

First international initiative to end street homelessness

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The first global initiative aimed at ending street homelessness has revealed key ingredients for success along with common systemic barriers, new research from Heriot-Watt University has found.

The Institute of Global Homelessness' (IGH) A Place to Call Home, launched in 2017, is the first concerted effort to support cities across the globe to eradicate street homelessness.

An initial 13 "Vanguard Cities" committed to either ending or reducing street homelessness by December 2020, with over half (Adelaide, Glasgow, Greater Manchester, Montevideo, Santiago, Sydney and Tshwane) achieving reductions.

Greater Manchester set the most ambitious target, to end all street homelessness by December 2020, and achieved an impressive 52% reduction against baseline, the largest reduction in absolute numbers on the streets. COVID initiatives helped to accelerate success and demonstrate what can be achieved with sufficient political will.

The independent evaluation, funded by Oak Foundation and delivered by Heriot-Watt University in partnership with the GISS institute in Bremen, Germany, monitored progress towards the numerical goals set by each city. Crucially, it draws out successful interventions that may be relevant to other locations.

Key to success in several cities was a lead agency driving efforts and coordinated entry to homelessness services including assertive street outreach services, individual case management, and the Housing First approach. Common barriers to progress included a lack of preventative interventions, pressure on [affordable housing](#) and insufficient resources, especially in Global South cities.

An overreliance on undignified and, at times, unsafe communal shelters and aggressive enforcement interventions represented an approach limited to "managing" rather than reducing street homelessness. Additionally, the direct involvement of some religious denominations was found to discourage some people from accessing services.

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, director of I-SPHERE at Heriot-Watt University led the international research team. She said: "Street homelessness is one of the most extreme and visible manifestations of profound injustice that our society faces today. Yet, it often struggles to achieve sufficient attention at an international level.

"While there are clear country-specific challenges that need to be overcome, this first global initiative on tackling street homelessness has highlighted the need to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach, towards more specialized interventions that target specific subgroups. Appropriate services for women, children, older people and other [vulnerable groups](#), as well as culturally sensitive responses to Indigenous people and other groups affected by racial and associated forms of prejudice are essential.

"The overwhelming emphasis on emergency interventions was clear in our findings, with support applied only when people are already in crisis, rather than placing greater focus on preventative models. Even predictable pathways into street homelessness from institutions like prisons and hospitals have seldom attracted concerted prevention efforts."

Baroness Louise Casey, Chair of the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) said: "This report is the first examination of approaches that compares homelessness across six continents in thirteen different cities. While we brought together a diverse set of cities across the Global North and South, the report demonstrates a high degree of continuity in terms of next steps to addressing street homelessness. That said, it's clear that radical reform is still required to achieve meaningful and constructive systemic change.

"You cannot, however, solve street homelessness if you do not first 'see it.' The report findings come as the United Nations recently passed a

Resolution calling for a common measurement of homelessness across member states for the first time in 60 years. IGH has since signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN's Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to improve global homeless data. We will use better global data to build on the findings of this international evaluation for what works and what does not work to end homelessness.

"Each global city demonstrated the importance of assertive outreach services and decent emergency accommodation, coupled with rapid access to long-term housing in settled communities. This report highlights that we now need to move away from inhumane and undignified communal shelters and reject exclusionary conditionality thresholds including unnecessary ID requirements, but countries need more support to facilitate this move. A concerted effort to identify and prevent key routes onto the streets is needed."

The involvement of the Institute of Global Homelessness was viewed as instrumental in driving up the local profile, momentum and level of ambition attached to reducing street homelessness in the Vanguard Cities. It is recommended that work with future cohorts of cities should focus on more tailored forms of support specific to the needs of each city, and to different types of stakeholders, particularly frontline workers.

More information: [Final-Report-Ending-Street-Homelessness-in-Vanguard-Cities](#)

[Executive-Summary-Ending-Street-Homelessness-in-Vanguard-Cities](#)

Provided by Heriot-Watt University

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