

Housing top tips

A route map to who does what in housing

For NHS front line staff



Introduction

Housing is one of the major determinants of health. Poor housing will impact a person's health to a greater or lesser degree. There is evidence that poor housing costs the NHS around £1.4bn per year.¹

Housing is a complex landscape, and this guide will help NHS front line professionals navigate the numerous services, systems, and professionals involved. Providing clear signposting for some of the more common situations and circumstances encountered, it will help identify where to look for information or find the housing service you need.

🖱️ *Click below for further information on each top tip.*

- Top Tip 1** Identify what the housing problem is
- Top Tip 2** Identify the client's tenure and ask some basic questions
- Top Tip 3** Identify the right local authority to contact
- Top Tip 4** Get to know who manages the social housing in your area
- Top Tip 5** Identify one person to be the point of contact to co-ordinate activity and liaise with partners
- Top Tip 6** Know who to contact if the home needs to be adapted
- Top Tip 7** Consider affordability and financial issues
- Top Tip 8** Know how to access your local housing options/ homelessness service
- Top Tip 9** Know where to get help if the home is in poor condition
- Top Tip 10** Be aware of options to move to other accommodation

Do note that there is massive pressure on housing services, and you may not always find that the solution you seek is available immediately.

¹ [BRE report finds poor housing is costing NHS £1.4bn a year – BRE Group](#)

Identify what the housing problem is

This might sound simple and obvious, but housing is complex and identifying the presenting problem and linking it with the right person to help resolve it may not be straightforward. Identifying the issues early on will help you work out who you might contact to get help. Don't be afraid to ask about housing, it is important to get it right.

Explore with the client where they live or where they have lived before, e.g. if they are in a hospital awaiting discharge, ask if their home is suitable to return to when they leave. Some housing issues will be urgent while others can be resolved over time. There may be any number of presenting issues including:

- **Suitability of current home** – inaccessible, perhaps a need for adaptations or equipment. ([Link to TT6](#))
- **Affordability of current home** – having problems paying rent/mortgage and bills. ([Link to TT7](#))
- **Homelessness** – sleeping rough, in temporary accommodation or worried about being homeless in the future, unable to return to family or friends. ([Link to TT8](#))
- **Home in poor condition** – maybe cold, with damp and mould, heating inefficient/broken. ([Link to TT9](#))
- **Need to move closer** to their family or friends for support. ([Link TT10](#))

Identify the client's tenure and ask some basic questions

The legal status of a person's tenure will inform their rights and responsibilities and those of their landlord if rented. The options will include:

- Owner occupier or shared ownership (part owned/part rented)
- Renting from a private landlord – on a fixed-term tenancy agreement or a monthly tenancy.
- Renting from a Council or housing association
- Renting in specialist housing, perhaps supported housing, sheltered housing, or a hostel.
- Renting a room/lodging (with a private landlord or with family or friends)
- Living with family
- Sofa surfing or sleeping rough.

The individual circumstances of the client will influence the advice and support given. Whoever you contact they are likely to want to know the answers to a range of questions. You may ask for some basic information from your client or let them know they may be asked about their:

- current and recent previous addresses and how long they lived there.
- current tenure and property size
- household size and family composition
- household income and savings
- any specific property requirements, adaptations,
- any medical problems that affect their housing needs
- any support needs.

If a comprehensive housing and support needs assessment is available, it makes it much easier for housing to provide advice and identify suitable housing solutions. A link is provided below for a guide to needs assessment for clients with a learning disability or autism.

Check if your client would like to make (or be supported to make) a referral to the relevant council for a social care needs assessment under the Care Act 2014. Carers are also entitled to a Carers Assessment under the Care Act.

Learning Disability England – [Housing Guide](#)

NHS England – [Getting a Care Needs Assessment](#)

NHS England – [Quick Guides to support health and social care system](#)

Identify the right local authority to contact

Find out how the local authorities in your local area are structured and who to contact so effective understanding and practical links can be developed.

