

FINDINGS

2020

Dying Homeless Project

Temporary memorial installed on Nelson's Column
February 2020
Photocredit: Anthony Luvera

Overview

The Dying Homeless Project, which was set up by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in October 2017 and taken on by Museum of Homelessness in April 2019, aims to document and remember every person who dies whilst homeless in the United Kingdom. We remember people on an online memorial page and we hold local and national events to commemorate people who have died.

We have previously published findings in August 2019, March 2020 and now in February 2021. Since the project began in October 2017, we have remembered 2466 people on our memorial.

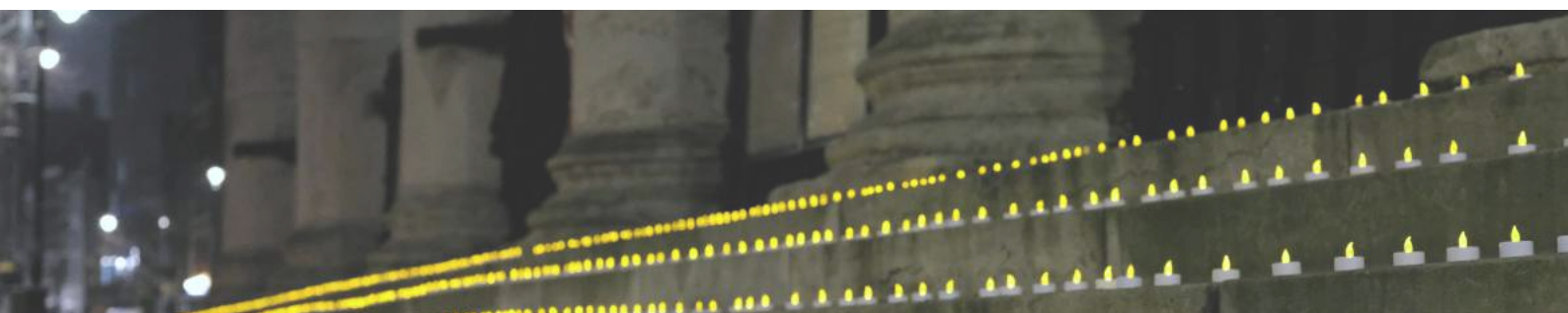
These findings and analysis are correct as at 9th March 2020. The project is not static and the data is constantly evolving as new findings come in via the Coroner's system, late FOIs or other research routes.

Methodology

The Dying Homeless Project collects information year-round; this can come from interested members of the public, grassroots groups, homelessness sector workers, and via public reporting. A significant proportion of the data comes from official sources via Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

The definition of homelessness is people who are sleeping rough, living in emergency or temporary accommodation such as hostels or B&Bs, living in supported housing for people who are homeless, sofa surfing or squatting. We include all people who do not have a settled home, regardless of immigration status.

Prior to 2020, both the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and MoH had experienced difficulty in securing, under FOI, data relating to how local councils record and account for people who have died whilst homeless. To respond to this, we were supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to recruit a coordinator to solve this issue and undertake a more comprehensive FOI process for gathering data. The result is a fuller picture of the situation across all 4 nations than we have previously been able to publish.



Methodology

Main sources of data

News reporting and information from grassroots groups, the sector and the public

In addition we have developed the Dying Homeless Project coalition - a group of people who meet regularly to plan the direction of the project. Coalition members include people from around the UK, including people affected by homelessness and people who work in services. They feed into the project providing vital advice, direction and information in relation to finding out about the deaths of homeless people.

We gather information from news reports, local networks and also cross-reference names that are remembered at homelessness memorial services with FOI data. We use these methods to try and capture people who might not be recorded under official sources.

Freedom of Information Requests

Of the 976 people identified this year, 865 of those people were shared with us under Freedom of Information requests.



Methodology

Legal and ethical framework

Developed with Farrer & Co LLP

1. Rights under GDPR and UK data protection law apply only to living persons. Therefore, on a legal basis MoH does not need to consider deceased individual's data protection rights nor do we have obligations under GDPR towards that person.
2. However, a duty of confidentiality may be owed to the deceased individual (and their relatives) in respect to information where there was a reasonable expectation of confidentiality.
3. Our blanket approach is therefore only to share information that would be available via public record. For example, details from a death certificate or a coroner's inquest.
4. However, our main consideration in publicly sharing findings relating to someone who has died homeless is that publications by MoH do not wherever possible cause distress or harm to friends, family and people who knew the person.



