
Editorial

This is the first edition of the EJH to appear since the emergence of covid-19, the subsequent lockdown and the tentative gradual easing of earlier restrictions. For those experiencing homelessness, while it is not yet clear how many deaths occurred as a consequence of the virus, what is clear is that the standard response to homelessness, the provision of congregate temporary shelters is no longer a tenable response due to covid-19. Shelter based responses to homelessness have been repeatedly critiqued on the basis that there is no convincing evidence that the provision of large congregate shelters for people experiencing homelessness achieves anything other than a temporary, and generally unpleasant, respite from the elements and the provision of basic sustenance for people experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, for a small minority, it is an extraordinarily expensive and unsuitable long- term response to their inability to access affordable housing. It will not be possible to ensure safe social distancing within the majority of such facilities and that shelter populations had be ‘thinned’ out in order to allow for social distancing. In most cases, provision was made for shelter users and rough sleepers in hotels which lay near empty due to the collapse of tourism. Although not a substitute for a home, the provision of an en-suite private room in a hotel was a considerable improvement on a crowded shelter or rough sleeping.

The evidence from Housing First projects and programmes across the Global North demonstrates that the provision of secure housing is the most effective response to those who experience homelessness, and the pandemic has starkly highlighted that secure housing is essential to survival. The ability to cocoon, quarantine and other measures to avoid contacting the virus is dependent on having this basic need met. That a significant number of countries introduced a moratorium on terminating tenancies over the past few months, was a further reminder of the importance of secure tenancies with terminations only allowed in exceptional circumstances. Thus, the recent lockdown has shown that it is possible to prevent homelessness by restricting tenancy terminations and to exit emergency accommodation. The challenge is to build on what was possible during the initial period responding to the virus.

In this edition of the EJH, both Tim Aubry and Jan Váně discuss the significance of Housing First. In the case of Tim's contribution a state of the art overview of the literature on Housing First as an evidence based practice for ending long-term homelessness, and Jan documenting some of the challenges of implementing Housing First based on a case study in the Czech Republic.

A number of contributions provide new information on the extent of homelessness and how homelessness is defined. Volker Busch-Geertsema, Jutta Henke and Axel Steffen present new data on the extent of homelessness in Germany, which they estimate at just under 340,000, and highlighting that largest group of people experiencing homelessness were refugees with protection status, who had not yet been able to find independent housing. Ingrid Sahlin in her contribution documents an emerging trend in a number of cities in Sweden where a distinction is made the 'structurally homeless' and the 'socially homeless', with the 'structurally' homeless deemed to have no support needs and have no entitlement to accommodation from the city authorities. The majority of the 'structurally homeless' tend be families and born outside of Sweden. Family homelessness is also the subject of the research note by Letizia Gambi and Sarah Sheridan, where they examine recent trends in Dublin. They also demonstrate how different methodologies for understanding the 'causes' of family homelessness can see family homelessness as either the result of 'family dysfunction' or 'housing market dysfunction', and hence shape public perceptions and policy responses. Our final paper on measurement and classification by Mark Wilding explores some of the difficulties in measuring the extent of homelessness amongst veterans in the UK, and offers some suggestions to improving data collection for this group.

Our final research note by Rachael McDonnell Murray, Pamela Gallagher and Eoin Galavan explores counsellors' experiences of using a suicide specific assessment and intervention tool in a small scale qualitative study.

Dan O'Flaherty provides an incisive review of a recent report by the Council of Economic Advisors, who provide economic advice to the President of the United States, on the state of homelessness in the US, as well as contextualising recent announcements by President Trump on homelessness. O'Flaherty argues that 'the report's analysis is pretty good, the policies that the report recommends do not follow from the analysis, and the Trumpian initiative appears to deviate significantly from both the report's analysis and its recommendations.' A range of other reviews, including a review symposium of street homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics conclude this edition of the EJH.