

Annual Frontline Worker Survey 2019: Full Report

“The most extensive survey of frontline workers supporting people experiencing homelessness across the UK.”



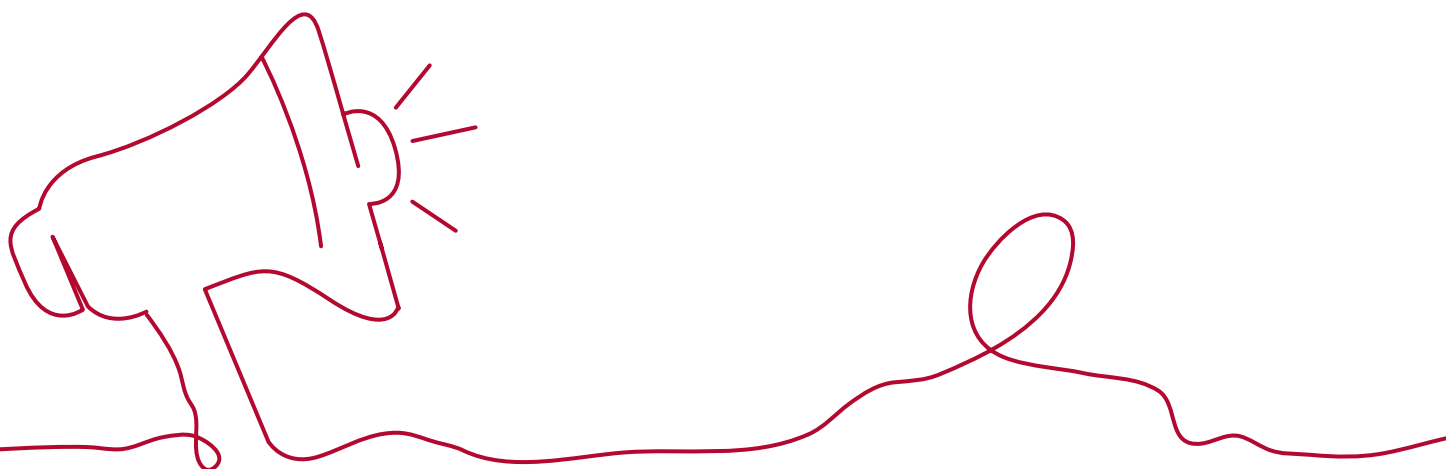
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St Martin's Frontline Network

frontlinenetwork.org.uk

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the 1,435 frontline workers who took the time to complete this survey and give their expert insights.

At the Frontline Network, it is not about us. It is about you as a frontline worker. That is why it is vital to gather your ideas and expertise within this annual survey.

We would also like to thank those who contributed their time to develop this report: members of the Frontline Network Steering Group, Frontline Network Partners, and the team at St Martin's Charity.

Also, we give our thanks to Crisis, Shelter, Trussell Trust, and other frontline organisations who promoted the survey across the UK and who contributed to the questions.

Thank you to those who reviewed this survey and to the frontline workers who individually contributed some of case studies cited.

Lastly, we would like to thank the Oak Foundation for their support of the Frontline Network.

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Introduction

The Frontline Worker Survey 2019 is the most extensive survey of frontline staff working with people experiencing homelessness across the UK. It builds on our 2017 & 2018 surveys. 1,435 frontline workers responded to this year's survey, which to our knowledge, makes this report the largest collection of frontline workers' views across the United Kingdom.

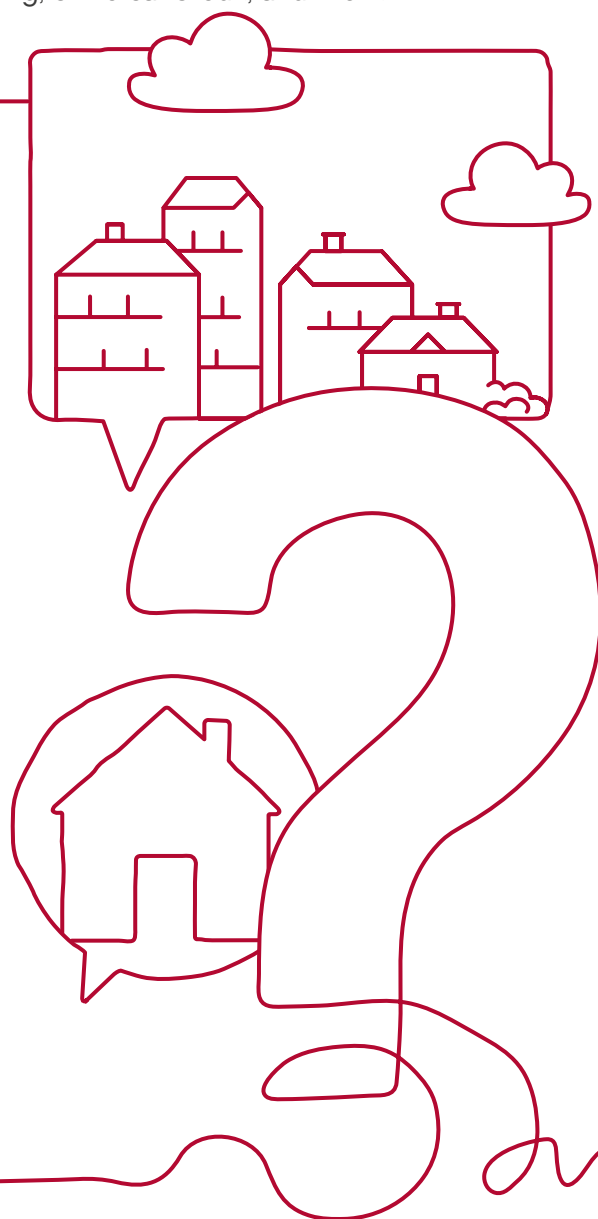
By providing a snapshot of the working life of frontline workers, we aim to highlight the importance of listening to frontline workers when considering responses to homelessness and to securing the long-term housing that is needed for many experiencing homelessness.

We stress the importance of investing in frontline workers, if these responses are to be successfully implemented. We hope this 2019 survey report allows you to understand the significant challenges facing people experiencing homelessness, and the many hurdles frontline workers must overcome to prevent homelessness.

In the 2019 survey, we asked forty-nine questions; primarily looking at how access to accommodation and specialist support services have changed over the last year on the frontline. We asked questions which reflect priority areas, such as frontline worker wellbeing, Universal Credit, and Brexit.

COVID-19:

- Since collecting the feedback to our Frontline Worker Survey 2019, the homelessness sector has had to learn how to support individuals experiencing homelessness during a global pandemic. At this time, we have seen frontline workers across the UK go into isolation and an increased number of face-to-face services close due to public health concerns.
- We have seen an incredible collaborative effort on the frontline - from statutory services to the voluntary sector - to accommodate thousands of people who are rough sleeping. We welcome the collaborative efforts that have been taken to accommodate people, and now more than ever it is important that the voices of those experiencing homelessness and the frontline workers that support them are listened to as we try to ensure the efforts achieved over the past months are not lost as we start to recover from the pandemic crisis.
- Please note the 2019 survey captured frontline worker responses within pre-COVID-19 conditions. You can find out how we responded to the urgent and evolving support needs of frontline workers during this time within our COVID-19 postscript.



About the Frontline Network

We believe many of the practical solutions – and systemic barriers – to preventing homelessness can be identified and overcome on the frontline. That is why in 2016 the St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity set up the Frontline Network.

Our work aims to build relationships, share best practice, develop solutions, and communicate the experience and views of frontline workers. The Frontline Network supports workers from the public, statutory and voluntary sectors working on the frontline with people experiencing homelessness.

We work with over 1,900 frontline workers from across the UK to network and share best practice. We provide funding to support the people frontline workers are supporting, as well as their own professional development.

We offer a range of funding, the largest of which is our Vicar's Relief Fund (VRF), which gives out small grants, through frontline workers, to support people experiencing homelessness. In 2019, the VRF gave out 3,769 grants to help people access accommodation, and 1,289 grants to help prevent eviction.

We believe frontline workers have a first-hand insight into how to prevent homelessness. And yet, with cumulative and time-sensitive workloads, it is often difficult to feedback frontline expertise. That is why we run an annual frontline worker survey, to understand the practical and systemic barriers to preventing homelessness, and to seek the best solutions to accessing accommodation and preventing homelessness.

For more information about how we work at the Frontline Network, visit our website today:
www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk

Definitions

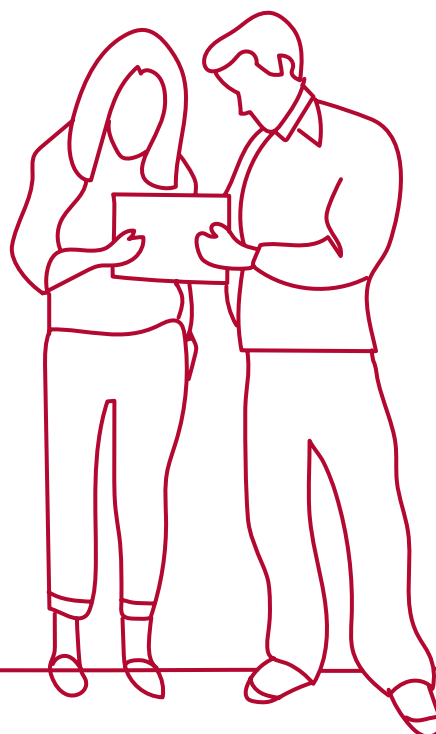
In the 2019 survey, we adopted the Homeless Monitor's definition of homelessness¹, which recognises its complex and multifaceted character. Homelessness can be categorised from rough sleeping on the street, to being deemed legally homeless under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

We classify homelessness as including those individuals living in hostels, shelters, and temporary supported accommodation, as well as hidden homelessness - sofa-surfers, and others living insecurely in sheds or cars who are often not captured in official statistics.

