



Centre for
Homelessness Impact

February 2024

What Works Evidence Notes

Prison Discharge and Homelessness

Evidence from across the world on solutions to homelessness

What Works Evidence Notes

This series draws together research evidence from across the world of what we know about how best to relieve and prevent homelessness.

The notes are deliberately short to provide a summary for busy people of findings of research from different fields. They will be updated regularly as our knowledge of what works advances.

About the Centre for Homelessness Impact

The Centre for Homelessness Impact champions the creation and use of better evidence for a world without homelessness. Our mission is to improve the lives of those experiencing homelessness by ensuring that policy, practice and funding decisions are underpinned by reliable evidence.

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ISBN: 978-1-914132-37-7

CHI | Registered Charity Number: E&W1183026; SC049501

Company Number: 11732500

www.homelessnessimpact.org

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Prison Discharge and Homelessness

Evidence from across the world on solutions to homelessness

Purpose

This paper provides an overview of existing evidence for interventions designed to support people being discharged from prison, aiming to identify factors that effectively reduce the likelihood that individuals experience homelessness after release. In addition to summarising existing research on the links between prison discharge and homelessness, this paper also examines how policy and further research can help improve outcomes in these areas.

Summary

The link between prison discharge and an increased risk of homelessness is evidenced by the number of people 1) without documented, stable post-release accommodation; 2) accessing statutory homelessness services and listing prison as their last place of residence; or 3) experiencing street homelessness in the wake of incarceration. However, the scale, causes, and solutions to this problem have not been adequately explored in the United Kingdom.

Several interventions to reduce the risk of homelessness upon release from prison have been implemented at varying scales across the four UK nations. Existing government programmes, including 'Through the Gate' services and the 'Duty to Refer,' have exhibited mixed results. Other existing programmes, such as 'Critical Time Intervention' and 're-entry programmes', have shown promise in ameliorating other outcomes relevant to homelessness, such as ill-health and rates of reoffending, but have not been specifically assessed for their impact on housing outcomes in the UK. Furthermore, some promising programmes, such as Scotland's 'Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone' programme and a range of accommodation schemes for people leaving prison

in England, have not been externally evaluated. Meanwhile, other interventions – including local efforts to incentivise private landlords to rent to people with experiences of incarceration, digital services providing assistance in navigating systems for people leaving prison, and the creation of protocols to ensure interagency coordination of services – have not yet been implemented at a large scale.

This paper concludes that best practices drawn from the available evidence on what works to prevent homelessness among people leaving prison should be adopted. It further recommends that research should address these gaps in knowledge and that further evaluations of these programmes should be conducted.

What do we mean by ‘what works’?

There is a wealth of research that can help us to understand the drivers and triggers of homelessness, and the population sub-groups most at-risk¹, but, within this research, there is comparatively little evidence on ‘what works’ in helping to reduce homelessness and improve other outcomes.² This lack of causal evidence of homelessness interventions means that we know very little about the impacts of most of our actions, including the potential for some interventions to even cause harm under some conditions.³

Expanding our understanding of ‘what works’ will mean that we reduce the chances of potentially misallocating precious resources into ways of working that could be improved to ensure people receive the services they need and achieve better outcomes for all.⁴

When we talk about evidence in this context, we refer to a specific type of research, impact evaluations. Here, we compare the outcomes in a group with what would have happened in the absence of that intervention, in other words, a ‘counterfactual’. For example, we might want to know whether Programme A helps to increase employment. To understand this fully, it is necessary to compare the outcomes of those who receive Programme A (a specific type of support for people

being discharged from prison) against those of a comparable group that do not receive it. Different impact evaluation designs use various approaches to make these comparisons.

However, not all impact evaluations are equally robust. We place varying levels of confidence in research findings depending on how they are set up and reported. Among other things, we have greater confidence in findings when: a) studies use control groups, comparing outcomes of those who receive an intervention to those who do not, b) there are numerous evaluations of an intervention, giving us a wider range of research to draw on, c) studies are from a variety of contexts with varying policy landscapes, and d) research is conducted with a large group of people that we can observe for a long period of time.

There is great value in other types of evidence too; qualitative research can provide insight into the experiences of individuals impacted by policies, inform how services should be designed and implemented, and explain why interventions are effective or not. Bringing together all these perspectives and forms of knowledge helps us to develop a more complete picture of what works, where, for whom, why, and how.

