

# Building political support to end homelessness

Hannah Gousy, September 2020

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## About the author

Hannah was Head of Policy and Campaigns at the national homelessness charity, Crisis until August 2020. During her time at Crisis, Hannah co-authored a comprehensive plan to end all forms of homelessness in Great Britain and worked on successful campaigns to establish the new Homelessness Reduction Act and set up Housing First pilots. Most recently Hannah led a successful campaign to secure an automatic legal right to settled housing for survivors of domestic abuse. During her time at Crisis, Hannah completed a secondment to the Centre for Social Justice, where she wrote a report on Housing First and other housing-led solutions to ending homelessness. Prior to her time at Crisis, Hannah worked in policy and campaigns roles at Shelter and Mind. Hannah is currently Head of Policy for the independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales.

## Acknowledgments

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working in frontline services, in policy roles and those with lived experience of homelessness.<sup>4</sup> The plan provides a comprehensive roadmap for government, outlining the policy changes needed to ensure that:

- No-one sleeps rough.
- Everyone has a safe, stable place to live and no-one lives in emergency accommodation such as a hostel or night shelter without a plan to quickly move into housing.
- Where we can predict it, homelessness is prevented. This includes ensuring that no-one leaves their home or is forced to leave a state institution such as a prison or hospital with nowhere to go.

The plan includes a full list of policy recommendations needed in England, Scotland and Wales to end homelessness. Some of the solutions in the plan include:

- Building 100,500 new social homes each year for the next 15 years to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness and those on low incomes, who may be at risk of homelessness.
- Increasing housing benefit rates to ensure that they truly cover the cost of housing and reflect projected rent rises.
- Enabling everyone to access help by; abolishing priority need categories in the homelessness legislation in England and Wales; ensuring that a lack of a local connection is never a barrier to support; and introducing robust regulation and monitoring of how key bodies support people facing homelessness.
- Funding of Critical Time Interventions, an evidence-based approach that helps people move quickly into their own home.
- Funding for robust, personalised support for all those sleeping rough, which is focused on moving them into permanent accommodation including Housing First for those who have higher support needs and face the greatest exclusion from homelessness services.

Homelessness and housing are devolved policy areas, and it is therefore the responsibility of the Scottish, Welsh and Westminster Governments to publish plans on ending homelessness for each nation. Many of the principles and policies from *Everybody In* have formed the basis of the Scottish Government's "Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan" and the Welsh Government's Homelessness Action Group's recommendations.<sup>5</sup> However, we are yet to see similar progress in England. A comprehensive plan to end homelessness from the Westminster Government is not only necessary to reverse the steep rise in homelessness in England, but also to affect the change required in non-devolved policy areas, including welfare and immigration, to successfully end homelessness across Great Britain.

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<sup>4</sup> Downie, M., Gousy, H., Basran, J., Jacob, R., Rowe, S., Hancock, C., Albanese, F., Pritchard, R., Nightingale, K. and Davies, T. (2018) *Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain*. London: Crisis.

<sup>5</sup> Welsh Government (March 2020), *The framework of policies, approaches and plans needed to end homelessness in Wales (What ending homelessness in Wales looks like)*, Report from the Homelessness Action Group for the Welsh Government, [accessed: [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-03/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-03/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020_0.pdf)]; [Scottish Government \(2018\), Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan](#).

It was this context that provided the driving factor in my application for a Churchill Fellowship; to better understand how to secure substantive political commitments, and the enactment of plans, to end homelessness. Given that the Crisis plan to end homelessness already sets out a comprehensive set of policy measures needed to achieve this, I was keen to focus the Fellowship more specifically on the process by which policy change is achieved.

The primary aim of the Fellowship was therefore to examine the political campaigning strategies used in other countries to help secure significant political commitments and establish plans to end homelessness. As part of my Churchill Fellowship I have travelled to cities in America, Canada, Spain and Austria to learn more about the strategies of campaigning organisations, as well as speaking to politicians and government officials about what makes a convincing case for political change from their perspective. The secondary aim of the project was to explore what mechanisms could be put in place to ensure that political commitments and policy interventions are long lasting.

### The nature of the study

In order to best utilise the lessons from this Fellowship I selected countries and cities where the political and socio-economic context bore a resemblance to the UK. While there are also significant lessons that can be taken from the Welsh and Scottish Governments about the development of their plans to end homelessness, it is important to note that these have been formulated in very different political contexts. Another critical factor was to select countries where the progress achieved, and the campaigns themselves, were broadly guided by similar principles to Crisis' plan to end homelessness; a housing led and preventative approach. While none of the countries and cities are an exact mirror of the UK context or the principles set out in Crisis' plan, between them I believe they serve as useful comparators and therefore held the potential to deliver some vital lessons.

The findings presented in this report are based on interviews with key stakeholders. The majority of these took place in person and some were done over Zoom.

## Chapter 2: An international perspective

To help better understand the lessons learnt and how they translate to the UK, I will begin by briefly outlining the context of each country, in terms of trends and patterns of homelessness, political interventions and the socio-economic context.

### United States

#### *Trends in homelessness*

According to the US Federal Government's Department for Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Annual Point in Time Count, 17 out of every 10,000 people in the US experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2019.<sup>6</sup> These figures are made up of people who are sleeping rough and people living in sheltered homelessness accommodation. The majority of people (70%) experiencing homelessness are single households as opposed to families.<sup>7</sup> Based on the data from the last point in time count, there has been a 3% increase in homelessness across the US. However, there has been an overall downward trend in homelessness over the last decade. Since 2007, when nationwide data collection began, there has been a 12% reduction in homelessness.<sup>8</sup> On closer examination, there have been more significant reductions among certain subpopulations including veterans (a 50% reduction) and families (a 29% reduction).<sup>9</sup>

There are some groups experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness who are not captured in the Annual Point in Time Count. This includes people who are "doubled up," the term used in the US to refer to sofa surfing. In 2018, the National Alliance to End Homelessness estimated that there were an estimated four million people living in this situation.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Alliance reported that in the same year there were 6.5 million people who were paying more than 50% of their income on housing costs, which is a lower figure than the previous year, but still significantly higher than in 2007, when monitoring on this data first began.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Key policy developments*

- **Rise in homelessness in the 1980s**

There was a significant rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness in the 1980s across the US. This rise was largely driven by cuts to affordable housing programmes and housing subsidies, set against the backdrop of the recession at the start of the decade and rising levels of unemployment. There were also significant cuts made to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and social services agencies during this period. In 1984, the HUD estimated that there

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<sup>6</sup> U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (2019), "2019 Point in time estimates of homelessness in the U.S", [accessed: <https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US>]

<sup>7</sup> U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (2019), *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, [accessed: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>]

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness, "State of Homelessness: 2020 Edition" [accessed: <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2020/>]

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

were between 250,000 to 350,000 people experiencing homelessness. By 1987, this figure had grown to between 500,000 to 600,000.<sup>12</sup>

- **McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act (1987)**

The response to rising levels of homelessness in the 1980s were primarily local, but by the late 1980s, the Reagan administration passed the first major federal legislative response to the issue; the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act (1987). Over the last thirty years the Act has been amended several times by the federal government. The Act was originally drafted to provide the legal basis upon which the federal government administered funding to individual states for the provision of homelessness shelters. The Act also established the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, an independent body of the US federal government, which is responsible for implementing and coordinating the federal and strategic plan to end homelessness. Subsequent amendments to the Act have established a right to education for children experiencing homelessness and the Continuum of Care Program, which is designed to provide a coordinated community wide response to ending homelessness.

- **The expansion of permanent supportive housing during the 1990s**

During the 1990s and 2000s there was a shift towards a more housing-led, or 'Housing First' approach to tackling homelessness in the US, particularly for people with high and complex support needs, who faced the greatest exclusion from mainstream services. Central to the concept of Housing First is that permanent housing is provided without a requirement on the prospective tenant to demonstrate that they are 'housing ready.' The move away from the shelter system towards the Housing First approach and expansion of permanent supportive housing was largely driven by research that found that higher rates of public services use – medical, mental health or criminal justice – are associated with longer-term and repeat homelessness.<sup>13</sup> The economic case for intervening earlier to prevent homelessness was brought to public attention in the US in 2006, in *The New Yorker* magazine. It featured the tragic life and death of Murray Barr, who became known after his death as 'Million Dollar Murray'.<sup>14</sup> Murray Barr, from Reno, Nevada was a well-known homeless man in his local area. Over the ten years he was street homeless in Reno, Murray Barr was repeatedly arrested and admitted to hospital. However, he was always discharged back to the streets rather than being assisted into housing. Following his death, local police officers calculated Murray's cost to local public services, including hospital care and short-term abstinence programmes. They concluded: 'It cost us one million dollars not to do something about Murray'.

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<sup>12</sup> Burt, M. (1992), *Introduction*. In *Over the Edge: The Growth of Homelessness in the 1980s* (pp. 3-10). Russell Sage Foundation. [accessed: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610440998.5>]

<sup>13</sup> Culhane, D.P. (2008) 'The Costs of Homelessness: A Perspective from the United States', *European Journal of Homelessness* 2(1), 97-114

<sup>14</sup> Gladwell, M. (2006) 'Million-Dollar Murray: Why problems like homelessness may be easier to solve than to manage', *The New Yorker*, 13 February. [accessed: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/02/13/million-dollar-murray>]

- **Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009)**

In 2009, the Obama Administration passed the Recovery and Reinvestment Act to help protect and create employment opportunities in the wake of the 2008 financial crash. The Act made provision for the establishment of a \$1.5 billion Homelessness Prevention Fund, which led to the creation of rapid rehousing programmes aimed at helping people to remain in their homes. A subsequent \$3bn was invested by the federal government into programmes that focused more squarely on helping people to remain housed. As a result of this intervention, a rental housing crisis was avoided, and the expected rise in homelessness as a result of the recession did not materialise. In comparison to the rising levels of homelessness in the UK during this period, between 2009-2011 homelessness in the US decreased by 1%.<sup>15</sup>

- **Opening Doors strategy**

In 2009, the federal government published its strategic plan to end and prevent homelessness, 'Opening Doors'. This was subsequently amended in 2015. The latest iteration of the plan has four main goals:

1. Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness in five years.
2. Prevent and end homelessness among veterans in five years.
3. Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in ten years, and
4. Set a path to ending all types of homelessness.