We define a frontline worker as anyone working in a paid position with people experiencing homelessness in any of the scenarios above – from outreach workers to probation workers to welfare benefits advisers.

In the 2019 survey report, we have considered to what extent key barriers and solutions to preventing homelessness are created within the different four nations of the United Kingdom. Within the post-devolution context, we recognise that there are divergent homelessness policies and laws across the UK.

1. The homelessness monitor: England 2019: www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor

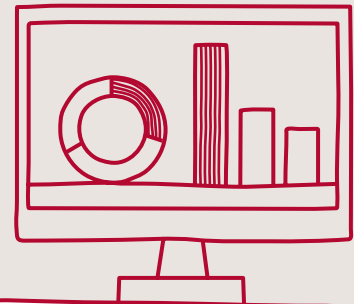


Key Findings

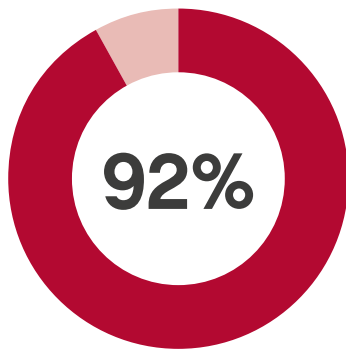
In the 2019 frontline worker survey, frontline workers have highlighted many systemic barriers to preventing homelessness. Despite the passion, expertise, and daily efforts of frontline workers to overcome these barriers, we see many instances where the experience of homelessness is structural, sustained, and predictable.

And yet, frontline workers have highlighted many practical solutions and examples to preventing homelessness. In this report, frontline workers show us how, with access to affordable accommodation and specialist support, they can make homelessness as preventable as it is predictable.

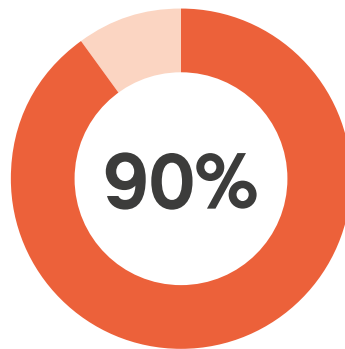
Please find below the key statistics within each section of the 2019 survey report. The following sections will then provide a more detailed analysis of each area of frontline work:



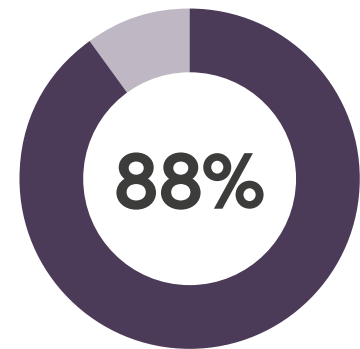
Access to Accommodation



of frontline workers thought that it was either difficult or very difficult to access specialist accommodation for their clients.

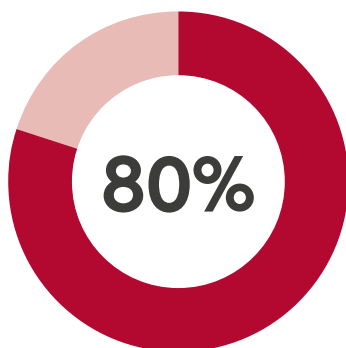


of frontline workers found it difficult/very difficult to find private landlords willing to let to LHA claimants.

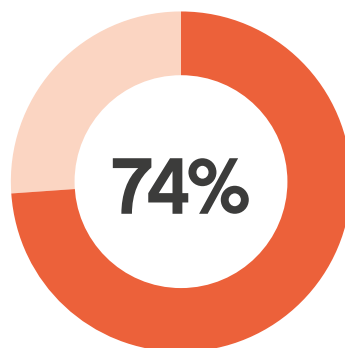


of frontline workers thought that access to private rented accommodation was difficult or very difficult.

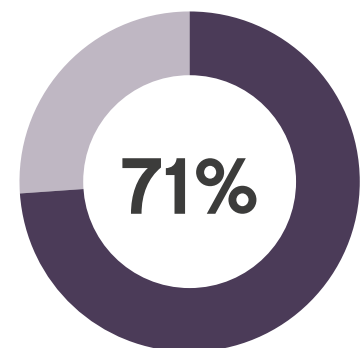
Access to Support Services



of frontline workers felt it has become harder/much harder to get mental health support for their clients than the previous year.

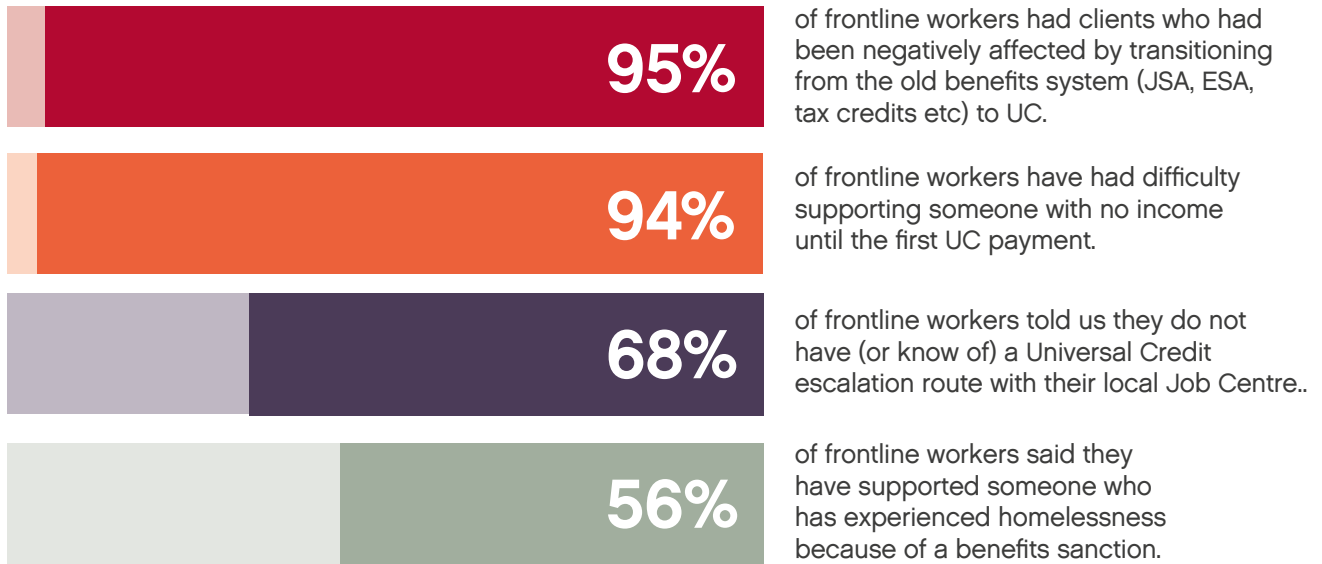


of frontline workers found it harder/much harder to access Government provided emergency/ in-crisis grants: i.e. cash.

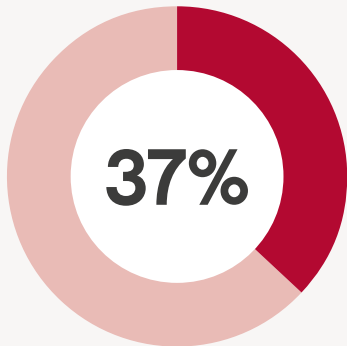


of frontline workers found accessing benefits for their clients harder or much harder than the previous year.

Universal Credit



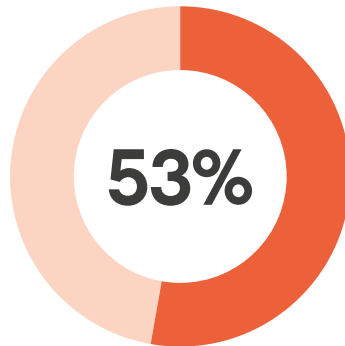
Frontline Worker Wellbeing



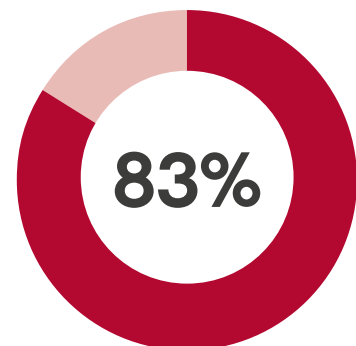
of frontline workers stated they have enough time to do their job effectively (4% decrease from last year's survey).

Frontline workers in the United Kingdom have on average
29.8 cases at any one time.

Access to Health Support

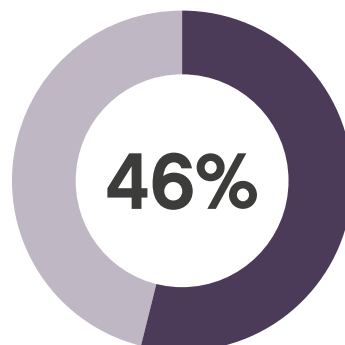


of frontline workers said it was difficult/very difficult to access health services for their clients.



of frontline workers found problems accessing mental health support for individuals in primary care (GP consultations and prescriptions).

Access to Migrant Homelessness Support



of frontline workers supported someone who has experienced homelessness because of their immigration status.

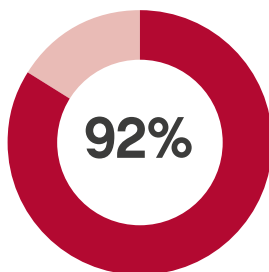
Access to Accommodation

In the 2019 Frontline Worker survey, we asked frontline workers how easy it was to access accommodation for the people they support. Feedback confirms the extreme difficulty people experiencing homelessness face in trying to access suitable accommodation – with frontline workers describing how all types of accommodation are more difficult to access, compared with last year’s figures:

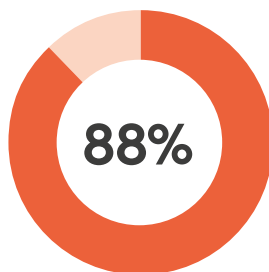


In a year where we have seen significant policy developments across the four nations, frontline workers have not yet stated significant positive changes in their overall ability to prevent homelessness. This year’s results show there is a growing need for greater supplies of accommodation options and additional funding to tackle some of the financial barriers to accessing accommodation – such as a deposit.

