

The Right to Housing and its Impact on Health

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Translations



Easy read



BSL



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1. The Right to Housing and its Impact on Health

“Housing is central to every aspect of our wellbeing, from health to educational attainment to happiness.” Shelter



Our right to live in good housing

Human rights are basic freedoms that allow us to live with dignity, regardless of our background. We all have the right to live in a secure, peaceful and respectful environment, not just to have a roof over our heads.

'Housing is central to every aspect of our wellbeing, from health to educational attainment to happiness.' Shelter

However, in Scotland, not everyone lives in good housing, which causes health inequalities. Health inequalities are the unfair and avoidable differences in health between groups of people. These differences often happen because of low income or social challenges that limit opportunities for a healthy and long life.



How housing affects health

Our rights to health and housing are closely linked, you cannot fully enjoy one without the other. Living in a good home is essential for staying healthy and reducing unfair health differences. A good home* should be:

- **Secure** - Protect you from being evicted unfairly
- **Safe** - Free from dangers like damp, cold or structural problems.
- **Accessible** - Designed for everyone, including those of us who are disabled.
- **Affordable** - Costs should not stop you from meeting other basic needs.
- **Connected to available services** - Have access to essential services, such as schools and healthcare, and vital utilities like water, sanitation and energy
- **Well located** - One which is safe, well-connected and free from pollution.
- **Respectful of cultures** - It should suit different lifestyles, traditions and needs.

*www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right-adequate-housing

Purpose of this resource

Governments and public organisations must protect your rights and help you to understand your importance. This resource explains how housing and health are connected. It aims to inspire changes in policies to make sure everyone has access to a safe, affordable and healthy home.

2. Secure housing

Having secure housing, sometimes called security of tenure, means that as a tenant you have the right to stay in your home unless a court agrees there is a valid reason for eviction. It gives legal protection against unfair evictions and provides stability.

Feeling secure at home does not just affect those of us who rent. It can also affect those of us who own our own homes who are struggling with mortgages or individuals in unsafe or abusive households.

How does having secure housing affect health?

Secure housing is essential for good health because it can:

- **Reduce stress** - Knowing you will not lose your home helps lower stress and worry.
- **Improve mental health** - Feeling secure in your home can reduce anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges.
- **Support wellbeing** - A stable home allows you to focus on other aspects of your life, like work, relationships and education, instead of worrying about losing your home.



3. Safe housing

Having safe housing, sometimes called habitable housing, means having a home that is safe, comfortable and suitable for living. It should protect us from health risks, provide a healthy environment, and meet basic needs like warmth, security, clean water and proper sanitation.

Safe housing should also protect us from the threat of violence or abuse. Domestic abuse, one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and children in Scotland, can have serious and lasting health impacts. The right to be safe at home includes being free from harm, fear and control.

How does having safe housing affect health?

Safe housing is essential for good health because it can:

- **Prevent illness** - A warm, dry home protects against conditions like colds, respiratory problems and infections caused by damp or mould.
- **Support mental wellbeing** - A safe and secure living environment reduces stress and anxiety.
- **Improve quality of life** - Access to essential services like clean water, energy and sanitation promotes overall health and wellbeing.



4. Accessible housing

What is accessible housing?

Housing should be designed to help you live safely and independently. Everyone should have access to adequate housing no matter what your circumstance. However, some of us may be at higher risk of ill health such as older people, children, and those of us with a disability.

How does having accessible housing affect health?

Accessible housing supports wellbeing and independence, particularly for older adults and those of us who are disabled. It can:

- **Help prevent falls** - Simple modifications like ramps, handrails and non-slip flooring can reduce injury risks.
- **Reduce hospital admissions** - Safer homes help prevent injuries and health complications that often lead to emergency care.
- **Increase independence** - Features such as wider doorways, step-free showers and smart home technology allow you to live more freely and safely.
- **Reduce the need for care homes** - Adaptable housing allows individuals to stay at home longer, easing pressure on healthcare and social services.



5. Affordable housing

What is affordable housing?