This plan is designed to serve as a roadmap for joint action by various federal departments whose work impacts on homelessness. This work is coordinated by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. The plan proposes a set of strategies that require the federal government to work in partnership with state and local governments, as well as the private sector to employ cost effective, comprehensive solutions to end homelessness.

The plan contains ten main objectives:

1. Provide and promote collaborative leadership at all levels of government and across all sectors to inspire and energise Americans to commit to preventing and ending homelessness
2. Strengthen the capacity of public and private organisations by increasing knowledge about collaboration, homelessness, and successful interventions to prevent and end homelessness
3. Provide affordable housing to people experiencing, or those most at risk, of homelessness
4. Increase meaningful and sustainable employment for people experiencing, or those most at risk, of homelessness
5. Improve access to mainstream programmes and services to reduce people's financial vulnerability to homelessness

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<sup>15</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness and Homelessness Research Institute (January 2012), *The state of homelessness in America in 2012*, Washington: NAEH.

6. Integrate primary and behavioural health care services with homeless assistance programs and housing to reduce people's vulnerability to and the impacts of homelessness
7. Advance health and housing stability for youth aging out of systems such as foster care and juvenile justice
8. Advance health and housing stability for people experiencing homelessness who have frequent contact with hospitals and criminal justice
9. Transform homeless services to crisis response systems that prevent homelessness and rapidly return people who experience homelessness to stable housing

There are several factors that qualify the US as a suitable case study. As outlined above a central principle of Crisis' plan to end homelessness is the shift towards a housing-led and Housing First approach to ending homelessness. While the shelter system still plays a significant role in the country's response to tackling and managing homelessness, there is much greater consensus, both from the federal government and service providers, on the merit of a housing-led approach to ending homelessness than is currently the case in England.

Secondly, significant commitments and plans to end homelessness have been made, and reductions in homelessness achieved, by both Republican and Democrat Governments- namely under the Bush and Obama administrations. Cross-party consistency and consensus were something that I was keen to explore with campaigners and politicians to help better establish how we can create long-lasting change.

Finally, I was particularly interested to learn more about the role of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and their work to lobby for policy change in this area. In 2000, the Alliance launched their own report, *'A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years,'* drawing together data and evidence to make the case for increased outreach and a housing-led approach to ending homelessness in the US.<sup>16</sup> The content of this plan inspired the plan of the federal governments and hundreds of local plans across the country.

In addition to examining political change from a national perspective, the US also presented the opportunity to consider how a federal plan to end homelessness translates at a local state and city level. For this reason, in addition to visiting Washington I also travelled to Houston to examine the work of the Way Home, a coalition of over 100 organisations who have worked closely with the Mayor of Houston, with support from the federal government, to successfully implement a Housing First approach to reducing homelessness.

It should also be noted, however, that there are some significant differences between the US and England with regards to the housing market and the welfare system, and therefore the resources available to prevent and end homelessness. In the UK, housing benefit (or a housing payment as part a Universal Credit allowance) are distributed by central

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<sup>16</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness (2000), *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*, Washington: NAEH.

government. Claimants are awarded differing amounts depending on the size of their household and whereabouts in the country they live. Housing benefit is means tested to ensure that it is targeted at people who are unemployed, on a low income or receiving some other forms of benefits. Importantly, housing benefit is awarded based on need; all those who meet the means test will receive it. By comparison, in the US, the housing benefit – housing subsidy – system is made up of a series of pots administered at a federal, state and city level. These pots are limited, and once they run out, claimants will no longer be awarded a payment. As a result, it is estimated that only one in four households in the US who require the subsidy actually receive it. In England, there are four million households living in the social rented sector, making up 17% of the overall housing stock.<sup>17</sup> By comparison, despite the population being more than five times larger than England, there are only 1.2 million households living in public housing units.<sup>18</sup>

## Canada

### *Trends in homelessness*

The Canadian Observatory on homelessness has reported that there are 35,000 people experiencing homelessness on a given night in Canada.<sup>19</sup> This includes people staying in emergency homeless shelters, women and children in specialist domestic abuse refuge accommodation, people who are unsheltered (sleeping rough) and those in temporary institutional accommodation.

In Canada, homelessness is experienced at a disproportionately high rate by Indigenous, or First Nations communities. This will of course vary considerably from city to city, but on average people from Indigenous Communities make up 60% of the homeless population, despite only making up less than 5% of the overall population. Homelessness among Indigenous Communities should be considered as a consequence of Canada's history of colonisation and exploitation of indigenous land and populations. Significant abuse and cultural trauma occurred through the use of residential schools, which forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families and communities. Structural drivers among this group have included transitions from reserves to urban living, racism, landlord discrimination and higher rates of unemployment.

There are number of key policy interventions that are worth highlighting in order to provide sufficient context to this project.

### *Key policy developments*

- **Rise in homelessness in the 1980s-** Canada experienced its first major rise in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the mid-1980s following a series of

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2020), English Housing Survey, Headline Report, 2018-19, [accessed: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/860076/2018-19\\_EHS\\_Headline\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/860076/2018-19_EHS_Headline_Report.pdf)]

<sup>18</sup> U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD's Public Housing Program", [accessed: [https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental\\_assistance/phprog](https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental_assistance/phprog)]

<sup>19</sup> Homeless Hub, "How many people are homeless in Canada" [accessed: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/how-many-people-are-homeless-canada>]

cuts to social housing spend and homelessness related programs.<sup>20</sup> In the early 1990s, federal spending on the construction of new social housing came to an end. At the same time the federal government transferred responsibility for social housing to the individual provinces and as a result there are far fewer social housing units, with the exact numbers varying significantly from province to province. This has been linked to an increase in homelessness across Canada.<sup>21</sup>

- **National Housing Strategy: A place to call home (2017)**

Following a nationwide consultation in 2016, Justin Trudeau's Liberal Government published Canada's National Housing Strategy (NHS) to reduce homelessness, expand investment in affordable housing units and deliver a new Canada Housing Benefit. The strategy has been developed using a rights-based approach. The decade-long strategy is backed by 55 billion Canadian dollars. The NHS is the first of its kind to be published in Canada and marked a significant shift away from the decades of a more localist approach to housing policy. Canada, much like the US has previously operated a system of housing subsidy that is administered at a local level. Through the new National Housing Strategy Act the Canadian Government has established the national Canada Housing Benefit. The Canada Housing Benefit has been co-developed with the federal government and delivered by the provinces and territories and coordinated with municipalities and other partners. The Government has estimated that this new benefit will deliver an average of \$2,500 per year to each recipient household to help subsidise their rent. Over time, the Canada Housing Benefit will grow to support at least 300,000 households across the country.<sup>22</sup> The establishment of the new housing benefit system moves Canada somewhat closer to the UK system of national provision based on needs, however the subsidy is only designed to cover a small proportion of a household's total rental costs, again highlighting the contrast with the safety net provided by the housing benefit system in the UK.

- **Reaching Home Strategy (2019)**

The Reaching Home Strategy, published by the Canadian Federal Government in April 2019, is designed to support the goals of the National Housing Strategy. It is specifically focused on supporting those at the greatest risk of homelessness into safe, stable and affordable housing and to reduce chronic homelessness nationally by 50% by the fiscal year 2027/ 2028. It should be noted that this was the expansion and the extension of the Homeless Partner Strategy program that funded communities and prioritised Housing First from 2014-2019.

- **The National Housing Act (2019)**

The National Housing Act commits the government to a long-term policy vision for housing, with a focus on those in the greatest housing need, and an increased public

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<sup>20</sup> J. David Hulchanski et al (2009), *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada*, Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto.

<sup>21</sup> Homeless Hub, "Solutions, supporting communities to prevent and end homelessness", [accessed: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/affordable-housing>]

<sup>22</sup> Canadian Government (2017), *Canada's National's Housing Strategy, A place to call home*, Ottawa: Canadian Government. [accessed: <https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sf/project/placetocallhome/pdfs/canada-national-housing-strategy.pdf?rev=97491935-2a97-405f-bd38-decf72266ee9>]

participation in policy formulation and implementation. Section 4 of the Act recognises the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right affirmed in international law, central to human dignity, well-being, and community. While it does not establish a legally enforceable individual right to housing, what it does do is stipulate 'accountability mechanisms' focused on reporting and overseeing the development of affordable housing as well as the participation of people with lived experience of housing exclusion in the future direction of housing policy. This sets Canada aside as one of only a handful of countries in the world to have passed such legislation. The enactment of the National Housing Act followed years of campaigning from stakeholders across the housing and homelessness sector.

The recent policy and legal developments set out above were the principle driving factors for selecting Canada as a case study for this Fellowship report; they provide a live example of bold measures taken by a national government to deliver affordable housing and tackle homelessness.

Furthermore, I was particularly interested to explore the work and tactics of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, which published its own plan to end homelessness in 2012, and is focused on leading a national movement of individuals, organisations and communities working together to end homelessness across the country. In addition to the Alliance's role in advocating for a legal right to housing, I was particularly interested in examining in more detail the role of their Built for Zero campaign, which is working with a number of core local leading communities to help end chronic and veteran homelessness. For this reason, in addition to meeting with national lobbying organisations in Toronto and Ottawa, I also visited Homeward Trust in Edmonton, Alberta to better understand the city's local plan to end homelessness in a ten-year period.

