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Housing and health: a reading list



Summary

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Summary

The link between housing and health

The causal link between poor housing conditions and poor health outcomes is long established. The early Nuisances Removal and Disease Prevention Act 1846 is attributed with starting the process of defining unfit living accommodation by setting out procedures for the removal of ‘nuisances’ to curb cholera spread. Further public health acts followed in 1848, 1872 and 1875 to establish sanitary authorities and require new housing to have proper drainage and running water.

Housing conditions can impact physical and mental health in various ways. The independent Marmot Review (2010) said housing is a ‘social determinant of health’, meaning it can affect physical and mental health inequalities throughout life. [The Marmot Review 10 Years On – Health Equity in England](#), recorded an expansion in research on the relationship between poor housing and health:

Poor-quality housing harms health and evidence shows that exposure to poor housing conditions (including damp, cold, mould, noise) is strongly associated with poor health, both physical and mental. The longer the exposure to poor conditions, including cold, the greater the impact on mental and physical health. Specific physical effects are morbidity including respiratory conditions, cardiovascular disease and communicable disease transmission, and increased mortality. In terms of mental health impacts, living in non-decent, cold or overcrowded housing and in unaffordable housing has been associated with increased stress and a reduction in a sense of empowerment and control over one’s life and with depression and anxiety. Children living in overcrowded homes are more likely to be stressed, anxious and depressed, have poorer physical health, attain less well at school and have a greater risk of behavioural problems than those in uncrowded homes.

The cost of poor housing to the NHS

The impact of poor housing goes wider than the actual inhabitants as conditions incubated in unhealthy housing may spread, with costs ultimately borne by health and social care services. The Building Research Establishment (2021) [estimates the cost to the NHS of treating those affected by poor housing as £1.4bn per year](#). The most costly issue to the NHS relates to excess cold.

Fuel poverty and cold homes

The rise in energy prices has led to an increased focus on the link between cold homes and health. [A report published in 2022 by the Institute of Health Equity](#) (PDF) notes:

Homes that are cold due to fuel poverty exacerbate health inequalities. Cold homes can cause and worsen respiratory conditions, cardiovascular diseases, poor mental health, dementia, hypothermia and problems with childhood development. In some circumstances, health problems may be exacerbated to a degree that they may cause death.

Evidence and impact of the pandemic

The covid-19 pandemic, with multiple lockdowns requiring people stay at home, is thought to have exacerbated health issues associated with poor housing and revealed additional challenges for those living in certain types of accommodation, such as houses in multiple occupation. [The Health Foundation \(2020\) said](#):

The pandemic has highlighted the health implications of housing. Poor housing conditions such as overcrowding and high density are associated with greater spread of COVID-19, and people have had to spend more time in homes that are overcrowded, damp or unsafe. The economic fallout from the pandemic may lead to an increase in evictions.

The reading list

This reading list draws together reports and other material demonstrating the interconnectedness of housing and health. It includes literature on the links between housing and major medical conditions; the impact of different types of housing on health; and the various collaborative partnerships in place working to combat these issues. The list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Other Parliamentary Housing and Health resources include:

Commons Library briefing, CBP-07328, [Housing conditions in the private rented sector \(England\)](#).

Commons Library briefing, CBP-01917, [The Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#).

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [Health in Private-Rented Housing](#), 04 April 2018

1 **Introductory literature: the relationship between housing and health**

The Good Home Inquiry, [Good homes for all: A proposal to fix England's housing](#) (2.3MB, PDF), September 2021

This inquiry examines the state of English housing and its impact on health. The inquiry is concerned with addressing the problem of unsuitable and low-quality housing in England's housing stock. It makes a series of recommendations to national and regional governments, and for health systems to create better housing in England.

Rolfe S et al, [Housing as a social determinant of health and wellbeing: developing an empirically-informed realist theoretical framework](#), BMC Public Health, 20 July 2020

This study provides a framework for causal pathways connecting the less tangible aspects of the housing experience to health and wellbeing. Within the study housing service provision, tenants' experience of property quality and aspects of neighbourhoods are demonstrated to have significant correlation with measures of health and wellbeing.