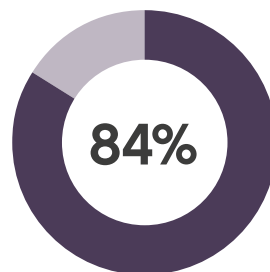
Key Findings



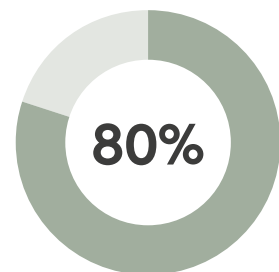
thought that it was difficult or very difficult to access specialist accommodation for their clients.



thought that access to private rented accommodation was difficult or very difficult (3% increase from 2018).



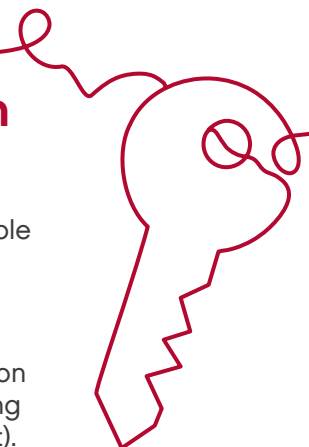
thought that access to social housing was difficult or very difficult (2% increase from 2018).



thought that it was difficult or very difficult to access emergency accommodation for their clients.

Key barriers to accessing accommodation as cited by Frontline Workers

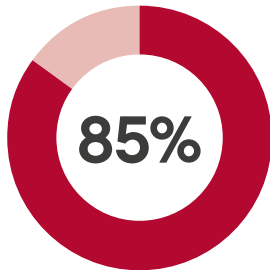
- A lack of social housing stock and specialist accommodation to move people into long-term accommodation.
- Support for those with multiple and complex needs is still limited when accessing supported accommodation.
- Guarantor requirement - increased need for a guarantor with the introduction of Universal Credit. Greater difficulty in sourcing a guarantor when accessing accommodation in the private rent sector (and in receipt of housing benefit).



Case Study

Accessing Accommodation within the LHA rate

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) limits the amount of housing benefit which tenants in the private sector can claim to help pay their rent.



85% of frontline workers told us they found it difficult or very difficult to access accommodation for the people they support within the Local Housing Allowance rate.



This marks a 5% increase

from our results in 2018. LHA rates have been frozen since 2016. As this year's results show, frontline workers have found it increasingly difficult to access accommodation within the LHA rate:



“Finding good landlords who will rent to LHA tenants is difficult, and the top up rent above the LHA make most of these properties prohibitive”.

Frontline Worker, 2019

“The LHA rate needs to be higher to help people on low incomes. Landlords now have a bigger option of getting rid of people on benefit and rent to people who can afford the higher rents”.

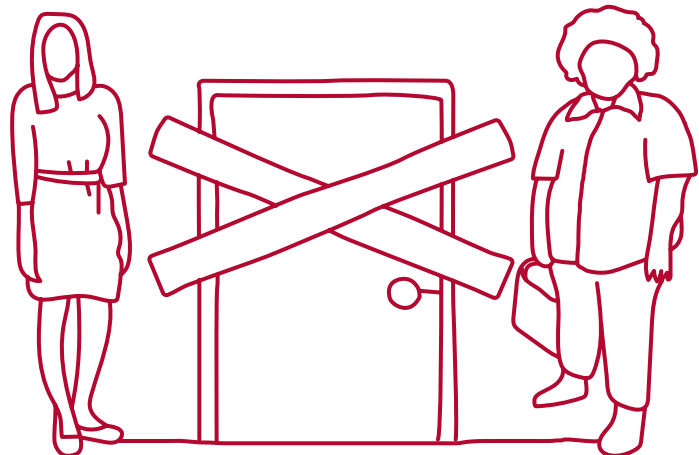
Frontline Worker, 2019

“In the last 3 years of seeing many clients, I am yet to meet a single client who has private rented property that is fully covered by the LHA”.

Frontline Worker, 2019

Since January 2012, most people under 35 have only been entitled to the shared accommodation rate of LHA. Indeed, our survey's qualitative data suggests that people under 35 are now especially difficult to find accommodation for.

Overall, 90% of frontline workers told us that it had become difficult or very difficult to find private landlords willing to let to LHA claimants.



What Works? Frontline Worker Recommendations for Accessing Accommodation

Frontline workers have described how targeted and sustained funding for specialist accommodation has had a positive impact on finding housing for individuals experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Here are some positive examples which frontline workers told us have had a significant impact on their ability to prevent homelessness:

Creating Partnerships with statutory services:

“Our local authority housing (Sheffield City Council) now attend Job Centre to ensure UC Housing Element gets sorted from the start”.

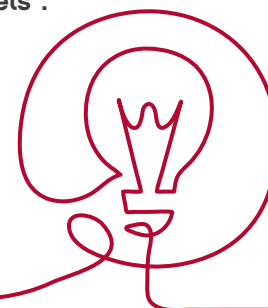
“I got myself invited to join the council's panel meetings for the social housing umbrella organisation so that I could argue my client's cases in person”.

Targeted local provision:

“Pilot of Housing First has started in Liverpool city region for the more complex & harder to accommodate. Funding secured for early intervention workers to focus on prevention work”.

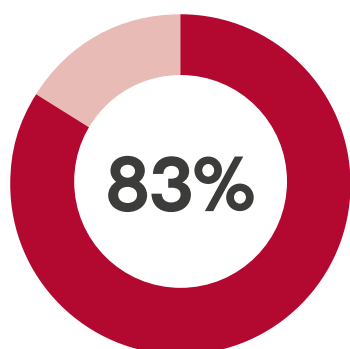
“A 'Complex Needs Bed' provision has been set up with our borough, which is a set number of bed spaces

within a 24-hour staffed accommodation provision – ran by ‘Emerging Futures’. This has helped relieve the initial issue of rough sleeping, by enabling us to take complex / dual diagnosis individuals from rough sleeping on the streets”.



Overview

How the four nations compare



of frontline workers in the UK told us it is either very difficult or difficult to access accommodation for the people they support.

This average was slightly lower in Scotland (69%), the same in England (83%), and slightly higher in Wales (87%). Frontline workers in Northern

Ireland expressed the greatest concern, with 92% saying it is either very difficult or difficult to access accommodation for the people they support.

Across the UK, 69% of frontline workers said that their caseload has either increased or greatly increased in the last year. This was the case among only 59% of Scottish frontline workers, compared to 86% in Northern Ireland, 77% in Wales, and 68% in England.

50% of frontline workers in Scotland stated their national Government's commitment to preventing homelessness has either increased or greatly increased in 2019. This figure

was just 36% in Wales, 32% in England, and 11% in Northern Ireland.

In England, 45% of frontline workers told us that the resources available to prevent homelessness have either decreased or greatly decreased in 2019. This compares with 57% in Northern Ireland, 45% in Wales, and 36% in Scotland.

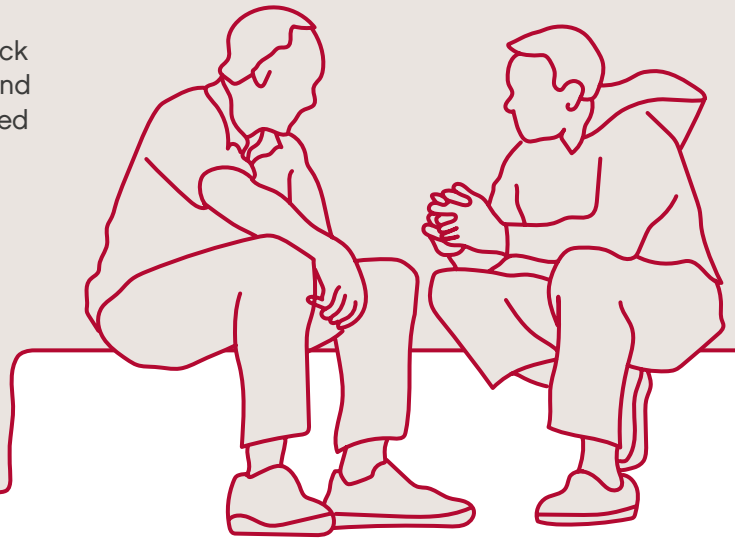
49% of frontline workers in England told us that their awareness of the latest housing legislation has either increased or greatly increased in 2019, whereas it was 43% in Northern Ireland, 44% in Wales, and 53% in Scotland.

Access to Support Services

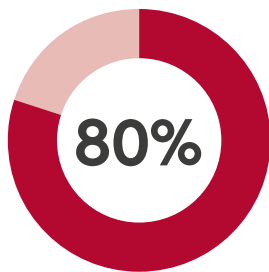
Preventing homelessness is often more than simply accessing accommodation, and frontline workers recognise the individuals they work with often have a range of complex needs, which require specialist support.

Frontline workers have already told us there is a lack of access to (and an under-supply of) affordable and specialist housing. However, in this section we asked frontline workers how they felt about accessing specialist support services, and whether it has become easier or harder to access different types of support.