## Spain

### *Trends in homelessness*

Data on the scale of homelessness in Spain is more limited. However, in 2017 it was estimated that there were between 23,000 and 35,000 people experiencing homelessness across the country.<sup>23</sup> This figure is made up of the number of people using homelessness services and includes people sleeping rough and living in emergency and longer-term homelessness accommodation. Homeless shelters provided services to an average of 16,437 people daily during the year 2016. This figure is 20.5% higher than in 2014.<sup>24</sup> While men continue to make up the majority of people experiencing homelessness in Spain, the proportion of women experiencing homelessness has increased. In 2005, women made up 17.3% of the total number of people experiencing homelessness.<sup>25</sup> This increased to 19.6% in 2012. Similar to the UK, over the last decade there has been an increase in the numbers of migrants experiencing homelessness in Spain as a result of their limited access to public funds and welfare provision.

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<sup>23</sup> FEANSTA, "Homelessness in Spain" [accessed: <https://www.feantsa.org/download/spain-20174593655314017659709.pdf>]

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

### Key policy developments

- **The rise in homelessness since the 2008 financial crisis**

In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness and living in inadequate and insecure housing across Spain as a result of declining incomes and high levels of unemployment. At the same time, there have been cuts made from the national local government to public services. Although levels of unemployment have been far greater in Spain than the UK following the global recession, both governments have adopted a similar response with regards to cuts to public services, limiting the capacity of the state and commissioned services to work with and support the growing numbers of people experiencing homelessness. The NGO Caritas reported an increase in the number of people using their homelessness services from 24,463 in 2007 to 30,415 in 2011.<sup>26</sup> Since the beginning of the financial crisis there has been a significant rise in the number of mortgage foreclosures, creating a new wave of people experiencing housing insecurity. There has also been an increase in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness who are in work. In 2016, 12.76% of the people that used homelessness services in Barcelona had a job, up from 4.1% in 2012.<sup>27</sup>

- **The Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy (2015-2020)**

In November 2015, the national Spanish Government adopted the first Spanish “Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2015- 2020.” Its main objective is to reduce the numbers of people experiencing homelessness from 23,000 to 18,000 by 2020. The strategy cites three main drivers for its development:

- the need to respond to European commitments for an integrated policy approach to homelessness;
- the Spanish context of homelessness support policies and the need to adopt an overall approach;
- the rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Spain, aggravated by the economic crisis.

While not officially cited, it has also been noted by commentators that the strategy came about as a result of increasing pressure from social platforms and organisations working in the fields of homelessness and housing exclusion.<sup>28</sup> Similar to the approach taken in Canada, the strategy contains elements of a rights-based approach. The Strategy prioritises housing-led approaches and recognises the effectiveness of Housing First programmes. It also advocates for a gendered approach to ending homelessness on account of the rising proportion of women experiencing homelessness in Spain.

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<sup>26</sup> FEANSTA, “Homelessness in Spain” [accessed: <https://www.feantsa.org/download/spain-20174593655314017659709.pdf>]

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Cabrero, G. and Gallego, V. (2016), *Spain’s First Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy*, *ESPN Flash Report 2016/25*, Brussels: European Social Policy Network.

A principal objective of my visit to Spain was therefore to find out more about the driving factors for the establishment of the plan, and how successfully it was being delivered in practice, particularly given the housing-led and rights-based approach to ending homelessness. I was also particularly interested in exploring the tactics used by the NGO, Hogar Si, who have been at the forefront of campaigning for and the delivery of Housing First, as well as taking a strong rights-based approach to campaigning. I also carried out stakeholder interviews with a number of organisations working locally in Barcelona, as well as the advisor to the Mayor of Barcelona, Albert Sales, to learn more about the interplay between national, state and city plans to end homelessness in Spain.

In comparison to England, there are relatively low levels of subsidized or social housing units provided. According to FEANSTA, the European federation for organisations across the continent working with people experiencing homelessness, 76.3% of Spain's population are homeowners (29.4% of households were mortgage holders, 46.9% of households owned their home outright) and 23.7% rented their home (15.3% at market price and 8.4% at below-market or for free) in 2018.<sup>29</sup>

## Austria

### *Trends in homelessness*

In 2017 there were 21,567 people in Austria recorded as experiencing homelessness, an increase of 21% since 2008. This figure consists of 13,926 people who were 'roofless' (sleeping rough) and 8,688 people living in homelessness accommodation. The peak in the total number of people registered as homeless was reached in 2013. Since then, there has been a slight reduction in numbers.<sup>30</sup> More than 50% of people sleeping rough in Austria were born outside of the country, although they only make up 27% of people living in homelessness accommodation. Men make up the larger proportion (70%) of people experiencing homelessness in Austria, although it should be noted that this proportion is higher among people sleeping rough. The largest age group (40%) of all those registered as sleeping rough were aged between 15 and 29. Around 70% of people experiencing homelessness in Austria live in Vienna and this was one of the reasons I chose to focus specifically on the city's response.<sup>31</sup>

### *Key policy developments*

- **National vs provincial responsibility for preventing and tackling homelessness**  
Compared to the other countries that I was visiting Austria does not have a national plan in place to end homelessness. It is largely considered the responsibility of the nine provincial governments to prevent and tackle homelessness. The federal government, however, is responsible for civil law including the regulation of the rented sector, which includes powers to address rent levels within parts of the private market and the regulation of housing associations (LPHAs). The federal

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<sup>29</sup> FEANSTA, "European Index of Housing Exclusion 2020,"

[accessed:[https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Country\\_Zoom\\_-\\_Spain.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Country_Zoom_-_Spain.pdf)]

<sup>30</sup> Baptista, I. & Marlier, E.(2019), *Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe, A study of national policies*, Brussels: European Social Policy Network

<sup>31</sup> FEANSTA (2017), "Homelessness in Austria" [accessed: <https://www.feantsa.org/download/austria-20178599194934673684360.pdf>]

government is also responsible for redistributing tax revenue across Austria, including funding for housing and homelessness services. The provincial governments are responsible for different forms of housing-related subsidies.

- **High levels of social housing**

Austria has a high proportion of rented homes, including social housing, particularly in cities. In 2017, only 7% of homes in Vienna were owner-occupied houses and 12% owner-occupied flats.<sup>32</sup> 23% of accommodation in the city is owned by the municipal government and a further 20% is owned by housing associations (LPHAs).<sup>33</sup> The remaining 34% is owned by private landlords.<sup>34</sup>

- **A Housing First approach to ending homelessness in Vienna**

Traditionally homelessness services in Austria have operated using a staircase approach, whereby people experiencing homelessness are required to demonstrate that they meet certain requirements before they pass through different stages of temporary accommodation, and then finally into a home of their own once they are deemed 'housing-ready.' In 2010, however, the Viennese city government made the decision to restructure its homelessness services, to prioritise Housing First projects, including those run by the NGO Neunerhaus. In 2015, three years after its implementation, it was reported that 98% of the Neunerhaus' Housing First tenants still had a valid tenancy, with only one eviction taking place within the programme.<sup>35</sup> Housing First in Vienna is primarily delivered through social housing, although it was noted that this is easier to deliver in units that are owned and rented by housing associations than properties let by the Viennese city government.

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<sup>32</sup> Baptista, I. & Marlier, E.(2019), *Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe, A study of national policies*, Brussels: European Social Policy Network

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 3: The use of a rights-based approach to ending homelessness

A rights-based approach to ending homelessness largely centres on the premise that shelter is a basic human need, and that everyone should be able to access safe, secure and affordable housing. This is often referred to as a ‘right to housing.’

There are two main interpretations of what constitutes a ‘right to housing.’ Firstly the legalistic understanding, which enshrines in law an individual’s right to housing which can be enforced through the courts, and secondly, a ‘social’ right to housing, which refers to a set of national government policies (often related to the provision of social housing and welfare assistance) which help ensure that everyone has access to housing.<sup>36</sup> Beyond these more formal definitions of a right to housing for the purpose of policy making, both campaigners and politicians frequently evoke rights-based language to lobby for change to improve access to and increase the supply of housing for people who have experienced housing exclusion.

The UK is often regarded as having some of the most progressive homelessness legislation in the world, which makes provision for certain groups of homeless households to access both temporary and settled housing. Following the abolition of priority need categories in 2012, Scotland has an almost universal provision of settled accommodation enshrined through its homelessness legislation. While the homelessness legislation in England and Wales still discriminates between household groups to determine which are in priority need and therefore eligible for settled housing, the duty on local authorities to provide settled housing to a significant proportion of homeless households is still considered as far more progressive than the international norm. What is more, that the legislation in all three nations places a legal duty on a public body (local authorities) to provide individuals with settled housing is often deemed more preferable to a more abstract approach whereby a right is bestowed upon an individual without the accompanying duty on a public body to deliver the services. Without this, the reality is often that individual legal rights fail to translate to the provision of accommodation.

A number of organisations and political parties that I met with during my Fellowship employed a rights-based approach in their work, and for this reason I was keen to explore the extent to which this provided a useful tool to achieve change, both from a campaigning and policy perspective.

### Canada

In Summer 2019, immediately ahead of my visit, the Canadian Government legislated for a right to housing, at a federal level, in the National Housing Strategy Act.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Anderson, I., (2012) “Policies to address homelessness: rights-based approaches”, [accessed: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bf1b/0231f67e84e2e9f93c21e10395abbe0c17f0.pdf>]

<sup>37</sup> Government of Canada, “National Housing Strategy Act” [accessed: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-11.2/FullText.html>]

This legislation is designed to serve as the principal mechanism to deliver the goals and targets set by the National Housing Strategy. This sets Canada aside as one of only a handful of countries in the world to have passed such legislation and follows years of campaigning from stakeholders across the housing and homelessness sector.

