



What's it like to be a woman and homeless in Medway?

A Healthwatch Medway report

April 2021

Context

Many people find themselves homeless in Medway[1]. The proportion of women who are homeless in Medway is higher than the national average.

We know that it can be particularly hard for them to get the healthcare that they need. We also know that women who are homeless face specific issues and we wanted to understand their experiences better.

In this report you will hear from five women who had experience living on the streets of Medway. We also chatted with three men.

They tell us what it is like to be homeless and the challenges they face to get healthcare.

They wanted to share their story.

What did we hear?

Homeless & pregnant

"I am 14 weeks pregnant; I haven't seen a midwife. I am concerned my baby will be taken away by social services".

"I had a miscarriage a short time ago. I couldn't get an appointment with a GP. When I tried to, they just offered me a phone consultation but I don't have a phone so that was no use, I ended up visiting A&E for support".



Support from their GP?

- Three women were registered with a GP, but one was far away and she was unable to travel to the surgery.
- *"I have just come out of Prison; I was registered at XX Surgery but can't get public transport to get there and need my medication. They are going to help me get my prescription sent to a local pharmacy as I really need my anti-psychotic meds".*
- *"I'm registered with XXX Practice. I had my bloods taken a few months ago and had to go to hospital for a mammogram. For some reason I had to go back to the hospital for another test but since then haven't had my results. It seems like the GP is hiding my results, I am worried in case it's cancer".*
- One of the men talked about the difficulties he'd had to register with a GP. His mental health issues causes unpredictable behaviour and he needed help to get registered with a GP.

The value of a key worker

- *"My key worker organised my Covid vaccine which I recently had at the Pentagon pharmacy".*
- We observed people being actively supported by the homeless charity during our visit. For example, we heard they were supporting someone to register with a local GP.

Mixed feedback about dentists and opticians

- *"I have a dentist locally and haven't had any problems with getting appointments".*
- Another woman who had just been released from prison told us that she had some teeth removed by the prison dental service.
- *"There's no point me going for an eye test because I can't afford to pay for the glasses which are normally £60 or more".*
- *"I've not had any problems with getting glasses".*



Talking about mental health support

- The woman who had suffered a miscarriage had not been offered any mental health support.
- Another woman told us she was finding it hard to manage without her anti-psychotic medication.



Substance misuse

- One woman told us she was now 3 years free from prescribed methadone and had successfully detoxed.
- Another woman told us that she had recently started injecting with a blunt needle which her partner has already used. She told us that years of substance misuse meant that she now injected into her capillaries which were not big enough to take needles.
- One man told us that he had to move around due to his personal circumstances. He was worried that this would mean he wouldn't get his methadone script.

Housing issues

- One woman told us that she had moved into a property through a property management company. However, when she moved in, she found there were debts on the meter from the previous tenant despite being told that the property would be checked every 2 weeks. This debt had left her very worried and had impacted on her mental health.
- One of the men we spoke to was worried that he wouldn't be able to keep his dog if he was offered housing. He told us that his dog was his companion and important to him.

Accessing services

- People told us they find it hard to access services which operate 9am -5pm.
- We heard that people who are homeless often sleep during the day and move around at night, especially women who find themselves living on the streets, they feel more vulnerable at night.

What are we recommending?

1. We heard that homeless people found it difficult to travel to services. We would encourage outreach provision to be available across Medway.

2. People told us they find it hard to access services which operate 9am -5pm. We would encourage services to seek flexible ways for the homeless community to access services. For example, could a 'one stop shop' be piloted to offer a range of support & health services in the evenings?

We will review what progress has been made as a result of our report before the end of the year.

How did we go about it?

We spoke to five women (and three men) in March 2021.

We worked with a homeless organisation who run a soup kitchen in Chatham. With their support we were able to talk to women who were visiting the soup kitchen that evening. They had kindly spoken to some of the women before we arrived so that they were ready to chat to us. Although the purpose of our visit was to hear from women, homeless men who were visiting the soup kitchen were also keen to talk to us and share their stories.

Prior to our visit, we undertook a full risk assessment to ensure we were Covid compliant. On the day of our visit, we spent time to explain to people what we were trying to achieve and what we would do with their story. Everyone gave their consent to use and share their stories.

After our conversations, we reviewed all the feedback and undertook a thematic analysis of the stories. We always work closely to the Healthwatch England Research Framework. If anyone would like more information, just let us know.

We really appreciated the openness and honesty from everyone involved. We know some of you found it hard to talk about the reality of your situation and we will protect your anonymity. Thank you.

We'd also like to thank the homeless organisation for their help and support to make this project a success. They have asked us not to name them in our report but the strength of their relationship with the homeless community meant that people were willing to talk to us. Thank you.



What happens next?

All the feedback we have heard will be shared directly with decision makers so that they can understand what it is like for people who are homeless. We will continue to work closely with Medway Council and charities that support the homeless community, to ensure we hear the issues that homeless women (and men) in Medway are facing. We will ensure the right decision makers hear those stories and can act on the feedback.

These stories will help Medway Council, and the many support organisations who work with the homeless community in Medway, to plan how best to support people and ensure they can get the help that they need.

We will continue to review the feedback we hear and the actions that have been taken as a result.

A bit about us!

Healthwatch Medway is the independent voice for local people in Medway.

We gather and represent people's views about any health and social care service in Medway.

Our role is to understand what matters most to people and to use that information to influence providers and commissioners to change the way services are designed and developed.

Our FREE Information and Signposting service can help you navigate Medway's complicated health and social care system to ensure you can find and access the services that are available for you. Call us on **0800 136 656** or email enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com

Do these stories resonate with you?

Tell us your story and we can make sure your voice is heard by the right people.

Get in touch [HERE](#)

Or call us for free on **0808 136 656 or email enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com**

Thank you