



The Housing and
Ageing Alliance

Homes for healthy ageing – time to ‘level up’

In her [latest blog](#) Sue Adams, CEO of Care & Repair England and Chair of the Housing & Ageing Alliance, calls for action to ‘level up’ by improving existing homes and argues that ‘building back better’ should include making all homes healthy, sustainable and accessible places to live across the life course.

Post-pandemic recovery debates frequently mention ‘levelling up’ or ‘building back better’. Surprisingly, given the extent to which the pandemic revealed the scale of poor housing, there has been little mention of building better homes. The usual debates about quantity, not quality, still predominate.

The effects of substandard, insecure, unsuitable housing on physical and mental health cut across all ages. The pandemic exposed and amplified housing-related health inequalities, bringing the negative impacts of housing conditions on mental as well as physical health into sharp relief during periods of confinement to home. This was clearly analysed by the Kings Fund and Centre for Ageing Better in [Homes, health and Covid-19: How poor quality homes have contributed to the pandemic](#), which highlighted the finding that:

- *Groups in the population who are more likely to live in poor housing are often the same groups who are vulnerable to COVID-19 and other health conditions, including older people, people with existing health conditions, those with lower incomes and people from ethnic minority groups.*

Older people were particularly badly affected by the pandemic, with 90% of Covid-19 deaths occurring amongst the over 65yrs age group, three quarters over 75yrs.

As the extent to which the pandemic has exacerbated health inequalities emerges e.g. rates of decreased life expectancy varying significantly in different localities, there are also calls to [‘build back fairer’](#).

So how can we learn from the experience of the pandemic, and how should we grasp opportunities to tackle the multiple housing and health crises we now face, and which have a particularly significant impact on older people?

As a first step, all **housing, planning, health & social care policies** need to acknowledge that we are living through a time of unprecedented demographic change. Addressing population ageing in all housing and related planning will ultimately benefit people of all ages.

Secondly, **‘Levelling up’** needs to include concerted action to bring over [4 million non-decent homes](#) (2 million lived in by an older household) up to a healthy, decent standard, alongside adapting homes to enable safer, independent living. This could dovetail well with emerging housing retrofit plans to address climate change, and NHS preventative healthcare planning.

And finally, **‘Building back better’** should mean that every new home is designed to be a healthy, sustainable and accessible place to live across the life course. Innovative housing models designed to support independence in later life for a diverse ageing population would also have potential benefits.

These three steps to improve homes for healthy ageing are 'win-win-win' actions. They will result in improved quality of life for current and future generations of housing occupants, a health and care dividend benefiting the NHS and Social Services, and a positive impact on climate change through reduced energy consumption.

[The Housing & Ageing Alliance](#) continues to make the case for concerted, cross sector and inter-departmental action that will:

- *Enable older people to live independently and well wherever they choose, remaining in control of their homes and lives*
- *Create age-friendly homes, neighbourhoods and services that enable people to live healthy, fulfilling lives, involved with families, friends & neighbours and contributing to their communities in later life*
- *Create integrated housing, health & care policies all aiming to enable people to live safely & well at home as they age*

Author

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