



Information is power in older people's housing

By Jeremy Porteus, founder and director of the Housing LIN (Learning and Improvement Network)

Control over where you live should not disappear with age. A shortage of integrated, personalised advice and information services means that's the reality for too many older people. Often, they and their carers, are unaware of the range of housing options available to them. They are also more likely to be able to move to a home they really like living in if they do so while they are still fit and healthy.

Yet many of the people contacting our existing advice and information (I&A) services are facing a sudden crisis – such as a stroke, a fall or the loss of a carer. Too often that can result in a premature move to institutional settings such as residential care.

A first step to raising awareness of the housing and care options available – such as aids and adaptations, extra care housing and telecare and telehealth – is signposting people to the information and advice services we already have.

In the spirit of 'Making Every Contact Count', anyone talking to older people about any aspect of their housing or care should be equipped to direct people to such services. These include the [FirstStop Advice](#) service provided by several organisations led by [EAC](#) (Elderly Accommodation Counsel). The arrival of FirstStop Advice has complemented the work of organisations such as Care & Repair England, Age UK and local providers such as home improvement agencies.

However, my organisation, the [Housing Learning & Improvement Network](#), has been backing calls for several years for more investment in personalised, local face-to-face housing information and advice services.

In 2011, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People also argued in its Living Well at Home [report](#) that local authorities should be encouraged to coordinate the provision of face-to-face housing I&A for older people.

More recently, Care & Repair England set out a one-stop shop model for integrated advice based on a personalised approach. This would provide older people with advice on:

- housing options for 'staying put'
- housing options for moving
- finance options such as equity release and
- care and support options.

Such an approach is about helping older people find solutions that meet their specific housing, health and care needs. There is overwhelming evidence that looking at each of those key elements in isolation is bad news for the individual and for the public purse.

Local authorities and NHS commissioners in England have acquired new responsibilities over recent years to work together to understand and meet the broader health and wellbeing needs of their communities.

Understanding the changing housing needs of their older residents should be a key concern for health and wellbeing boards. After all, the 2014 Care Act requires councils to provide information and advice around the broader care needs of their vulnerable residents.

Commissioners and providers should be involving enthusiastic older people in developing and testing such services. That's how we'll get integrated and personalised information and advice of the sort set out above.

We then need to promote the services. We need to ensure they are accessible through using a range of platforms – from traditional leaflets to helplines and websites.

Only in that way will older people remain in control of one of the most fundamental elements of our lives – where we live.

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