Methodology

Legal and ethical framework

5. MoH will not process sensitive information related to individuals, such as medical records or case notes. We note that representatives of deceased people have the right to request a legal duty of confidentiality around such information.
6. In respect of homelessness services and agencies, we will not name individuals or organisations that report in to us and will make every effort to respect the professional integrity of organisations working in the field wherever possible.
7. We operate the 'power of veto' where if a relative of a deceased person contacts us and requests information to be removed from the site, we will do so.

Where a death is reported via the website or other less formal means, we have a strict verification process working with local authorities or local services. We also try and ensure that family have been informed prior to publication.

It is our policy not to share on social media or elsewhere reports of any particular death until we have completed our verification process

Summary findings

A key finding from this data is that a significant and increasing number of people are dying when they come off the streets. We documented 976 deaths in 2020, compared to 710 in 2019. Most of this data shows that people were accessing some form of temporary accommodation when they died.

This should be a reminder to all involved in homelessness provision to properly consider suitability, safety and general standards of the accommodation and support provided in the future and to have a balanced view about the success of the 'Everyone In' programme.

·Our data is published ahead of the official ONS figures on the deaths of people who are homeless and can be compared. In 2019, the ONS verified 563 real and actual deaths and used this figure to estimate that 726 people had died nationwide. In 2020, we have verified 693 real and actual deaths in England and Wales, an increase on both our own figures and the ONS. Direct comparison between the 2 datasets between 2019 (ONS) and 2020 (MoH) shows a rise of 23%.



37%

increase in number of
deaths documented

Summary findings

There is a correlation between rising numbers of deaths and key moments in the historical timeline related to the pandemic. We documented sharp rises around the start and end of the first lockdown (April 2020) and the start of the second lockdown (Oct 2020), as well as a smaller rise at the end of the first lockdown (July)

In line with the UCL Inclusion Health findings published in the Lancet in 2020*, our information shows that the primary goal of Everyone In - to keep people safe from COVID-19, was broadly successful with only 10 deaths (3%) in our data


Causal data highlights physical health conditions (41%) and drug and alcohol use as the primary causes of death (36%). Rates of suicide are very high at 14%.



14%

deaths from suicide

*Lewer, D, Braithwaite, I, Bullock, M, Eyre, Max T, White, P, Aldridge, Robert et al; COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness in England: a modelling study. December 2020, The Lancet, VOLUME 8, ISSUE 12, P1181-1191



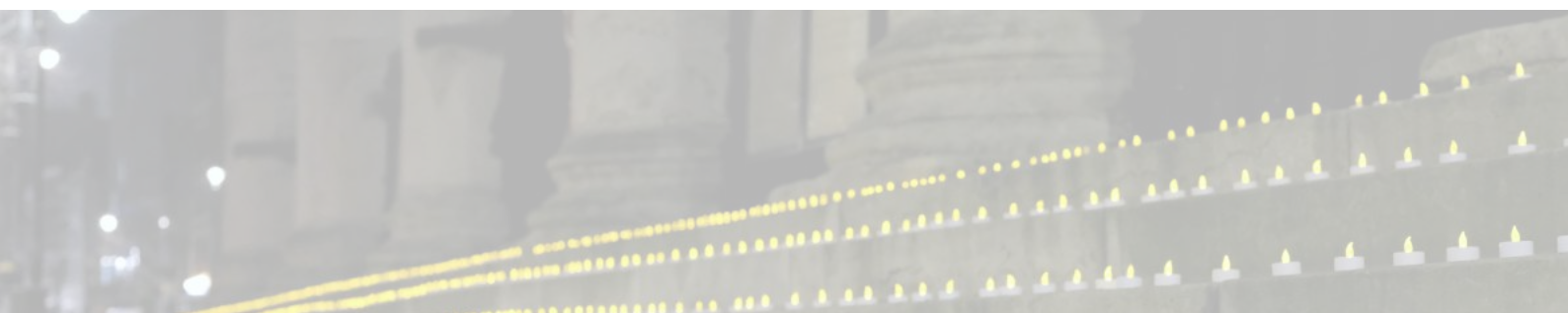
Commentary on the data

The total number of deaths reported is likely to be higher than our figures suggest as several local authorities did not respond to our FOI requests. For example, we have no data for Birmingham, the UK's second largest city, or a third of London boroughs.

The data presented here is not fully comprehensive for 2020, as our Freedom of Information requests cover the period between 01 January 2020 and 20 November 2020.