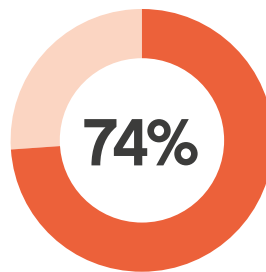
We also asked if there were any additional areas of support that were particularly difficult to access. Here is what we found:



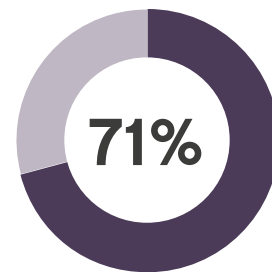
Key Results



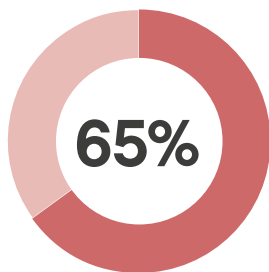
of frontline workers felt it has become harder/much harder to get support for mental health issues.



of frontline workers found it harder/much harder to access Government provided emergency/ in-crisis grants: i.e. cash.



of frontline workers found accessing support around benefits issues harder or much harder.



frontline workers found it harder/much harder to access multiple/complex needs support services.



Frontline workers told us that mental health, benefits, and Government provided emergency/in crisis grants (either in cash or in-kind only) were among the top five types of support that had got 'harder or much harder' to access across every region of the UK in the past year. In Wales, 'specialist legal advice' also featured in the top 5 most difficult types of support to access, whereas in Scotland 54% of frontline workers found support for individuals with 'Multiple/Complex Needs' harder or much harder to access. In Northern Ireland, 68% of frontline workers stated support for 'Drug Dependency Issues' was harder/much harder to access than in the previous year.

Long waiting lists and high thresholds for mental health support were stated as the main barriers to accessing support.

Frontline workers have described the great difficulty in accessing support for benefits-related issues, and believe this barrier often leads to extended periods of financial hardship for the people they support. This problem is made worse by difficulties in accessing financial crisis support. Indeed, nearly 3 in 4 (74%) frontline workers say they found it harder to access local authority in-crisis grants (e.g. cash) this year. Moreover, nearly 7 in 10 (68%) frontline workers said that 'in-kind only' crisis grants from the local authority (e.g. white goods) were harder to access.

Barriers to support: What you told us

Every day frontline workers overcome structural & practical barriers, to help individuals access specialist support, and to prevent them from experiencing homelessness.

Frontline workers describe instances where structural barriers result in the experience of homelessness becoming a sustained and predictable one for the people they support.

Here are some of the most prevalent examples from frontline workers within our 2019 Frontline Worker Survey open comment section:



“Access to mental health services remains the biggest problem especially those with dual diagnosis”.

“Grants for Household items when people who are in extreme hardship are housed are becoming increasingly rare to access”.

“Finding it increasingly difficult to access support for individuals with lower MH needs – many no longer meet the criteria for support to be provided”.

“Local mental health services do not work with dual diagnosis clients meaning a large portion of my client base is unable to access mental health services”.

“The cuts to Legal Aid have driven the overwhelming demand for our service – benefits advice and request for foodbank/energy vouchers”.

Overview

Overall, there has been widespread difficulty expressed in accessing financial in-crisis support.

In this context, it is not surprising that many frontline workers told us they are turning to support from foodbank services to resolve their client's in-crisis issues. A minority of frontline workers, but still the largest percentage describing a service as "easier to access" this year, was the 20% of frontline workers who stated that accessing support for food crises had become slightly/much easier in the past year.

Finding support for people with complex needs was cited as difficult. This lack of support is consistent with levels seen in last year's report, especially for those with a dual diagnosis of substance misuse and experiencing mental health issues

Where Government funding has been made a priority in addressing key barriers, frontline workers have described key positive changes - such as mental health services for individuals with dual diagnosis. Where this collaboration is yet to happen, frontline workers have suggested further support and additional funding should be a priority.

What Works? Frontline Worker Recommendations for Accessing Support Services

When we asked frontline workers what examples they have of a solution to accessing a specialist support for the people they work with, we received over six hundred and fifty suggested examples. Below are some of the most frequently cited recommendations:

Collaborative working with statutory services:

"Multi-agency working is the key to achieve positive outcome for supporting clients with any issues - (e.g. district councils to actively engage with agencies)".

"Getting DWP, Housing Options, Turning Point etc having surgeries in local homeless charities has worked for us. Instead of not attending soulless buildings they can access their support in somewhere they feel safe, i.e. the charity they access".

"Our organisation has set up scheduled days when work coaches come into our organisation to support our service users with their benefit enquiries. All partnership working helps to enhance the lives of our services users and provides direct and efficient communication between agencies".

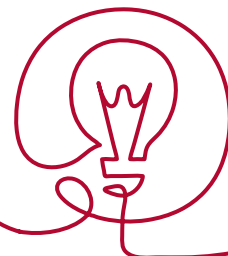
"We have a much better relationship with DWP since the inception of the Help to Claim service".

Positive Impact of Government Funding:

"We now have access to a Government funded Mental Health Practitioner which allows us very quick access into MH support services. We work more closely with partner agencies due to the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding. Increased funding has had a very positive impact on homelessness in Ipswich".

Joined Up Working:

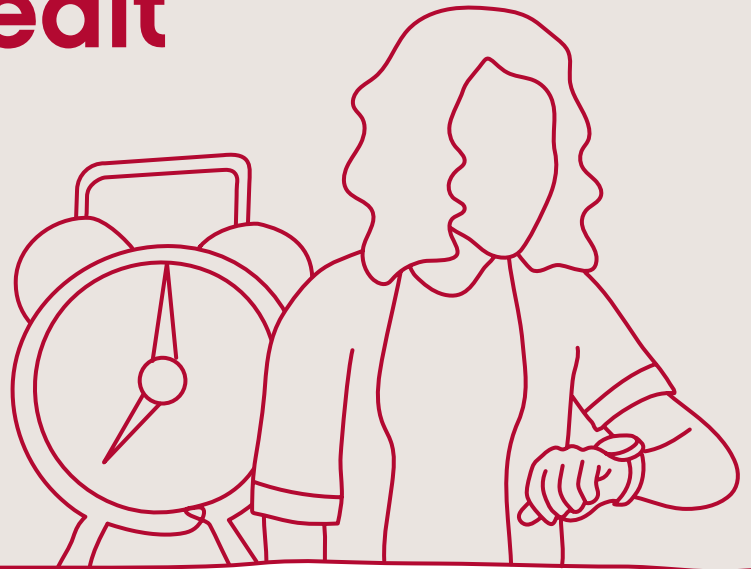
"[In relation to] dual diagnosis, The Beacon Trust are an excellent example of how one team treating a number of issues can help. i.e. mental health, alcohol, and gambling. None of the individual teams would assist and all tried to pass on to another department with the person getting worse in the meantime".



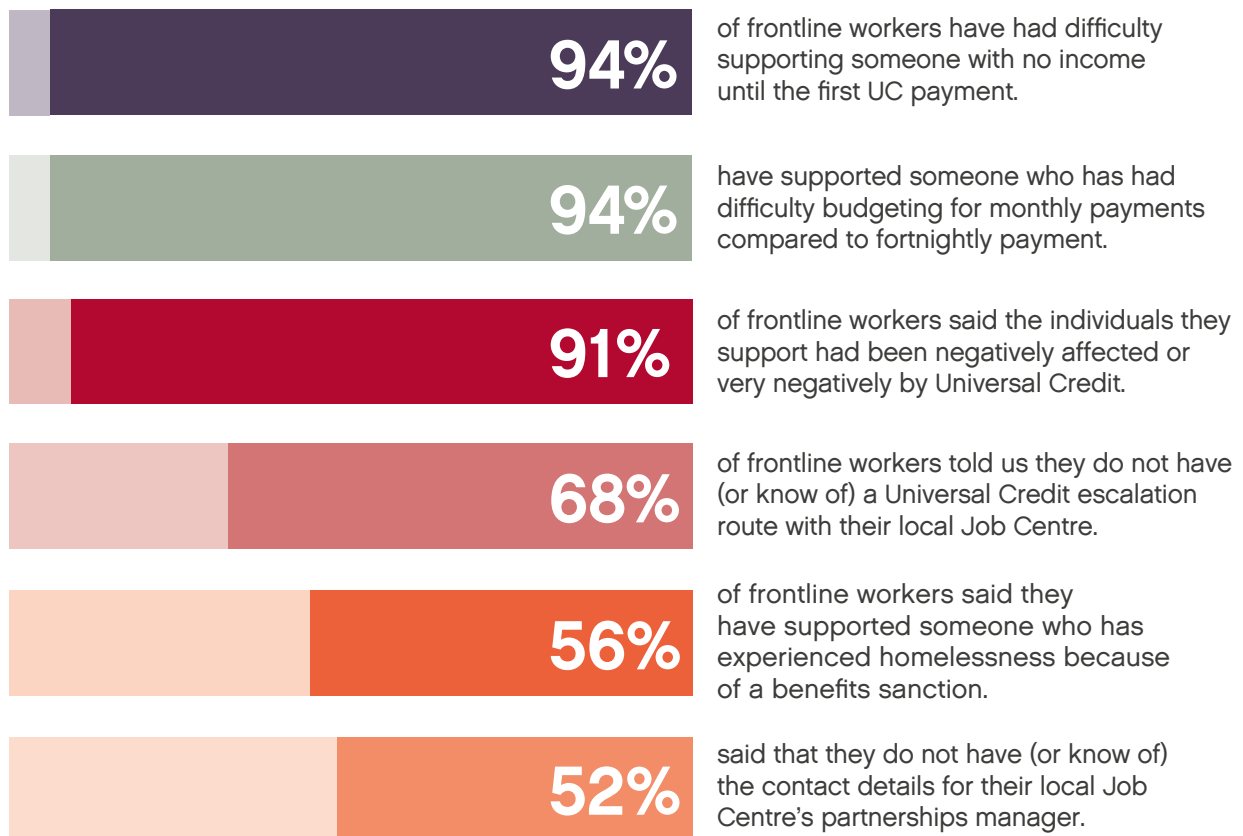
Universal Credit

Over the past year, frontline workers described how it has become harder to access benefit support, with Universal Credit (UC) cited as a major factor.

