

COVID-19 and rough sleepers: a randomised control trial to evaluate models of housing and support to reduce infection and homelessness

BACKGROUND

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, 15,000 rough sleepers have now been offered self-contained temporary accommodation, mainly in hotels ([MHCLG, 2020](#)). This approach, which has involved the decanting of hostels, shelters and similar shared provision for rough sleepers, is a short-term response.

As lockdown ends, decisions will need to be taken about how to house former rough sleepers in line with the UK government's commitment to prevent people from going back to the streets – including, potentially, through the re-opening of shelter-type accommodation ([MHCLG, 2020](#)). Existing temporary accommodation with shared facilities might make it impossible for people to comply with the UK government's social distancing advice. So these decisions will impact on the risk of a second wave of infection from COVID-19 and possibly any mutations.

At the same time, our understanding of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of current rehousing models in reducing and managing future waves of COVID-19 is limited - we've no previous experience to learn from. There is also limited understanding of the potential for alternative more 'housing-led' models (such as Rapid Rehousing and Housing First in the UK context) (Miller et al 2020) to improve health and housing outcomes for this population.

While this knowledge gap exists, there is a danger that external and operational pressures on LAs may lead to former rough sleepers being returned to unsuitable accommodation – making future outbreaks of COVID-19 more likely, as well as failing to make an impact on the broader social and economic consequences of rough sleeping.

ABOUT THE STUDY

In response to this challenge, [The Centre for Homelessness Impact](#) (CHI) has teamed up with an academic trials team to conduct the first ever randomised controlled trial in the UK to evaluate the relative effectiveness and cost effectiveness of settled accommodation in preventing COVID-19 infection and reducing housing instability for people who have been sleeping rough during, or immediately prior to, the pandemic.

Our primary objective is to investigate whether settled housing prevents COVID-19 infection and reduces housing instability compared to usual practice through a randomised controlled trial (RCT). Our secondary objectives are to conduct a process evaluation to examine whether settled

housing is delivered as intended, works as hypothesized, is scalable and sustainable. We will conduct an economic evaluation to examine cost-effectiveness.

The project would be for 18-24 months initially, with interim findings shared 3, 6 and 12 months into the project to ensure it can inform policy developments. We envisage the study will kick off in July 2020.

The study will be initially implemented across six LAs, including London/ Metropolitan Boroughs and District/unitary authorities. Eligibility to participate will be limited to people approaching the LA for assistance who are homeless and in single-person households. Participants will be assessed by LA staff to determine which form of intervention accommodation is most appropriate to their needs and to secure the best fit between these needs and housing available.