1 Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) *Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?* *Housing Studies*, 33:1, 96-116. DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957)

2 Halpern, D. (2020). *Using Evidence to End Homelessness* (L. Teixeira & J. Cartwright, Eds.; 1st ed.). Bristol University Press. DOI: [10.2307/j.ctv10kmc3j](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10kmc3j)

3 Keenan, C., Miller, S., Hanratty, J., Pigott, T., Hamilton, J., Coughlan, C., Mackie, P., Fitzpatrick, S., Cowman, J. (2021) *Accommodation-based interventions for individuals experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness*. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1165>

4 Rodriguez-Guzman, G., Hume, S., McKie, P., Nwosu, C., Piggott, H., White, J. *Accelerating Learning - Lessons and Reflections from the First Randomised Controlled Trials in Homelessness in the UK*. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 15(3), 171-186

The Challenge: Key Issues and Recent Trends

People who have recently been released from prison generally have a higher risk of homelessness when compared to the general population, as seen in studies conducted in several OECD countries – including the United States⁵, Canada⁶, and Australia⁷. Between October and December 2022, people leaving prison in England experienced homelessness (as measured by applications for statutory government assistance) at a rate 40 times higher than the general population (6.3% vs 0.16%).^{8,9}

While the exact details are unique to each individual, possible reasons that people might experience homelessness after leaving prison include that accommodation is not arranged before the end of their sentence, that prior accommodation or employment is lost during the course of their imprisonment, or that a lack of coordination between state-run services and departments leaves some

incarcerated individuals at risk of homelessness unknown to local authorities at the time of release.¹⁰ In addition, the collateral consequences of (or additional negative effects caused by) imprisonment can worsen a person's risk of homelessness upon release. For example, research shows that the stigmatisation of people who have been in prison can make re-entry into society challenging.¹¹

5 Roman, Caterina and Jeremy Travis. 2006. "Where will I sleep tomorrow? Housing, Homelessness, and the Returning Prisoner." *Housing Policy Debate* 17:389-418.

6 Gaetz, S. and B. O'Grady. (2009). "Homelessness, incarceration and the challenge of effective discharge planning: A Canadian case." *Finding home: Policy options for addressing homelessness in Canada* 672-693.

7 Baldry, E., McDonnell, D., Maplestone, P., and Peeters, M. (2006). "Ex-Prisoners, Homelessness and the State in Australia." *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 39(1):20-33.

8 See Tables A4R (Column AA) and A1 (Column P) in this report: DLUHC. (2023). "Statutory homelessness in England: October to December 2022".

9 The rate for prison leavers was calculated by dividing the number of people listing custody as their most recent form of accommodation upon filing for a homelessness relief duty by the total number of households at this time.

10 Crisis. (2023). *Prison Leavers*.

11 Home Office. (2022). *Criminal Records Reform -- Rehabilitation Periods: Equalities Impact Assessment*.

Limited access to housing for people with a criminal record can also exacerbate their risk of experiencing homelessness. For instance, post-release housing options for some individuals are limited by restrictions on where someone can live after being convicted of certain crimes.¹² Furthermore, an increased risk of experiencing housing discrimination in the private rented sector due to the stigmatisation of holding a criminal record has been extensively documented in the United States, but has not been adequately researched in the United Kingdom.^{13,14,15} In addition, it is well-documented that individuals leaving prison experience worsened employment outcomes, which can exacerbate the causes and challenges of homelessness.¹⁶ In England and Wales from April 2021 to March 2022, just 13% of people released from custody were employed after six weeks, and this percentage improved only minimally after 6 months.^{17,18} Indeed, 50% of employers in England and Wales would 'not consider employing' a person who has experienced incarceration.¹⁹

Experiences of homelessness after prison may also increase a person's risk of reoffending, simultaneously increasing their risk of experiencing negative outcomes associated with incarceration. According to data recorded by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), two-thirds of individuals discharged from prison in England and Wales in 2016 who were known to have experienced homelessness after release reportedly reoffended within a year, compared to one half of the total population released from prison.^{20,21}

12 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation. (2020). [Accommodation and Support for Adult Offenders in the Community and on Release from Prison in England. p. 37.](#)

13 Kirk, David S. (2018). 'The Collateral Consequences of Incarceration for Housing', in *Handbook on the Consequences of Sentencing and Punishment Decisions* ed. Beth M. Huebner and Natasha A. Frost. Abingdon: Routledge.

14 Douglas N. Evans, Kwan-Lamar Blount-Hill & Michelle A. Cubellis (2019) 'Examining housing discrimination across race, gender and felony history.' *Housing Studies*. 34:5, 761-778.

