

# The National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group Written Statement to APPG for Ending Homelessness Inquiry: Progress towards meeting the Government manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024

June 2022

## About our National Group

In November 2017 the first [National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group](#) was convened, led by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). This was the first-time representatives from major Homelessness, Housing and Domestic Abuse organisations formally met to discuss how to work together nationally to tackle domestic abuse and better connect these policy areas. The main aims of this group are to ensure that:

- The experience of survivors of domestic abuse is more prominent in the housing sector and helps shape improved and enhanced service delivery.
- Women and children can access secure housing and good quality services when experiencing domestic abuse; and
- Co-ordination exists between the housing and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sectors with regards to domestic abuse.

The group seeks to find consensus, share best practice, and influence policy and practice on domestic abuse and housing in England and devolved authorities. We recognise that those who have experienced domestic abuse or violence and other forms of abuse, have insight and knowledge that service providers can learn from to improve joined up multiagency working. It is for this reason that we aim to ensure survivors' perspectives are embedded in the effective planning, delivery, and monitoring of partnership initiatives.

The group has representatives from the domestic abuse, LGBT+, housing and homelessness sectors. It includes:

- Against Violence & Abuse (AVA)
- Agenda
- Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid
- Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
- Crisis
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England
- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)
- The DRIVE Partnership
- Galop
- Gentoo Housing Association
- Homes England
- Homeless Link
- Imkaan
- National Housing Federation (NHF)
- National Federation of ALMO's
- Peabody Housing Association
- Refuge
- Resolve ASB
- Respect
- SafeLives
- Shelter
- Single Homelessness Project
- Solace Women's Aid
- Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse
- St Mungo's
- Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA)
- Women's Aid Federation of England (Women's Aid)

We believe that the Government is unlikely to meet its manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024. There needs to be a recognition at the national and local level, through funding, policy and practice, that a one size fits all approach to ending rough sleeping for everyone won't end rough sleeping for women. Strategies and interventions to end rough sleeping must consider how women's needs are different, and crucially, how women are disproportionately impacted by domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). [A 2018 evidence review by the University of York](#) found that "experience of domestic violence and abuse is near-universal among women who become homeless".

In response to ongoing risks to their safety, women will often take steps to hide themselves while sleeping rough which means they are under-represented in official rough sleeping counts and data. It is also important to recognise the ways in which experiences of violence and abuse intertwine with other disadvantages in the lives of women who sleep rough, such as poor mental health, homelessness, substance/alcohol misuse and losing children to the care system, creating additional barriers to accessing services and support that meets their needs. [Many women who sleep rough are part of a couple](#); a lack of accommodation pathways and options for rough sleeping couples entrenches rough sleeping for both and increases risk for survivors when domestic abuse is an issue. [Perpetrators of abuse](#) are also often placed at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. A lack of safe, risk-managed accommodation pathways for perpetrators increases the risk of further abuse and exploitation for the survivor and further entrenches homelessness and rough sleeping for the perpetrator.

Ultimately, women sleeping rough lack access to meaningful interventions and the services and support that they need. Gender responsive and trauma informed services and support that can address women's experiences of domestic abuse and VAWG are vital if women are to come in off the streets and stay off the streets. We recognise that the government has taken some important and impactful action to tackle rough sleeping. The 'Everyone In' initiative was effective in the way it enabled women to access accommodation quickly. The open access nature of the scheme, and the low threshold for paperwork and assessments, worked well for women who would have struggled to access accommodation previously through existing pathways. [Some women only hotels](#) were set up and stand out as examples of good practice, however, women only hotel provision was limited and could have been increased by clearer guidance/requirements from government. Greater considerations could also have been made around safety when housing women in mixed gender hotels. Please see the [Kerslake Report](#) for further evidence around this.

Best practice for women sleeping rough at a local, regional, and national level looks like strong partnerships between the women's specialist sector and homelessness providers. [The Westminster VAWG Housing First project](#) is one such example of this; strong partnerships between the local authority, women's specialist and homelessness providers have seen promising outcomes for the women the project supports. A gendered approach to Housing First, one that is designed to address the impact of domestic abuse and VAWG in women's lives, can play an important role in ending rough sleeping for women experiencing long term or recurrent homelessness, however it is not a solution to rough sleeping in and of itself. Housing First will meet the needs of a relatively small cohort of women and must sit alongside other gender responsive approaches for those with lower needs. The [Navigator model](#) funded by the RSI funding is a good example of such an initiative; although not gender specific the support is more targeted and flexible than traditional floating support or 'tenancy sustainment team' models. Navigator teams should have access to an enhanced training offer around domestic abuse, VAWG and women's experiences of trauma to enable them to work with women effectively.

