

To the future Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government,

We write today to call on whoever forms the next government to take urgent action to tackle the growing shortage of accessible homes in the UK.

Homes are critical to our health and wellbeing. Living in suitable housing can support us to stay safe, happy, healthy and active for longer, reducing our risk of falls and injury and greatly enhancing our quality of life. But today we face a serious shortage of homes which are safe and suitable for older and disabled people. We, the undersigned organisations, have come together to form a coalition, Housing Made for Everyone (HoME), to demand greater action to secure housing suitable for all.

Currently too many people live in homes that limit their independence – only [7% of homes](#) in England are accessible, meaning 93% of homes lack the basic features that make them even ‘visitable’ by disabled people. For disabled people, living in an unsuitable home is detrimental to all areas of life: for example, we know that disabled people living in inaccessible homes are four times more likely to be unemployed.

A lack of suitable housing is a problem that will affect us all, with most of us likely to experience mobility impairment or difficulties with the activities of daily living at some point as we get older. Households headed by someone aged 65 years and over [will account for 88%](#) of total growth in households over the next 25 years, and the design of our homes is central to how our society responds to the shift in the age profile of the population. But [research shows](#) that a paltry 1% of homes outside London planned to be built by 2030 are set to be fully wheelchair accessible.

This means we will see increased pressure on our health and social care services as many more of us struggle in homes that are not fit for purpose. Poor housing for the over-55s costs the NHS [£624 million a year](#), mainly as a result of excess cold hazards and falls. Without government action this picture will only get worse, with the cost [forecast to reach £1 billion](#) per year by 2041.

As we build more homes, it’s more important than ever that we build the right homes. The current lack of standards for office-to-residential conversions has resulted in some poor-quality housing, much of it with inadequate space. We are concerned that accelerated planning or extending permitted development rights could also result in yet more homes failing to meet basic accessibility standards, when we urgently need to be increasing the availability of accessible homes.

We urge you to make the accessible, adaptable design standard set out in Building Regulations, Volume 1, M4 Category 2 the mandatory baseline for all new homes and, where need can be demonstrated for M4 Category 3 (wheelchair user dwellings) the next government should make it easier to introduce relevant planning policies. We urge you to review the regulatory baseline and we ask you to act urgently to ensure we are building homes suitable for the future. We also need local authorities to have sufficient funding to map and review the requirements and supply of accessible housing in their area.

Without action, we face an ever-mounting bill with councils spending greater sums on trying to adapt homes retrospectively and the costs to our health and social care systems spiralling. The cost to individuals is no less damaging. Now is the time to ensure that everyone’s right to a safe and accessible home is met, today and in the years to come.

Signed,

Sheron Carter, Chief Executive, Habinteg Housing

Anna Dixon, Chief Executive, Centre for Ageing Better

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director, Age UK

Alan M Jones, President, RIBA

Sue Adams, Chief Executive, Care and Repair England

Kamran Mallick, Chief Executive, Disability Rights UK

Jeremy Porteus, Chief Executive, Housing LIN

Kate Henderson, Chief Executive, National Housing Federation

Terrie Alafat CBE, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Housing

Fiona Howie, Chief Executive, TCPA