15 Hanratty, J. et al. (2020). 'Discharge Programmes for Individuals Experiencing, or at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness: a Systematic Review.' [Centre for Homelessness Impact.](#)

16 Bretherton J and Pleace N. (2019). 'Is Work an Answer to Homelessness? Evaluating an Employment Programme Homeless Adults.' [University of York.](#)

17 Ministry of Justice. (2021). [Community Performance Annual, update to March 2021.](#)

18 NB: [Recent criminological research from Australia \(not yet replicated in the UK\) found that risk of homelessness dramatically increases six months after release from prison; thus an extended view of the experience of homelessness after release is vital.](#)

19 Home Office. (2022). [Criminal Records Reform -- Rehabilitation Periods: Equalities Impact Assessment.](#)

20 Walker, A. (2019). 'Thousands of Ex-Prisoners Likely to Be Sleeping Rough.' [The Guardian.](#)

21 Ministry of Justice. (2019). [Economic and Social Costs of Reoffending: Analytical Report. Ministry of Justice Analytical Series.](#)

There are several ways to measure how many people experience homelessness in the wake of incarceration, but the information collected during the process of applying for government homelessness assistance provides the most detailed information. Statutory homelessness statistics suggest that prison discharge and homelessness are consistently linked across the United Kingdom, though frequency varies across each of the four nations.

In England, the statutory homelessness statistics released quarterly by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) reveal that, of 144,670 total households owed a homelessness relief duty in England in the fiscal year 2021-22, 4.2% (6,090) fell into homeless immediately upon departure from prison; this represents a slight decrease from 2020-21 but still indicates that a substantial number of people experience homelessness in the wake of prison discharge.²²

In Wales, in 2018-19, 11% (1,317 out of 11,715) of the households found to be eligible for a homelessness relief duty listed a prison as their last settled accommodation.²³

In Scotland, in 2020-21, 5.2% (1,765 out of 33,792) of total households applying for a homelessness relief duty listed prison as their most recent accommodation.^{24,25,26}

In Northern Ireland, while the number of people experiencing homelessness after discharge specifically from prison is not published, the number of households 'presenting as homeless' to a local council after being discharged from any kind of institution (hospital, prison, etc.) in 2021-22, represented 311 out of a total of 15,758 (2%).²⁷

While considerably less data about people experiencing street homelessness is available, the Rough Sleeping Questionnaire (RSQ), conducted by the UK Government in 2019 and 2020, illustrates that a substantial subset of people experiencing street homelessness sampled from across England had been incarcerated previously (53%).²⁸ Crucially, 11% of the report's respondents indicated that prison was the most recent type of accommodation they held before experiencing street homelessness; this suggests that the risk of experiencing street homelessness immediately upon discharge from prison constitutes a significant issue throughout England. Zooming in, the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) system indicates that, in Q3 2022, 31% of individuals experiencing street homelessness throughout Greater London also reported prior imprisonment.^{29,30} More specifically, in 2022-2023, 3.1% of people newly experiencing street homelessness said their last settled base was a prison, consistent with the figure from 2021-22.³¹

22 DLUHC. 2023. 'Table A4R', [Statutory homelessness in England: financial year 2021-2022](#).

23 StatsWales. 2019. '[Households found to be eligible, homeless subject to duty to help to secure during the year. Main reason for loss of last settled home by type of household \(Section 73\)](#)'.

24 [Homelessness in Scottish Prison Service 2020-2021, 2021](#). Scottish Government.

25 [Homelessness in Scotland 2020-2021, 2021](#). Scottish Government.

26 Shelter Scotland. (2015). [Preventing Homelessness and Reducing Reoffending – Insights from service users of the Supporting Prisoners: Advice Network, Scotland](#).

27 Department for Communities. (2022). '[Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2021-22](#)'. Department for Communities.

28 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. '[Rough Sleeping Questionnaire: Initial Findings](#)'. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

29 Greater London Authority. (2023). [Rough Sleeping in London \(CHAIN Reports\): Greater London Bulletin \(2022/2023\)](#).

30 Similar to Q1, when 30% of those experiencing street homelessness were prison leavers: Greater London Authority. (2021). [Rough sleeping in London \(CHAIN reports\)](#). Greater London Authority.

31 Greater London Authority. (2022). [Rough sleeping in London: Full Report \(CHAIN reports\)](#). Greater London Authority.

The Centre for Homelessness Impact and DLUHC are currently working with local authorities throughout England to implement the Rough Sleeping Data Framework^{32,33}, which expands data collection and will improve our understanding of how many people fall into street homelessness after being released from prison. In order to accurately assess the scale of the problem across the United Kingdom, the collection of data about the number of people experiencing statutory and street homelessness after release from prison must also be expanded and improved in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.



