

Written evidence submitted by CaCHE (UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence) (PHS0127)

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Why the Health and Social Care Committee should consider housing as part of its Prevention inquiry

Housing policy is a key tool of health promotion and disease prevention. There are long-recognised links between housing and health. Poor housing conditions can be a cause and exacerbate poor mental and physical health, impact on quality of life and cause premature death. The first housing policies in the 1800s emerged in response to the impact poor housing conditions were having on public health. Breaking the link between poor housing and poor health has been a priority for housing policy ever since. More recently, experiences under Covid-19 highlighted the impact of housing on health outcomes. It is vital that poor quality housing is viewed as a public health issue and the question of how to improve housing conditions is central to any inquiry into health promotion and prevention.

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

According to the [Centre for Ageing Better](#) (2020), around 10 million people in England currently live in a home that fails the government's own decent homes standard and presents a serious threat to their health and safety. Living in poor quality housing can impact on mental and physical health, undermining independent living and increase demand for health and social care. The [Building Research Establishment](#) has estimated that the cost to the NHS of non-decent homes in England is around £1.4 billion per annum. It is therefore concerning that progress in improving housing conditions has stalled in recent years.

Recent research by [CaCHE](#) suggests that this is because cracks and fissures have emerged within the national framework for housing improvement, undermining the role government has traditionally played in protecting the national resource that is our housing stock. Many councils are struggling to fulfil their statutory duties to intervene to improve housing conditions in the private sector. National funding streams supporting housing improvements have ended or been scaled back and local agencies are less able to provide loans or grants, equipment and materials, and advice and guidance. Some Home Improvement Agencies have been forced to close, handyman services have been scaled back, area renewal programmes have largely ceased, and local home improvements loan schemes have suffered.

The CaCHE report concluded by observing that:

“Policy-makers might balk at the costs of ensuring the national policies, local infrastructure and targeted initiatives are in place to address poor quality housing. However, cutting funding to the national framework for housing improvement is a false economy, leading to greater pressure and spending on health and social care and undermining efforts to meet carbon reduction targets and tackle the climate emergency. In summary, housing is a valuable national asset and social good that needs to be repaired and maintained.”

Why this area would benefit from scrutiny

Why are efforts to tackle the problem of housing quality stalling? Why is there an uneven geography in the delivery of home improvements and what are the implications for health inequalities? How can we minimise the impact of poor housing on public health and ease pressures on health and social care? What works, why, where, for whom and at what cost in tackling poor quality housing?

Scrutiny of these critical questions by the Prevention in Health and Social Care Committee would serve to renew commitment to the key role housing can play in health promotion and prevention and catalyse efforts to better integrate housing policy and health prevention. Housing policy will be challenged to look beyond the contemporary focus on new housing supply. Health and social care will be challenged to recognise housing as integral to health promotion, prevention and integrated care systems.

Why the Government needs to take action in this area?

It is vital that everyone is able to live in a home that is safe and comfortable. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and there is an urgent need to improve the quality of housing in England. The majority of non-decent homes are in the owner-occupied sector. Primary responsibility for maintaining this housing falls on owners. However, policy also has a key role to play in protecting this national resource. In recent years, the focus of housing policy has drifted away from dealing with poor quality housing. The national framework for housing improvement has been neglected and progress in tackling poor housing quality has stalled. The consequences for public health, and for health and social care budgets are significant.

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