' ([page 47](#)).



Cyrenians runs accommodation - with wrap around support - for people in recovery, young people - many of whom are care experienced - and women leaving abusive relationships. This includes the Farm Community - which was set up in the 1960s.

One former resident credits their time there as instrumental to their current success:

“Before getting my tenancy now, I lived at the Farm – this is like a stepping stone to get you on the right path. They get you ready for step two...the positive is you build good relationships in there so the support is great....there was a sense of community there.”



TACKLING THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF HOMELESSNESS

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