

SHELTER

Social housing – a prescription for better health and wellbeing

Home is our country's foundation. When we live in a safe, secure and affordable home, it supports our health and wellbeing, and provides us with the solid base we need to thrive.

17.5 million people in Britain are impacted by the housing emergency – many of whom are living in expensive, damp, crumbling homes that are making people sick and holding them back.¹

We cannot build a thriving society when people's homes are harming their health. In [our general election manifesto](#), Shelter calls on all political parties to:

- Build a new generation of social homes – at least 90,000 a year for ten years
- Make renting secure and affordable
- Raise standards in rented homes
- Strengthen housing rights

Record levels of homelessness – a national scandal

Homelessness has reached record levels. Research from Shelter shows at least 309,000 people in England are without a home, including almost 140,000 children.² This is a result of a failure to build enough genuinely affordable social homes and to make the private rented sector secure and affordable.

Rough sleeping kills. In 2021 (latest available ONS statistics) an estimated 741 people who were street homeless or in emergency accommodation died in England and Wales – 54% higher than when records began in 2013. This equates to two people dying every day. The average age at death was 45 for men and 43 for women. This is more than 30 years lower than the average age at death of the general population.³

Being homeless and living in temporary accommodation puts children's lives at risk. Between 2019 and 2022, homelessness and temporary accommodation may have contributed to 34 children's deaths.⁴

Shelter's [Still living in limbo](#) report found that two thirds (66%) of people report that their physical or mental health has been damaged by living in temporary accommodation. This ranged from worsening physical conditions, to higher rates of mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression.⁵

Private renting conditions – cold, damp and dangerous with spiraling rents

Due to the failure to build enough genuinely affordable social homes, more and more people are being pushed into the private sector. Private rents are spiraling and have increased by a massive 27% in the last ten years, with a record increase of 6% in the past year alone.⁶

Almost half of private renters (45%) say worrying about how they will pay their rent is making them feel anxious and depressed.⁷

Under the constant threat of no-fault evictions, private renters are left feeling scared to complain about the dangerous and unhealthy conditions in which they live. More than half a million private rented homes in England (579,000) have hazards that are so dangerous they are assessed as 'a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety'. 1 million private rented homes are in disrepair and failing to provide efficient insulation and heating.⁸



It is vital that the Renters Reform Bill is strengthened and passed, to deliver reforms that truly end all unfair evictions, which are preventing renters enforcing their rights to good quality, safe homes and pushing thousands into homelessness.

Poor housing – the cost to the NHS

Poor housing conditions cost the NHS England a staggering £1.4 billion a year – putting a massive strain on services.⁹

Children living in bad housing are twice as likely to suffer from poor health than those living in good housing. For example, children living in cold homes are twice as likely to suffer from respiratory problems than those living in warm ones.¹⁰

Damp and cold conditions cause and exacerbate lung diseases, and all lung conditions cost the NHS £11 billion annually.¹¹ Respiratory incidences and mortality rates are higher in disadvantaged groups and underserved communities. The NHS emphasise that the equality gap is widening and leading to worse health outcomes with poor housing being one of the main determinants of this.¹²

Social housing – invest for a positive impact on health and wellbeing

[Health Equals](#), a coalition of over thirty organisations led by the Health Foundation and of which Shelter is a member, say that one of the fundamental factors in someone's health outcomes is tied to their home. Not just the location, but the conditions and affordability of that home.

A healthy, affordable, secure and decent home is not only a preventive measure but helps those already suffering with health conditions and ill health. Social housing can alleviate pressures on the NHS and health system to focus on other determinants of ill health. **But why social housing?**

Positive impact on health. 46% of social renters say their social home has a positive impact on their physical or mental health,¹³ while a recent analysis found that living in a privately rented home is associated with faster biological aging.¹⁴

Genuinely affordable. Social rent housing is the only tenure of housing that is affordable by design because rents are set with a formula tied to local wages, unlike every other so-called 'affordable' home. Social housing is nearly always far more affordable than private renting, that could alleviate the anxiety of being able to pay the rent.

Secure tenancies. People in social housing usually have secure tenancies, giving them greater protection from eviction and enhanced rights compared to those renting privately. They provide the foundation people need to get on in life, meaning families don't face constant stress of insecurity and frequent moves and can put down roots, concentrate on their health and wellbeing and make their house a home surrounded by supportive neighbours.

Decent standards. On average, social homes are twice as likely to meet the decent homes standard as private rented homes.¹⁵ They are more likely to be better insulated and more energy efficient than private renting, reducing unhealthy damp and cold conditions, fuel poverty and carbon emissions. They are also more likely to have working smoke alarms. While in the past, there has been no proactive regulation of social homes, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 that Shelter and others campaigned for has given the regulator more teeth to drive up standards.

All political parties must commit to build a new generation of social homes - at least 90,000 a year to improve the health and wellbeing of renters and end record levels of homelessness.



¹ YouGov survey of 13,268 adults (18+) in Great Britain, 6th–14th April 2021, online, weighted to be representative of all GB adults (18+)

² Nuttall, E., [Homelessness in England 2023](#), Shelter, December 2023

³ Office for National Statistics (ONS), [Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2021](#), 23 November 2022

⁴ Procter, A., Pratt, S. and Wise-Martin, I. '[APPG for Households in Temporary Accommodation, Call for evidence findings: summary, analysis of themes and call to action](#)' January 2023.

⁵ Garvie, D., Pennington, J., Rich, H., Schofield, M. '[Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end - Shelter England](#)' March 2023

⁶ ONS, [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK: monthly estimates](#), Table 1

⁷ YouGov survey of 1,937 private renters in England, 18th October – 7th November, online, weighted to be representative of GB adults (18+)

⁸ DLUHC, [English Housing Survey 2022 to 2023: headline report](#), Chapter 4: swelling conditions annex tables, Table 4.3 and Table 4.4

⁹ Garrett, H. et al., [The cost of poor housing in England](#), Building Research Establishment, 9 November 2021

¹⁰ Institute of Health Equity, [Fuel poverty, cold homes and health inequalities in the UK](#), August 2022

¹¹ In total, all lung conditions (including lung cancer) directly cost the NHS in the UK £11 billion annually. NHS England, [Respiratory high impact interventions](#)

¹² NHS England, [Living well, ageing well and tackling premature mortality: Respiratory Disease](#)

¹³ YouGov survey of 2,002 social tenants, 16th–30th March 2023, online, weighted to be representative of social tenants.

¹⁴ Clair, A., Kumari, M. and Baker, E., [Are housing circumstances associated with faster epigenetic ageing?](#), Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health

¹⁵ DLUHC, [English Housing Survey 2022 to 2023: headline report](#), Chapter 4: swelling conditions annex tables, Table 4.3

