

# THE REAL COST OF THE LACK OF DISABLED-FRIENDLY HOMES



# KEY FINDINGS

The lack of disabled-friendly homes is placing intolerable pressure on health and care services across the UK:<sup>1</sup>

Over the past month at least

## 15,000 hours of GP time

have been taken up with disabled or older people due to injuries, illness or other health problems experienced because of their inaccessible home.<sup>2</sup>

Some GPs (22 from our survey) had

## more than 20 appointments

for health problems caused by inaccessible homes in the last month.

## One third (35%)

of Leonard Cheshire Disability residential service managers say that there is at least one person living in their care service who would like to live more independently, but is unable to do so because there is nowhere accessible for them to live.<sup>3</sup>

The financial cost of inaccessible homes to the NHS and care services is enormous – up to £450m per year.<sup>4</sup> But in many cases, the human cost is even worse:

- The lack of disabled-friendly housing has left people like Sally (on page 3) living with poor mental and physical health, as she is stuck living in just one room that has sewage leaking into it.
- Stacie and May (on page 5) are struggling with illness, and risking their health because of their inaccessible home.
- Angela (on page 7) has seriously injured her back providing care to her husband, because her home is so inaccessible that care workers cannot give them the support they need.

<sup>1</sup> medeConnect Healthcare Insight conducted a poll of 1,004 regionally representative GPs in the UK in January 2014. medeConnect is a division of Doctors.net.uk, the UK's largest online doctor community. Tables available here: [www.leonardcheshire.org/gptables](http://www.leonardcheshire.org/gptables)

<sup>2</sup> On average GPs reported having 1.8 appointments related to inaccessible housing. There were 42,823 NHS GPs practising across the UK in 2010/11: <https://assets.digital.cabinet-office.gov.uk/media/53315c7d40f0b60a76000396/Population-Overview-Report-1.pdf>. Average GP appointment times are 12 minutes.

<sup>3</sup> We asked 138 service managers, and received a 43% response rate, survey was carried out in 2014

<sup>4</sup> Based on £300m of health costs, and £150m of care costs – further details later in briefing.

# SALLY

Sally, 50, her husband Steve, 51, and their two sons live in Southampton in a two-storey house. Sally has chronic lymphedema – a condition which means it is very hard for her to use her legs.

Sally's home is almost completely inaccessible. She is forced to spend virtually every minute in her living room, and she has not been outside for two years. Sally and Steve have carried out some adaptations to their home like installing a portable toilet downstairs, but this has caused numerous problems, including the toilet overflowing into the living room.

Sally has a carer who helps to wash her in the lounge with a basin, but even with help, the impact on Sally and her family has been severe.

Sally: 'I previously led a very active life, going to the beach and seeing my friends as often as I could. Now I'm stuck living my entire life in one room, and I feel terrible. Most days I can't even talk about my living situation, it upsets me too much.

It is also incredibly difficult for my husband to clean me up with only a bowl and flannel after accidents. The stress on us both is having a real impact on our relationship. Sometimes I get so frustrated that I can't bear it.'

## THAT'S WHY WE ARE CALLING FOR:

- The Housing Standards Review<sup>5</sup> to ensure that all new homes are built to Category 2 standards (also known as Lifetime Homes).
- Local councils to ensure that 10% of new homes are built to Category 3 (fully wheelchair accessible) standards.
- All local councils to have an accessible housing register, so they know where their wheelchair accessible, adaptable and adapted homes are, and how many they have.

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<sup>5</sup> Currently being carried out by DCLG

# WHAT ARE LIFETIME HOMES/CATEGORY 2 HOMES?

Lifetime Homes<sup>6</sup> are ordinary houses and flats which incorporate 16 design criteria that can be applied to new homes with a total average cost of £1,100.<sup>7</sup>

These standards save money in the long run, by ensuring that things like grab-bars and stair-lifts can be easily and cheaply installed if people's needs change.

Lifetime Homes work for a broad range of people – from disabled people who need more space to move around, to older people who need grab bars to help them get around the home safely, to families with young children who need to fit prams and pushchairs through the front door. These are not just homes for disabled people – they work for everyone.

## THE HEALTH COST OF INACCESSIBLE HOMES

It only costs around £1,100 extra to build a new home to Lifetime Homes standards. But the cost of not doing so is far, far higher.

Every day disabled and older people have accidents, fall ill and experience other health problems because their homes simply do not work for them.

