A photograph of two men in a laundry room. One man, with grey hair and wearing a dark blue hoodie, is leaning over a washing machine. The other man, with dark hair and wearing a brown sweater, is sitting on the floor next to him, looking at the machine. The background shows laundry baskets and a window with a view of trees.

Housing and disabled people

Wales's hidden crisis

Executive summary



Comisiwn
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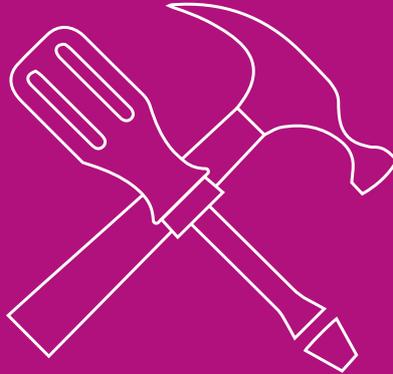
Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

Inaccessible Wales

In 2015/16

32,000

people received an adaptation to their home, rising by 11.7% since 2013/14.



Over

1/2

of councils said a lack of funding for adaptations was a challenge.

Only

1

out of a total of

22

councils



set a percentage target for accessible and adaptable housing.

Only

15%

of councils said the information they hold about disabled people's housing requirements was 'good'.



Housing is the cornerstone of independent living, yet many disabled people live in homes that do not meet their requirements. If disabled people are to have choice and control over their lives, then urgent action is required to make sure that future housing supply is accessible for everyone.

In December 2016, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (‘the Commission’) launched a formal inquiry on housing for disabled people. The inquiry examined whether the availability of accessible and adaptable housing, and the support services associated with it, fulfilled disabled people’s rights to independent living.

Disabled people’s rights to independent living are enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). The principles underlying the Convention recognise that disabled people are the experts in their own lives, and are best placed to identify and determine the housing and support they require. A central approach of this inquiry was to gather evidence from disabled people about their housing experiences.



Impact of not having an accessible home



Mobility problems



4 times less likely to be in work



Indignity of not being able to live independently



Feelings of social isolation and anxiety



Poorer mental health

The shortage of housing in Wales has received increasing political and media attention, yet the effects of this crisis are not uniform; the impact of unsuitable housing on disabled people is particularly acute.

Our inquiry uncovered four major challenges, which form the basis of our recommendations:

1. Disabled people are demoralised and frustrated by the housing system

Disabled people report a severe shortage of accessible houses across all tenures. Disabled people are more likely to live in social housing, as it is more affordable, tends to provide more security of tenure, and landlords are more willing to install adaptations and provide support, if required. Social housing is particularly pressured, with long waiting lists. Information on the accessibility of properties is particularly poor in the private sector. Estate agents, for example, do not typically provide information about the accessibility of private lets or houses for sale.

Disabled people can experience serious deterioration in their mental wellbeing due to living in unsuitable accommodation. We heard evidence of people eating, sleeping and bathing in one room. We heard of family members carrying people upstairs and between rooms. The costs of inaccessible housing are well documented, and include impacts on independent living, increased need for social care, more reliance on carers and family members, accidents (including those that are life-changing or fatal) and avoidable hospital admissions.

Social care packages and housing are inextricably linked; sometimes a disabled person's care package is a crucial factor in ensuring that they can live independently.