In this section, we explore how Government welfare reform and benefit support impacts directly on frontline worker's ability to prevent homelessness and access the necessary welfare support for the individuals they support:



Key Findings



There has been an 11% increase from last year's report in the number of frontline workers who cite the people they work with as having been negatively or very negatively impacted by UC.

Frontline workers have said that it is taking longer to support Universal Credit claims, and that this is having a significant impact on frontline workers' workloads. Often, extra support is required for individuals who are struggling with digital access, and for those who do not have any income until their first UC payment.

Overview

What Frontline Workers Told us During the Universal Credit Rollout

Frontline workers have articulated an overwhelmingly negative experience of Universal Credit. This reflects our findings from last year's frontline worker survey.

Frontline workers have expressed concern over the serious financial impacts of a delayed Universal Credit claim, and that individuals must wait at least five weeks for a first payment – some even longer. This is leaving many without enough money to cover the basics.

Despite these barriers, we have listened to frontline workers' expert feedback, in relation to developing local initiatives to mitigate the impact of Universal Credit. We have seen some fantastic examples of frontline homelessness services becoming more integrated with statutory services, to try to better support individuals making a Universal Credit claim.

Case Study

Developing Partnerships with Statutory Services

In the 2018 Frontline Worker Survey, we asked frontline workers if they had developed partnerships in their local area to try and overcome barriers to supporting people with Universal Credit. In this year's 2019 Frontline Worker Survey, we are pleased to see over 600 frontline workers detail examples of how they have developed partnerships which have positively impacted their ability to support individuals with Universal Credit claims:



“We have an ongoing relationship with the DWP, and I provide a weekly drop in at the job centre in my area. Building relationships over the last 4 years has significantly reduced the issues most experience with UC and it the job centre. As a result, I have not had anyone I am working with sanctioned in the last year”.

“We have a good relationship with Basildon Job Centre. There are two Community Engagement Officers jointly funded by Basildon Council and the DWP who have supported us a lot, as well as a good relationship with a couple of Work Coaches who go above and beyond to help”.

“I have contact emails and phone numbers for all DWP managers in Warwickshire, they are very helpful. We also have regular training from the head UC trainer from the Midlands. We know how to open an account without a bank account and how to get around no ID now. Untidy tenancies cause a lot of reoccurring issues every month. Up to 40% deductions are crippling most the people we support”.

“Through various networking events and building a relationship with local Job Centre Plus staff, it has been possible to assist the people we work with through this difficult process”.

“We now run a weekly drop in at the jobcentre and are forging strong links with the jobcentre staff who refer clients to our drop in and come in and ask us questions/for advice”.

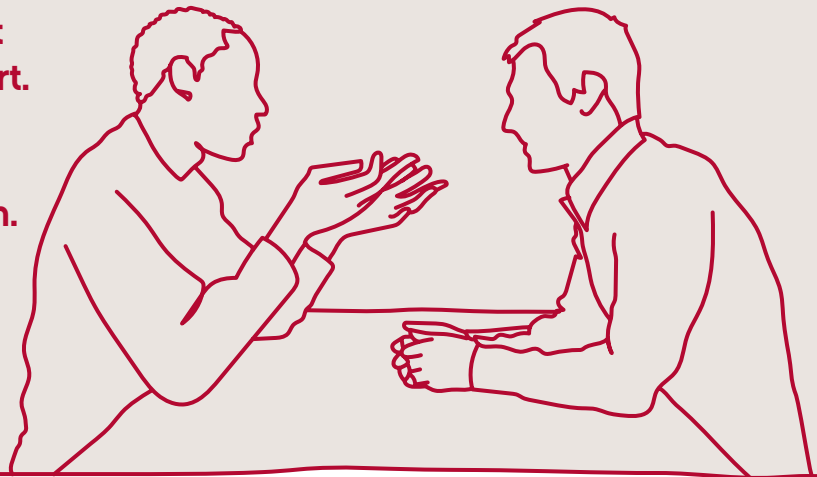
Frontline Workers, 2019



Frontline Worker Wellbeing

Frontline workers have told us earlier in the 2019 Frontline Worker Survey that mental health is a common support need for the individuals they support. We also know that the wellbeing of frontline workers is essential to frontline work and support provision.

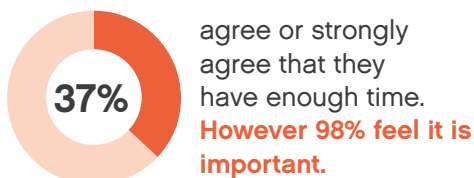
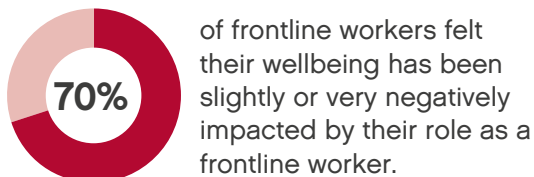
In this section we consider how frontline worker wellbeing impacts their ability to support people experiencing homelessness, and the key elements to protecting frontline worker wellbeing:



Key Findings

This year's 2019 Frontline Worker Survey results have told us that frontline workers in the United Kingdom have on average 29.8 cases at one time:

Having enough time to do your job effectively:

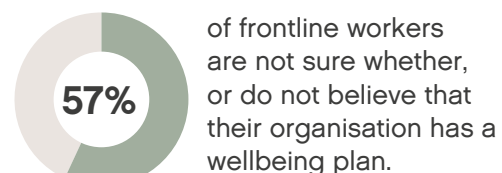
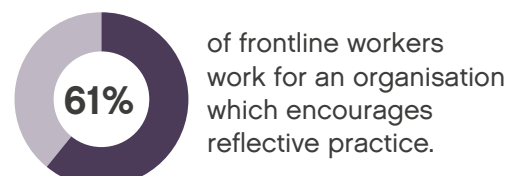
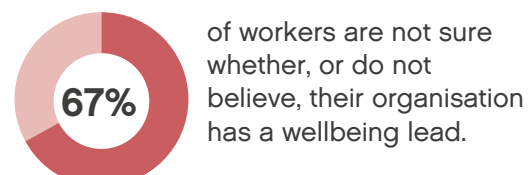
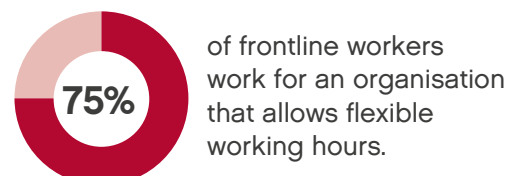


Feeling supported by your manager:



Organisational Support

We asked frontline workers how they are supported by their organisation:



Overview

Only 37% of frontline workers feel secure about the future of their job.

Just under two in three (64%) frontline workers believe they have supportive supervision in their role. However, a significant number of frontline workers (83%) believe they are supported in their job by their colleagues.

While this year's results revealed a strong sense of teamwork, we also see that frontline workers wellbeing is still negatively impacted by time pressures, job insecurity and lack of supervision, themes which reflect similar findings as our findings in the 2018 Frontline Worker Survey Report.

Good Working Practice

We asked frontline workers if they have any good examples of working practice that positively impacts their wellbeing. Here is what we were told:

“Team/Management meetings, sharing good practices and trying to implement streamlined case management systems”.

“Boundaried working, good time management, not taking it home in my mind”.

“Regular reflective practice sessions with a psychologist”.

“Open door policy with manager, effective communication within the whole team being offered development opportunities”.

“Mental Health first aiders to refer to within the office and discuss concerns especially after a bad day”.

What Works? Frontline Worker Recommendations for Improving Frontline Worker Wellbeing

We asked frontline workers what would be most helpful to improving their wellbeing. Frontline workers recommended changes to management culture, alongside better pay and conditions. Some mentioned changes to their daily work routines to support wellbeing, such as exercise and access to supervision/reflective practice.

Here some of the most prominent themes that frontline workers told us improves their wellbeing:

Being valued:

“Being appreciated for the work we do, for all the years of experience we bring to the role, feel encouraged and thanked for our hard work. Feeling like we are being listened to and communicated with. To cover multiple staff sickness instead of piling on the work on those who are still standing and making them stressed and stretched too thin”

Reducing workload:

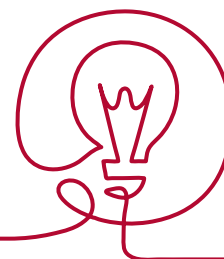
“Having less clients that I need to support. Having dedicated staff to manage the day to day running of the hostel and allow support staff just to support clients”.

Regular supervision:

“Regular clinical supervision; opportunity to be reflective about case work/ good & bad practice examples and as a positive learning experience. Management empathy is missing; trauma responsive work is not valued despite platitudes towards this and stating that “we are trauma informed”.

Access to training:

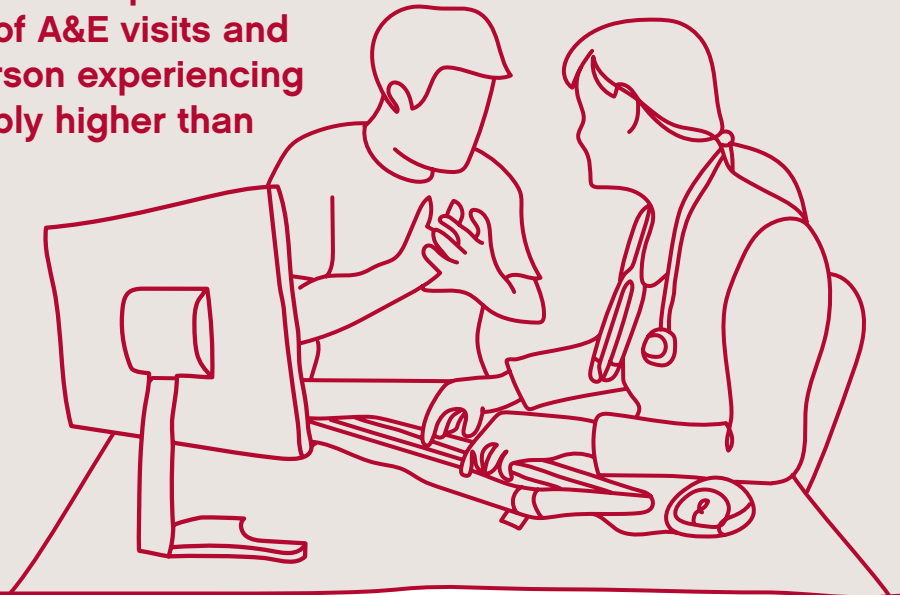
“Working in third sector I appreciate that it would be difficult to make a promotion chain to limitations of funding, however it often feels that current staff are not enabled to improve on skills to advance to other positions”.