32 Anderson, Rob. (2022). [‘Defining an end to rough sleeping.’](#) Centre for Homelessness Impact.

33 DLUHC. (2023). [‘Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework, September 2023.’](#) DLUHC.

Existing Government Support

Governmental policies and programmes have increasingly focused on accommodation status at release. This has resulted in emphases on coordination between governmental services and on beginning to work with people who are in prison before their release to ensure their successful transition to the community. However – due to a lack of funding, an overstretched frontline workforce facing increasing caseloads, and a strained housing market – these promising provisions have faced significant challenges and have largely not met their goals.³⁴

Under the Duty to Refer, implemented in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, prisons in England are required to refer individuals with no pre-arranged settled accommodation to local authorities.³⁵ However, the number of people referred is substantially lower than the number of individuals who experience homelessness after being released from prison. In England, 6,090 households owed a homelessness relief duty were categorised as becoming 'homeless upon departure' from custody in 2021-22, but only 2,060 households were referred to local authorities from prison in the same period. Furthermore, in most cases, local authorities do not have a duty to house people unless they are particularly vulnerable, excluding many single individuals on probation supervision.³⁶

In 2013, the Ministry of Justice implemented 'Through the Gate' resettlement services, which expanded the availability of post-release supervision and services provision³⁷. Beginning 12 weeks before prisoners' scheduled release, these services assist prisoners in finding and maintaining accommodation; managing their finances, benefits, and debts; and entering education, training, and employment. However, participants have reported disjointed services and insufficient support upon release.³⁸ Furthermore, consistent underfunding and understaffing have limited the programme and increased pressure on already strained personnel.³⁹ Despite a renewed focus on accommodation services, a 2019 MoJ report notes that the percentage of people housed in the wake of their release from prison remains stagnant.⁴⁰ This report

34 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation. (2020). *Accommodation and Support for Adult Offenders in the Community and on Release from Prison in England*.

35 Shelter. (2021). *Homelessness Referrals for People in Prison and on Probation*.

36 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation. (2020). *Accommodation and Support for Adult Offenders in the Community and on Release from Prison in England*.

37 These services, which, for the most part, restructured existing programmes for people leaving prison, were, until mid-2021, largely outsourced to third sector organisations entitled Community Rehabilitation Companies; however, these services have since been incorporated into the government-run 'Probation Service.'

38 Taylor, S., Burke, L., Millings, M., & Ragonese, E. (2017). 'Transforming Rehabilitation during a penal crisis: A case study of Through the Gate services in a resettlement prison in England and Wales.' *European Journal of Probation*, 9(2), 115–131.

39 Millings, M., Taylor, S., Burke, L., & Ragonese, E. (2019). 'Through the Gate: The implementation, management and delivery of resettlement service provision for short-term prisoners.' *Probation Journal*, 66(1), 77–95.

40 Ministry of Justice. (2020). *A Process Evaluation of the Enhanced Through the Gate Specification: Final Report*.

highlighted several reasons for this obstinate figure: ‘a shortage of housing stock, delays in obtaining benefits, high up-front costs of renting, low priority on housing registers, insufficient support services, and providers who are averse to accommodating people with substantial criminal records’.

In 2021, five regions across England⁴¹ adopted a programme entitled Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) to support people leaving prison who are at risk of homelessness by supplying up to 84 nights of guaranteed temporary accommodation and individualised assistance in securing permanent housing. To date, this programme has supported 5,210 people. According to a National Audit Office report released in May 2023, this intervention showed mixed results across a variety of outcome measures, including accommodation, employment, and substance use.⁴²

The report highlighted that, while the proportion of people who were recorded as being housed on the first night after their release from prison was significantly higher in CAS3 regions than in areas without the intervention, the proportion of people who remained housed three months later remained largely the same in CAS3 regions when compared to other areas.⁴³ In other words, the seemingly positive effects on housing more people upon release is not sustained over time. Difficulties cited as hindering the effectiveness of the CAS3 programme mirrored obstacles observed in prison discharge generally: a lengthy referral process, limited workforce capacity, large caseloads, and a lack of clarity regarding resettlement responsibilities among departments each contributed to the programme’s mixed results.



41 Per NAO report, below: Yorkshire and Humberside; North West; East of England; Kent, Surrey, and Sussex; and Greater Manchester.