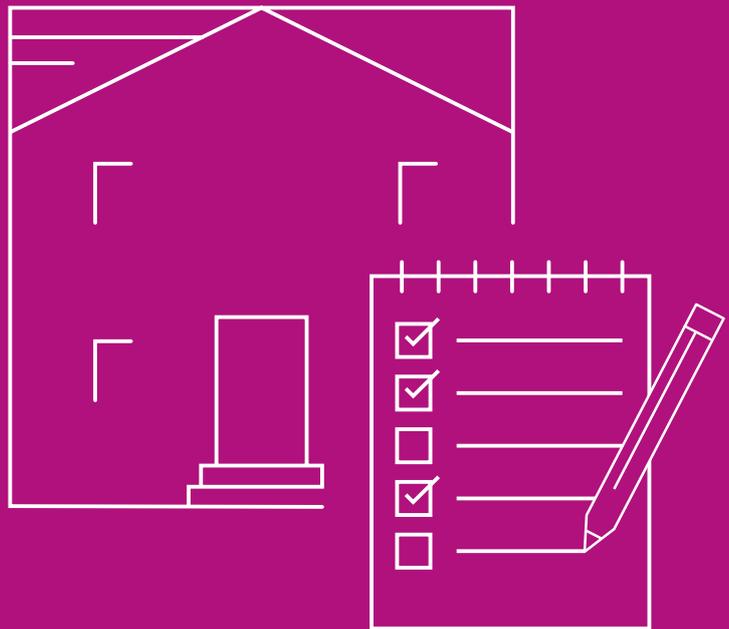
Disabled people reported positive housing outcomes where they were able to access well-managed local housing and support and advice services, whether voluntary or statutory. Ultimately, finding appropriate, accessible housing can transform people's lives for the better. Disabled people reported improved health and wellbeing, and enhanced prospects for employment and study where their homes met their accessibility requirements.

‘Disabled people can experience serious deterioration in their mental wellbeing due to living in unsuitable accommodation.’

Over

1/2

of councils use
an Accessible
Housing Register



2. There is a chronic shortage of accessible homes

Despite the recent investment by the Welsh Government to build 20,000 new homes by 2021 there remains a severe shortage of accessible and wheelchair-accessible housing. Yet demand is increasing as the number of disabled people is increasing; in 2016, there were an estimated 13.3 million disabled people in Britain, up from 11.9 million in 2013/14 (ONS, 2017). Wales has a higher proportion of disabled people than any other nation or region in the UK, with 26 per cent of the population being disabled (ONS Family Resources Survey 2015/16).

Building regulations in Wales have produced houses that are generally inaccessible, particularly for people who use wheelchairs. The Welsh Government has taken action to ensure that the social housing that it directly funds is built to meet some accessibility and adaptability criteria, through the Development Quality Requirements (DQR). These requirements mean that all new publicly-funded houses meet the Lifetime Homes standard. The Welsh Government has not taken any such action to introduce higher standards of accessibility for building developments in the private sector.

Our survey of local authorities, undertaken as part of our evidential basis for the inquiry, found that the systems used to identify disabled people's requirements and deliver accessible houses are weak (EHRC, 2018a). Local authorities are making decisions about current need and future demand for accessible houses based on very limited data; only 15 per cent of Welsh local authorities rated the data available to them as 'good' or 'very good'.

Only one Welsh local authority set a target for accessible housing and many reported that developers are reluctant to build accessible houses, as they see them as less profitable.

There is strong evidence that housing that meets people's requirements will save on health and social care costs in the future, as well as considerably lowering the cost of adaptations when they are needed.



The Welsh
Government plans to build

20,000



affordable homes by

2021



yet they have not set any
targets for accessible
homes within this figure.



3. Installing home adaptations involves unacceptable bureaucracy and delay

Not all disabled people need adaptations to their homes, but many do. These adaptations vary from minor changes such as fitting grab rails, to bigger changes such as the installation of stair lifts, wet rooms and hoists. Adaptations can also include adding extra bedrooms, for example for a child with autism who is unable to share with their siblings. There is significant evidence that the timely installation of adaptations creates significant savings to the public purse.

Disabled people are often left waiting for long periods of time, even for minor adaptations. Only 21 per cent of Welsh local authorities reported that they completed an adaptation in eight weeks. The average wait from application to installation in Wales is 18 weeks (EHRC, 2018).

Disabled people face particular problems in the private rented sector where private landlords frequently refuse to make adaptations to their properties. We also heard examples of disabled people being prevented from making adaptations to 'common parts', for example ramps to a front door.



