



How does housing influence our health?

This briefing sets out how NHS organisations across Wales are addressing the impact poor quality housing can have on people's health and wellbeing.

Key Points

- Poor housing costs the Welsh NHS £95 million per year in the first five years of treatment charges and costs Welsh society over £1bn a year.
- Quality housing acts as a wider determinate for good physical and mental health, and when investing in good quality housing there is a proven return on investment in health benefits.
- The impacts of poor housing are reflected in health inequalities across Wales and have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable populations of society.
- Health, social care, housing and wider public services are working together to enable seamless services are provided to improve population outcomes and service user experience through implementing [A Healthier Wales](#).

Healthy homes are far more than just houses

Health outcomes and quality housing are so connected, the relationship between the two cannot be ignored. There is increasing evidence to suggest good quality housing helps us stay healthy and can improve our wellbeing, while poor housing can increase demand on health, other public services and the economy. As highlighted within Public Health Wales NHS Trust report, [Making a Difference in Health and Housing: A Case for Investment Report](#), published in June 2019 it is estimated the cost of poor housing to Welsh society is over £1bn a year, with 18 percent of homes in Wales considered to be of a standard that is detrimental to a person's health. Poor housing not only costs the NHS, but also leads to more reliance on other public services such as social care, Local Authority referrals to food banks, leads to more accidents at home and higher risk of fuel poverty.

Housing is more than just a physical structure. The Health Foundation report [How does housing influence our health? \(2019\)](#) considers a healthy home to be: an affordable, safe and secure base; provides for all household needs; allows people to feel safe and comfortable; and is connected to community, work and services. Having a healthy home is a key wider determinate to overall health and wellbeing, reduces incidences and conditions, keeps people out of hospital and reduces GP visits. Quality housing also plays an essential role in supporting those with mental health conditions.

Wales has some of the greatest levels of health inequalities within the UK. Good quality, affordable homes can help meet public health challenges and reduce the widening health inequalities in our communities. Homes in the most deprived areas tend to be concentrated in areas with higher crime levels, which often also result in poor quality housing, increased anxiety, isolation and loneliness.

There is also an increasing awareness of the impact housing has on vulnerable people. For example, homelessness may impact on the treatment for certain conditions, such as cancer, and living with long term conditions place a financial burden on families which can lead to referrals to food banks and other Local Authority support services. People who are homeless are more likely to be living with mental health problems and less likely to receive any support.

The solution to the problem does not lie solely with the NHS. Housing and health are impacted by a wide array of public and private services. Therefore, an integrated approach, as outlined in the Welsh Government's long-term plan for health and social care, *A Healthier Wales*, and based on partnership working across health, social care, local government, housing associations, education, utility companies and other stakeholders is needed to reduce demand on NHS services and address the core relationship between health and housing. Effective integration is needed across the public sector to maximise population health and wellbeing across a person's lifetime.

**Aneurin Bevan
University Health
Board**

Partnership working across Gwent

The Gwent Health, Social Care and Housing Strategic Partnership is one of five Strategic Partnerships that make up the supporting structure of the Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB). The membership is open to all the Residential Social Landlords (RSLs) in Gwent and includes senior representation from the five Local Authority strategic housing departments, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), Social Services, the Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team and third sector organisations, including Care and Repair Cymru.

The current work programme of the Gwent RPB Housing Strategic Partnership includes:

- Implementation of the recommendations of the appropriate housing for older people study carried out by the Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team;
- Integration of the ABUHB, Local Authority and RSLs estate strategies to make best use of the available resources;
- A focus on reducing social isolation, including making the links between RSLs tenants and the ABUHB led Integrated Wellbeing Network programme; and
- Aligning use of Integrated Care Fund capital and revenue funding to provide packages of care within Gwent, including housing, to improve outcomes for individuals and release revenue from high cost, out of county placements.

**Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health
Board**

Warm Wales: The Healthy Homes Healthy People North Wales project

Established in 2004, [Warm Wales](#) works with partners in the public and private sectors to help provide homes with affordable warmth and to prevent and alleviate fuel poverty. Amongst its current projects is [Healthy Homes Healthy People](#) (HHHP) which focuses on improving people's homes by taking a person-based approach to reduce fuel poverty, improve health and wellbeing and reduce avoidable health inequality through bringing together Warm Wales, Wales and West Utilities, Local Authorities, primary care, social prescribing programmes and housing associations.