Whether from falling on stairs without a stair-lift, being injured lifting a partner in and out of a wheelchair, or becoming depressed due to being trapped living in one room, inaccessible homes damage people's health.

To measure how much these health problems cost the NHS, we asked 1,004 practising GPs<sup>8</sup> for their views. The results reveal the immense pressure that inaccessible housing is placing on the health service:

- Over the past month at least **15,000 hours of GP time – equal to more than six working years of GP time<sup>9</sup>** have been taken up with disabled or older people who have suffered injuries, illness or other health problems because of their inaccessible home;
- **95% of GPs** have at least one patient who they see because of problems with their inaccessible home; and
- Some GPs (22 in our survey) had **more than 20 appointments** related to inaccessible homes **in the last month**.

On average GPs say that almost 3% of their total caseload is due to health problems caused by inaccessible homes – **which we estimate could cost as much as £300m every year.<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> Lifetime Homes standard were developed by Habinteg and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, details are available here: <http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/pages/about-us.html>

<sup>7</sup> Estimates vary. The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment estimated the average cost as £1,100. A previous CLG estimate put the average cost at £547. DCLG The Future of the Code for Sustainable Homes, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> medeConnect Healthcare Insight conducted a poll of 1,004 regionally representative GPs in the UK in January 2014. medeConnect is a division of Doctors.net.uk, the UK's largest online doctor community. Tables available here: <http://www.leonardcheshire.org/gptables>

<sup>9</sup> Average GP appointment times are 12 minutes. Years calculation is based on GPs working 48 hours per week, the legal maximum.

<sup>10</sup> This assumes that 2.9% of the total budget for GPs is spent on inaccessible housing related issues. GP budget for the UK is £10.1bn, based on 8.4% of total NHS spending in 2011/12 going to GPs.

# STACIE AND MAY

Stacie, 42, has leukaemia and her daughter May, 5, is severely brain-damaged. May cannot walk or even sit up unaided.

Stacie; “May is a wonderful little girl but as you can imagine, life can be difficult. I need to rest up and build up my strength to fight this illness. Unfortunately, our home just makes things worse.”

“We live in a privately rented first floor flat. At the moment, I’m too weak to carry my daughter upstairs. The severity of her disabilities mean she cannot walk or even throw an arm around the person carrying her - and it definitely isn’t going to get any easier. She’s only five. She’s a growing girl.”

“We have been on the housing list for about two years now. Even with the combination of my cancer and my daughter’s disabilities we have not even been placed in the top band and will probably be waiting for years.”

“All the while, my health is suffering as I struggle to make our home work for us. I’m really worried that the stress and exhaustion is making it harder to fight the cancer – having a home that we could move around easily would be such a weight off my mind, and so much better for me and my daughter.”



In light of these figures, it is no surprise that when we asked GPs what they thought should be done about the scandal of inaccessible housing, they overwhelmingly agreed with our campaign aims:<sup>11</sup>

- **Two thirds (66%)** of GPs agree that the government should ensure that all new homes are built to accessible standards, compared to just 13% who disagree;
- **More than half (56%)** of GPs think they should be spending less time dealing with problems caused by inaccessible homes, compared to just 9% who disagree; and
- **More than half (54%)** of GPs say that building homes which are suitable for older and disabled people would save the NHS millions of pounds, compared to just 10% who disagree.

Dr Maureen Baker, Chair of the Royal College of GPs: “GPs treat the whole person, so we are only too aware that inaccessible or inadequate housing can have a negative impact on our patients’ physical and mental health.

“General practice is currently under huge pressure dealing with the demands of a growing and ageing population with decreasing resources and a chronic shortage of GPs.

“We need at least 10,000 more GPs across the UK by 2020 to keep up with demand, so it goes without saying that the service we could provide for our patients with an extra 15,000 working hours every month, is immense.

“We want what is best for our patients, and taking steps to ensure that they can live safely, in their homes, without constant fear of an accident will not only be good for them, but - as this research shows – will help reduce pressure on general practice and the NHS as a whole.”

The message from health professionals is clear – the lack of accessible homes in the UK is costing the NHS dearly.

# THE SOCIAL CARE COSTS OF INACCESSIBLE HOMES

Every year an estimated 800,000 people aged 18-64 become disabled – some with no warning at all.<sup>12</sup> As a result, they may be forced to move out of the home they have lived in for years. Ideally, when that happens there will be a range of options available on the local accessible housing register, or easily adaptable properties available to buy.