Canadian federal law now recognises that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right. The federal government is required to develop and maintain a national housing strategy that takes into account a human rights-based approach to housing. This involves setting out a long-term vision for housing, establishing national goals on housing and homelessness, focusing solutions on those in the greatest need and including the public in the policy-making process, particularly those with lived experience of homelessness or precarious housing.<sup>38</sup>

### **Preamble to the National Housing Strategy Act<sup>39</sup>**

*Whereas housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities as well as a strong national economy in which the people of Canada can prosper and thrive;*

*Whereas access to affordable housing contributes to achieving beneficial social, economic, health and environmental outcomes;*

*Whereas improved housing outcomes are best achieved through cooperation between governments and civil society as well as the meaningful involvement of local communities;*

*Whereas national goals, timelines and initiatives relating to housing and homelessness are essential to improving the quality of life of the people of Canada, particularly persons in greatest need;*

*Whereas a national housing strategy would support a common vision, key principles and a coordinated approach to achieving improved housing outcomes;*

*Whereas a national housing strategy would contribute to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations;*

*And whereas a national housing strategy would support the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Canada is a party.*

During my visit to Canada, I was fortunate enough to meet with a number of organisations who supported the campaign to legislate for the right to housing, including the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the Maytree Foundation, the Cooperative Housing Alliance and academic Emily Paradis, as well as representatives from Government who were responsible for delivering this change, including Adam Vaughan, MP and Dylan Murano, the special advisor to Jean Yves Duclos (the former Minister of Families, Children and Social

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<sup>38</sup> Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, “We got the right to housing. Now what?” [accessed: <https://www.acto.ca/r2hnowwhat/>]

<sup>39</sup> Government of Canada, “National Housing Strategy Act” [accessed: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-11.2/FullText.html>]

Development responsible for delivering the legislation) to help better understand how this was achieved and role they believe it will play in ending homelessness.

### *The campaign for a right to housing*

The enshrinement of a right to housing by Justin Trudeau's Liberal Government into federal law followed more than a decade of campaigning, including from smaller grassroots organisations who worked closely with people experiencing housing exclusion.

Following on from a discussion at the 2008 Law Union of Ontario Conference on international examples of the enactment of a right to housing, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) convened a group of academics, community activists, people with experience of homelessness and housing exclusion and lawyers to discuss what this could look like in the Canadian context.<sup>40</sup> This group became known as the R2H Coalition.

The campaign was originally launched in 2010/11. Four individuals, together with the non-profit Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, filed an application against the federal and provincial governments for a 'Right to Housing challenge' in the provincial and federal courts to argue that the governments of Canada and Ontario were in violation of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* for their failure to address, and their contribution to, the growing crisis of homelessness and rise in inadequate housing. They argued that under sections seven and fifteen of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada and Ontario had obligations to reduce and eventually eliminate homelessness and inadequate housing. They also pointed to international covenants that Canada has signed, which guarantee the right to adequate housing. Almost 10,000 pages of expert witness evidence were submitted to support this case on National Housing Day in the autumn of 2011. The Canadian courts however, continued to rule that the right to housing was not a judiciable issue – rather this is was an issue for policy makers to deal with.

In his 2008 essay, 'Community Campaigns for the Right to Housing: Lessons from the R2H Coalition of Ontario,' Yutaka Dirks, former Advocacy & Outreach Coordinator for the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, describes the community organising principles that were used to campaign for the right to housing.<sup>41</sup> He describes how the broad vision of the need for adequate housing served to bring people together working in a number of fields, including those in frontline organisations, academics and people with experience of homelessness, whose testimonies were central to the Right to Housing Challenge. From a practical perspective he explains how the organisation offered their offices as a meeting space, provided material resources such as printing and teleconferencing capabilities, and offered staff time to chair the meetings and implement decisions made by the Coalition. Under the broad vision of the organisation he also described how the 'human rights-based demand, for a fully funded federal housing strategy to end homelessness and inadequate housing, became both the remedy sought by the Applicants and the Coalition's rallying cry,'

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<sup>40</sup> Dirks, Y. (2015, "Community Campaigns for the Right to Housing: Lessons from the R2H Coalition of Ontario", *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, [accessed <https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1212&context=jlsp>]

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

illustrating the dual purpose and advantage of the rights based perspective in the context of this campaign.<sup>42</sup>

In 2014, Leilani Farha who was and currently still is the Executive Director of the Ottawa based Canada without Poverty, was appointed to the position of the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. Subsequently, in 2016, people with experience of homelessness went to Geneva to give evidence to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, catapulting the campaign to international prominence.

*What convinced the Liberals that legislating for a right to housing was an effective strategy to deliver affordable housing and tackle homelessness?*

Despite the well-established nature of the campaign, its international prominence and the fairly strong cross-party support for the principle of a 'right to housing', it was not until 2015, when Justin Trudeau was running as the Liberal Party's Prime Ministerial candidate that it finally gained the political traction required to eventually enshrine it into law. There were two meetings I had that were particularly helpful in better understanding, from a political perspective, why the Liberal Party championed the right to housing in their election campaign. Firstly, my meeting with Dylan Murano, the special advisor to Jean-Yves Duclos, the Member of Parliament for Quebec since 2015, and the Former Minister for Families, Children and Social Development, whose department was responsible for bringing in the legislation. Second, was my meeting with Adam Vaughan, who was elected as the MP for Spadina Fort-York in Toronto and currently serves as the Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister for Families, Children and Social Development, with responsibility for Housing and Urban Development. Vaughan played an instrumental role in ensuring that there was an urban strategy, which focused on the role of affordable housing, at the heart of the Liberal Party's 2015 election campaign.

*"Housing rights are human rights and everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home... and one person on the streets in Canada is too many," Justin Trudeau (November 2017)*

When I met with Dylan Murano, he described that what made the campaign for a right to housing attractive to the party was that it was both 'normative and functional.' Evoking a human rights frame served as a powerful message during an election campaign, helping to create a sense among the public more generally that everyone was entitled to access safe and affordable housing. Using rights-based language focused on housing rather than homelessness made the call much more relatable to a wider cohort of people, which is essential to electoral victory. Many more Canadians could relate to the pressures of high cost and poor-quality housing compared to the issue of homelessness, which is more often regarded as an issue affecting particularly marginalised communities. In this sense the 'right

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<sup>42</sup> Dirks, Y. (2015, "Community Campaigns for the Right to Housing: Lessons from the R2H Coalition of Ontario", *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, [accessed <https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1212&context=jlsp>]

to housing’ slogan was normative in helping establish a wider public understanding of the importance of access to safe and affordable accommodation, and backing for a set of policies, including the establishment of the Canada Housing Benefit, which was specifically targeted at reducing homelessness.

However, it was not simply a useful campaigns frame to build public support. The legal concept of a right to housing was ‘functional’ for the Liberal Party in that it served as a powerful mechanism to create long lasting political change. As previously described by the activist Yutarka Dirks, the right to housing was more than just a rallying call. Through a series of legal challenges, campaigners had put forward detailed proposals of how a legal right to housing could be met; through a legal obligation on government to produce a fully funded national housing strategy. It was these policy proposals that made the campaign tangible. That the national strategies would have a legal status would also help ensure that beyond Trudeau’s Government there would be an obligation to continue with this work in some form, therefore cementing the Liberal Party’s legacy in this significant area of social policy.

As previously described, community organising principles ensured that people who had been homeless or experienced housing exclusion were at the centre of this campaign, both in terms of identifying the policy solution and designing the campaigning tactics. These organising principles held resonance for the Liberal Party in terms of their own concept of policy and decision making, which is highly consultative and based on community engagement, particularly with people directly affected by an issue.

Following the Liberal Party’s election win in 2015, the government consulted with stakeholders, provinces, territories, Indigenous partners, and people with lived experience of homelessness on how to modernise programmes to better prevent and reduce homelessness across Canada. These consultations were guided by the work of an Advisory Committee of experts and stakeholders in the field of homelessness and chaired by Adam Vaughan MP. In total, ten roundtables were held across the country. The government also launched an online feedback survey seeking input from all Canadians and organisations with ideas and suggestions on how to prevent and reduce homelessness in Canada. The Government released the Advisory Committee on Homelessness’ Final Report and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy—What We Heard Report on May 18, 2018.<sup>43</sup>

#### *What does the ‘right to housing’ mean in practice in Canada?*

Canada is already a signatory to the UN-backed International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which recognises housing as a right. In 2019, the Liberal Government enshrined the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right in Canadian law, a symbolic move that also has practical considerations through the National Housing Strategy Act.

Contrary to what is often imagined when we discuss a ‘right to housing,’ the legislation does not guarantee every individual in Canada with a legal right to a home. Rather, it means that

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<sup>43</sup> Government of Canada, “What we heard – Summary report” [accessed: <https://open.canada.ca/en/content/what-we-heard-summary-report-0>]

the government is legally obliged to put the required measures in place that are needed to deliver the affordable housing with the specific objectives of preventing homelessness, prohibiting forced evictions, addressing housing discrimination, and to do so with a demonstrable focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups. For the Liberal Government this has led to the creation of the Canada Housing Benefit and 55 bn dollars investment in social and affordable housing and a target to cut chronic homelessness.