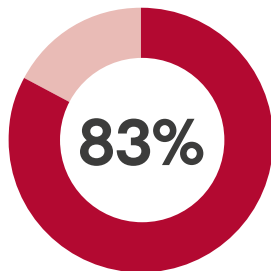
Access to Health Support

People experiencing homelessness are significantly more likely to have experienced some form of mental ill health or physical health problem. We also know that the number of A&E visits and hospital admissions per person experiencing homelessness is considerably higher than for the general public¹.

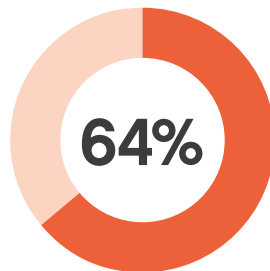
In this section of the 2019 Frontline Worker Report we explore frontline worker access to health support for the individuals they support. We also asked to what extent homelessness and health services are designed and integrated to address the homelessness and health outcomes of the people they support:



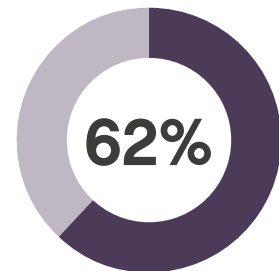
Key Findings



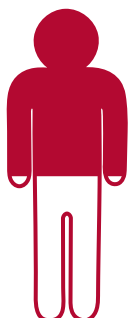
83% of frontline workers found problems accessing mental health support for individuals in primary care (GP consultations and prescriptions).



64% described that not having ID was a barrier to accessing primary care.



62% found that being asked for proof of address was an issue in accessing primary care.



Over half of frontline workers (53%) found it difficult or very difficult to access health services for their clients.



1. What drives the high health care costs of the homeless? Housing First Europe, Housing Studies, 2017 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2017.1280777>

Overview

Frontline workers have described a strong interdependence between health and homelessness. It has also been stated that primary care services need to be more aware of their duty to support the specific needs of patients experiencing homelessness, and housing and health need to be more joined with a specific pathway.

Where this collaboration is happening, frontline workers can support individuals from co-occurring mental health and substance misuse conditions. However, overall frontline workers have described how primary healthcare remains difficult or very difficult to access for the people they support.



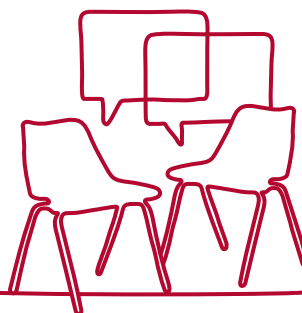
Other barriers to people being able to access primary or secondary health services?



Appointment availability.



Limited local NHS dental provision.



Limited offer of support by crisis mental health services when having consumed alcohol or substances.



Fear or distrust of services due to previous experiences. Fear of being reported due to immigration status.



Support for people with multiple and complex needs was frequently cited as inadequate, especially for those with a dual diagnosis of substance misuse, alcohol dependency and mental health issues. Many describe how the entry thresholds for primary healthcare support can restrict those trying to access the service – until they have addressed their substance misuse.

Frontline workers described how long waiting times and travelling difficulties are both challenges to accessing healthcare. Other barriers include a lack of access to the digital resources necessary to making an appointment.

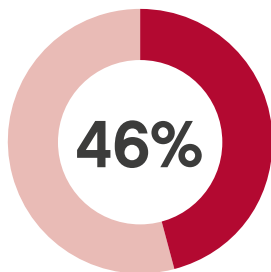
Migrant Homelessness

In the Frontline Worker Survey 2019, frontline workers described how similar the supports needs of migrants are to other individuals experiencing homelessness. However, their immigration status often excludes them from many vital support services. Not having access to public funds can result in not being able to cover housing costs, or access critical health or social care services. Frontline workers told us these restrictions are significant precursors to experiencing sustained periods of homelessness for migrants.

In this section, we ask frontline workers how support services across the United Kingdom are responding to the support needs of migrants. We ask to what extent frontline workers are supporting individuals who have experienced homelessness because of their immigration status.



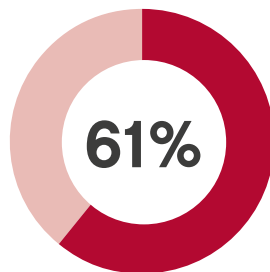
Key Findings



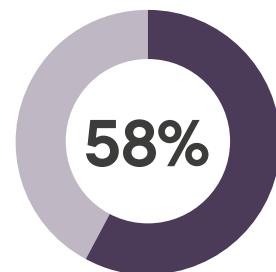
of frontline workers are supporting someone who has experienced homelessness because of their immigration status.



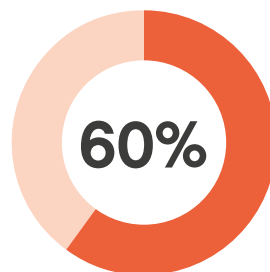
Barriers to preventing homelessness



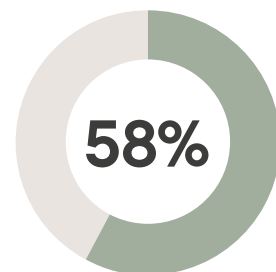
of frontline workers identified that language was a barrier to preventing homelessness for the migrant individuals they support.



stated that accessing social housing was a barrier for the migrants experiencing homelessness they support.



of frontline workers said accessing benefits was a barrier for the migrants experiencing homelessness they support.



believe accessing accommodation within the private rented sector was a barrier to prevent homelessness for migrants they support.

Overview

Frontline workers have described how the urgent need for employment, compounded by limited housing options, makes migrants extremely vulnerable to homelessness.

In the 2019 Survey, 79% of frontline workers told us they need further training on the impact of Brexit, and how to prevent homelessness within this context.

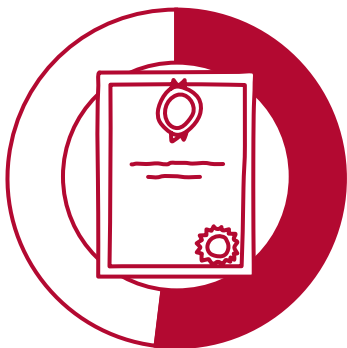
Within our open comments, frontline workers describe how certain individuals they work with are so worried about their entitlements, that they will go into hiding.

The 2019 survey showed that language barriers and fears of being reported to immigration enforcement teams play significant factors in hidden homelessness among migrants.



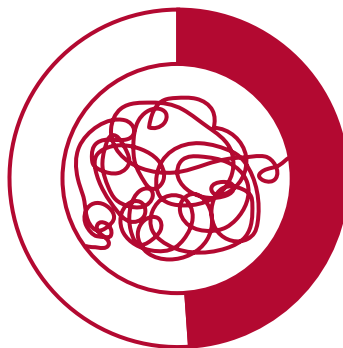
EU Settlement Scheme

We also asked frontline workers if they have experienced any problems when supporting clients to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme:



52%

Difficult obtaining ID or documentation to prove residence



49%

Language barriers



37%

Lack of immigration advice for complex cases

Inform the way we work

In our Frontline Worker Report 2018, frontline workers told us that their work can be undermined by common funding practices, such as short term contracts. That is why in this year's survey, we asked frontline workers what funders could do to support their work.

We asked frontline workers if they have access to a personal budget, allowing them to take a flexible approach to the way they support individuals experiencing homelessness:



What are the main things that funders could do to improve their impact on your work?

65% of frontline workers asked for funding to support their wellbeing and resilience.

62% believe that funding should be allocated for a minimum of three years at a time.

Personal Budgets:

ONLY 20% of frontline workers have access to a personal budget.

For frontline workers working for a local authority, this number is

ONLY 10% (working in local authority housing and social care).

Slightly above the overall average,

25% of frontline workers working for a charity have access to a personal budget.

39% of frontline workers working for a charity in Scotland have access to a personal budget.

ONLY 8% of frontline workers in Wales have access to a personalised budget.

Overview

Frontline workers have described that many people experience high levels of anxiety when moving into accommodation. However, we have been told that a flexible, and personalised approach through a personal budget could lead to better access to specialist support services for individuals experiencing homelessness. The feedback also shows that personal budgets can better establish trusting relationships between the people they support, and offer long-term support to individuals accessing accommodation.

How does a personal budget help you support the people you work with?

“Can do things that they need and be responsive in a timely manner to their needs”.

“Helps remove the (small) barriers that would otherwise cause significant problems e.g. not having ID for housing/ medical access and/or gaining employment”.

“It enables a more holistic support”.

“Personal budget has been a huge tool for our engagement with clients, especially around UC”.

If you had a personal budget to support the individuals you work with, what would you spend it on?

“Positive activities for young people and their families”.

“Taking them to lunch or Cinema to promote their confidence”.

“Small things such as coffee away from the hostel environment, or a bus ride to the park. This usually breaks down barriers of the chaotic environment and builds up trust between you and the client. They feel they are heard properly and not seen by other residents”.