Not all councils provided all the information requested. Therefore, our percentage breakdowns related to specific themes (e.g., age, causes) is based on a proportion of the 976 quoted figure. This is elaborated on below.

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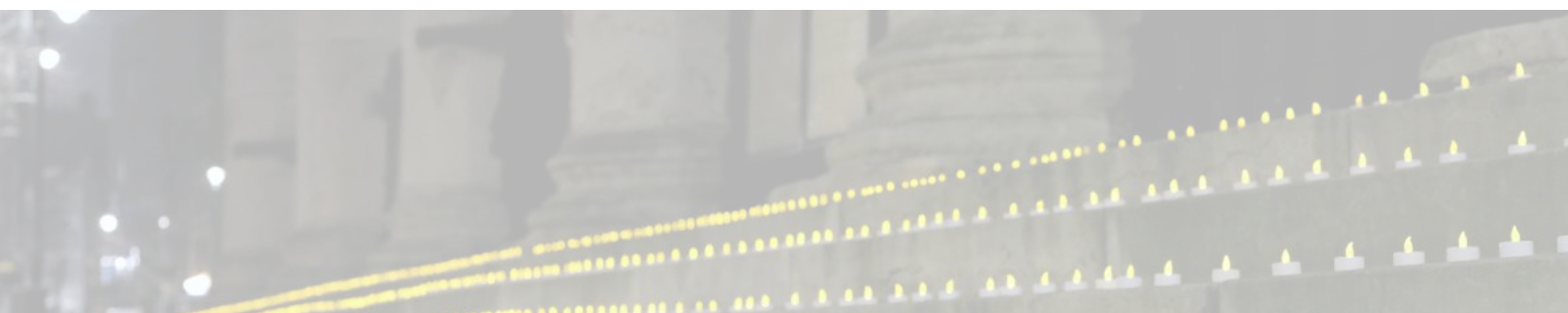
Commentary on the data

The lack of standard definitions around types of accommodation creates some barriers in working with the data. There were some significant inconsistencies in the way Local Authorities describe what their accommodation is.

In contrast to the ONS dataset, we are able to generate specific data around dates and causes of death in particular areas and therefore identify trends.

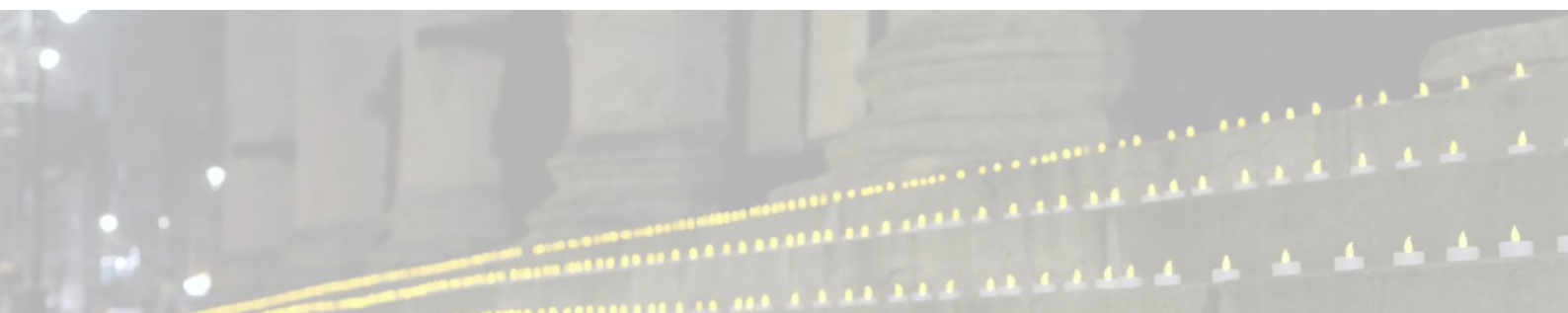
We were very concerned to identify 5 suicides in Greater Manchester area between October and November 2020. We also identified that 31% of all deaths in Camden (5 of 16) were due to suicides.