The National Housing Strategy Act also places an obligation on future governments to publish and deliver a strategy which meets the same objectives. How another government chooses to do that might well be different, however there are some additional measures which safeguard the delivery of a right to housing and are arguably very much rooted in the design and policy of the campaign itself, particularly with regards to the role of people with lived experience of homelessness and housing exclusion. The Act creates a new Federal Housing Advocate. The role of the advocate, which has a team working for them, is to ensure that vulnerable groups, low-income Canadians, and people with lived experience of housing need are able to advise government; monitor how the government is progressing at implementing housing policy; measure the impact on priority groups; conduct studies on housing issues; and consult and receive submissions from the public about housing issues.

The Advocate can also initiate studies of systemic housing issues. The Advocate, working with the National Housing Council, can then establish a three-person review panel to hold public hearings to examine these housing issues. They can involve affected communities and experts in the process. A report of these hearings would then go to the Minister and ultimately to Parliament to respond with proposed solutions.

## Spain and Austria

### The use of a rights-based approach in Spain

The use of a rights-based approach to advocate for policies designed to end homelessness was also employed by campaigners working in Spain. In particular, the campaigning organisation Hogar Si, used this approach extensively as a way to both change public attitudes and provide practical policy solutions.

In response to the growing number of violent attacks against people sleeping rough in Spain, Hogar Si have been lobbying national government to make aporophobia – “a fear of poor people” - an aggravating circumstance in criminal offences. To achieve this, they were calling on the Government to modify the Criminal Code to set heavier punishments imposed on those acting against their victims because they were homeless, as well as passing a Comprehensive Law of Hate Crimes to help foster ‘tolerance and social diversity, reinforcing and encouraging public policies aimed at eradicating intolerance and hatred, and protecting victims.’<sup>44</sup>

*“Poverty and social and residential exclusion are features of societies that do not guarantee the rights of their citizens and that we must combat...by providing a*

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<sup>44</sup> Hogar Si, “What can we do against aporophobia?, actions aiming at eradicating homelessness” [accessed: <https://hogarsi.org/en/que-podemos-hacer-contra-la-aporofobia/>]

*decent and adequate home we fulfil a constitutional right and we take homeless people out of the space that puts their life at risk...The experience from other countries shows that developing new innovative methodologies such as Housing First make it possible to eradicate chronic homelessness. Developing these methodologies with public policies allows to solve a serious social problem in an efficient way and it will eliminate the main risk people suffer: aporophobia hate crimes.”<sup>45</sup>*

The text above is taken from Hogar Si’s website on their aporophobia campaign. This campaign is articulated through a rights-based frame; everyone has the right to live their life free from violence and hate. What is particularly interesting about the use of a rights-based approach here, and what the paragraph above demonstrates, is that this more specific ask is linked explicitly to the need for structural policy change to eliminate poverty, including the expansion of the Housing First approach.

While the full impact with regards to building political support for the commitment to end homelessness was less clear, the use of rights-based language in the anti-evictions movement has been significant in terms of influencing debates regarding housing policy and shaping the political focus of the main parties in Spain. The anti-evictions movement gained traction in Spain following the 2008 financial crisis and the rising levels of mortgage foreclosures. Immediate to her election in 2015 the Mayor Barcelona, Ada Colau Ballano, was one of the founding members and spokespeople of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), which was set up in Barcelona in 2009 in response to the rise in evictions caused by unpaid mortgage loans and the collapse of the Spanish property market. While issues of homelessness and evictions of homeowners still remain fairly distinct as policy areas, in Barcelona at least, under Colau Ballano’s administration, there was now a much sharper focus on reframing homelessness in the broader discussion of housing supply, and the mayor and her team had put processes in place to ensure that people with direct experience of homelessness played a key role as advisors on housing policy in the city.

### *Austria*

As in Spain, over the last decade there has been a significant move in Vienna to shift homelessness services towards a Housing First approach. In 2010 the Viennese city government made the decision to restructure its homelessness services, to prioritise Housing First projects, including those run by the NGO Neunerhaus. In 2015, three years after its implementation, it was reported that 98% of the Neunerhaus’ Housing First tenants still had a valid tenancy, with only one eviction taking place within the programme. Housing First in Vienna is primarily delivered through social housing, although it was noted that this is easier to deliver in units that are owned and rented by housing associations than properties let by the Viennese city government. During my visit to Vienna, I was fortunate enough to meet with staff from Neunerhaus who have played a central role in lobbying the City of Vienna Government to take this approach. As in Spain, they described the

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<sup>45</sup> Hogar Si, “What can we do against aporophobia?, actions aiming at eradicating homelessness” [accessed: <https://hogarsi.org/en/que-podemos-hacer-contra-la-aporofobia/>]

importance of adopting a human rights frame when building the case for change with government officials, although unlike the Spanish context, they stressed that this was not an approach that was used to build public support for the approach.

## Lessons for England

In 2017 Leilani Farha, who played a pivotal role in the campaign to enshrine a right to housing in Canada, visited the UK in her role as UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing. She described the Grenfell disaster as a human rights disaster. More specifically she referenced the underinvestment in truly affordable housing as the key to understanding the tragedy.

The UK is often regarded as having some of the most progressive homelessness legislation in the world, which makes provision for certain groups of homeless households to access both temporary and settled housing. As outlined above, one of the perceived advantages of the homelessness legislation in England is that rather than simply providing individuals with a more abstract right to housing, there is a legal duty on a public body (local authorities) to directly provide settled housing, thereby making the right a reality.

With this in mind, I was particularly interested to see whether there were any lessons that we could import from Canada's recent moves to legislate for a right to housing, both in terms of winning public and political support, but also, from a policy perspective, guaranteeing the measures needed to end homelessness over the longer term.

### *A right to housing as a policy mechanism in England*

#### **1. Strengthened and more effective policy making through the direct involvement of people with lived experience of homelessness**

A rights-based approach, which is built on a philosophy of empowerment, holds the potential to change the way governments treat people with lived experience of housing exclusion and homelessness. Rather than simply being regarded as a recipient or benefactor of particular policies, people with lived experience are brought into the heart of government policy making. People with first-hand experience of the issue and systems are much better placed to identify gaps in provisions. This is particularly the case for certain cohorts of people whose needs are not well represented by traditional policy and decision makers (e.g. women, disabled people and people from BAME backgrounds). This has the clear advantage of designing a much more effective housing and homelessness strategy, which truly captures the needs of these groups. In Canada, the role of the independent advocate is to design and help perform this function; working closely with people who have lived experience of housing exclusion.

Even in the absence of a legally enshrined right to housing, there is a clear role for organisations like Crisis, and others working across the homelessness sector to play in ensuring that people with lived experience of homelessness play a central role not only in campaigning for change, but also in early stages of policy making. In particular, as described by Yukarta Dirks in the Canadian context, larger organisations can help both to facilitate and coordinate this work using community organising principles.

## **2. A better coordinated, and sustained policy response from consecutive national government**

While the real outcomes of the Canadian experience are yet to be fully realised, what is striking is that their National Housing Strategy brings together a number of different government department objectives to deliver its central goal. In her report to the UN on the implementation of a rights-based approach to housing, Farha describes how while

“a housing policy is composed of a number of programmes that address current housing issues, including homelessness, social housing supply or access to housing in the private market...housing strategies operate at a higher level than housing policy and programmes and are based on a vision of structural change that is required over time. A strategy coordinates a wide range of laws, programmes, policies and decisions to address housing needs that, when taken together, create a housing system. The aim of a housing strategy is not only to provide housing, but also to address gaps and inequalities in existing systems.”<sup>46</sup>

This reflection will hold resonance for those of us working in housing and homelessness policy; without a strategy that operates at a higher-coordinating level, aligning multiple policy areas (including welfare, housing supply, immigration and health) across central government departments to work towards a shared goal, ending homelessness feels like an impossible challenge. At Crisis, presenting our plan to end homelessness as a ready-made roadmap felt like an important first step, but securing this, both practically and politically, is much more difficult.

While not entirely meeting this challenge, the rights-based approach to housing does hold some of answers to achieving such as strategy. By its very nature, a rights-based approach enshrines policy objectives and strategies in law, as the National Housing Strategy Act has done in Canada. Enshrining a strategy in law has the clear advantage of centring the minds of multiple government departments, particularly given that failure to meet the objectives of the strategy could lead to a legal challenge from third parties.

What is more, enshrining the requirement to produce a strategy based on the same objectives and outcomes, means that even if the specific interventions differ, the overarching direction of policy change remains the same between different governments. Like so many areas of social policy, monumental efforts to end rough sleeping and homelessness can be undone in a few years. Compounding this problem, many of the structural solutions to ending homelessness, in particular investment in social housing, must be delivered over consecutive years and multiple political administrations. While the legislation itself does not guarantee totally identical policies between governments it should, in theory, avoid massive policy swings that undo significant shorter-term progress.

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<sup>46</sup> United Nations (2018), *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context*, [accessed: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/007/65/PDF/G1800765.pdf?OpenElement>]

### **3. A stronger, preventative policy response from national government to compliment the legal duties placed on local government**

As outlined above, in contrast to most countries in the world, including Canada, homelessness legislation in the UK places a duty on local authorities to provide certain groups of people with settled housing, rather than simply bestowing an individual with an abstract right to housing. Despite the clear advantages of this approach, without a joined-up strategy from national government to both deliver the resources required by local government to deliver on this duty and ensure that the policies of central government departments work effectively to prevent homelessness further upstream, the local system can become overburdened and fail to operate as effectively as it was designed to.