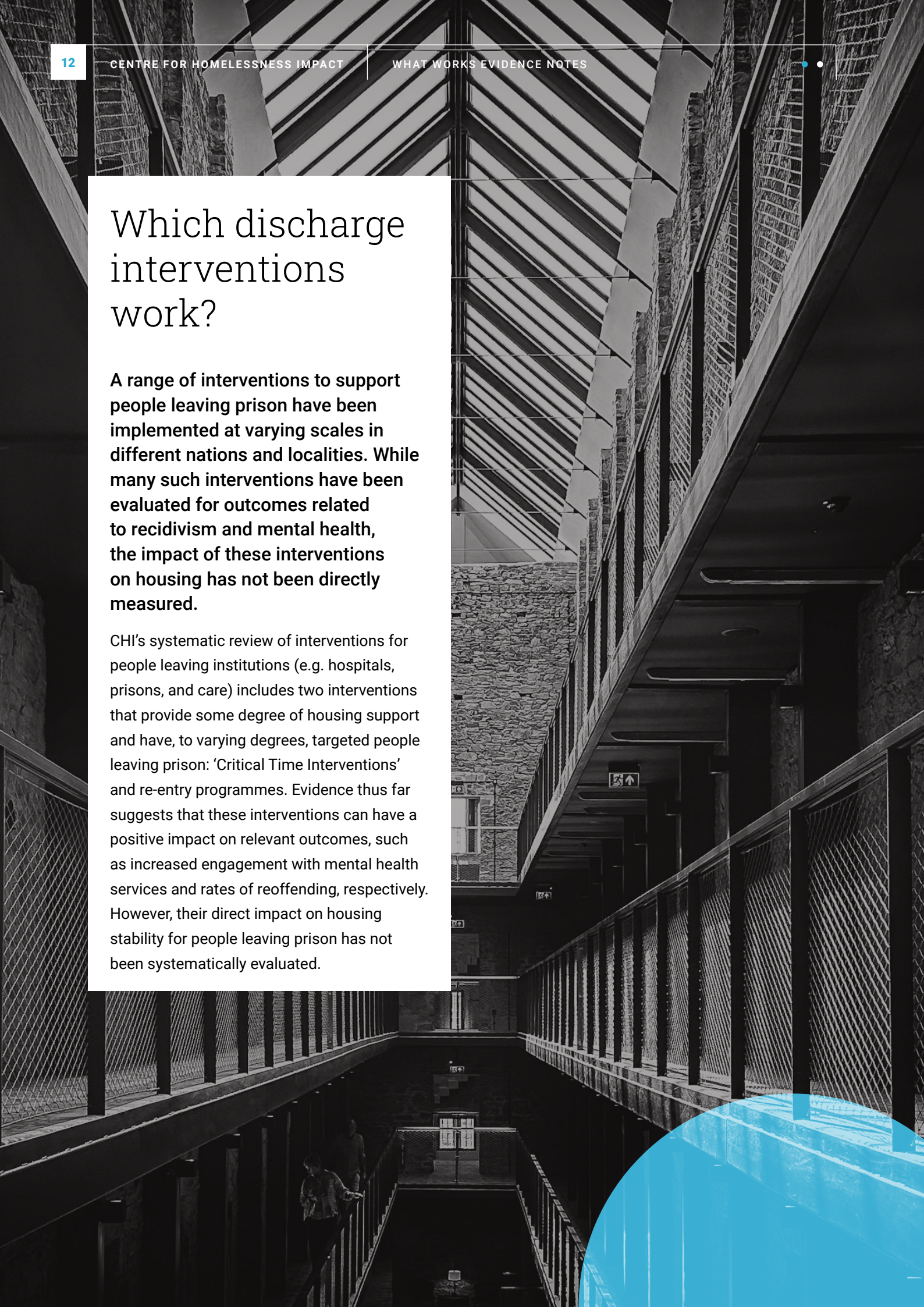
42 NAO. (2023). ‘Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending.’ P. 10. [NAO](#).

43 However, the report also noted that comparisons between these regions was difficult and indicated that, in future, HMPPS plans to conduct a robust evaluation of the program’s efficacy when compared to control groups.

Which discharge interventions work?

A range of interventions to support people leaving prison have been implemented at varying scales in different nations and localities. While many such interventions have been evaluated for outcomes related to recidivism and mental health, the impact of these interventions on housing has not been directly measured.

CHI's systematic review of interventions for people leaving institutions (e.g. hospitals, prisons, and care) includes two interventions that provide some degree of housing support and have, to varying degrees, targeted people leaving prison: 'Critical Time Interventions' and re-entry programmes. Evidence thus far suggests that these interventions can have a positive impact on relevant outcomes, such as increased engagement with mental health services and rates of reoffending, respectively. However, their direct impact on housing stability for people leaving prison has not been systematically evaluated.



Critical Time Intervention (CTI)

CTI is an intervention leveraging increased contact with a single caseworker to improve the connection of a person leaving prison with requisite services and community support.⁴⁴ This intervention seeks to prevent recurrent homelessness in people leaving institutional settings and largely targets people experiencing vulnerability as they are struggling with severe mental illnesses; most interventions have targeted people leaving hospitals.