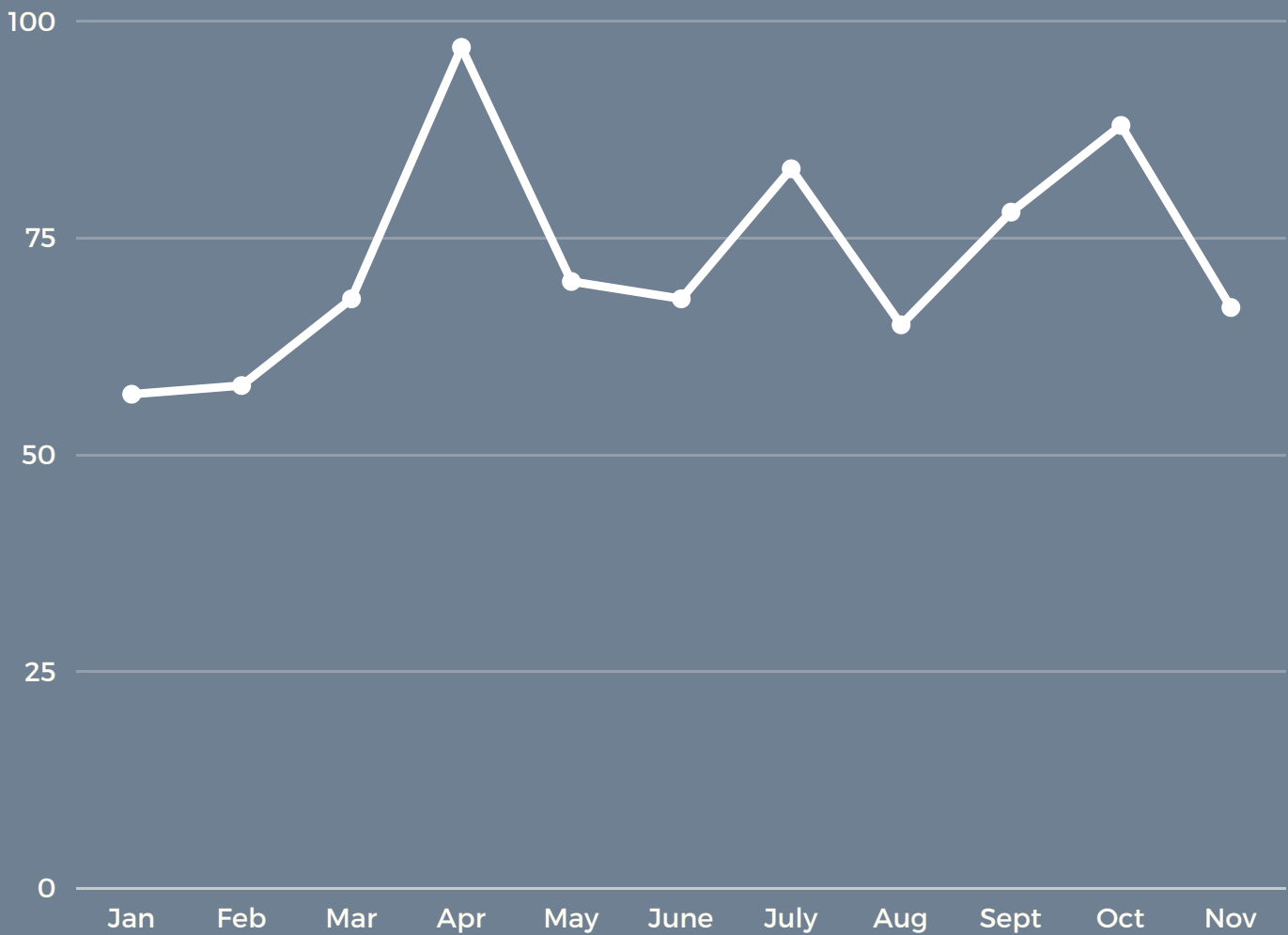
·We were concerned to learn about two deaths of homeless people in police custody. These took place in Reading on the 8th January 2020 and in Exeter on 20th May 2020.



Picture across the UK

England & Wales	693
Scotland	176
Northern Ireland	107
Total UK	976
London	180
Glasgow	33
Manchester	30
Brighton & Hove	29
South Lanarkshire	18
Bristol	18
Hull	16
Liverpool	16
Edinburgh	16



