

Homelessness is not just a housing problem

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The editorial in this month's *PLoS Medicine* examines how the health needs of the homeless are underrepresented in the medical literature, leading to the failure of health and social systems to address them. At a time when charities warn that the risk of homelessness is closer for many people than has previously been assumed, the editorial argues that "imaginative and collaborative solutions from across the whole spectrum of health and social care providers are needed."

As discussed in the editorial, a systematic review published in *PLoS Medicine* earlier this month ([doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0050225](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0050225)) found that homeless people in the US, UK, mainland Europe and Australia have substantially higher rates of mental health problems than the general population.

However, as a perspective alongside the research noted ([doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0050237](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0050237)), there are few studies like these in the medical literature, and despite community concern about homelessness, there is little documentation and surveillance of the complex health needs of the homeless. The editorial examines some of the problems that prevent these needs from being addressed by society as a whole.

The charity Crisis warns that homelessness is a far wider phenomenon than those who sleep on the streets, estimating that in England there may be 400,000 "hidden homeless" adults at any one time in addition to the 120,000 households officially recognized as homeless under the legal definition in 2006. "The global financial crisis has reminded everyone

how precarious a seemingly secure lifestyle can be," says the editorial. Instead of considering the needs of the homeless a problem on the fringe of society, it argues that "political will at the highest level is needed to put them back into them mainstream political and therefore health and social agenda."

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