But all too often these options are not available. For many there are simply no disabled-friendly homes to move into. For some, the only option is to move into housing with care.<sup>13</sup>

For most people, moving into housing with care is a positive choice. It can have a transformative effect on people's lives, reducing stress and isolation and enabling them to live less restricted, more connected and more enjoyable lives. It can also provide the perfect environment for people who become disabled to recover from an accident or illness and regain skills and independence.

We know from talking to the people who use our services that as long as they have choice and control over their lives, housing with care is a great place to live. However, it is only a positive choice if it is a real choice. Sadly a lack of accessible housing means that for some people it isn't.

It is unacceptable that some people are forced to move into a residential service because it is the only option available. Even worse, that others are forced to stay there once they have recovered enough to move back home, only to be told there isn't anywhere accessible for them to live.

To measure the scale of this problem, we asked our service managers how many people currently using our residential services would rather live in their own home:<sup>14</sup>

## Half (48%)

say there is at least one person in their service who has had to move there primarily as a result of problems with their housing.

## One third (35%)

say there is at least one person in their service who would like to live more independently, but is being prevented by a lack of accessible housing in the local area.

If there are similar numbers of people wishing to move out of residential services across the country, then **the total additional cost of people living in a residential service who would rather be living elsewhere, could be more than £150m.**<sup>15</sup>

The message from care professionals is clear – the lack of accessible homes in the UK is costing local authorities and disabled people dearly.

<sup>11</sup> medeConnect Healthcare Insight conducted a poll of 1,004 regionally representative GPs in the UK in January 2014. medeConnect is a division of Doctors.net.uk, the UK's largest online doctor community. Tables available here: <http://www.leonardcheshire.org/gptables>

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Social exclusion and the onset of disability, (2003)

<sup>13</sup> Such as a care home, or other residential environment where care is provided

<sup>14</sup> We asked 138 service managers, and received a 43% response rate, survey was carried out in 2014

<sup>15</sup> 1.8% of Leonard Cheshire service users living in residential care are prevented from moving out by a lack of accessible housing. There are 441,000 people living in residential care nationwide (there are 464,329 beds in care homes and care homes with nursing in England, assuming an average occupancy rate of 95%: [http://www.carehome.co.uk/care\\_search.cfm](http://www.carehome.co.uk/care_search.cfm)). If we assume the same proportion of people are experiencing the same problem across the country that equates to 7,938 people nationwide.

The average difference in care costs between a week in residential care and a week receiving homecare is £378 – equating to £156m per year: (<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB16111/pss-exp-eng-13-14-fin-rpt.pdf>)

# ANGELA AND TERENCE

Angela, 47, and Terence, 70, live together in Peterborough. Terence has a serious spinal injury, and finds it extremely difficult to get around their home in his wheelchair.

There are only two places in the first floor flat that he can sit safely, and their home has no wheelchair accessible escape route in case of an emergency. Recently a neighbour's flat caught fire, and Angela and Terence were trapped inside until the Fire Brigade could rescue them.

Their home is so inaccessible that Terence's care agency has refused to supply care workers, leaving Angela to provide care 24/7.

Angela: 'I now have serious damage to my back because I have to manually lift Terence in and out of bed, as there's not enough space to use a hoist. One of these days I worry I'm going to drop him, and then we'll both end up in hospital.'

'We are too far from family support as well, so we are socially isolated and our mental and physical health is suffering. We have letters from our GP stating we need to be rehoused urgently – but we have been on the list for four years now.'

## CONCLUSION

Disabled people are being let down by the government's and local authorities' failure to deliver enough disabled-friendly homes – and as a result, health and care costs are mounting.

The evidence is clear. Ensuring that all new homes are built to Category 2 (Lifetime Homes) standards, and 10% are built to Category 3 (fully wheelchair accessible) standards will ensure that these costs are brought down.

It is vital that both national and local government seize the opportunity to act decisively. If these costs continue to spiral it will become more and more difficult to provide health and care support to the people who need it.

None of us wants to imagine living our lives in just one room, like Sally. Or struggling to carry our children up the stairs, like Stacie. Or damaging our backs as we try to support our partner in an inaccessible house, like Angela.

That's why it is so important for government and local authorities to act now – so Stacie, Sally and Angela have somewhere they can live without their health suffering.

# **THE FINANCIAL COST OF INACCESSIBLE HOMES TO THE NHS AND CARE SERVICES IS ENORMOUS – UP TO £450M PER YEAR**

[www.leonardcheshire.org/hometruths](http://www.leonardcheshire.org/hometruths)