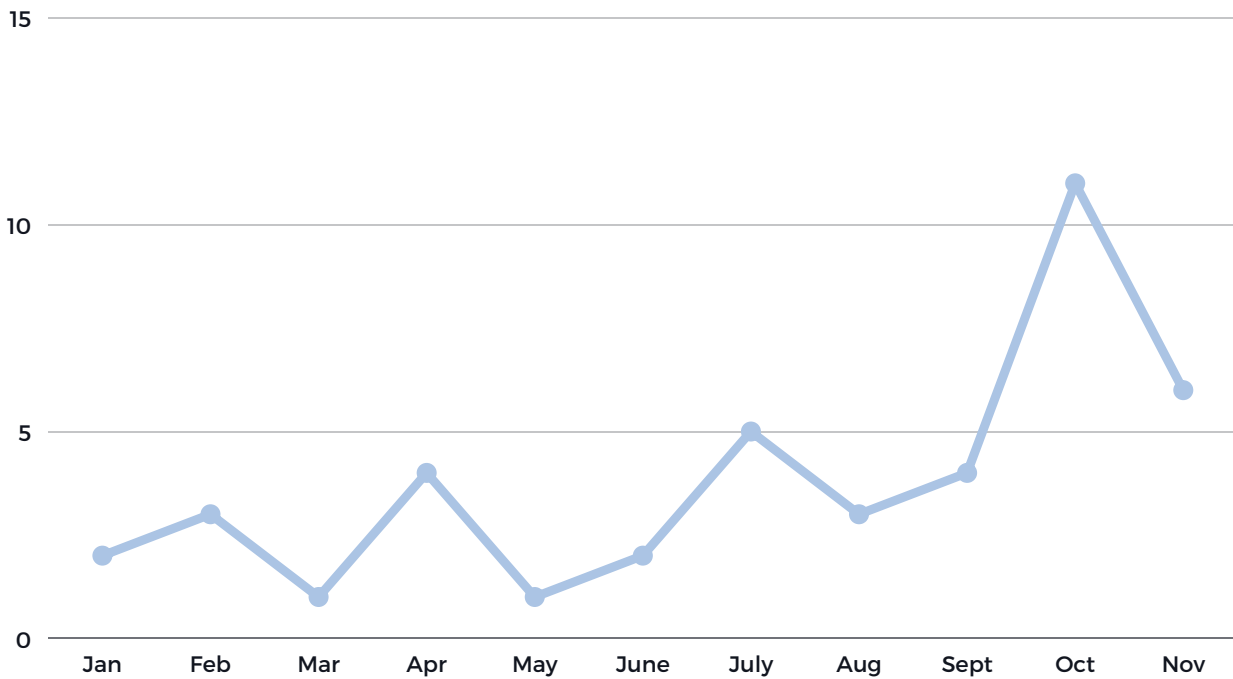


Date of death

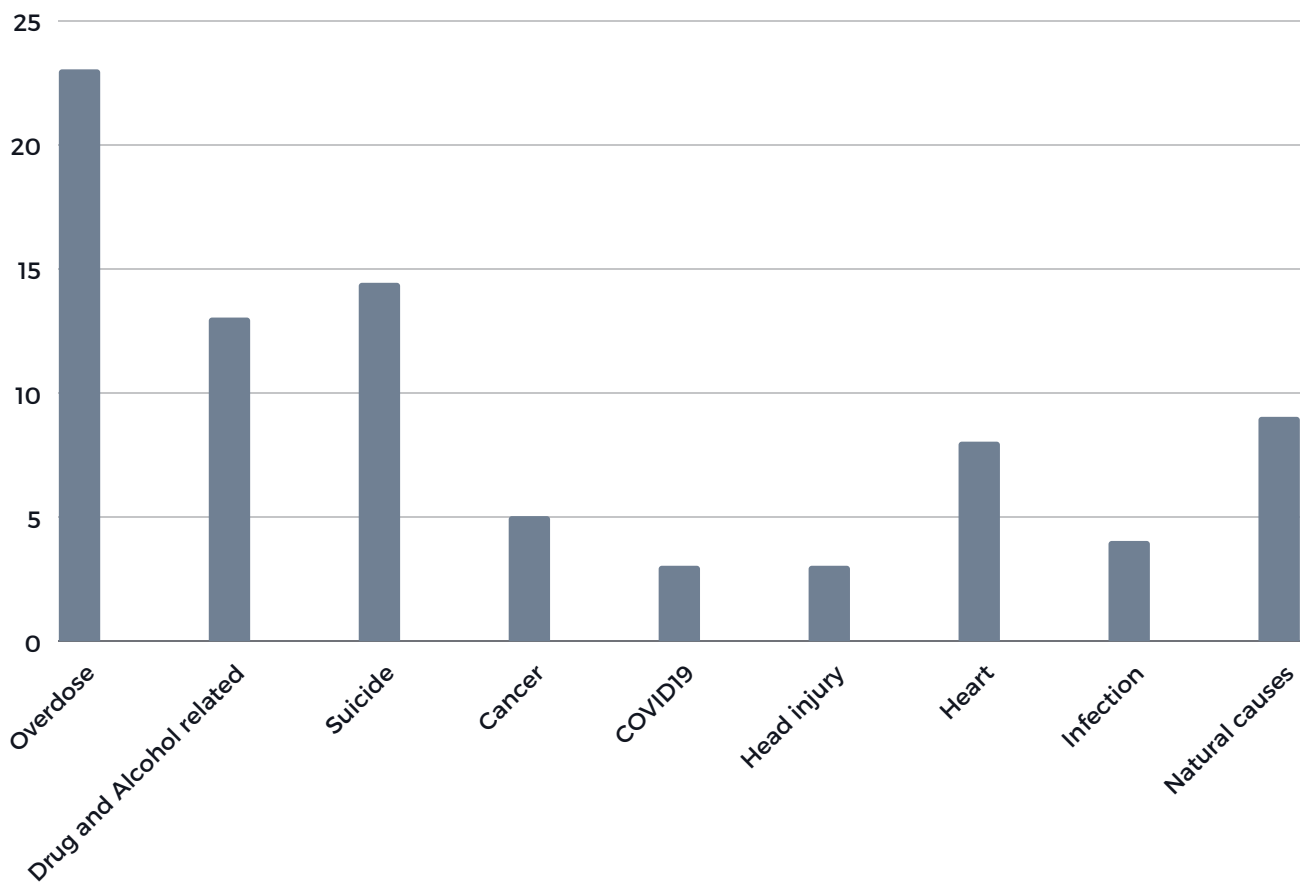
This graph shows the numbers of people who died in each month. We can see here the pattern of deaths throughout the year broadly following the lockdown patterns.