You may be in a 2-Tier area. In these areas Adult Social Care and Public Health generally fall within the county council (the Tier 1 authority). Housing, Housing & Council Tax Benefits, Private Sector Housing, Grants and Environmental Health sit with the district, borough, or city council (the Tier 2 authority). Some areas have a 1-Tier structure with one unitary authority where all services sit together in one combined council.

Adult Social Care has responsibility for assessing a person's care and support needs, they work closely with housing, and commission care and support services.

Be aware that the local housing or social care authority area is unlikely to cover the same geography as the Integrated Care Board/Integrated Care system (ICB/ICS) area so explore which local authorities your area covers so you can go straight to the right one.

Many councils have developed local multi-agency housing protocols around particular issues like hospital discharge, prison release, mental health resettlement, domestic abuse, etc. The main contact is likely to be in the housing advice, homelessness, solutions, or options team and will be able to help explain the procedure.

If you don't know which council to contact but you have a postcode:
Government – [Find your local council](#)

Get to know who manages the social housing in your area

It is worth being familiar with who the main 'landlords' are in your area – is social housing still council owned or is it owned and managed by a local housing association (also called Registered Provider). Talk to your local council as they will know who the social landlords are in the area including any providing supported housing.

Housing associations can be small local housing organisations or big national ones. Most housing associations provide family or 'general needs' housing while some also or only provide specialist housing for older people or people with complex needs. If you are likely to have regular contact try to make links with the local managers, housing officers and wider networks for the main social housing providers in your patch to find out the range of housing managed in your locality.

Check if there is a directory of social housing in your area, some areas have them and this can be helpful in finding the right option for your client. It might be found as part of a bigger Community Directory.

Identify one person to be the point of contact to co-ordinate activity and liaise with partners

If the client is unable to manage dealing with the housing, care, and support agencies themselves it is helpful to find a person, perhaps a family member or local support agency, who can act as a coordinator to support the person to access services and advocate for them. If their needs are complex then a broader care plan should be developed with partners across health, housing, and social care to ensure their needs are fully met.

For older people Age UK will usually be aware of local services for older people. Adult Social Care (ASC) should be able to signpost to local voluntary groups or services or identify support for clients with particular needs e.g. learning disability, mental health. The links below will help you identify support agencies in your area.

Citizens Advice - [Find your local Citizens Advice](#)

Government - [Find a community support group or organisation](#)

Shelter - [Helpline](#)

Age UK - [UK's leading charity helping every older person who needs us](#)

Know who to contact if the home needs to be adapted

If a person owns their own home, they will generally be responsible for repairs and adaptations themselves. If they are elderly or vulnerable there may be services that can help. You can contact your local home improvement agency for advice. There may be Disabled Facilities or other grants available, and they may also be able to support the client through the application process.

If adaptations are needed and the home is rented, a Disabled Facilities or other grant might be available towards essential works, or the landlord may in some cases be able to pay for the work themselves. Whatever the tenure the client may need an assessment by an Occupational Therapist, Trusted Assessor or other professional to access grant funding and there may be a waiting list. Other grants may be available e.g. boiler replacement in some locations. Most grants are means tested.

There might be a handyperson service locally who can provide advice and carry out minor jobs (either free or paid for) such as moving beds downstairs, fitting key safes, rearranging furniture to allow a move home, etc. This can be especially useful in cases of discharge from hospital when a bed may temporarily need moving downstairs.

Your local home improvement agency or local housing authority will be able to provide further advice. They may be located within your local council or maybe a separate organisation.

Home Improvement Agencies - [Find my HIA](#)

Consider affordability and financial issues

When considering a person's housing situation, it is nearly always worth suggesting they check they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to. A benefit check can be completed online through this [link](#).