HHHP has programmes across Wales, and the North Wales Project is part of [the 2025 Movement](#), a place-based partnership in North Wales with a mission to end avoidable health inequalities in the region by 2025. The Movement was formed in 2015 in response to figures which showed that people living in areas of higher deprivation in North Wales are likely to live 11 years less than those in the least deprived areas.

HHHP North Wales uses a holistic approach to focus on: improving home and personal safety; income maximisation and personal/family support; affordable warmth; and improving health and wellbeing outcomes. The aim of the project, which is currently being delivered in part with funding from Warm Homes Fund and support from the lead bidder Flintshire County Council, is to identify and assist 3000 vulnerable households in North Wales who are at risk or in fuel poverty using a person-centred approach to reduce health inequalities.

Warm Wales are also working with a number of organisations in North Wales, looking at providing training for frontline staff and volunteers to conduct home visits and sign post to supportive organisations to provide safe, sound, secure, warm and affordable homes for all. The funding from Warm Homes Fund finishes at the end of December 2020.

Throughout Wales and Cornwall, over 2,300 households have been assisted through HHHP home services resulting in an approximate saving of £1.5 million for keeping homes warm. In North Wales communities, this amounts to roughly 950 home visits and a saving of £543,000 to date. Warm and dry homes in which people can feel safe and secure in have resulted in health benefits, such as improved respiratory illness rates, increased education by teaching school children how to read and understand their families energy bills, and training frontline NHS staff to ask questions to their patients that allow their home situation to be considered in their treatment plan.

**Cardiff and
Vale
University
Health Board**

Wellbeing 4U

Partnership working with housing associations in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (CVUHB) is one of the key ways in which the Keeping People Well component of the Health Board's Shaping Our Future Wellbeing strategy can be achieved.

Over many years work has been undertaken with a range of registered social landlords, including a technology-based community health project (Citizen Driven Health with Cadwyn Housing Association). CVUHB has commissioned United Welsh Housing Association with primary care funding to deliver the Wellbeing4U project.



[Wellbeing 4U](#) is delivered directly in GP practices across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, concentrated in areas of high deprivation. Wellbeing coordinators are able to receive referrals from GPs for patients who require social support to address their needs, and the issues which are often contributing towards mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. The coordinators can help people to change behaviours, such as high levels of alcohol consumption or increasing physical activity, as they spend time with patients understanding what matters to them, and signposting them to groups or organisations that they feel would be beneficial. The partnership between United Welsh and the CVUHB has enabled patients to receive a social prescribing service close to home, at a point that is convenient for them, and is empowering them to take control over their own lives. They often benefit physically and mentally from this initiative, and evidence received highlights that patients are making fewer GP appointments.

**Cwm Taf
Morgannwg
University
Health Board**

Closer to Home, First Choice Housing Association

[First Choice](#) provides housing association services throughout Wales and Shropshire. Their goal is to enable adults with learning disabilities to be supported so they can live independently within their own communities. The Closer to Home (C2H) programme was established to reduce the number of people with learning disabilities or challenging behaviour from being placed in institutions.



To accomplish this, the programme aims to enable people with a learning disability or challenging behaviour to move back to the community in Bridgend if they live out of area; reduce the need for acute services; and to prevent further out of area placements.

Hywel Dda University Health Board

Partnership working across Hywel Dda University Health Board

Porth Gofal

Ceredigion Council is currently in the process of implementing its new wellbeing and care pathway. This new way of working provides residents the means to identify the right help they need at the right time and values prevention and early intervention as core principles for the way it works. The pathway places people at the centre of any plan of support. They will be able to get the solutions they need, when they need, following a proportionate assessment.

[Porth Gofal](#), one of the three key parts of the pathway, is a partnership between Ceredigion County Council, Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDdUHB), and third sector organisations. This includes Prevention Support Officers alongside a Senior Social Worker, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, District Nurses, links with the third sector and a dedicated input from Families and Children Services.

This integrated team of professionals closely consider every new referral that comes through to enable the most appropriate response. Dedicated support is then discussed with the individual and put in place to support their wellbeing. Under the new model, the focus of assessments shifts from identifying problems and generating demand towards promoting the independence of residents.

Youth Health Team – supporting vulnerable young people

HDdUHB's Youth Health Team work collaboratively to deliver health and wellbeing support to wider curriculum education and supported housing settings. This includes ongoing health promotion workshops on subjects such as substance misuse, sexual health and emotional health. The Team also works with young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) – helping young people to address substance misuse and other health issues in order to achieve a longer-term goal of reducing poverty and increasing the likelihood of securing employment which in turn would impact on living conditions and thus long-term health. The Team can identify those who are vulnerably housed and proactively deliver drop in sessions to supported housing projects.

