

# Parliamentary Briefing: homelessness and speech and language therapy

## Key Messages for MPs

- People experiencing homelessness are significantly more likely to have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), but these are often unrecognised and unsupported.
- Communication disability, difficulty, or difference can be a hidden barrier to accessing support, including housing, healthcare, employment, and justice services, perpetuating cycles of homelessness.
- Despite NICE recognising SLCN in its guidance on homelessness, most services are not commissioned to provide speech and language therapy. Embedding speech and language therapists (SLTs) in homelessness services improves engagement, health outcomes, employability, and social reintegration, while reducing long-term costs to health, housing, and justice services.
- Homelessness is not just rough sleeping; it includes hidden homelessness affecting families and children, where SLCN can compound disadvantage.

## Why This Matters

- Communication is fundamental to securing housing, health care, benefits, and employment. Without support, people experiencing homelessness with SLCN are at greater risk of exclusion, poor health outcomes, and exploitation.
- Investing in speech and language therapy in homelessness settings supports the Core20PLUS5<sup>1</sup> focus on health inequalities and reduces the costs of repeat homelessness, A&E use, and criminal justice involvement.
- Ensuring communication needs are systematically identified and supported would support more equitable services

## The Case for Action

### 1. The issue

Shelter estimates that at least 309,000 people were homeless in England at the end of 2023; rough sleepers represent less than 5% of this population.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/national-healthcare-inequalities-improvement-programme/core20plus5/>

- Children experiencing homelessness are disproportionately affected by mental health and behavioural difficulties linked to chronic stress, instability, and overlapping support needs.<sup>2</sup>
- People experiencing homelessness are 17% more likely to have SLCN than the general population.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Barriers to Inclusion**

- Many people do not meet the criteria for NHS speech and language therapy services due to lack of diagnosis, substance use, or mental health conditions.
- Outreach and hostel staff rarely have training in SLCN, leading to unrecognised needs and inaccessible services.
- Written materials, consent forms, and capacity assessments are rarely adapted to people's literacy or communication skills.

## **3. Workforce and Commissioning Gaps**

- Few homelessness settings have embedded speech and language therapists despite evidence from youth justice and mental health services showing positive outcomes.
- There is limited research and data collection on SLCN and homelessness; key databases such as CHAIN (the Combined Homelessness and Information Network, run by St Mungo's for the Greater London Authority) do not consistently capture SLCN status.

## **Recommendations**

### **Require Statutory Identification and Data Collection**

- Mandate that homelessness services and local authorities record SLCN status in data systems such as CHAIN to enable targeted support, and meet Equality Act requirements.

### **Fund and Commission Speech and Language Therapy in Homelessness Settings**

- Allocate dedicated funding to employ speech and language therapists in hostels, outreach teams, and day centres to assess, provide therapy, and train staff.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2025). *Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping: Supported housing*. <https://www.gov.uk/...supported-housing>

<sup>3</sup> Andrews L, Botting N. The speech, language and communication needs of rough sleepers in London. *Int J Lang Commun Disord*. 2020 Nov;55(6):917-935. doi: 10.1111/1460-6984.12572. Epub 2020 Sep 10. PMID: 32909664.

- Integrate speech and language therapists into multidisciplinary teams implementing NICE NG214 on integrated health and social care for people experiencing homelessness.

### **Train and Upskill the Workforce**

- Provide training for outreach staff, hostel staff, and database managers on recognising and supporting SLCN.
- Adapt written materials and capacity assessments to meet the Accessible Information Standard and Mental Capacity Act duties.

### **Invest in Early and Preventative Support for Children and Families**

- Ensure that children in temporary accommodation have access to speech and language therapy assessment and support, recognising the hidden nature of child homelessness.

### **Support Research and Evaluation**

- Fund studies to map SLCN prevalence and outcomes in homelessness populations to inform effective service design.

### **Leverage Cross-Sector Lessons**

- Draw on successful speech and language therapy models in youth justice and mental health to design and sustain speech and language therapy provision in homelessness settings.

**For more information, contact:** [elissa.cregan@rcslt.org](mailto:elissa.cregan@rcslt.org)