If considering specialist accommodation for your clients do bear in mind that there will be rent and/or support charges to pay. Many schemes will have high rent levels as they include significant management and maintenance charges and service charges for communal spaces and property related services. In addition, depending on how the scheme is commissioned there may be planned or self-funded on-reach or on-site care and support services.

If your client has earned income and/or savings or owns their own home this may impact on their ability to access benefits to pay towards the rent costs.

Housing benefit (HB) and Social Security regulations are complex, and it is essential that the affordability of any new home is considered. It would be impossible to explain the complexities of benefit entitlement here, but it is something to be mindful of.

Government - [Benefits Calculator](#)

Know how to access your local housing options/homelessness service

Each local housing authority has a duty to provide housing advice and tackle homelessness. Homelessness is complex, as are the legal duties that councils have, but the main duty is always to prevent homelessness where possible. Most homeless referrals are now accepted online so make sure your client has access to the internet or can be supported by somebody who has.

Housing will want to know where they last lived and why they had to leave, their financial circumstances, any health problems, etc. If they are satisfied that the person is homeless and falls into a 'priority need' category, they may offer temporary accommodation. Be aware that being vulnerable and meeting social care criteria for Adult Social Care service eligibility doesn't automatically mean they will be considered to be in a 'priority need' category for homelessness. If the council is unable to offer accommodation, they must still offer advice and assistance with other housing options e.g. private renting.

If you can, and you are likely to encounter people facing homelessness regularly, find out who the Homelessness Manager is in the local authority so you can contact them directly in case of problems. Note that they may have different titles including housing options or housing solutions manager.

This link will help you identify the local authority area your client lives in by postcode and will take you straight to further information and a referral form.

Government – [Help from your council if you're homeless or at risk of homelessness](#)

Know where to get help if the home is in poor condition

If the person owns their own home, they are responsible for carrying out repairs themselves. There may be small grants available for essential works, or agencies such as Age UK can provide Trusted Trader lists and sometimes offer support to get work carried out.

If the person is renting from a private landlord, council or housing association and the property is damp or has mould or is in need of other essential repairs, the landlord will be your client's first point of contact. All landlords have a legal responsibility to maintain and repair the fabric of the home and ensure it is safe to live in. This includes maintaining windows, doors, heating, plumbing, electrical installation, hot water systems, etc.

If the landlord is not carrying out essential repairs Environmental Health officers from the local council can be asked to visit and inspect. They can negotiate with the landlord on your behalf and if necessary, take enforcement action to require the landlord to carry out the works. They may also be able to support an application for alternative housing on the housing register.

The local authority environment health, private sector housing or public health team may also offer winter warmth grants, energy grants and have fuel poverty initiatives. Some also provide grants to replace boilers.

If hoarding is an issue this can be a difficult area to address, and specialist help may be needed to make the home safe and habitable. The link below explains more about the issue and how to approach it.

Citizens Advice - [Repairs in rented homes](#)

Age UK - [Home improvement and repairs factsheet](#)

If you don't know which council to contact but you have a postcode:

Government - [Find your local council](#)

Mind - [Helping someone who hoards](#)

Be aware of options to move to other accommodation

A person may have accommodation but seek the longer-term support of family or friends in another area. For those in social housing their landlord should be able to advise on options to move to another local authority area or the client or their family can contact the other authority directly for information about applying to their housing register or for a property exchange.

Owner occupiers can be supported by family or their advocates to obtain valuations of their homes and seek alternative housing in their chosen area. There are options for people to purchase sheltered housing on the open market or as shared ownership, or perhaps a move to specialist housing such as an extra care housing scheme. These types of schemes provide independent living with support on site, and are often known as housing with care or independent living schemes. For some people a care home may be more appropriate.