4. Disabled people are not getting the support that they need to live independently

It takes more than bricks and mortar to ensure that disabled people are able to claim their right to independent living. Access to advice, support and advocacy plays an important role, yet provision is patchy and people report that they have nowhere to turn when their housing is unsuitable, they have difficult choices to make, or they are facing a crisis. A consistent theme from the evidence was that navigating the complex systems for allocations and adaptations was stressful and challenging.

We heard that tenancy support and floating support were particularly important for people with learning disabilities, sensory impairments and mental health conditions; however, changes proposed by the UK Government in policy and funding arrangements have created uncertainty among housing providers.

There is currently a UK Government review of supported housing, about how disabled people can be best supported and the appropriate mechanisms for funding. Our findings have emphasised that choice and control for disabled people are central to realising the right to independent living. These rights should be central to any new policy for supported housing. The current review and pressures on care budgets have led to uncertainty for housing providers. One survey by the National Housing Federation identified that housing providers had put 85 per cent of developments on hold in the course of a year.



Summary of recommendations

Independent living principles recognise that disabled people are the best experts in determining and promoting better solutions. Governments at national and local level need to be much more effective in **engaging disabled people** both strategically and operationally, in order to meaningfully reflect their input, in a continual cycle of improvement.

The need to build more accessible and adaptable homes

We are calling for:

- **The Welsh Government to introduce a national strategy** to ensure there is an adequate supply of new houses built to inclusive/universal design standards and to wheelchair-accessible standards, across all tenures. This should include a review of the way that building standards are enforced, particularly in the private rented sector. The strategy should recognise that housing support, advice and advocacy is often necessary to enable people to maintain their housing and their right to independent living.
- National and local governments to take action to improve the way that **data is collected and shared**, both on the requirements of disabled people and on the accessibility of existing housing stock.
- The Welsh Government to require all new homes are built to Development Quality Requirements and to mandate local authorities to ensure that 10 per cent of **new homes are built to a wheelchair-accessible standard**.
- The Welsh Government to **publish annual data on the number of accessible, adaptable and wheelchair-accessible** homes built.
- Local authorities to **apply the five ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in their strategic planning** for accessible homes, in particular when developing Local Development Plans and Local Housing Market Assessments.
- Local authorities to meet their duty to publish **Equality Impact Assessments** alongside their Local Development Plans and Local Housing Market Assessments.

Improving the installation of home adaptations

We are calling for:

- Local authorities to urgently address the bureaucratic **hurdles and delays that exist within adaptations systems**, to ensure that low-cost, minor adaptations in particular can be installed quickly and easily.
- The Welsh Government to provide **additional funding to disabled people's organisations and advice agencies, to increase the supply of independent advice and information regarding housing options, including adaptations**, with a particular focus on the private-rental sector.
- The Welsh Government to pilot training for private sector landlords on accessibility as part of the Rent Smart Wales scheme, of licensing landlords and agents under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Matching homes to people who need them

