Key facts: housing and disabled people

**Disability** is created by barriers in society. The barriers generally fall into 3 categories:
- the environment – including inaccessible buildings and services
- people’s attitudes – stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice
- organisations – inflexible policies, practices and procedures

**Impairment** is ‘an injury, illness, or congenital condition that causes or is likely to cause a loss or difference of physiological or psychological function.’

The impact of impairment on a person’s life will differ according to how society is organised. One with many disabling barriers (such as inaccessible housing and other environmental barriers) will mean ‘the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in society on an equal level with others.’

- Data from the government Office for Disability Issues show that there are more than 11 million disabled people in Great Britain. This use of the word disabled conflates impairment and disability – and it is helpful to remember that impairment and disability are different.

- The number of ‘disabled’ people is rising. This is partly because society is ageing: the Office for National Statistics estimates that in England in 2021, compared to 2011, there will be 24 per cent more people aged 65 and over and 101 per cent more people aged 85 and over. As impairment rises with age, the number of disabled people is rising in part due to this growth in the older population in the given environment. Estimates show there will be an increase in the number of older disabled people, rising from 2.3 million in 2002 to 4.6 million by 2041.

- This increase in ‘disability’ is also due to the slow progress made in tackling the inequality that faces people with impairments (disabled people) – so impairments have a more disabling impact that they would if barriers were tackled. In relation to housing:
  - Government data from the English Housing Survey shows that 21.5 million homes in England are not even fully ‘visitable’ by disabled people, meaning that they do not have four very basic design features: level access; a flush threshold; door width and circulation space compliant with Part M of Building Regulations and a toilet on the entrance level. These four features are much less than needed to allow a property to be liveable in by many disabled people, but still only 5 per cent of homes had these four features.
  - Habinteg reported in 2010 that 78,300 wheelchair user households in England have unmet housing needs, while Aspire, in 2014, found that only 14 per cent of people with spinal cord injury in England are discharged from hospital to a permanent accessible property. Leonard Cheshire Disability has estimated that there are 300,000 disabled people on housing waiting lists across Great Britain.

- As housing has historically been built to poor standards of accessibility, demand for housing adaptations is particularly high: demand for Disabled Facilities Grants, to fund adaptions, is estimated to be 10 times available funding.
• Poor design standards in nearly 10 million homes in England mean that adaptive work to make the property visitable (not liveable in) by a disabled person would be expensive or impossible\textsuperscript{12}.

• These and other factors mean that:
  − 1 in 3 households with a disabled person still live in non-decent accommodation;
  − 1 in 5 disabled people requiring adaptations to their home believe that their accommodation is not suitable;
  − More than a quarter of disabled people say that they do not frequently have choice and control over their daily lives\textsuperscript{13}.

• Inaccessible housing can increase physical and psychological distress: the combined cost of hospitalisation and social care for hip fractures (most of which are due to falls) is £2 billion a year or £6 million a day\textsuperscript{14}. Even if only a proportion of these are linked to poorly designed housing, the savings from designing housing to be accessible could be huge. Inaccessible housing can also mean people moving unnecessarily and against their choice to care homes the average cost of which (without nursing cost) ranges from £480 a week in the north west of England to £625 in London\textsuperscript{15}. Inaccessible housing can also delay hospital discharge and again the costs can be significant: the average cost of an excess bed day was £273 in 2012/13\textsuperscript{16} and available data cites 41,789 days delay waiting for community equipment/adaptations and 53,584 days for other ‘housing’ reasons\textsuperscript{17}.

• 93 per cent of older people live in mainstream housing and while there is a shortage of specialist housing for older people in England, older people will continue to want to live in mainstream housing – underlining the growing need for accessible housing for this group\textsuperscript{18}.

• Many of us believe that all new housing should be, as a minimum, built to the Lifetime Homes Standard\textsuperscript{19}, which incorporates 16 design criteria which make the property accessible and easily adaptable. We think 10 per cent should be built to wheelchair design standards. These standards have been increasingly adopted by local authorities. In London the Greater London Authority\textsuperscript{20} has required all new housing to be built to Lifetime Homes Standards with 10 per cent to wheelchair design standard since 2004. This has been complied with by developers.

• New national technical housing standards\textsuperscript{21} were announced in late March 2015 and come into force on 1 October 2015. While these incorporate three access standards into building regulations for the first time Categories 2 and 3, which broadly align with Lifetime Homes and the Wheelchair Design Guide standards, are optional. Anything other than the base line standard will only be permitted where a planning authority has demonstrated that they ‘address a clearly evidenced need, and where their impact on viability has been considered, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Guidance’. We are concerned that these requirements – particularly the definition of viability and how this has been interpreted to date – may result in much less accessible housing being delivered.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities upholds the right of disabled people to independent living and commits signatories (including the UK) to ensure that disabled people ‘have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement’\textsuperscript{22}. 


References

1 https://www.gov.uk/socialmodel


3 Ibid.


5 Ready for Ageing? www.parliament.uk April 2013

6 Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods, DCLP/DWP/DH, 2008

7 English Housing Survey 2012, DCLG.

8 Mind the Step, Habinteg, 2010.

9 ‘Aspire’s research finds massive shortfall in accessible housing in the UK’, www.aspire.org.uk

10 No Place Like Home, LCD, December 2014.

11 Disabled Facilities Grants in England, Astral Advisory, April 2013

12 English Housing Survey 2012, DCLG.


15 Paying for Care, www.payingforcare.org

16 Reference costs 2012-13, DH.


19 http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/

20 The London Plan, www.london.gov.uk