We only recorded a small amount of information in December as the Freedom of Information request covered up to November 20th. December's information will be published next round.

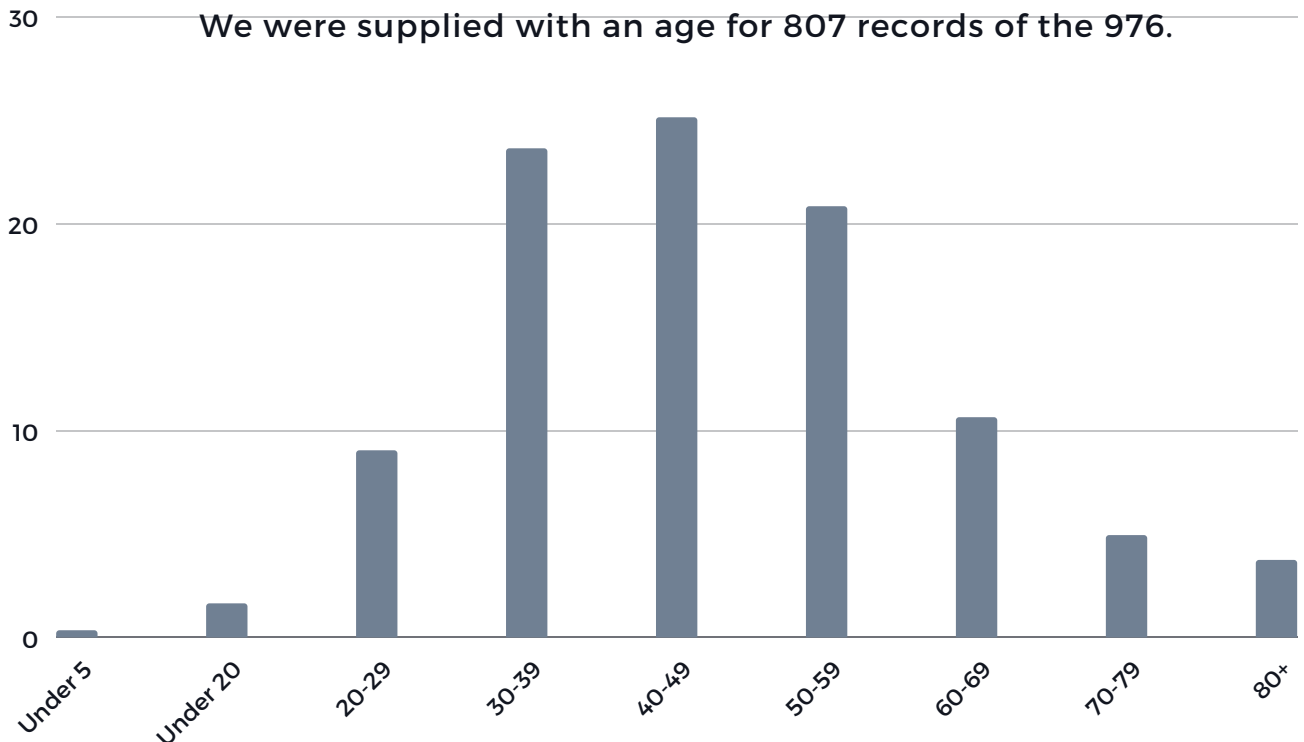
People completing suicide, by month.