Affordable housing means that you should be able to afford essentials like healthy food or heating after paying your rent or mortgage. In Scotland, unaffordable housing is a key driver of poverty and inequality.

How does having affordable housing affect health?

Affordable housing is crucial for good health, providing financial stability and a safer, more comfortable living environment. It can:

- **Improve mental health** - Reducing housing costs can ease financial stress, including relief from rent or mortgage arrears, which disproportionately affects lower-income families and women experiencing domestic abuse. Energy-efficient homes lower energy costs, freeing up money for essentials like food and healthcare. This financial security can reduce stress and anxiety, supporting better mental health.
- **Prevent illness** - Affordable, warm and dry homes protect against respiratory conditions, cold-related illnesses and stress-related mental health issues. Proper ventilation and maintenance can reduce indoor pollutants like mould and dampness, lowering the risk of respiratory illnesses such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Affordable housing supports better sleep, lower blood pressure and healthy childhood development.
- **Promote sustainable, healthy communities** - Energy-efficient housing cuts carbon emissions, leading to cleaner air and a healthier environment.



6. Housing connected to available services

What does housing connected to available services mean?

Good housing must provide access to key services to support health and wellbeing, such as clean drinking water, reliable energy for cooking, heating and lighting, proper sanitation facilities and waste disposal. Investing in homes with essential services and healthcare access builds stronger, healthier communities in Scotland.

How does being connected to available services affect health?

Housing that is connected to available services is essential for good health. It can:

- **Prevent illnesses** - A warm, dry home with clean water and proper sanitation lowers the risk of infections, respiratory issues, and waterborne diseases.
- **Reliable energy access** - Consistent heating and electricity support safe food storage, cooking, and a healthy living environment, reducing malnutrition and cold-related illnesses.
- **Waste management and hygiene** - Proper sanitation and waste disposal prevent contamination and disease, creating a healthier home.
- **Safe and well-lit living conditions** - Reliable heating and lighting reduce risks from cold, damp, and poor visibility, improving safety and wellbeing.



7. Housing in a good location

What is housing in a good location?

Housing in a good location means being close to employment opportunities, healthcare services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities, or being in an area that is not polluted or dangerous. It also encourages active travel (e.g. walking and cycling) and access to greenspaces, improving physical and mental wellbeing.

How does living in a good location affect health?

Where you live affects your physical and mental health. It can:

- **Lower stress and improve mental health** - Commute times and job accessibility can impact stress levels, work–life balance and financial stability.
- **Promote physical activity** - The availability of parks and recreational spaces can encourage or limit opportunities for exercise. Access to parks, recreational spaces, and active travel options (e.g., walking and cycling) promotes exercise and improves physical and mental wellbeing.
- **Ease healthcare access** - How close you are to medical facilities affects how easily you can access timely care and manage health conditions. Reliable transport reduces missed appointments, especially for those in poverty or living in remote and rural areas.
- **Increase access to education and development** - Access to schools, childcare and learning resources supports skill development, social connections and future opportunities.
- **Improve the environment and safety** - Air quality, greenspaces and community safety contribute to overall physical and mental wellbeing.

8. Housing that respects cultures

What is housing that respects cultures?

Culturally sensitive housing is vital for inclusive and supportive communities. Housing should respect cultural identity and be inclusive to suit different ways of living (e.g. multi-generational living).

How does having housing that respects cultures affect health?

Housing that is respectful of cultures is essential for good health because it can:

- **Create a sense of belonging** - which reduces stress, improves mental health and strengthens social connections.
- **Ease care for older adults and children** - which reduces the need for external care and improves family finances.
- **Increase access to other essentials** - such as food, healthcare, education and job opportunities, and strengthen social support, thereby enhancing mental and physical health.

Any housing improvements or developments should reflect residents' beliefs and changing needs to prevent stress and health risks from poorly adapted environments. Investing in inclusive housing designs helps reduce health inequalities and build resilient communities across Scotland.



9. References and further information

For more information about the links between housing and health, visit the following resources.

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