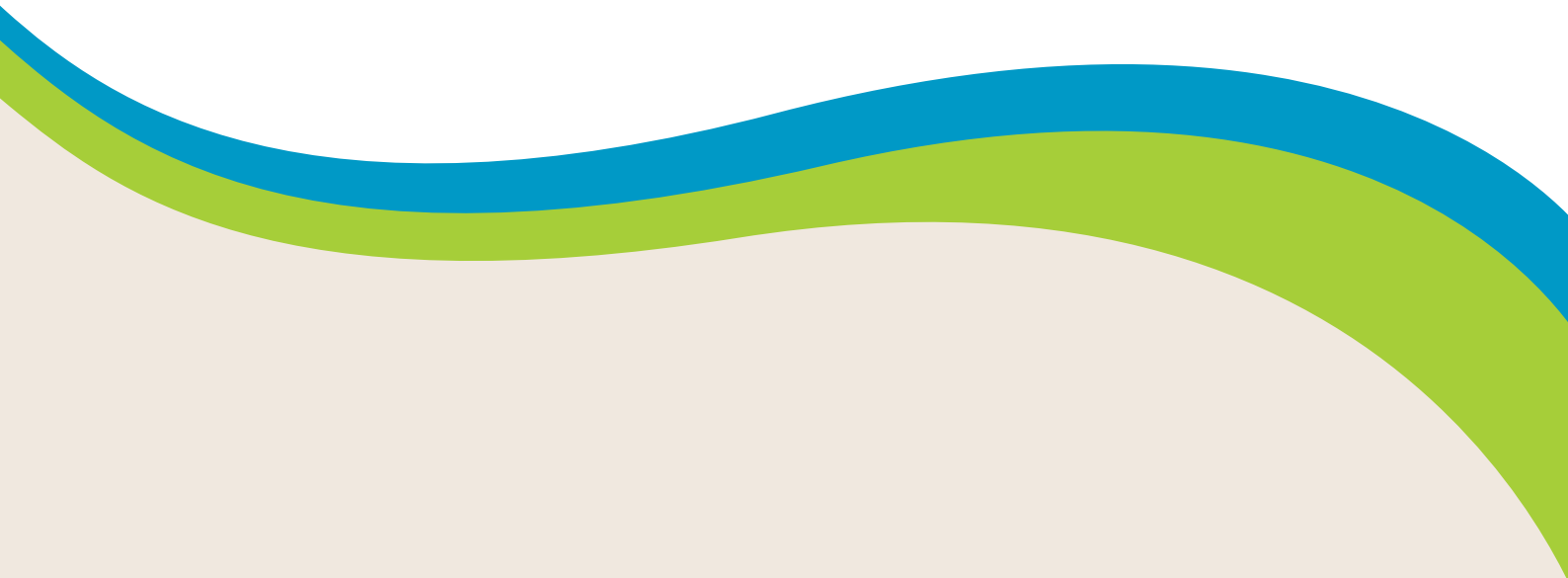
The client may be able to apply to go onto the Housing Register which will usually be managed by the local housing authority. If you search 'applying for housing' and 'allocations policy' on the relevant council website, you will find how to apply for housing (which might be an online application) what the eligibility criteria is, and how they prioritise the letting of social rented homes in the area. The housing register may also be the route into supported housing or extra care provision and the housing options officers should be able to advise you further on this.

Don't always assume that it is best to keep someone in their existing home in the long term if it is too big or expensive to manage. A sensitive conversation about the need to remain independent but perhaps in a smaller, warmer, more suitable home can often initiate a positive planned move, which may in turn prevent a health crisis arising such as a fall which could lead to future hospital admissions.

For older people there is also a Housing Options for Older People (HOOP) tool here. This provides an assessment tool which will lead clients to information about what supported housing is available in their area.

Elderly Accommodation Council - [Housing Options for Older People \(HOOP\)](#)

Age UK - [UK leading charity helping every older person who needs us](#)



directors of
adass
adult social services
eastern region
connecting innovating improving



Commissioned by ADASS East, developed in partnership with the Eastern Region Housing Network and Curators of Change, and written by Trish Reed, EELGA Associate