The Health Foundation, [Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On](#), February 2020, section 3E p108.

The Health Foundation commissioned the [Institute of Health Equity](#) to examine progress in addressing health inequalities in England, 10 years on from the Fair Society, Healthy Lives study (The Marmot Review).

[Quick Guide: Health and Housing \(995KB, PDF\)](#), NHS, 2016

This guide provides practical resources and information for Clinical Commissioning Groups from a range of national and local organisations on how housing can: help prevent people from being admitted to hospital; help people be discharged from hospital; and support people to remain independent in the community.

Health Evidence Network, [Is housing improvement a potential health improvement strategy?](#) (309KB, PDF), World Health Organisation, February 2005

This is a report on housing improvements and health. The report says reducing exposure to specific hazards in housing may lead to health improvements for residents and prevent harmful exposure by future generations. It shows improvements in mental health are reported

consistently following housing improvements, and the degree of mental health improvement may be linked to the extent of the housing improvements. It also says general housing improvements may result in improvements in physical health and general well-being.

2 Housing and the NHS

2.1 Cost of Poor Housing to the NHS

Garrett H, et al, The Building Research Establishment, [The cost of poor housing in England, 2021](#)

This research was carried out in response to requests for an update to a 2015 briefing on ‘The Cost of Poor Housing to the NHS’. The study quantifies the cost of poor housing to the NHS by combining existing data from the 2018 English Housing Survey on health and safety hazards in the home, with NHS treatment cost figures. Its findings show 2.6 million homes in England – 11% of the country’s housing stock – are categorised as ‘poor quality’ and therefore hazardous to occupants and poor housing in England could be costing the NHS £1.4billion a year in treatment bills.

Nicol S, Roys M, & Garrett H, [The cost of poor housing to the NHS \(1,993KB, PDF\)](#). Watford: The Building Research Establishment, 2015

This briefing paper provided an estimate of the cost of poor housing along with the economic justification for investing in improvements to the existing housing stock.

2.2 Housing and NHS Partnerships

Greater Manchester Tripartite Agreement, [Better Homes, Better Neighbourhoods and Better Health](#), Housing LIN, 30 March 2021

This agreement is a collaboration between Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Housing Providers and Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership. Its aim is to align resources and expertise to improve health outcomes in existing homes and neighbourhoods and influence the development of new housing and communities.

Buck D and Gregory S, [Housing and health: opportunities for sustainability and transformation partnerships](#), The King’s Fund, 22 March 2018

NHS organisations and local government work together with other partners to improve health and care for their local populations through sustainability and transformation partnerships (STPs). This report is aimed at helping those contributing to STPs to make most of the contribution housing can make to health as the partnerships deliver and continue to develop.

3 Housing and specific health conditions

3.1 Housing and covid-19

[Housing and health: Working together to respond to rough sleeping during Covid-19](#), St Mungo's, January 2021

This report presents the findings of research into the health needs of people sleeping rough in England and their vulnerability to Covid-19. It looks at the approach taken to address the health and housing needs of this group during the pandemic. The report aims to help inform decision makers and offer solutions to rough sleeping, both during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

[Homes, health and COVID-19](#), Centre for Ageing Better, 22 September 2020

According to latest figures, 4.3 million homes in England do not meet the national standard to be considered in a decent condition. This report reviewed existing literature on the association between housing and health, focusing on role of this interaction in the spread and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

[Homes, health and COVID-19: Infographics](#), Centre for Ageing Better, 22 September 2020

An overview of facts and statistics on how Covid-19 has exacerbated the link between housing and health, and how lockdown impacted those living in poor-quality homes.

Tinson A, and Clair A, [Better housing is crucial for our health and the COVID-19 recovery](#), The Health Foundation, 28 December 2020

Issues such as overcrowding, poor quality and unaffordable homes are a threat to health. This report shows how these problems have been highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic and outlines measures to help tackle risks to health.

