

Priority need of former prisoners

Find out if you have a priority need for help from the council if you are vulnerable and homeless or about to be released from prison.

If you have nowhere to live, you can apply as homeless to the council. You have to be British or Irish, or have an immigration status that entitles you to claim benefits. You don't have to wait until you're released to apply. Get advice to check when it's best to do it.

The level of support you'll get depends on your circumstances. If you have a priority need, you're entitled to more help, including emergency housing.

Priority need due to being vulnerable

Some people are automatically in priority need. Others have a priority need only if they are vulnerable.

You have a priority need if you'd be much more likely to come to harm than an ordinary person because of one or more of the following:

- old age
- a history of being in care
- being in the armed forces
- a physical or mental health condition or a disability
- serving a prison sentence or being remanded in custody
- becoming homeless due to violence, other than domestic
- another special reason, for example institutionalisation, a high suicide risk, or young age
- recovering from an addiction, and you would be at risk of a relapse if you had to sleep rough

The council must assess you as if you were already homeless, not how well you are managing when you still have somewhere to live. The council can only consider support you get from family or friends if it's consistent and regular.

Factsheet

Institutionalisation

Some people who have been in prison or another institution struggle with adapting to living in the society and find it extremely difficult to manage. This is called institutionalisation. It's possible to have a priority need because of having been institutionalised.

You might have a priority need if you have a history of being in various institutions, for example prisons, military, or social services care, being in and out of prison or serving a long prison sentence. Get help straight away if you think you've been institutionalised and the council is refusing to help you.

Showing you have a priority need

You shouldn't have to prove your case to the council. The council has a duty to investigate your circumstances and contact all relevant professionals. For emergency accommodation, the council only needs a reason to believe that you might have a priority need.

It can help if you have evidence, for example:

- a letter from a professional, for example a probation officer or a rehab worker, confirming you meet the criteria of being vulnerable and giving details of how your circumstances would affect you if you had to sleep rough
- showing the council what medication you've been prescribed
- a copy of your medical record from your GP

You can get further advice from [england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice](https://www.england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice), a local Shelter advice service or local Citizens Advice.

If you have nowhere to sleep tonight, are at risk of harm or losing your home within the next 2 months, call Shelter Helpline on 0808 800 4444 for advice and information on your options. Calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks.