“Building a strong trustworthy relationship going out to do things that the client needs and is interested in”.

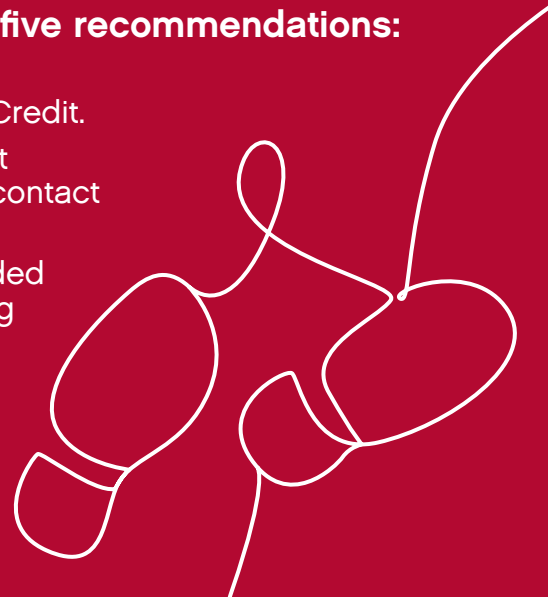


Report Recommendations

Every day frontline workers overcome multiple structural & practical barriers, to help individuals access housing and specialist support, and to prevent them from experiencing homelessness.

Based on the feedback from 1,435 frontline workers in our Frontline Worker Survey 2019, we have set out the following five recommendations:

1. Scrap the 5-weeks wait for the first payment of Universal Credit.
2. Ensure frontline workers have access to a Universal Credit escalation route for their local Job Centre, as well as the contact details of the Job Centre's partnership manager.
3. Ensure people experiencing homelessness are not excluded from mental health support services because of coexisting mental health and substance use problems.
4. Increase housing benefit, so it permanently covers the average cost of renting across the country.
5. Give frontline workers the required job security and time to effectively prevent homelessness.



Despite their daily innovation and strong resolve, this year's feedback represents a harsh reminder of the difficulties people experiencing homelessness face in accessing accommodation – with all types of accommodation being viewed as more difficult to access, compared with last year's figures.

From stagnant LHA (Local Housing Allowance) rates, to a lack of social housing being built, there are growing concerns among frontline workers about being able to access the accommodation necessary to ensure their client's experience of homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Frontline workers described how it has become harder to access specialist support, and that accessing welfare and financial support has become much harder, with Universal Credit (UC) being cited as a major factor.

There has been widespread difficulty expressed in accessing statutory in-crisis support. It is not surprising therefore that many frontline workers told us they are turning to support from foodbank services to resolve certain client's in-crisis issues.

In relation to frontline worker wellbeing, we have seen that just over one in three frontline workers believe they have enough time to do their job effectively (38%), with a UK average of 29.8 cases at any one time.

Frontline workers told us the importance of taking a flexible approach to the way that services are delivered to people experiencing multiple and complex needs.

Providing services that are tailored to those with specific support needs was the most effective way of obtaining the support needed.

In terms of supporting wellbeing, we learnt how much frontline workers value support from colleagues and good management. Maintaining the wellbeing of frontline workers at work is paramount when considering the daily tasks they face and barriers they overcome on behalf of the people they support.

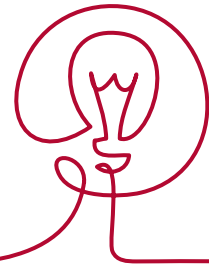
In exceptional times during COVID-19, we have seen incredible collaborative efforts to accommodate people, but our responses from this survey tell us that further action must be taken in a post C-19 context, to ensure that individuals can access much needed support and long-term housing.

Get Involved!

If you're a frontline worker in the sector, we encourage you to join the Frontline Network – registration is free, and members can access support, training, and a strong frontline community.

Please get in contact if you would like to find out more about your local Frontline Network.

If you are a decision-maker who is unsure how you can bring in the voice of frontline workers when developing strategies to reduce homelessness, please do get in contact and we would be happy to offer support: frontline@stmartinscharity.org.uk



What We Have Done So Far

Thank you to all the frontline workers who took the time to feedback your expertise. Your insight is central to the work at the Frontline Network.

Through our local network events and online Frontline Network Forum, we will continue to provide opportunities for better collaborative working, so that frontline workers can come together to share their experience and expertise.

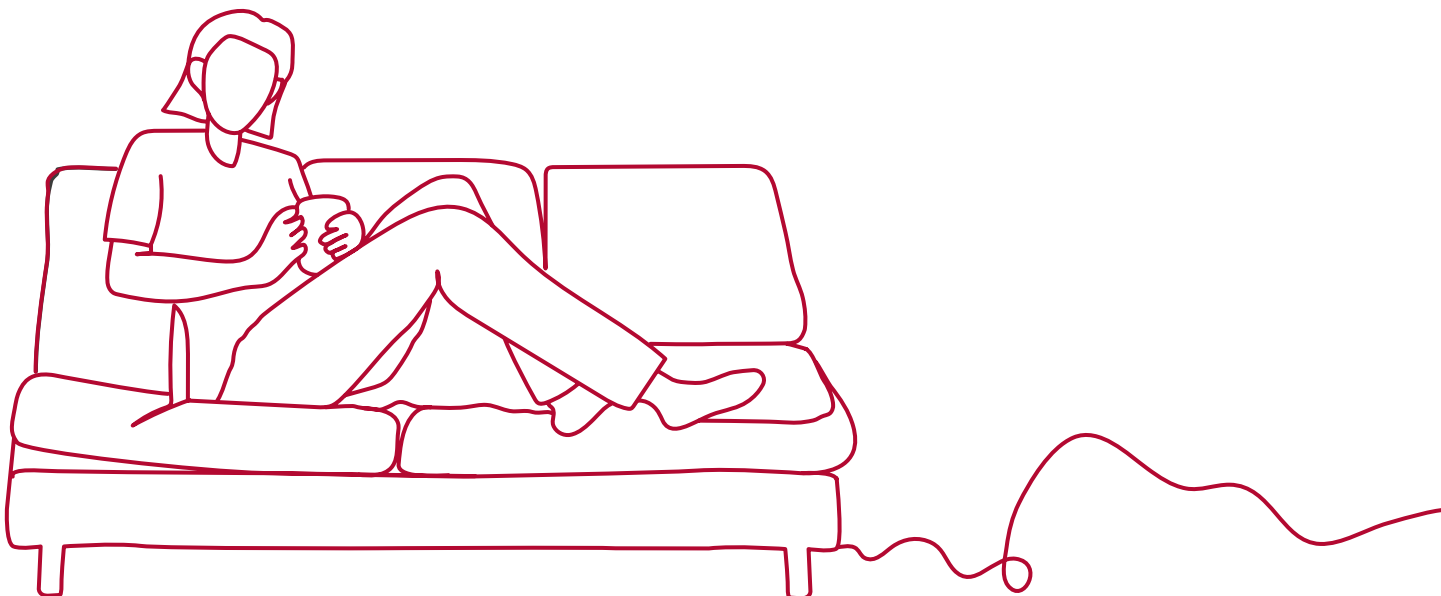
We will continue to support innovation on the frontline through the Ideas Fund and increase the number of opportunities for frontline workers to network and access peer support through our shadowing fund and training fund.

In 2020 we employed a Local Network Coordinator. This coordinator is currently developing local networks in areas where we do not currently have a Partner organisation, and will feed into the development of training opportunities where needs are identified.

In 2019 we launched a training fund for frontline workers across the UK. This has enabled frontline workers to apply for funding to attend

either existing training, or to commission bespoke training where there is a high enough need in their area.

Just before publication of this report, we saw an opportunity to do more to help people who have been directly affected by COVID-19, which is why we created the "VRF - Emergency Fund". To date (August 2020) we have awarded over 4000 grants and £1.5million.



COVID-19

Just before publication of this report, the homelessness sector has had to learn how to support individuals experiencing homelessness during a global pandemic.

During this outbreak, the Frontline Network heard from hundreds of frontline workers whose services have been affected by the outbreak. They told us that the impact for people experiencing homelessness who usually receive support through their face-to-face services is huge.

To ensure that we were able to respond to the immediate and evolving needs of frontline workers during COVID-19, we developed an 'Emergency Fund Survey'. Over 1000 frontline workers responded to this survey, to help us understand how we could offer support during this time.

From this feedback, we saw an opportunity to do more to help people who have been directly affected by COVID-19, which is why we created the "VRF - Emergency Fund". Our Emergency Fund was able to offer vital support to people experiencing homelessness in the following areas:



Basic Essential Needs

In the Emergency Fund Survey, 61% of frontline workers stated that the people they support urgently needed access to essential items while self-isolating.

That is why our Emergency Fund helped frontline workers access food and hygiene packages, as well as utility costs and other essential items.

Securing Accommodation

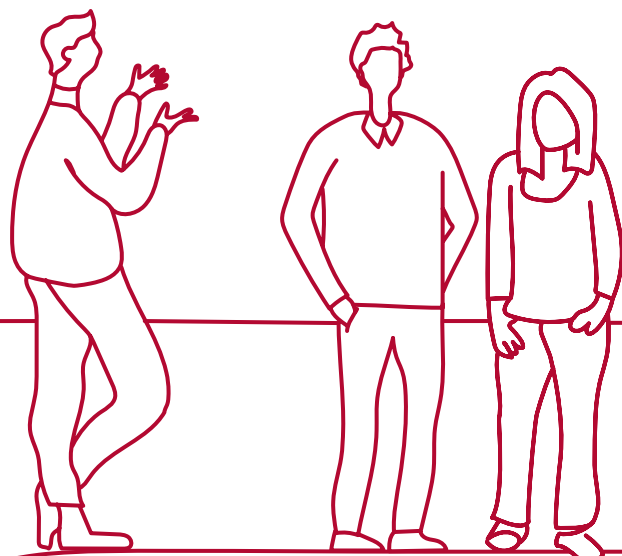
49% of frontline workers in our EF survey said they need funding to help the people they support access accommodation.