Brown P et al, [Lockdown, Rundown, Breakdown](#), Northern Housing Consortium, October 2020

This report examines the impact that living in poor-quality accommodation had on northern households during the pandemic. It stresses the connection between home and health, the need for security and sense of wellbeing, and urges action for the short, medium and long term to ensure the housing crisis does not lead to systemic or personal breakdown.

3.2

Housing and dementia

Fleming R, Zeisel J and Bennett K, [World Alzheimer Report 2020: Design, Dignity, Dementia: dementia-related design and the built environment \(Volumes One and Two\)](#), Housing LIN , 29 September 2020

These reports offer a global perspective of dementia related design. The reports look at design in domestic settings, day and residential care, hospitals and public buildings and spaces. It includes four case studies from the UK. The reports demonstrate dementia design can follow simple principles, is cost effective and improves enjoyment and safety of built environments for those living with dementia, and can enable those living with dementia to live longer in their own homes and communities.

Brown M et al, [Being Home - Housing and Dementia in Scotland](#), University of West Scotland, 2017

This report gives an overview of the housing situation of people affected by dementia and identifies the role suitable housing plays in the lives of those affected in Scotland. It shows how improved housing can increase opportunities for individuals to live well with dementia and makes recommendations to various policy makers and bodies for improving the situation.

3.3

Housing and mental health

NHS Confederation, [Healthy foundations: integrating housing as part of the mental health pathway](#), 20 May 2022

This report explores what more can be done at the policy and practice levels to achieve a more integrated and strategic approach between health, housing and social care. It brings together the key outcomes and recommendations from a series of engagement events, culminating in a Mental Health and Housing Summit.

Preece J and Bimpson E, [Housing insecurity and mental health](#), UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Excellence, 27 March 2019

This report explores the relationships between mental health and housing insecurity considering current contemporary housing systems. It examines decreasing affordability, the role of the private rented sector and worsening housing outcomes compared to previous generations. The report includes policy recommendations aimed at a number of audiences, including the UK and devolved governments, research communities and mental health charities.

Copeman I, [Mental wellbeing: the importance of home](#), Housing LIN, 2020

A blog which discusses the links between poor housing and mental health and which includes an overview of findings from several projects and case studies.

Reynold L, [Full house? How Overcrowded Housing Affects Families](#), Shelter, October 2005

This report takes information from the experiences of 505 families living in overcrowded housing. The findings are presented through case studies, facts, figures, and quotes from the families themselves. Section 4 focuses on health with a total of 71% of respondents strongly agreeing that overcrowding harmed the health of family members.

4 Health across different tenures and scenarios

4.1 The private rented sector

Harris J, and Mckee K, [Health and wellbeing in the private rented sector part 1 | literature review](#), UK Collaborative Centre for Housing, July 2021

This report is the first output of a project to explore the relationship between living in the private rented sector and subjective wellbeing. It features an overview of key themes from the literature and from interviews with experts. The report shows poor property conditions, affordability and security of tenure are widely cited as substantial drivers of poor health and wellbeing.

Harris J and Mckee K, [Health and wellbeing in the UK private rented sector | enhancing capabilities part 2 | findings from tenant interviews](#), UK Collaborative Centre for Housing, July 2021

This is the second output of the project described above. It includes findings of in-depth interviews with 53 tenants. This “capability approach” is an alternative way of thinking about and measuring wellbeing. In this study Professor Martha Nussbaum outlines 10 “essential” capabilities, including bodily health, that are needed in order to live well. This study explores the conditions and circumstances through which private rented sector housing either enhances or detrimentally affects these capabilities.

Pawb T, and Bevan P, [Private renting and mental health: A way forward](#), Chartered Institute of Housing, 20 February 2019

This report explores the levels of mental health support available to tenants and landlords in the private rented sector in Wales and makes recommendations to help people access and sustain tenancies. Key findings include almost a third (32 per cent) of support organisations feel tenants in the private rented sector ‘never’ have enough support. There are strong indications people with mental health problems sometimes face discrimination when trying to access private rented sector housing.