Two other examples of best practice are the DLUHC funded [Respite Rooms](#), where these are delivered in partnership between the homelessness and women's specialist sectors, and the Wiser project. [The Wiser project](#) is a consortium partnership between homelessness and women's specialist services which provides flexible, assertive outreach support that is proven to work well for women experiencing VAWG, rough sleeping and multiple disadvantage. Research has shown that women experience recurrent homelessness; another important measure to ending rough sleeping for women is therefore to ensure that mixed supported accommodation settings are gender responsive and trauma informed in their approach. Some examples of good practice around this include [Keeping Us Safer](#), [Women's Development Unit women's spaces guidelines](#) and the [Safe Space approach](#).

The National Group recommends the following changes to funding, policy and practice at national and local level, in order to effectively tackle women's rough sleeping:

- To end rough sleeping as a whole, specific investment is needed to work with women or they will remain on the streets or keep returning to the streets. The Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding provides local authorities with an excellent opportunity to tackle women's rough sleeping, but **there is a need to ringfence a proportion of this funding and provide clear minimum standards for safe women's provision to ensure that this happens in every local area**. This is essential to deliver the safeguards that women survivors of violence and abuse require – including women-only accommodation, the provision of ongoing specialist support and additional security measures for safety.
- **We would recommend that DLUHC make ““rough sleeping for women should be rare, brief and non-recurrent” a sub indicator of the government's rough sleeping strategy.** Recognising women as a specific cohort within the wider rough sleeping cohort at a government level will ensure that women's rough sleeping is adequately explored and resourced within the larger attempt to end rough sleeping.
- Women sleep rough differently in comparison to men, in different places and at different times. Research has shown that women experience long term or recurrent homelessness in larger numbers than first thought and may cycle in and out of rough sleeping, interspersed with periods living in informal, unsafe, and hidden places to stay. As a starting point, more must be done to **quantify the scale of and respond to women's hidden homelessness**.

**We would recommend a gender-informed count/census to begin to form a better data picture of women's rough sleeping and support the development of gender responsive approaches to rough sleeping.** In London there is current work taking place to conduct a women's rough sleeping census and we recommend that this is something that should be replicated in other areas of the country.

For evidence please see:

- [Women and Rough Sleeping, A critical review of current research and methodology](#) – J Bretherton and N Pleace.
- Women's Development Unit [strategy](#) and [evidence report](#)

- **Longer term funding is also needed** to end homelessness for this recurrently homeless cohort of women if we are to support women to move away from rough sleeping for good. If the needs of this cohort are not met through specific action, women will remain at high risk of rough sleeping and will likely return to the streets in future. This is also evidenced by the fact that women are over-represented in the T1000 cohort. Please see:
  - [Women's Homelessness in Camden: Improving data, strategy and outcomes](#) – Bretherton, J and Pleace, N.
  
- There are certain cohorts of women who will need specific, targeted support to enable them to move away from the streets.
  - Women who have children removed from their care – there is no statutory duty to housing or emotional support after children have been removed. This should be recognised and referenced as a vulnerability. Please see [AVA's 'Staying Mum' research](#).
  - Women with no recourse to public funds are amongst the most vulnerable rough sleepers within our society. Radical policy change is needed to safeguard this group, avert destitution, and prevent the need to sleep rough.
  - Women leaving prison are highly vulnerable to homelessness and rough sleeping. A recent [report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons](#) showed that 65% of women were released from HMP Bronzefield without suitable accommodation. A [February 2020 report by the Independent Monitoring Boards](#) found that a quarter of women surveyed lost their home upon entry to prison, and 12% had already been homeless on entry to prison; 45% of women surveyed said they had no address to go to on release. Most women in prison are serving sentences of under six months, and most are for non-violent offences (more statistics available from [Women in Prison](#)). The Government must explore and pursue community alternatives to prison, to prevent women from losing their accommodation in the first place and from being trapped in a cycle of homelessness or rough sleeping.
  - Girls and young women, and their workers, have regularly raised lack of specific age-appropriate single-sex housing options through Agenda's [Girls Speak project](#) as a reason for many young women sofa-surfing and sleeping in risky arrangements.

For further information, please contact Louisa Steele at Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse at [l.steele@standingtogether.org.uk](mailto:l.steele@standingtogether.org.uk)