The programme encompasses three consecutive three-month phases, in which CTI caseworker typically works with 10-15 clients at a time:

- Phase one (transition to the community): this covers the period immediately before and after discharge from the institution, in which the caseworker gets to know the client, assesses their needs, and co-creates a transition plan to link the person to services and the community.
- Phase two (try-out): the caseworker monitors and adjusts the systems of support developed during phase one and intervenes as needed.
- Phase three (transfer of care): the caseworker helps to develop and implement a plan to achieve long-term goals (e.g., employment, family reunification) and finalises the transfer of responsibilities to caregivers and community providers.⁴⁵

[Watch Sian describe how Critical Time Interventions work in practice](#)

While the efficacy of CTI programmes has been evaluated for people leaving prison, housing outcomes for this group have not yet been assessed. In a study across eight English prisons, CTI for prisoners with severe mental health issues was shown to significantly improve contact with mental health practitioners up to six months after release, which is important as individuals in this cohort are at a particularly high risk of suicide and drug overdose in the days and weeks following release.⁴⁶ Further evaluations targeting housing and reoffending outcomes would be valuable.⁴⁷

However, it should be noted that the impact of CTI on housing outcomes has been evaluated for people with experiences of homelessness being discharged from hospitals in the United States, showing some promise for its efficacy in reducing the risk of homelessness upon institutional discharge. Importantly, it should not be assumed that findings related to hospital discharge in the United States will translate directly to prison discharge in the United Kingdom, so attention is needed when generalising; one study reported significantly improved housing outcomes for people who participated in CTI programmes when compared to people who did not: participants were five times less likely to experience homelessness in the wake of hospital discharge compared to non-participants.⁴⁸

44 Hanratty, J. et al. (2020). [‘Discharge Programmes for Individuals Experiencing, or at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness: a Systematic Review.’ Centre for Homelessness Impact.](#)

45 Ibid.

46 Shaw et al. (2017). [‘Critical Time Intervention for Severely Mentally ill Prisoners \(CriSP\): a Randomised Controlled Trial.](#) NIHR Journals Library.

47 ‘Draine, J. and Herman, D. (2007). [‘Critical Time Intervention for Re-entry From Prison for Persons With Mental Illness.’ Psychiatric Services 58\(12\): 1577-1581.](#)

48 Herman, D. et al, (2011). [‘A Randomized Trial of Critical Time Intervention to Prevent Homelessness in Persons with Severe Mental Illness following Institutional Discharge.’ Psychiatric Services 62\(7\): 713-719.](#)

Re-entry programmes

'Re-entry programmes,' largely based on US policies and generally similar to Approved Premises programmes in the UK, are interventions that focus on various aspects of the transition from prison to living in the community. Some of these programmes specifically target housing, and others focus on other tenets of successful reintegration, such as employment. These interventions typically involve service provision (e.g. rental assistance, employment training, mental health case management), focusing on improving coordination between services throughout the re-entry process.

Some housing-focused programmes have shown promise in initial evaluations. One study with a small sample size based in the United States found that an intervention that offers individualised case management and partially pays for rent upon release effectively improved both long-term housing stability and wellbeing for people released from prison.⁴⁹ This study concluded that 'housing-centred' programmes, especially those that provide both material and emotional support, 'can be an important bridge' in the re-entry process'.⁵⁰ Another US-based study found that a larger, multisite intervention centred on the provision of housing reduced rates of reoffending.⁵¹

A review of nine high-quality studies (predominantly from the United States) found that, while the assessed re-entry programmes were generally effective in reducing recidivism, their success varied across participant characteristics and specific outcome measures. This review also found that most studies assess the effectiveness of re-entry programmes through their impact on rates of reoffending, leaving housing outcomes largely unknown.⁵² Thus, while a handful of individual studies suggest that re-entry programmes that focus on housing provision can improve both recidivism and housing stability, it is difficult to extrapolate both of these conclusions to re-entry programmes in general. More research – especially systematic reviews measuring the effect of such programmes on housing outcomes – is needed.

49 Pleggenkuhle, B., Huebner, B., & Kras, K. (2016). '[Solid start: supportive housing, social support, and re-entry transitions.](#)' *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 39(3), 380-397.

50 Ibid: P. 15

51 Lutze, F. et al. (2013). '[Homelessness and Reentry: A Multisite Outcome Evaluation of Washington State's Reentry Housing Program for High Risk Offenders.](#)' 41(4).

52 Wong et al. (2019). 'Halfway out: an examination of the effects of halfway houses on criminal recidivism', [International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology](#), 63(7)

Table 1: Summary of Effective Interventions for People Leaving Prison

Intervention	Population	Description	Impact on housing outcomes	Impact on other outcomes
Critical Time Intervention (CTI)	Adults leaving prison who are vulnerable to mental illness	9-month programme in which a single caseworker develops a re-entry plan and coordinates requisite services in three successive phases.	? Housing stability	+ Contact with mental health practitioners + Housing stability for people leaving hospitals
Re-entry programmes	Adults leaving prison under post-release supervision	Interventions focused on providing services related to various challenges stemming from prison discharge (e.g. temporary housing, employment assistance, or mental health services); some are housing-focused.	? Housing stability	- Recidivism

Promising interventions where more evidence is needed

Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE)

In Scotland, a set of standards to ensure that people leaving prison have reliable access to stable accommodation upon release was implemented in 2017.⁵³ Best practices for coordinating and maintaining access to relevant services for people in prison are organised into four timeframes: the point of imprisonment, the main duration of the sentence, the eight weeks prior to release, and the period after release.