The further decentralisation of policy making to local councils in England following the Localism Act (2011) has made this problem much more acute.<sup>47</sup> What is more, the localism agenda has run in parallel with reductions in funding from national government to local authorities. Historically, significant reductions in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping have been achieved through interventions from national government. What is more, evidence suggests that at a national policy level, there are a number of departments whose policies are contributing to rising levels of homelessness and a lack of affordable housing. A report from the National Audit Office found that while the then Department for Communities and Local Government is responsible for setting national policy on homelessness it was very likely that policy determine by the Department for Work and Pensions affecting Local Housing Allowance rates had contributed to the increase in homelessness over the last decade.<sup>48</sup> So while the legal obligations on local councils hold the potential to tackle homelessness, without a complimentary set of legal obligations on all central government departments to prevent homelessness through the structural levers at its disposal, the system can easily become overwhelmed. Over the last decade this has led to local authorities rationing the housing it has access to and many people who find themselves experiencing homelessness missing out. This has included families spending long periods of time in temporary accommodation or single households being denied access to the full rehousing duty because they are not considered vulnerable enough.<sup>49</sup> For this reason, I believe that a right to housing, as conceived and enshrined in law in Canada, has the potential to complement our existing levers by ensuring national government is obliged to prevent the flow of homelessness and invest in the structural levers such as the welfare system and affordable housing needed to ensure that local authorities have the resources to deliver on their duties under the existing homelessness legislation. Taken together, this holds the potential to create a world leading policy response to homelessness.

#### *Using a rights-based approach to win public support*

In more recent years there has been greater reluctance among activists in the UK to employ right-based language in campaigns, in part because it is perceived to run counter to current political discourse and will therefore fail, as a frame, to achieve the desired political

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<sup>47</sup> Fitzpatrick, Suzanne, Pawson, Hal and Watts, Beth (2020) *Localism and homelessness: a decade of disaster in England*. *British Politics and Policy at LSE* (16 Jun 2020).

<sup>48</sup> National Audit Office (2017), "Homelessness", [accessed: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/homelessness/>]

<sup>49</sup> Gousy, H. (2016) *No One Turned Away: Changing the law to prevent and tackle homelessness*. London: Crisis.

outcome. This reluctance has been exacerbated in the context of debates about the UK's membership, and subsequent exit, from the European Union and growing scepticism regarding international human rights frameworks and debates about British sovereignty.

Recent research commissioned by Crisis and carried out by the FrameWorks Institute however, suggests that the use of a rights-based approach could be an effective campaigns tool.<sup>50</sup> In 2016 the FrameWorks Institute conducted in depth interviews with members of the public to systematically identify what sort of messaging and language 'frames' were most effective in winning public support for the political change needed to end homelessness. A Moral Human Rights frame – the idea that, as human beings, we all have the moral right to be treated with dignity and respect - was found to be particularly effective in shifting attitudes and winning support for policy change to end homelessness. Arguing that everyone has a right to dignity and respect as part of our basic humanity increases people's sense of responsibility for addressing homelessness and boosts support for policy change. I would also suggest, as demonstrated in the Canadian and Spanish context, that the moral human rights frame could be extended to incorporate a broader right to housing, therefore boosting its relevance to a larger proportion of the public.

Whilst legislating for housing as a human right, as outlined above, would make it much more difficult for future governments to significantly shift policy objectives, it is of course never the case that one parliament can bind future governments, and it would be feasible for a future parliament to repeal the legislation. Shifting public attitudes to generate greater support for the structural changes needed to end homelessness and other forms of housing exclusion will therefore be crucial to ensure that there is sufficient political will to continue to support this legislation.

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<sup>50</sup> Nichols, J., Volmert, A., Busso, D., Gerstein Pineau, M., O'Neil, M. and Kendall-Taylor, N. (2018) *Reframing Homelessness in the United Kingdom: A FrameWorks Message Memo*. FrameWorks Institute

## Chapter 4: Translating national plans to local change – the opportunities and challenges

As part of my Fellowship, I was particularly interested to explore the extent to which it is possible to translate national plans into local change and the key lessons in gaining traction with local political leaders and organisations delivering homelessness services.

### Houston

In 2010, the US federal government published the Opening Doors strategy, which set ambitious targets to reduce ‘chronic’ and veteran homelessness. This strategy is heavily designed around the Housing First philosophy and advocates for the expansion of permanent supportive housing as a means to achieve these targets. Since 2007, when nationwide data collection began, there has been a 12% reduction in homelessness, with significant reductions among some subpopulations, including veterans (a 50% reduction) and families (a 29% reduction).<sup>51</sup>

Between my meetings with the National Alliance to End Homelessness, who are based in Washington and are focused on lobbying the federal government and supporting communities around the country to develop plans to end homelessness, and organisations and politicians based in Houston, I was able to get a much better sense of the factors that allowed national plans and targets to translate successfully to local change. In Houston, I was hosted by the Way Home, a coalition of over a hundred organisations who have worked closely with the Mayors of Houston, with the support from the federal government, to successfully implement a Housing First approach to reducing homelessness. The strategy led to a 50% reduction in all forms of homelessness.<sup>52</sup> I was also fortunate enough to meet with Annise Parker, who served as the Democrat Mayor of Houston between 2010-2016 to better understand what led her to champion the use of Housing First approach in the city and gain support for this among key political stakeholders and frontline homelessness organisations during her time in office.

By way of context, Houston has a strong mayoral form of municipal government. The mayor serves as the executive officer of the city. As the city's chief administrator and official representative, the mayor is responsible for the general management of the city and has legislative powers. The mayor also retains control of the distribution of housing vouchers and allocation of housing units and therefore has a significant role to play in reducing homelessness.

#### *Data driven services and the political case for change in Houston.*

There were a range of factors that motivated Annise Parker to explore the use of a Housing First approach to ending homelessness when she assumed office as Mayor of Houston in 2010. As a starting point, Mayor Parker utilised data from the point in time counts, carried out by the federal Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to quantify the

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<sup>51</sup> U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (2019), *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, [accessed: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>]

<sup>52</sup> City of Houston, *“Mayor’s Office for Homeless Initiatives”* [accessed: <https://www.houstontx.gov/homeless/>]

scale of homelessness. Cities and regions are mandated to carry out a point in time count every two years. The data showed that despite the significant investment in the city's services, levels of homelessness were not reducing. Parker subsequently commissioned a hundred interviews with people who were using services in the city to gain a better understanding of what had driven their homelessness and their perception of how effective current services were in assisting them and ultimately ending their homelessness. The interviews made a clear case for the move away from the shelter system towards the introduction of a Housing First approach to ending homelessness.

The political culture of Houston is very market orientated, and there is a significant emphasis within the delivery of all public services on value for money. The city was spending upwards of around \$100 million on housing people in shelter and temporary hostel type accommodation without, up until this point, a sufficient evaluation of its outcomes. Testimonies of the people using homelessness services and the data from the point in time count helped Annise Parker make the case for a different strategic approach to tackling homelessness. The new strategy was focused very specifically on the Housing First approach, which has a very clear evidence base from which to demonstrate its value in terms of ending homelessness, particularly for people with higher support needs.

The extensive evidence base for the Housing First approach has been used across the US as an argument for moving away from the shelter system. Data linking has enabled academics to track people through a range of public services data sets, including housing, homelessness, welfare, criminal justice and health to explore patterns of service use and the associated costs. Data linking has also helped better understand how effective various interventions are in meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness. In the US it has been used to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of housing-led interventions, including Housing First. Housing First is particularly cost effective for people with very high levels of support needs because they often use public services at a much higher rate and, often over longer time periods.<sup>53</sup>

In the specific political context of Houston, which is particularly market orientated and focused on value for money, the effectiveness of Housing First gained popularity with key political stakeholders as well as those delivering homelessness services.

#### *The use of data to help deliver federal objectives*

The requirement on local areas to produce and monitor data on the effectiveness of homelessness interventions has been a central element to the federal government's approach to delivering their national strategy to tackle homelessness. As outlined above, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds a significant number of homelessness programmes across the country. The 2009 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act consolidated several of HUD's separate homeless assistance programs into a single grant programme, the Continuum of Care Programme (CoC Programme).<sup>54</sup> The HUD requires that Continuums of Care (CoCs) establish

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<sup>53</sup> Culhane, D.P. (2008) 'The Costs of Homelessness: A Perspective from the United States', *European Journal of Homelessness* 2(1), 97-114

<sup>54</sup> U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Coordinated Entry Core Elements" [accessed: <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-Core-Elements.pdf>]

and operate a coordinated entry process in cities and regions in order to qualify for federal funding. This means that there is often a single coordinating organisation that anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness can approach. That organisation then helps direct them to the homelessness programme which best fits their needs. In Houston the Way Home ran the Continuum of Care Programme for the city.

Another important role associated with a Continuum of Care is the ongoing management, including data collection and the annual evaluation of the coordinated entry process required by HUD. The Way Home in Houston was responsible for gathering data from all the local homelessness organisations in the area on the effectiveness of their services to submit to the HUD in order to make further federal funding applications based on the performance of local services. Houston, along with many other cities throughout the US, use the Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS), a local information technology system, to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and homelessness services to gather this information. There are other cities and regions which use slightly different systems, including for example the VI-SPDIAT, but importantly all systems must comply with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards. The coordination of all local services through a Continuum of Care has the advantage of ensuring that services are better planned and therefore most efficient and effective. What is more, they provide an important tool for the federal government to achieve its strategic objectives far more quickly by ensuring that funding is only provided to areas that can demonstrate compliance with the principles of the federal plan (e.g. a housing-led approach) and the effectiveness of services (via the HMIS) in ending homelessness.