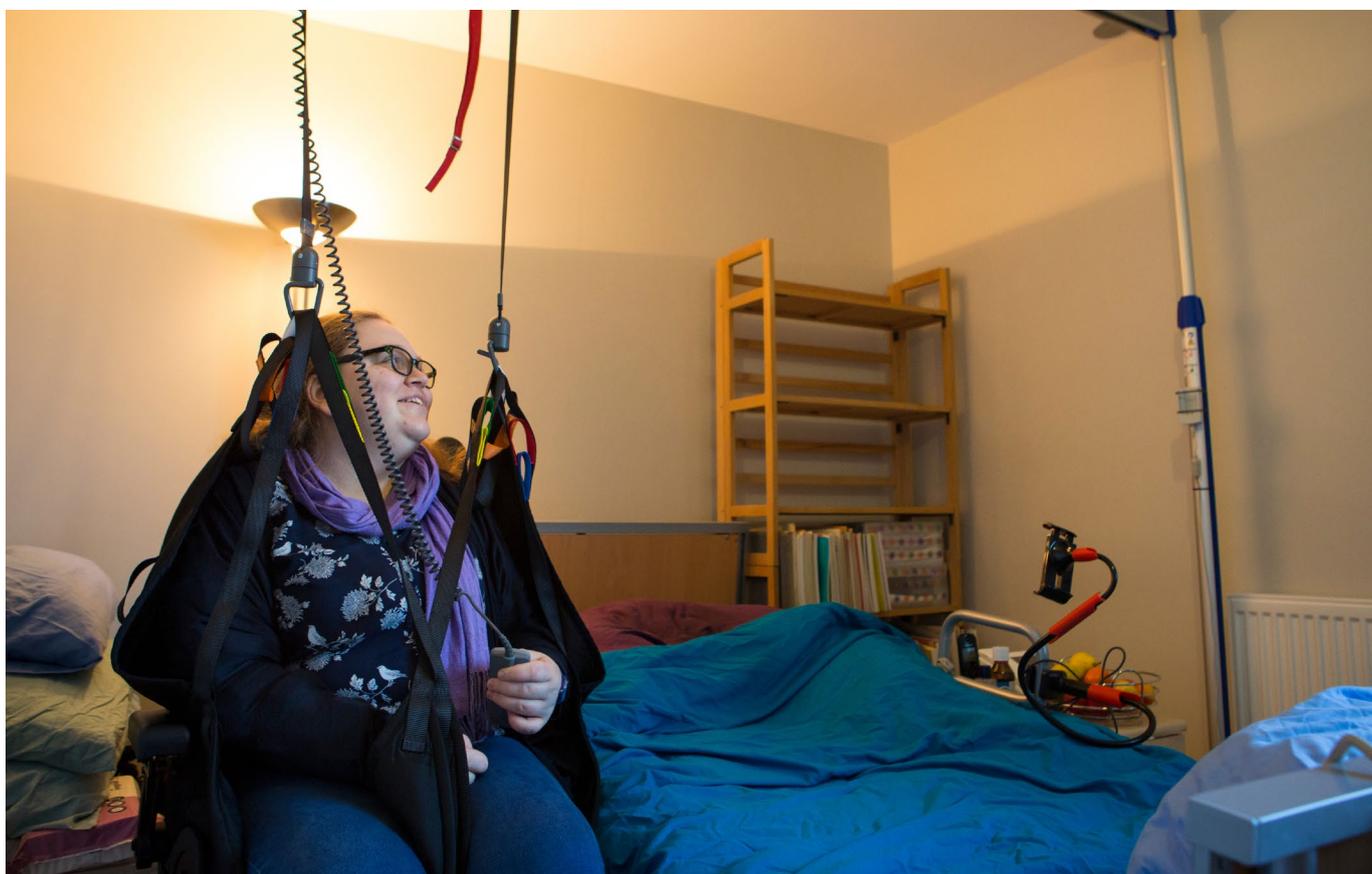
We are calling for:

- Local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to embed independent living principles into assessment and allocations policies for social housing, **to ensure real choice and control**.
- Local authorities to significantly **increase their knowledge of existing accessible social housing stock**, and develop specialist support and information services to facilitate suitable matching.
- Local authorities to apply best practices on the use of **accessible housing registers**, with the longer term aim of the use of a standard methodology across all local authorities.
- The Welsh Government to **publish standards and monitor and publish effectiveness of Accessible Housing Registers**.

Supporting people to live independently

We are calling for:

- The UK Government to ensure that the new policy and funding model for supported housing upholds the rights of tenants, and that freedoms and choice are not restricted, in line with the UNCRPD. The new model needs to address the current uncertainty, and deliver a stable market for both housing providers and those providing specialist support.
- Local authorities to ensure that **housing, care and health services are fully integrated and sufficient funds are available to support people to live independently**, and that there is an increased focus on prevention.
- Local authorities to **provide increased specialist disability advice and advocacy services** for housing options.
- The UK Government to ensure that its **review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012** considers the impact of removing housing from the scope of legal aid for disabled people, and takes effective steps to mitigate any identified impacts.



Contacts

This publication and related equality and human rights resources are available from the Commission's website: **www.equalityhumanrights.com**

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