

London's first dedicated detox unit for homeless people set to open

London's first dedicated detox unit for homeless people is set to open on 14 June to help save the lives of some of the city's most vulnerable people and provide them with an avenue off the streets for good.

The Addiction Clinical Care Suite, based at St Thomas' Hospital in Lambeth, will plug a known gap in treatment facilities for homeless people dealing with serious alcohol and substance dependence. Its location in a hospital setting will enable patients to receive the wide range of care needed to treat the complexity of health problems facing those living on London's streets.

This vital new service is being provided thanks to a unique pan-London partnership among the capital's leading public bodies.

Public Health England (PHE) London led the creation of the project with the Greater London Authority, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust and London's borough councils after funding was awarded by central government. The project was then commissioned by the City of London Corporation before St Thomas' Hospital was chosen to deliver the service.

As well as supporting people who sleep rough to safely withdraw from alcohol and drugs as part of the first steps in a treatment journey, the service will also provide peer support, groups, and activities alongside a range of other initiatives focusing on stopping smoking, healthy eating, essential screening, vaccinations and mental wellbeing.

It includes a holistic support programme, with access to psychiatrists and psychologists to help patients begin a recovery from life on the streets and harmful substance use.

The intention is to meet immediate needs while providing opportunities for long term change, contributing to ending rough sleeping and tackling entrenched health inequalities.

The service is funded through a combination of grants from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and local authority treatment budgets. Referrals will come from across London and local authorities will ensure that people supported by the service have somewhere suitable to go after their detox period has been completed.

This is the first of several new pan-London substance misuse services due to open this year thanks to the PHE-led partnership and commissioning from the City of London. These initiatives will give people who sleep rough a life-saving opportunity to access valuable treatment services that have been designed to meet their needs and specific vulnerabilities.

Alison Keating, Head of Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco at PHE London, said:

We are delighted to have been able to lead on the creation of this fantastic new unit that will provide life-changing and life-saving treatments to some of London's most vulnerable homeless people.

Joint working with some of the city's leading organisations has helped us to provide this avenue off the streets and out of addiction. We will continue to work across organisational boundaries to build on this innovation and make a real and sustained difference to London's most vulnerable populations.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said:

I am delighted to be supporting this landmark new service, providing vital support to some of the most vulnerable Londoners.

The window for helping those with addictions can often be incredibly small and ensuring immediate access to appropriate detoxification and treatment can be life changing. The health issues experienced by people who are homeless are often complex and entrenched, there are no quick fixes.

Therefore, it is vital we continue to invest in addiction support and substance misuse therapies to address these life-threatening health inequalities.

Dr Ian Abbs, Chief Executive Officer of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, said:

We are very proud to be part of this new service at St Thomas' Hospital, which is a lifeline to people living in incredibly difficult circumstances.

Our expert medical and nursing teams will work with mental health colleagues to provide specialist care in one suite.

Getting this right will mean we can give this group of patients a chance to live healthier and happier lives.

Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Community and Children Services Committee, Ruby Sayed, said:

Rough sleeping is the most acute and visible form of homelessness, and an issue that remains a challenge not only in the Square Mile, but right across London and indeed the country.

Every single person has the right to feel safe, secure and protected. The new facility at St Thomas' Hospital will provide a holistic support programme, allowing people to begin a recovery

from life on the streets and harmful substance use.

In collaboration with our partners, we are proud to support some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Eddie Hughes MP, Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, said:

We know that one of the many issues facing rough sleepers, or those at risk of homelessness, is drug or alcohol misuse and the crippling effect this can have on people's lives.

The detox unit at St Thomas' Hospital will offer transformative care to rough sleepers in London suffering from addiction, to ensure some of London's most vulnerable people get the help they need.

This is one of many projects supported by the government's £750 million investment this year to help end rough sleeping, which includes £52 million specifically allocated to substance misuse support services.

The government, the Mayor of London and London local authorities are working collaboratively to end rough sleeping in the capital. In December 2020, the government announced [extra funding for substance misuse treatment services for people who sleep rough](#).

In London, some of the extra funding has been used to establish a new pan-London programme to tackle substance misuse amongst London's homeless to reduce drug and alcohol related harm, save lives, and help people move away from the streets and into housing they have a better chance of sustaining. This new inpatient detoxification unit is one of several new services that will be delivered in the coming months.

[The average life expectancy for a rough sleeper in England is 44 years old](#) and this new programme offers a unique opportunity to maximise the engagement of London's rough sleepers in substance misuse treatment and recovery as part of a wider homeless health and resettlement programme.

The burden on the NHS linked to substance misuse is also increasing. Over the past 10 years the rate of alcohol admissions for mental and behavioural disorders in London has increased from 295 per 100,000 hospital admissions to 425 per 100,000 in 2018 to 2019.

The City of London has taken on responsibility for commissioning and contracting this and several other new pan-London services.

The Addiction Clinical Care Suite has been developed following a pilot conducted by Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust which demonstrated that hospital-based detoxification can be required to address the complexity of physical and mental health needs that homeless people face.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact london-pressoffice@phe.gov.uk