### *Creating proof points*

One of the key factors that helped accelerate change in Houston and secured political buy in for the shift from a shelter led to a housing-led approach to ending homelessness was the creation of the local mayoral challenges by the federal government. The mayoral challenges have been credited with a 24% reduction in veteran homelessness during a three-year period, in the middle of the recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis. In 2010, the Obama Administration set the goal of preventing and ending homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015. In 2014, as part of the Joining Forces initiative, Michelle Obama announced the commitment of 77 mayors, 4 governors, and 4 county officials to meet that goal, and called on additional mayors and local leaders to commit to ending veteran homelessness in their communities by the end of 2015.<sup>55</sup> The federal government set a challenge to house 100 veterans in 100 days. For cities that were prepared to sign up to the challenge they were required to demonstrate that efforts would be targeted at assisting veterans using the Housing First approach. Houston took up the challenge and met the target four times over. Annise Parker described to me how this created a new paradigm in the city among frontline services that it was possible to end homelessness. She said that the attempts to reduce homelessness in Houston would have been slower and harder without the federal programme. The one-off shorter-term funding that they received

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<sup>55</sup> The White House (2014), "Factsheet: Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness", [accessed: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/04/fact-sheet-mayors-challenge-end-veteran-homelessness>]

through the mayoral challenge allowed services to try a different approach without diverting from their existing funds. This crucially achieved the buy in from local leaders and homelessness services to a longer-term commitment to the Housing First approach. This success of the approach used with veterans was subsequently expanded to other groups experiencing homelessness.

### *Creating long lasting political change*

To build initial buy in for the changes that she wanted to make in Houston, and help ensure long term sustained political change, Mayor Parker put together an advisory group of senior business leaders and philanthropists. This included the Catholic Church, the Houston Endowment and the Baseball stadium. They were impressed with the strong evidence base on the Housing First approach and were attracted to the idea of investing in something that worked and helped support the case for change with frontline services. The group also remained in place after Annise Parker was no longer mayor and continued to advice on the homelessness strategy for the city. This has helped ensure that a lot of the progress made, and commitment to the Housing First approach, has not been lost.

### *Pitfalls of the approach from a national perspective*

Houston certainly serves as an example of how national plans can be successfully translated into local change. However, there were a number of organisations that I met with who highlighted some of the pitfalls with the approach from a national perspective.

There are some disadvantages to the approach of using certain populations, in this case veterans, as proof points to demonstrate that homelessness can be ended. These were highlighted to me by several national lobbying organisations. There is no doubt that a focus on providing additional services to veterans is much more popular with both politicians and the public. As a result of this strategy, there are some cohorts of people who have almost lost out completely from the benefits of these new interventions. There is approximately six times more federal money for veterans who are homeless than any other groups of people experiencing homelessness. With the exception of families and people experiencing chronic homelessness, there remains a lack of a clear strategy for other cohorts and therefore the reductions in the rates of homelessness among these groups has not fallen as dramatically. For this reason, the National Alliance to End Homelessness has been more specifically focusing its work on the needs of single households with low supports needs. The Alliance has estimated that there are likely to be 250,000 individuals who are homeless with low support needs.

What is more, while evidence on cost effectiveness has led to an expansion of the Housing First approach for people with higher support needs, this has been to the detriment of more prevention-based services. This is particularly the case for more upstream interventions that involved programmes that work with young people who are at risk of experiencing homelessness, which was highlighted to me by the National Network for Youth working in Washington. The main reason for this is because it is easier to demonstrate the costs savings of an intervention that is targeted at ending homelessness for people with much higher support needs who are more likely to be using a range of public services, much more frequently. By comparison it is more difficult to evidence the costs savings of prevention-

based services because it is more difficult to identify who would have gone on to become homeless if that intervention had not been put in place. As a result, there is a risk that investment will continue to be made in the Housing First intervention in the absence of a wider housing-led strategy for people with lower support needs and prevention interventions to help manage and reduce the flow of people who will require such an expensive intervention. This approach is critical to the longer-term success and sustainability of Housing First and ultimately the elimination of homelessness.

While it is not being extensively used in the US yet, the role of predictive analytics is being explored by academics and third sector organisations to help identify which groups of people are most likely to become homeless to help make the case for well targeted, and arguably more cost effective, prevention-based programmes.<sup>56</sup>

## Edmonton

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness produced its own plan to end homelessness in 2012. *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in 10 Years* outlines how Canadian communities can end homelessness through a number of key principles, which include the use of measurable and ambitious outcomes and key milestones, effective prevention, Housing First for people with higher support needs and investment in affordable housing.<sup>57</sup> Following on from the publication of the plan, the Alliance's Built for Zero campaign helps a core group of leader communities to implement the principle of the plan and end chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness in their communities as a first step to eliminating all homelessness in Canada. The Alliance seeks to use the urgency of a campaign-style movement with a collaborative peer-learning approach to help local areas achieve and sustain functional zero on chronic homelessness.

As part of my Fellowship, I was fortunate enough to travel to Edmonton to meet with the Homeward Trust, a not-for-profit organisation, which plays a similar role to the Way Home in Houston as a 'system planner' in leading local efforts and organisations to address and help end homelessness in the city. This visit was central in helping better understand how the Built for Zero campaign helps achieve change at a local level. It is one of 61 designated federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Entities, and acts as the Community-Based Organization for the Government of Alberta's investment in ending homelessness. Key to the organisation's role is the implementation of the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS), which collects data from a range of organisations in the city which help to support people who are experiencing homelessness. They also run the By-Name-List for the city which makes a record of each person experiencing homelessness (by name) to help ensure that they are provided with the response that is most appropriate to their needs. Crucially data from the list is used to help improve performance and reduce

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<sup>56</sup> Deloitte (September 2019, "Addressing homelessness with data analytics, a data driven approach to homelessness", [accessed: <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/homelessness-data.html>]

<sup>57</sup> Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (2012), *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in 10 Years* [accessed: [https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/A-Plan-Not-a-Dream\\_Eng-FINAL-TR.pdf](https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/A-Plan-Not-a-Dream_Eng-FINAL-TR.pdf)]

chronic homelessness to functional zero. The focus of using real time data rapid cycle testing has been crucial to the city's attempt to reduce homelessness.

## Spain

I came to Spain to find out more about the country's national Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness (2015-2020) and how key partners campaigned to establish it and are now working on its delivery. On the face of it, Spain's national plan was very similar to the US federal plan in the sense that it shone a spotlight on particular cohorts of people experiencing homelessness, contained a clear list of outcomes and objectives and was heavily influenced by the Housing First philosophy. By comparison however, the local campaigns organisation did not recognise the impact of the plan in their day-to-day work to help end homelessness. By comparison, local plans which were not required to coordinate with the overarching objectives of the national plan were much more influential. In part, this was because of the recent upheaval and turnover of the Spanish national government. But more importantly this can be explained as a result of the fact that there was a lack of clear funding to local cities and states to specifically meet with objectives in the plan. As a result, the plan lacked clear accountability and there was a greater divergence in the approaches used across Spain to end homelessness.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

This report has attempted to summarise the key lessons for securing and sustaining political commitments to ending homelessness through each chapter, but by way of a conclusion, this final chapter will highlight the key recommendations for the Westminster Government and organisations campaigning to end homelessness in the UK.

The report did not intend to make recommendations to the Westminster Government regarding the specific policy changes needed to end homelessness (e.g. investment in the welfare system and large scale social house building). Rather, drawing on the international examples of this Fellowship, the recommendations focus on the solutions needed to build the mechanisms and policy infrastructure to help deliver the long-term change needed to end homelessness. The recommendations in this chapter for those campaigning for change to end homelessness are designed to help create the political will needed for the Westminster Government to implement these changes and to ensure that the political commitment to preventing and ending homelessness is sustained.

### The Westminster Government

#### *Legislate for a right to housing*

Drawing on the lessons from the Canadian experience, the Westminster Government should legislate for a 'right to housing.' The purpose of the legislation would be to provide a stronger framework to ensure the delivery of policy and resources needed at a national level to ensure that local authorities are able to deliver on their obligations under the homelessness legislation, both in terms of preventing homelessness as well as providing those already experiencing homelessness with settled accommodation. Legislation setting out a 'right to housing' could include the following elements:

- **A requirement to regularly publish a cross-government strategy to deliver affordable accommodation and end homelessness.** This strategy should include targets for the delivery of social housing based on calculations of local need and rates of homelessness. In lieu of a sufficient supply of social housing, the strategy should also include details on the recommended investment required in housing benefit. The strategy should take into consideration groups who are most at risk of homelessness and outline specific interventions for prevention among those groups, including for example prison leavers, care leavers and survivors of domestic abuse.
- **The establishment of an independent housing and homelessness advocate to monitor the progress of the strategy.** The independent advocate could operate in the similar way to an independent commissioner function (e.g. the Victims Commissioner, the Children's Commissioner, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner). Powers could be bestowed upon the commissioner granting them access to obtain information from public bodies and lay reports before Parliament. Ministers and public bodies would be required to respond to any recommendations made in the reports within a specified time period.
- **The establishment of a central government advisory group made up of people with lived experience of homelessness and housing.** The Westminster Government currently has no direct and formal function to guarantee the consultation and

involvement of people with experience of homelessness and housing exclusion in policy making. There are examples that I found through my Fellowship travels both in Barcelona and Canada of the clear advantage of doing this to help strengthen policy making. I therefore recommend that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government establish a formal advisory group of people with lived experience of housing exclusion and homelessness. It will be important to ensure that members of this group represent a diverse range of experience, including of communities with protected characteristics. Drawing on the Canadian experience, an independent Housing and Homelessness Commissioner could help to convene this group and ensure that any reports they lay before Parliament are informed by this group.

#### *Improved data*

Currently, the government spends a significant amount of money (approximately 1bn each year) on homelessness services with very little evaluation of their effectiveness.<sup>58</sup> Robust and clear evidence on the success of specific interventions as well as the needs and demographics of those who are at risk of, or are already, experiencing homelessness, has been central to the success of the ability of national governments in other countries to implement their plans to tackle and end homelessness, as well as building and sustaining the political will for change. I would therefore recommend that the Westminster Government implement the following recommendations to maximise the impact of their interventions.