That is why our Emergency Fund offered grants to secure accommodation, so they can safely self-isolate during this outbreak.

Overcoming Barriers to Support

A further 51% of frontline workers described how they had lost all forms of direct contact with the people they support.

That is why our Emergency Fund offered grants to access the resources (such as mobile phones to laptops) necessary to stay in touch with frontline workers during lockdown.



As the recovery phase begins, our funding will adapt to the changing needs of frontline workers and the people they support.

Appendix



Appendix 1 – Methodology

The Frontline Worker Survey 2019 is the most extensive survey of frontline staff working with people across the UK. 1,435 frontline workers responded to this year's survey, between 4th November and the 26th November 2019. The 49-question survey was created using Survey Monkey and distributed through the Frontline Network's mailing list, to recipients of the Vicar's Relief Fund grants over the past two years. It was also promoted via social media, the Frontline Network and Crisis, Shelter, Trussell Trust, and other frontline organisations.

The survey had a high response rate, with 1,435 frontline workers from across the homelessness/housing, criminal justice, health, advice, welfare benefits, substance use sectors. Where the response to a question was lower than 1,435, we have included the reference in Appendix 2 as applicable number of respondents / total number of respondents to that question.

The survey contained 34 closed questions and 15 open questions. We included open questions within each thematic area, allowing people to include information which might not have been captured through the closed questions. In total, 3,359 comments were included in the responses to the open questions. These were coded against recurring themes. A selection of these quotes are incorporated in the report.

There was no identifiable sampling frame and so no statements as to the statistical representativeness of responses can be made. However, regionally low return rates from Northern Ireland (43), and the North East (48) mean that those figures should be treated with caution.

Appendix 2 – Survey Questions

1. Please state your job title [1,435/1,435]
2. Which of the following best describes the type of service you work in [1,435/1,435]
3. Which of the following best describes the type of organisation you work for [1,435/1,435]
4. Which of the following best describes the size of the organisation you work for? [1,426/1,435]
5. Do you have a 'caseload' that you are the lead worker for? [1,435/1,435]
6. If yes, how many clients do you have at any one time? [1,144/1,435]
7. Which groups of people do you work with?* [1,435/1,435]
8. Which region of the UK is the service you work in based? [1,435/1,435]
9. In what area is your service? (Please note you can tick more than one area).* [1,435/1,435]
10. For how many years have you been in a role where you are working with people experiencing homelessness? [1,435/1,435]
11. Are you or have you previously been a user of homelessness services? [1,435/1,435]
12. Have you ever attended a Frontline Network Local Partner event? [1,434/1,435]
13. Has it got easier or harder to access support for your clients in the following areas over the past year? (Please tick 'Not Applicable' if you haven't had to try and access a particular type of support) [1,263/1,435]
14. What example(s) do you have of a solution to accessing a particular type of support? (If possible, please include the name of the organisation involved within your example) [657/1,435]
15. Any other comments? [256/ 1,435]
16. How easy or difficult is it to access accommodation for the people you support? [1,189/1,435]
17. How easy or difficult do you find obtaining the following [1,189/1,435]
18. Over the past year, the commitment from my nation's Government to preventing homelessness has [1,189/1,435]
19. Over the past year, which of the following has increased or decreased [1,189/1,435]
20. How have your clients been affected by the introduction of Universal Credit (UC)?* [1,152/1,435]
21. If positively, can you tell us why? [137/1,435]
22. If negatively, have your clients faced problems in any of the following areas? [1,124/1,435]
23. Have you developed partnerships in your local area to try and overcome barriers to supporting people with UC? (If yes, please provide details of the partnership, and the organisation) [617/1,435]
24. In relation to welfare benefits, can you tell us whether you have: [1,139/1,435]
25. Compared to other types of benefit, have you found supporting clients with UC is: [1,112/1,435]
26. Any other comments? [198/1,435]
27. Are you supporting individuals who have experienced homelessness as a result of their immigration status? [1,127/1,435]
28. If yes, which groups of people do you support? [557/1,435]
29. If yes, what barriers have you experienced to preventing homelessness? [571/1,435]
30. Are you supporting people to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme? [1,057/1,435]
31. If yes, have you experienced any problems when supporting clients to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme? [263/1,435]
32. Can you say whether you agree or disagree with the following statements [1,085/1,435]
33. How easy or difficult do you find it to access health services for your clients [1,103/1,435]
34. When accessing primary care (GP, pharmacy, dentist, optician services), have you experienced problems in the following areas? [1,078/1,435]

35. When accessing secondary (hospitals and specialists) care, have you experienced problems in the following areas? [1,059/1,435]
36. Are there any other barriers to your clients being able to access primary or secondary health services? [226/1,435]
37. What has been the impact of your role on your wellbeing? [226/1,066]
38. How important do you feel the following are to your wellbeing at work [1,066/1,435]
39. Thinking about your current role, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements: [1,066/1,435]
40. Please tell us whether your organisation: [1,066/1,435]
41. What would be most helpful for improving your wellbeing at work? [536/1,435]
42. What examples of good working practise do you have that positively impacts your wellbeing at work? [466/1,435]
43. What are the main things that funders could do to improve their impact on your work? [1,010/1,435]
44. Do you have access to a personal budget, allowing you to take a flexible approach to the way you support the people you work with? [1,034/1,435]
45. If yes, how does a personal budget help you support the people you work with? [161/1,435]
46. If no, do you think access to a personal budget to support the people you work with would be useful? [869/1,435]
47. If you had a personal budget to support the individuals you work with, what would you spend it on? [455/1,435]
48. We currently provide grants to prevent eviction where someone has rent arrears. In your experience, what is the most useful point to intervene and prevent eviction by making a one-off payment towards arrears: [999/1,435]
49. If we were to provide another rapid intervention grant to support your work, what grant would be most helpful for you? [563/1,435]

Appendix 3 – Key Terms

- **Strength-based practice:** Strength-based practice is about transforming relationships between staff and the people they work with. It addresses the power imbalance, which can otherwise compound their trauma, and encourages staff to realise that they are not the resource holder or the decider of the destination, instead facilitating the building of a collaborative relationship where both parties share their knowledge and skills.¹
- **Psychologically informed environment' (P.I.E):** Psychologically informed environments make use of methods which are informed by psychological theories and frameworks, to understand how we think and feel about the way a person is behaving, which enables a more considered reaction. It's useful to understand generally how trauma, e.g. in childhood, war zones or everyday life, can affect the way people cope with difficult situations, so that we are less likely to make judgements about behaviour we find difficult or challenging.

- **Housing First:** Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach which aims to provide independent and permanent housing first, with a view to providing the necessary wrap-around support, once accommodation has been secured.²
- **LHA (Local Housing Allowance):** LHA rates were originally set to ensure that individuals in receipt of housing benefit could afford the cheapest third of properties available in their area. This meant that most were able to access a safe and stable home to build their lives in.³

Appendix 4 - Who do Frontline Workers Support?

We define frontline worker as a paid worker who directly supports someone experiencing homelessness.

This includes those working in the Voluntary, Statutory, and Public sectors. Frontline Workers responding to this survey work in roles including outreach, housing, social work, and probation.

Please find below the groups of people frontline workers most often support:

- 94.78%** People experiencing mental ill health
- 93.24%** People with substance misuse issues
- 91.15%** People with multiple/complex needs
- 91.01%** Women
- 89.41%** Men
- 88.99%** People in contact with the criminal justice system
- 87.04%** Current and/or former rough sleepers
- 86.55%** Survivors of domestic abuse
- 85.58%** People with a learning disability
- 82.93%** LGBTQ+
- 82.51%** People with a physical disability
- 82.37%** People with dual diagnosis
- 78.40%** People with an autistic spectrum condition
- 74.85%** Young people
- 73.38%** Care leavers
- 70.87%** Veterans / Ex-services personnel
- 70.73%** Refugees
- 70.04%** Roma / Gypsy / Travellers
- 71.01%** People with a sensory disability
- 69.97%** Migrants with Recourse to Public Funds
- 66.20%** Asylum Seekers
- 65.86%** BAME
- 61.68%** Migrants without Recourse to Public Funds
- 48.71%** Other (please specify)

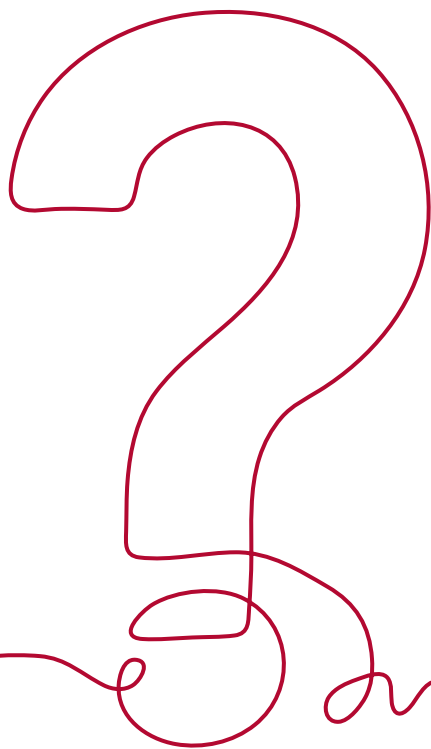
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2. Housing First England, 2019 : Exploring patterns of Housing First support: Resident Journeys – https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Exploring%20patterns%20of%20Housing%20First%20support_Sep19.pdf

3. Gov UK, 2020: Local Housing Allowance Guidance – www.gov.uk/guidance/local-housing-allowance



Frontline Network



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