First, at the point of imprisonment, each person's housing, health, and welfare benefit needs are assessed; the local authority is contacted regarding access to homelessness prevention services; and work is undertaken with external parties, including private landlords, to maintain an existing tenancy if possible. Second, throughout the sentence, a lead support worker is tasked with ensuring that progress is being made on securing sustainable housing for each person. Third, in the two-month period prior to release, GP appointments, homelessness and benefit applications, and arrangements for the resumption or start of a tenancy are arranged; crucially, relevant stakeholders including prison support staff, social or private landlords, and local authority staff are coordinated throughout this period in a combined plan directed by a single

support worker. Fourth, a post-release plan is agreed for the period following a person's discharge from prison; family and support networks are involved in this process to ensure progress towards clear and attainable goals related to accessing housing, service, and support.

Throughout these four stages, the SHORE protocol provides a person-centred approach, in which each person in prison is both supported and involved proactively in planning and preparing for a seamless transition from prison. This process has been cited as an effective method of coordinating services and support across agencies via a combined plan; anecdotal evidence from participants in a CHI 'Evidence Sprint' in 2021 reflected that opportunities to prevent homelessness were more commonly identified since the implementation of SHORE.⁵⁴ A robust, external evaluation of this programme would offer further evidenced conclusions and actionable insights.

53 Scottish Prison Service. (2017). '[Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone \(SHORE\) Standards.](#)'

54 Centre for Homelessness Impact. (2022). '[2022 Evidence and Skills Sprints: learning from Aberdeenshire County Council.](#)'

Landlord Incentives

A person's prior imprisonment, experience of homelessness, or receipt of benefits can often lead to difficulties renting properties in the private rented sector (PRS).^{55,56} As a result, some local authorities encourage landlords by offering cash upfront for an assured shorthold tenancy, providing a guarantee for late or unpaid rent, or depositing bonds to cover costs incurred during a tenancy.^{57,58,59} In 2021, CHI conducted a randomised controlled trial testing the impact of these interventions on landlords' theoretical willingness to rent to people receiving Universal Credit.⁶⁰ This study found that providing rent guarantees and cash incentives resulted in the largest increase in respondents' willingness to rent to people who relied on Universal Credit, but reluctance remained high. Similar interventions may be effective in encouraging landlords to rent to formerly imprisoned people, but this has not yet been assessed.

Protocols for ensuring people exit prison into accommodation

Some local authority housing options services follow shared protocols in partnership with local prisons, clarifying processes and responsibilities for various agencies when discharging people from prison in order to prevent homelessness. For instance, the 'Essex Prison Housing Protocol' establishes best practices for release, clearly delineates services essential to the re-entry process, and divides responsibilities for re-housing among relevant agencies.⁶¹ Qualitative evidence compiled by DLUHC and the MoJ concludes that such plans should cover entry into prison, the duration of a sentence, the period prior to release, and re-entry into the community; furthermore, the creation of such protocols should involve all agencies and available services relevant to prisoners' successful reintegration.⁶² Specific stipulations for the formation of re-entry protocols include that existing tenancies should be maintained at the beginning of short sentences, probation officers should be included in the re-housing process, local authorities should create specific avenues for referrals from prison, and data should be shared among all relevant agencies.

55 Pleggenkuhle, B., Huebner, B., & Kras, K. (2016). '[Solid start: supportive housing, social support, and re-entry transitions.](#)' *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 39(3), 380-397.

56 Crisis. (2023). '[Systemic failure' fuelling worsening homelessness and health among prison leavers in Newcastle.](#)'

57 Rent guarantee scheme offered by Oxford City Council: Oxford City Council. '[Council rent guarantee pilot scheme benefits landlords and tenants.](#)' *Oxford City Council*.

58 Cash upfront scheme offered by Enfield Council: Enfield Council. '[Enfield Council Homefinder Scheme.](#)' *Enfield Council*.

59 Deposit bond scheme offered by Isle of Wight Council: Isle of Wight Council. '[Landlord Incentive Scheme.](#)' *Isle of Wight Council*.

60 Volker, E., Valencia-Torres, L., Murar, F., and Farrington, J. (2021). '[Encouraging landlords to let to people receiving benefits and at risk of homelessness: two online randomised controlled trials.](#)' *Centre for Homelessness Impact*.