Powys Teaching Health Board

Supporting people with learning disabilities in Powys

As stated in the Welsh Government's *Learning Disability: Improving Lives Programme*, "the ability to have a decent home should be everyone's right as it is a key part of having a good quality of life." Lack of housing choice can separate people with learning disabilities from their home, family and wider circles of support and reduce their social connectedness and access to live independent lives.

A partnership programme in Powys, supported through the Integrated Care Fund under the Powys Regional Partnership Board, is supporting people with learning disabilities to lead meaningful and valued lives within their own communities.

People with learning disabilities have poorer health than their peers. These differences can be due to a range of avoidable causes including:

- Deficiencies relating to access to healthcare provision;
- Personal health risks and behaviours such as poor diet and lack of exercise;
- Communication difficulties and reduced health literacy;
- Increased risk of health problems associated with specific genetic, biological and environmental causes of learning disabilities; and
- Greater risk of exposure to social determinants of poorer health such as poverty, poor housing, unemployment and social disconnectedness.

Partners in Powys have developed a joint commissioning strategy for adults with learning disabilities. This outlines a range of ambitions to provide person-centred care and support for people in learning disabilities, and to promote independence and social inclusion. These include:

- Supporting people to move back to Powys if they wish to;
- Ensuring people are getting the best services as close to home as possible;
- Reviewing how resources are allocated to support more people in the future; and
- Developing different types of accommodation.

Through the delivery of the joint strategy there is a coordinated approach to improving the housing offer for people with learning disabilities, enabling more people to live in their accommodation of choice and to return to Powys from out-of-county placements.

**Public Health
Wales NHS
Trust**

Making a Difference Health and Housing: A Case for Investment

In June 2019 Public Health Wales released a [report](#) which highlighted the need for increased funding in housing in order to better people's health. The report takes a prevention focused approach to improving health and wellbeing over winter in Wales. The aim of the report is to help frame strategic planning for future services by describing the impact different types of weather, such as cold times in the winter, has on health and care services.

Based on international evidence on the causes of ill-health in winter, risk factors and vulnerable populations, proven methods to reduce winter related morbidity and mortality, and insights across key stakeholders, the report establishes a whole system framework of action at a national and local level based on collaboration, integration and local contexts. The report highlights that investing in housing has a proven return for health benefits, such as for every £1 invested in central heating leads to 42p worth of health benefits.

The report states that more needs to be done to realise the nature of population health improvement required to sustainably change the health and wellbeing outcomes of the people of Wales and pivotal to this is a truly integrated health, care and housing relationship. It is essential housing and population health be tackled on a collaborative basis across public, voluntary and all public sectors. It highlights many examples of ongoing projects that are showing a real impact on improving health via housing in a collaborative way on different sections of the population such as children, the elderly and rough sleepers.

**Swansea Bay
University
Health Board**

Care and Repair Western Bay

As part of the work to prepare for winter 2019/2020, Care and Repair Cymru has committed to working collaboratively with six Local Health Boards across Wales, as well as several third sector organisations and the Welsh Government, to help get people home.



[Care and Repair Western Bay](#) provides a range of holistic services in Neath Port Talbot and Swansea, meaning they work to address any issue that would be contributing to a problem including signposting to additional services they are unable provide directly. Some of their services include assistance to improve, repair or adopt people's homes for people over 55 years of age or people who live with a disability. This includes case worker support services that conduct home visits and offer residents support, advice and information, grants/funding options and can refer patients to Occupational Health Therapists for equipment and adaptations to people's homes.

Patients, caseworkers and clinical ward teams work together to discuss improvements needed in people's homes to support early, effective and safe discharge.

Conclusion

Health and housing have an interconnected relationship: good quality, safe housing is a wider determinate of improved health and wellbeing outcomes. In this way, improving people's access to affordable and safe housing, that meets its occupants needs and is connected to essential services, can lead to improved outcomes when receiving NHS treatment and also keeping people well.

As these examples within the briefing evidence, any solution is not solely on one organisation or sector to bare. *A Healthier Wales* clearly demonstrates that cross-sector, partnership working is an essential way forward. The Welsh NHS, housing associations, utility companies, local government, social care and many others are coming together to find innovative housing solutions which will benefit not only the people of Wales but Welsh society as a whole.

How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further details on anything highlighted in this briefing. Please contact **Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director**, Nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org

The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations that make up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards, the three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

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