4.2 Housing with care

Associated Retirement Community Operators, [Putting the ‘care’ in Housing-with-Care](#), November 2021

This report was produced to analyse the quality, efficiency and benefits of social care provided by Integrated Retirement Community operators in the UK. It includes case studies and statistical comparison and claims Integrated Retirement Communities are essential to preventing the UK's social care system collapsing, whilst also potentially reducing the care staff shortage by 60,000.

Strzelecka D, et al, [Identifying the health care system benefits of housing with care](#), Housing LIN & Southampton City Council, August 2019

This report offers a case study overview, through the local context of Southampton, of the impact and potential benefits to the health care system of housing with care services. It examines the financial cost-benefits of housing with care, and looks at the estimated financial impact for health care services of current provision, and the potential growth of housing with care services.

4.3 Social Housing

Gibb K, Lawson L, Williams J & McLaughlin M, [The Impact of Social Housing: Economic, Social, Health and Wellbeing](#) (1,411KB, PDF), UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) and Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) August 2020

This research considered social housing's economic and social impacts for its residents, communities and for Scotland.

Buck D, et al, [The economics of housing and health: The role of housing associations](#), The King's Fund, 20 September 2016

This report utilised case studies to illustrate how housing associations provide a wide range of services with health benefits which can both reduce demand on the NHS and create social value. It showed how housing associations provide a wide range of services that can alleviate the overall economic burden of ill health and how housing associations work with local NHS partners to provide services which help offset the costs of NHS care.

4.4 Homelessness

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Guidance - Health matters: rough sleeping](#), February 2020

This guidance contains information on the physical and mental health needs of those sleeping rough.

Crisis [Health and wellbeing](#) webpages [accessed on 4 January 2022]

These pages provide an overview of the health issues facing homeless people linked to relevant research and information on projects and available assistance.

Leng G, [The Impact of homelessness on health: a guide for local authorities](#) (PDF), Local Government association, 2017

This paper looks at the impact of homelessness on health, and on how collaboration between local professionals such as environmental health and housing to allied health, public health and social care can improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities for those facing homelessness.

5

Housing and health inequalities

Alice Lee, Ian Sinha, Tammy Boyce, Jessica Allen, Peter Goldblatt (2022) [Fuel poverty, cold homes and health inequalities](#) (PDF). London: Institute of Health Equity

This report highlights links between fuel poverty, cold homes and poor health outcomes. It notes the households more likely to experience fuel poverty and regional disparities in fuel poverty.

Dr Annika Hjelmkog, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, [How to combine action on housing retrofit with tackling health inequalities \(and other injustices\)](#), 21 June 2022

This briefing paper highlights the interconnected policy priorities that retrofitting homes can contribute to and takes a Whole Systems Approach to retrofitting as a public health issue.

Chartered Institute of Housing, [Helping to tackle health inequalities](#) (blog) 28 April 2022

Considers how public health, health and housing bodies can work better together for the benefit of their communities.

6 Parliamentary Material

6.1 All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

APPG on Housing and Care for Older People, [Housing for people with dementia – are we ready?](#), 17 February 2021

This report explores the policy changes needed to help people live as well as possible with dementia in their own homes. It makes a range of recommendations, with an overarching message that joining together housing and care is key to improving the issues.

APPG for Healthy Homes and Buildings, [Building our Future Laying the Foundations for Healthy Homes and Buildings](#), October 2018

This white paper makes a range of recommendations to improve future home building and recognise the relationship between building and health. It has an overarching message that it is only through a holistic approach to delivering healthy homes and buildings that real benefits can be realised.

6.2 Select Committee reports

Communities and Local Government Select Committee, [Housing for older people](#), February 2018


The Committee concluded “A national strategy for older people's housing is needed to bring together and improve policy in this area”. There was a call for the then-forthcoming social care green paper to “consider the range of housing for older people, from mainstream and accessible homes to supported and extra care housing, as well as access to adaptations and repairs.”

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