

Building Health into Homes

How occupational therapy can unlock the connection between housing and health

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The purpose of the project

- To improve people's health outcomes by addressing their housing needs more effectively.
- To achieve this by enabling the health, social care and housing systems to collaborate more impactfully.
- To demonstrate how and why OTs in all settings are ideally positioned to facilitate this.



What have we created?

- Strategic document – the ‘why’
 - Health and care leaders
 - Scope of OT to improve health through homes
- Operational tools – the ‘what’
 - System and service managers
 - Guidance on how to work differently
- Practitioner resources – the ‘how’
 - OT and multi-disciplinary workforce
 - Practical tools and frameworks



A truth universally acknowledged

“Health starts at home...
but for some people,
home is making them
sick.”

“Fixing England’s
dangerous homes would
deliver more than £1.5
billion in annual health
and social care savings.”

“More than a fifth of
excess winter deaths are
estimated to be due to
cold homes.”

“The housing system is
a major driver of health
inequalities across the
lifecourse.”

“Ensuring people have
good housing can help
to delay or reduce a
person’s need for health
and care services in the
future.”

“Three quarters of health
workers see patients
whose poor housing is
likely harming their
health.”

The scale of the issue

Housing is the single largest cause of mental health discharge delays

Acute hospital housing delays tripled between 2022-2024

In mental health hospitals, over 100,000 delayed discharge days per year are attributed to awaiting supported housing, costing the NHS £56 million annually

The lack of accessible homes

Only 13% of homes in England meet basic accessibility criteria

13 million people are living in homes that don't meet their accessibility needs

New-build accessibility standards aren't being implemented by government, despite being supported by 98% of consultees

Only 23% of new homes built since 2022 include accessibility features. This shortfall could have housed 885,000 more people in accessible homes

Homes and health policy

Hospital to community

Homes need to enable people to spend less time in hospital – by reducing the need for admissions, and enabling earlier discharges.

Homes must support and enable rehabilitation and the management of long-term conditions.

Analogue to digital

Homes must be connected, accessible and suitable for remote monitoring and digital health tools.

The focus on digital health tools must include devices/apps that enable rehabilitation and support independent living.

Sickness to prevention

Home hazards are a major cause of illness and injury

Accessible homes enable participation and independence, and reduce the need for care and support

Everyone lives somewhere

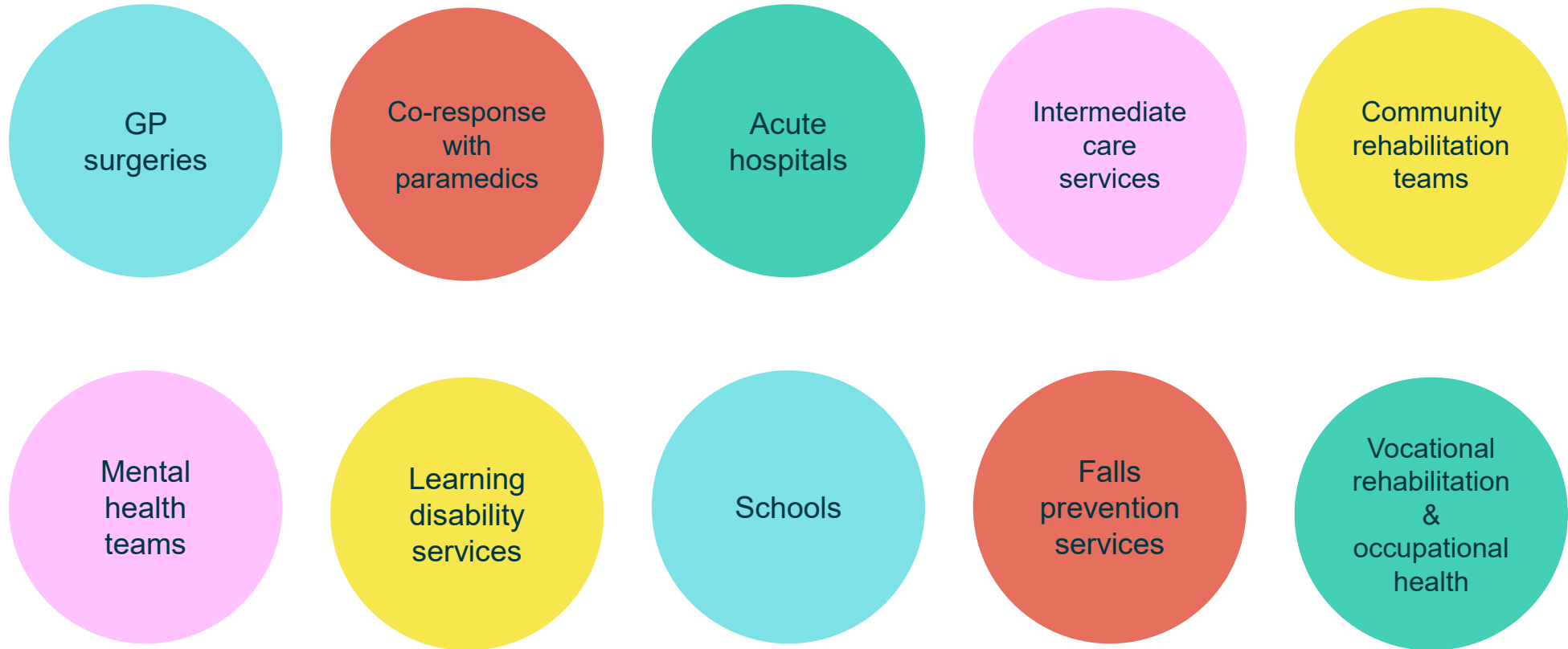
- OTs are one of few professions who routinely practice across housing, health and social care. They are uniquely placed to bridge the gaps between these systems.
- OTs have a unique perspective on how living spaces can both help and hinder people's ability to carry out everyday activities.
- OTs typically intervene to improve the physical accessibility of homes, but housing design is only one aspect that impacts occupational performance.
- As our understanding of housing as a social determinant of health has deepened, there is huge potential for OTs in all practice settings to ensure that people's homes are enabling rather than disabling spaces.

Realising the potential of homes for health

- Physical health and safety
- Mental health and cognitive function
- Sensory environment
- Home management
- Education and development
- Employment opportunities



The opportunity of occupational therapy



Learning from lived experience

'I feel lucky to be in a home that meets my needs, as I know many people are inadequately housed. But I shouldn't have to feel lucky; accessible housing should be a given.'

'Your home is meant to allow you to live your life to the best that you can and to open up the world to you, not close it down. I didn't appreciate that until I went through the whole journey.'