61 Future of Essex. *Essex Prisoner Housing Protocol*.

62 Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2019). *Prison Release Protocol Guidance*.

Digital services for people leaving prison to access services

In the absence of a case manager or reintegration programmes to help people find relevant services on release, preliminary research suggests that digital services could help. A qualitative, exploratory study considering possible avenues for digital services in the Australian criminal justice system indicated that software enabling people leaving prison to find and access housing and related services would be of most use to formerly imprisoned respondents, who unanimously identified finding and maintaining housing post-release as the most challenging obstacle to successful reintegration.⁶³ This study also suggests that service coordination could be enhanced by digital software documenting the services and information needed and received by different prisoners in the period before release, though concerns about increased surveillance were expressed.

Other Promising Programmes

Several promising programmes recently implemented in England target different parts of the process of maintaining stable accommodation for incarcerated people. First, DLUHC's 'Accommodation for Ex-Offenders' scheme has provided £550 million to support the accommodation of people leaving prison in private rented sector housing via direct rental deposits, landlords incentives, and post-release housing advisors.^{64,65} Second, a £6.4 million pilot programme has provided two years of guaranteed accommodation, as well as tailored housing and employment support, to 400 people leaving custody in three areas across England.^{66,67} Third, an MoJ programme entitled the 'Prison Leavers' Project' has allocated £20 million to promote collaboration across local agencies working to prevent reoffending; several of the interventions developed focus on the role of housing.⁶⁸ These programmes have not yet been externally evaluated.

63 Grierson et al. (2022). *Design considerations for a digital service to support prison leavers. (from proceedings of Designing Interactive Services Conference).*

64 Homeless Link. (2022). 'A Summary of the Government's New Rough Sleeping Strategy.'

65 DLUHC. (2023). 'Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Scheme: Local Authority Funding Allocations between July 2021 and March 2025.'

66 Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service. (2018). 'Prisons to Deliver Trailblazing £6m Rough Sleeping Initiative.'

67 Ministry of Justice. (2019). 'Scheme Giving Ex-Offenders a Stable Place to Live Up and Running.'

68 Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Prison Leavers Project: innovating to tackle the complex causes of reoffending*



Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

Experts by experience who commented on this article emphasised that ensuring that people leaving prison do not experience homelessness for even one night upon release should be a policy priority moving forward. While several interventions to ameliorate the link between release from prison and subsequent homelessness have been implemented, further evidence is required to draw definitive conclusions about what does and does not work; additional research should be undertaken to evaluate existing programmes, specially to measure the impacts on housing outcomes.

Given the existing evidence, our recommendations are to:

- Promote the implementation of evidence-based, integrated approaches, such as CTI and re-entry programmes, which have been shown to be effective for other outcomes relevant to successful reintegration, and evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in housing outcomes.
- Increase coordination between different governmental agencies and service providers before and after release may improve the effectiveness of existing programmes. Interagency protocols developed with input from relevant stakeholders can facilitate this process.
- Explore and evaluate proactive programmes aiming to increase opportunities for obtaining settled accommodation in the period following prison discharge (e.g. incentivising private landlords to rent to people with prior experiences with the criminal justice system, providing stable and sustained accommodation for people upon release, or ensuring that housing needs are assessed and addressed soon after the point of imprisonment).
- Increase support for prison support staff and other frontline workers, with a focus on improving workforce capacity, to attenuate the risk of staff burnout and ensure that each person leaving prison is assisted in navigating access to a range of services via a single point of contact.

What 'quick wins' can be implemented?

Finally, existing evidence sources, as well as the findings of CHI's 2021 'Evidence Sprint' related to prison discharge, hint at the possibility for small-scale, relatively easy changes to improve housing outcomes for people leaving prison:

- Coordinate with local authorities to assess housing needs, utilise homelessness prevention services, and contact landlords to maintain existing tenancies at the start of a sentence may help ensure that prison support staff prevent post-release homelessness where possible and meet Duty to Refer requirements where needed.
- Complete homelessness applications in the period immediately prior to release can reduce gaps between the end of a sentence and the provision of temporary accommodation by local authorities.
- Build on recent policy changes to avoid scheduling releases on late afternoons and Fridays for all people leaving prison⁶⁹. These releases increase the likelihood that people leaving prison experience a gap between release and the receipt of essential services; accordingly, changing this timeline may improve outcomes.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Nacro. (2023). ['Changes to Friday prison releases start from 30th November'](#). Nacro.

⁷⁰ Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2019). [Prison Release Protocol Guidance](#). Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities.



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ISBN: 978-1-914132-37-7

CHI | Registered Charity Number: E&W1183026; SC049501

Company Number: 11732500

www.homelessnessimpact.org