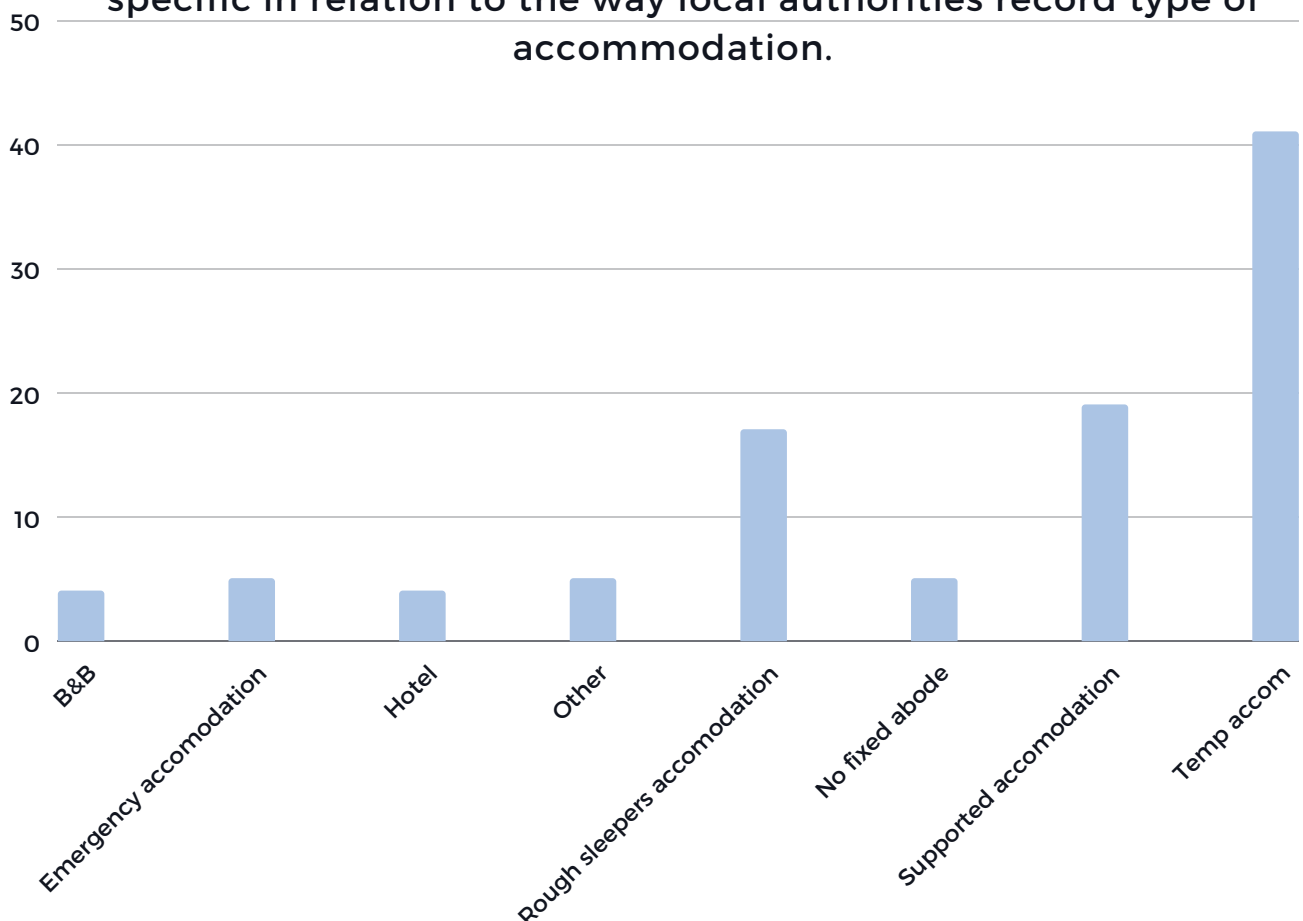
Selected causation, in percentage of total. Causation data is only a snapshot, consisting of 304 people out of 976 so just under a third of the data we have.



