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Improving Private Rented Housing is a Health Priority.

[Why the Health and Social Care Committee should consider this issue.](#)

Housing has long been recognised as vital for population health, including mental and physical health, as well as other outcomes. Poor housing contributes to health disparities because it affects disadvantaged sections of the population disproportionately. The [private rented sector](#) (PRS) has particular problems that include poorer quality housing (compared to other housing sectors), and poor security of tenure.

Publicised problems with the PRS often focus on the criminal behaviour of a small number of so-called “rogue landlords.” However, the sector also has widespread and systemic deficiencies. UK government has recently stated that “a fifth of private tenants in England are spending a third of their income on housing that is non-decent” ([DLUHC, 2022](#)). It goes on to say that the most serious hazards “exist in 12% of properties, posing an immediate risk to tenants’ health and safety” and an estimated 1.6 million PRS tenants live in dangerously low-quality homes. According to the government, private landlords who rent out non-decent properties receive an estimated £3 billion from the state in housing welfare, while health problems caused or exacerbated by the PRS are estimated to cost the NHS £340 million a year ([DLUHC, 2022](#)).

[Why the Committee should look at it now: in particular, whether there is an opportunity for it to add value to existing research and evidence.](#)

It is concerning that the population has become increasingly reliant on the poorest quality housing sector. There is wide recognition that this requires urgent action, as indicated by the government’s own response outlined in [A Fairer Private Rented Sector](#).

Over the last two decades, the private rented housing sector has doubled so that [one in five people](#) in England now live in privately rented homes. However, the private rented sector is consistently the poorest sector for housing quality. According to [ONS](#), the private rented sector had the highest proportion of non-decent homes (23%) in 2021, while the social rented and owner occupied sectors had 10% and 13% respectively.

There is a clear opportunity to add value to existing research and evidence. Research into housing improvement and health has, until recently, largely ignored the private rented sector and focused instead on area based regeneration and improvement initiatives, often driven by concerns about social housing. The evidence base around improving UK’s private rented sector is therefore still in its early stages. There is a growing body of research coming from the ESRC funded UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence ([CaCHE](#)).

The [first controlled impact evaluation](#) of a PRS landlord licensing scheme (‘selective licensing’) recently found that implementation of these schemes in Greater London was followed by area-level

improvements in mental health indicators, reduced anti-social behaviour and increased population turnover.

[We argue](#) the Greater London evaluation shows that intervention in the private rented housing sector can have important wider impacts, including impacts on health and social outcomes linked to health. The study also illustrates how intervening in something as complex as the housing system is likely to lead to numerous and multi-directional outcomes. There are likely to be winners and losers. As the government prepares to intervene more in this sector, it is crucial that we learn more about who benefits, who does not, and how we can best help those most in need. We call for improved PRS housing data of sufficient granularity and quality to aid policy, practice and research.

Why this area would benefit from scrutiny.

As stated above, the government is intending to intervene more in this sector and it is important to have a good understanding of the impacts, including equity impacts, economic impacts and unintended consequences. Planned interventions include ensuring all private landlords register their rentals on a new system ("Property Portal"), adhere to a legally binding standard on decency; the replacing of Section 21 'no fault' eviction notices with a tenancy system intended to give residents greater security of tenure; and a new Ombudsman to intervene in disputes between tenants and landlords.

Furthermore, all local authorities have decisions to make about their existing discretionary powers, such as deciding to implement, renew or cease selective licensing schemes. High quality monitoring and evaluation of such activities is crucial.

Why the Government needs to take action in this area.

The government has already recognised the need for action. What is now necessary is (i) translating good intentions into effective, implemented policies; (ii) monitoring and evaluating complex impacts; and (iii) providing a knowledge exchange space that will enable further effective improvements.

NOTES

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