

Healthy foundations: integrating housing as part of the mental health pathway

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There is little argument that good quality housing and positive mental health are inextricably linked. Settled housing is known to have a positive impact on mental health.¹ It is well evidenced that poor quality housing, poverty, worklessness and crime are all linked to poorer physical and mental health outcomes.² Mental ill health is frequently cited as a reason for tenancy breakdown,³ with housing problems frequently referenced as a reason for someone being admitted or re-admitted to inpatient care.⁴

To enable people to live well, work and take part in community life, there is a critical need for safe, secure and affordable housing.⁵ For people living with serious mental illness, the right housing can be a critical factor in supporting people to live as independently as possible, whilst also accessing the support they need to live and thrive in local communities.

With large, sector-wide transformation and investment taking place across the health and care landscape, now is an opportune time to invest in and make explicit the relationship between mental health and housing. Recognising the opportunity provided by the [cross-government 10-year plan for mental health and wellbeing](#), we set out to explore 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 in a summit held in February by the [NHS Confederation Mental Health Network](#), [HACT](#) and [Home Group](#).

Three key themes emerged throughout our engagement with colleagues from across the health, care and housing sectors which will be essential to drive forward future plans for mental health and wellbeing in local communities, and deliver a more integrated and strategic approach between health, housing and social care:

- A need for national strategies and a vision for mental health and housing to unlock resources and build partnerships.
- Building new models and partnerships, and
- Accelerating innovation and good practice, using the opportunity of the evolving health and care landscape.

The Health and Care Act 2022, the first major piece of primary legislation on health and care in England in a decade,⁶ emphasises that the future of health and care must be based on

¹ HM Government, State of the nation re: poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency in the UK

² Johnson R, Griffiths C and Nottingham T. At home? Mental Health issues arising in social housing.

³ Social Exclusion Unit (2004), Mental Health and Social Exclusion, www.nfao.org

⁴ Johnson R, Griffiths C, Nottingham T (2008). At Home? Mental Health Issues Arising in Social Housing.

⁵ Closing the Gap: Priorities for essential change in mental health, www.gov.uk

⁶ Health and Social Care Act 2012, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/contents?view=plain>

collaboration and partnership working at a local level. Engaging the local housing system will be mission critical.

The social care white paper published in December 2021⁷ identifies the importance of integrating housing into local health and care strategies.

This comes at a time when the NHS and its partners are driving forward a major programme of transformation in community and primary care, with greater integration of mental health support. The Community Mental Health Framework is clear that additional investment in community mental health teams needs to involve housing as part of ensuring access to a broader range of expertise and mental health support.⁸

Recommendations

- Homes England should develop a **National Supported Housing Strategy**, endorsed by NHS England and NHS Improvement, underpinned by long-term investment. This would inspire greater confidence from housing providers and developers to better meet appetite and demand for supported housing by the NHS.
- NHS England and NHS Improvement should develop a clear **vision and national strategy for mental health and housing**. It should demonstrate the importance of housing within mental health pathways and current transformation priorities, which can be translated locally through integrated care systems and their integrated care boards.
- The cross-government mental health plan currently in development must **recognise and propose action on housing**, recognising how important it is for good mental health and wellbeing for the whole population.
- Development of **expertise and workforce programmes that deliver a higher consistency of specialist skills** in multi-disciplinary teams across health, housing and social care settings. A focus on workforce should encourage collaboration between clinical and non-clinical teams, with a shared understanding of quality and risk.
- Development of more **consistent and explicit models of supported housing services** are needed that are built on good practice, quality and collaboration between people with lived experience and their clinical, supported housing and social care teams.
- Investment in developing a **comprehensive evidence base** that addresses both the quality case and the financial case for investment, clinical integration and excellence.
- **Enhanced appreciation of mental health** and the impact current policy and practice by mainstream housing and homelessness services has on people experiencing poor

⁷ People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform white paper. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper>

⁸ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/the-community-mental-health-framework-for-adults-and-older-adults/>

mental health. A commitment to doing 'no harm' in mainstream housing management by landlords.

Suggested parliamentary questions

*If you would like to discuss the issues raised in this briefing, or would like any alternative questions, please don't hesitate to be in touch via **Caitlin Plunkett-Reilly, External Affairs Manager (Public Affairs)** – caitlin.plunkett-reilly@nhsconfed.org.*

- To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the cross-government mental health plan will include measures on housing?
- To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, about the cross-government mental health strategy?
- To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what discussions he has had with Homes England regarding a National Supported Housing Strategy?
- To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what plans he has to increase supported housing capacity in England?
- To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about housing and mental health?

About the NHS Confederation

The NHS Confederation is the membership organisation that brings together, supports and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The members we represent employ 1.5 million staff, care for more than 1 million patients a day and control £150 billion of public expenditure. We promote collaboration and partnership working as the key to improving population health, delivering high-quality care and reducing health inequalities.

The Mental Health Network (MHN) is the voice for NHS-funded mental health and learning disability service providers in England. The MHN represents providers from across the statutory, independent and third sectors. By working with government, regulators, opinion formers, media and the wider NHS, the MHN promotes excellence in mental health services and the importance of good mental health.