The overall age of death is broadly in line with previous data on homeless deaths which indicate people in their mid 40s as being the most at risk.



629 of the 926 records included a 'status' in terms of where a person was staying and their situation. This is about 64% of all records. Below is a breakdown in %. The data needs to be more specific in relation to the way local authorities record type of accommodation.



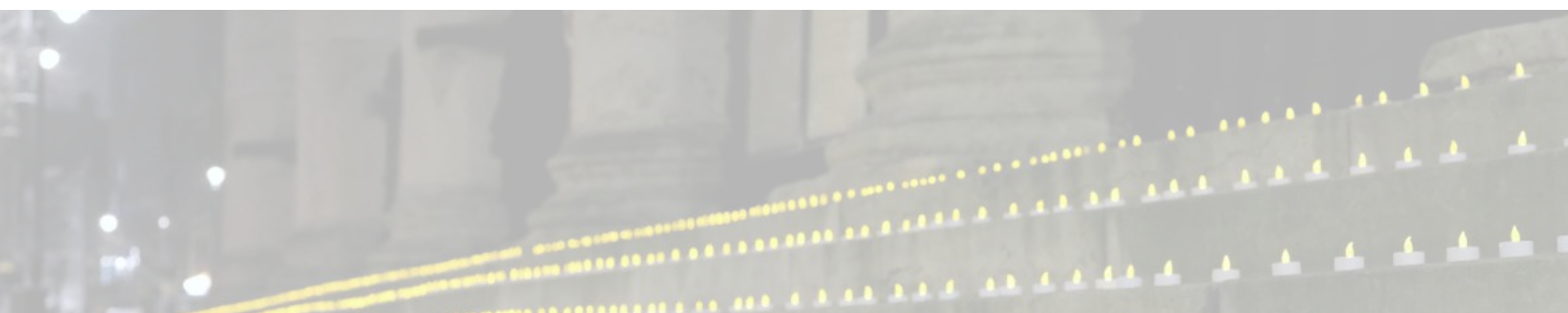
Areas for development

The Dying Homeless Project has been developing year on year, and will continue to do so.

Areas that we are actively working to explore further are gender and immigration status, as we know that discrimination based on gender identity, sexuality, nationality and ethnicity is far too common and puts people experiencing homelessness at risk.

We publish our findings with heavy hearts but in the hope that these findings can be used to spark change.

MoH welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively to save lives; the number of lives at stake is too big for any one organisation to tackle alone. We welcome conversations with stakeholders and authorities who would like to work with us to provide information for our ongoing project, and to discuss our recommendations to explore how we can work together to shape future approaches to preventing unnecessary deaths.





Recommendations

Structural change

**National confidential enquiry
on homeless deaths**

**Mandatory fatality reviews for
all local authorities, with
mechanisms for accountability
around applying lessons
learned.**

Temporary memorial installed at
St Martin-in-the-Fields
February 2020
Photocredit: Anthony Luvera

Recommendations Housing

Urgent attention to increasing council housing stock. We agree with recommendations for changes in planning, land availability, housing benefit, Right to Buy reform and expenditure made by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, (published on 27 July 2020) The work has been done, the evidence is available, but action is needed.

Reform and regulate temporary accommodation provision including that provision held by both companies and charities.

Temporary memorial installed at
St Martin-in-the-Fields
February 2020
Photocredit: Anthony Luvera

Recommendations

Care

Recognise that a roof is not enough. People need relationship, meaning and purpose. Design solutions with this in mind.

Pilot harm reduction spaces

Adequately fund and significantly improve access to mental health and substance misuse services

Implement a genuine trauma informed approach to supporting people across services.

Improve communication between health, social care and housing services

May they all Rest in Peace

Visit our online memorial at:
Dying Homeless
(museumofhomelessness.org)

A photograph of a person in the foreground, wearing a black beanie and a patterned face mask, lighting a small white candle. The candle is placed on a concrete ledge. In the background, a long line of similar lit candles stretches across a stone surface, creating a path of light. Other people are visible in the background, some also lighting candles. The scene is at night, with some blurred lights in the distance.

phf Paul Hamlyn
Foundation

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