- **Require all local authorities to coordinate a by-name list of all those experiencing homelessness and provide the funding to expand national roll out of a CHAIN style database.** This should include all those who are sleeping rough as well as living in any form of temporary accommodation. In addition to the inclusion of people in homelessness accommodation, this could operate in a similar way to the CHAIN-database that is already in operation in London to achieve real-time, by-name data sharing between the agencies working with people who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping. The system would enable frequent and regular reporting of numbers, locations and other data to support monitoring the reduction in rough sleeping.
- **A central government working group, coordinated by the Cabinet Office, should be established to improve data linking systems across a range of public services.** This would require administrative data to be improved across government departments to allow homelessness to be identified in datasets that are being linked. Data linking will enable government officials and academics to track people through a range of public services, including housing, homelessness, welfare, criminal justice and health to explore patterns of service use and the associated costs. Data linking can help policy makers to better understand how effective various interventions are in meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The government should

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<sup>58</sup> National Audit Office (2017), Homelessness, [accessed: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Homelessness.pdf>]

build upon the newly established H-CLIC system, which has already helped to create better opportunities for linking personal-level data with other administrative data to better understand the impact of policy interventions at a lower cost. In addition to better joined up data, the cross-government working group should also work with public services to help improve the quality of data so that people can be accurately tracked, and in particular repeat homelessness can be identified.

- **Making better use of predictive analytics.** Building on lessons from the US, the Westminster Government should ensure that alongside investing in the interventions which clearly show a savings based on ending homelessness for those with the highest support needs, that there is greater investment made in predictive analytics to identify which groups of people are most likely to become homeless and target interventions accordingly.

*A clearer link between a national strategy for ending homelessness and housing exclusion and funding from central government*

Despite the similarities in the content of the Spanish and US national plans to tackle homelessness and the similar challenges with regards to the multiple layers of government, there were vastly different outcomes in local areas. As outlined earlier in this report, since the introduction of the Localism Act (2011) much of the responsibility for the delivery of homelessness services and decisions regarding the funding of services has shifted from central government to local authorities. While the localist approach does allow for responses to be tailored to specific local contexts this has thrown up a number of challenges for local areas as outlined above, particularly in light of reductions to local authority budget. A further implication of localism has been the limited ability of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to intervene as quickly to reduce rising levels of homelessness.<sup>59</sup> It should be noted however, that since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the start of 2020, there has been an increased interventionist approach from central government to tackle homelessness by increasing local housing allowance rates to the thirtieth percentile and instructing local authorities to provide self-contained temporary accommodation to all those at risk of sleeping rough and living in unsuitable communal temporary accommodation. Drawing on the success of the ability of the US federal government to implement their plan to end homelessness versus the national government's plan in Spain, there are several measures that the Westminster Government could take to ensure that a national strategy to end homelessness is implemented consistently across the country.

- **Publish a national outcomes framework to be used by all commissioned homelessness services across the country as part of the cross-government strategy to deliver affordable accommodation and end homelessness.** This would help to ensure that the principles of the national strategy translate to local services and that every part of the system is working towards a common and agreed description of 'homelessness ended' and of the indicators towards that goal, helping guarantee greater chance of success.

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<sup>59</sup> Fitzpatrick, Suzanne, Pawson, Hal and Watts, Beth (2020) *Localism and homelessness: a decade of disaster in England. British Politics and Policy at LSE* (16 Jun 2020).

- **Allocate funding to local authorities and homelessness services on the basis of strategies that are guided by the key principles and outcome of the national strategy.** I would recommend that the Westminster Government draws on the experience of the work of Continuums of Care, which work to help coordinate all local services. They provide an important tool for the federal government to achieve its strategic objectives far more quickly by ensuring that funding is only provided to areas that can demonstrate compliance with the principles of the federal plan (e.g. a housing-led approach) and the effectiveness of services (via the HMIS) in ending homelessness.
- **Alongside longer-term sustainable funding for local authorities and homelessness services, allocate additional shorter term funding stream to help create proof points for local authorities.** Additional funding for local areas (essentially the short-term double funding of services) will help to create proof points for particular interventions e.g. Housing First. As demonstrated in Houston, this was vital in helping to build support among local services and key stakeholders for this approach. I would not recommend however, building additional funding points to target specific cohorts of people who are experiencing homelessness as the US federal government as this can have the unintended consequence of marginalised other groups in policy making and undermining a rights-based approach to housing.

## Campaigners

Many of the recommendations for campaigners in the UK working towards the goal of ending homelessness should in part focus on ensuring that the Westminster Government implements the measures set out above. In addition to those points there are some specific observations that I would like to make with regards to the tactics and means of organising employed by campaigners. These recommendations are primarily aimed at people who are working in campaigns organisations such as Crisis. I appreciate that the term campaigner, however, captures a much broader spectrum of people, many of whom will already be engaging in the principles set out below in some shape or form.

### *Using rights-based language*

- In more recent years there has been greater reluctance among activists in the UK to employ rights-based language in campaigns, in part because it is perceived to run counter to current political discourse and will therefore fail, as a frame, to achieve the desired political outcome. Recent research commissioned by Crisis and carried out by the FrameWorks Institute however, suggests that the use of a rights-based approach could be an effective campaigns tool.<sup>60</sup> In 2016 the FrameWorks Institute conducted in depth interviews with members of the public to systematically identify what sort of messaging and language ‘frames’ were most effective in winning public support for the political change needed to end homelessness. A Moral Human Rights frame – the idea that, as human beings, we all have the moral right to be treated with dignity and respect - was found to be particularly effective in shifting attitudes and winning support for policy change to end homelessness. Arguing that everyone

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<sup>60</sup> Nichols, J., Volmert, A., Busso, D., Gerstein Pineau, M., O’Neil, M. and Kendall-Taylor, N. (2018) *Reframing Homelessness in the United Kingdom: A FrameWorks Message Memo*. FrameWorks Institute

has a right to dignity and respect as part of our basic humanity increases people's sense of responsibility for addressing homelessness and boosts support for policy change. I would also suggest, as demonstrated in the Canadian and Spanish context, that the moral human rights frame could be extended to incorporate a broader right to housing, therefore boosting its relevance to a larger proportion of the public.

- Whilst legislating for housing as a human right, as outlined above, would make it much more difficult for future governments to significantly shift policy objectives, it is of course never the case that one parliament can bind future governments, and it would be feasible for a future parliament to repeal the legislation. Shifting public attitudes to generate greater support for the structural changes needed to end homelessness and other forms of housing exclusion will therefore be crucial to ensure that there is sufficient political will to continue to support this legislation.

*A shift from campaigning to “end homelessness” to “ensuring that everyone can access safe, decent and affordable housing”*

- This second recommendation links to the previous one. During my Fellowship travels I found clear examples of campaigns that were targeted at building support for preventing and ending homelessness. This includes the Build for Zero and Right to Housing Campaigns in Canada; the policy content of both these campaigns centres on supporting those who were experiencing homelessness. The focus on the provision of housing for all rather than ending homelessness for a minority however has proved as an effective frame in building political and public support.
- With regards to generating political support, the timing of the use of this frame was particularly significant. As outlined in further detail in this report, the Right to Housing campaign was taken up by the Liberal Party during the election because it had a broad political appeal among the public, not just to those experiencing homelessness and those concerned with tackling homelessness, but to a much broader base of Canadians affected by housing exclusion, including rent increases and poor housing conditions.
- As campaigners, there is of course a balance to be struck. Whilst packaging up seemingly smaller reforms for politicians aimed at tackling homelessness, which feel more containable and potentially less politically divisive, might garner shorter term campaigns wins, particularly mid election cycle, longer term use of this campaign's mechanism might not necessarily secure the more substantial changes needed to prevent and ultimately end homelessness for good. It is much more unlikely that these substantial reforms can be made by politicians without public backing.
- Beyond its use as a political strategy, I would also argue that the shift away from talking about 'ending homelessness' towards 'a right to housing' is crucial in ensuring that as a sector we do not other the experience of 'homelessness' as distinct and peripheral, but rather demonstrate the interconnecting factors of poverty, cuts to the welfare system and the supply of affordable housing which lead to housing exclusion.

*Adopting community organising principles to develop and design campaigns with people who have lived experience of homelessness and housing exclusion.*

- In the absence of a legally enshrined right to housing, which as outlined above would formalise the involvement of people with lived experience of housing exclusion in government policy making, there is a clear role for organisations like Crisis, and others working across the homelessness sector to play a greater role in ensuring that people with lived experience of homelessness play a central role not only in campaigning for change, but also in early stages of policy making. In particular, as described by Yukarta Dirks in the Canadian context, larger organisations can help both to facilitate and coordinate this work using community organising principles as described in more detail in this report.
- A rights-based approach, which is built on a philosophy of empowerment, holds the potential to change the way governments treat people with lived experience of housing exclusion and homelessness. Rather than simply being regarded as a recipient or benefactor of particular policies, people with lived experience are brought into the heart of government policy making. People with first-hand experience of the issue and systems are much better placed to identify gaps in provisions. This is particularly the case for certain cohorts of people whose needs are not well represented by traditional policy and decision makers (e.g. women, disabled people and people from BAME backgrounds). This has the clear advantage of designing a much more effective housing and homelessness strategy, which truly captures the needs of these groups. In Canada, the role of the independent advocate is to design and help perform this function; working closely with people who have lived experience of housing exclusion.
- Whilst I have begun to sketch out what a legal right to housing would constitute in the UK context (this of course would look different in Wales and Scotland) as an example of how this could work to complement the existing legal system, I strongly recommend that a practical next step for an organisation such as Crisis would be to help establish a group of people who have experience of housing exclusion to determine the detail of this legal mechanism and build a campaign to exert pressure of the government in the run up to the next general election.