# Key Points

* Housing has an important influence on health and wellbeing through several routes. These include; affordability; quality; fuel poverty; and the role of housing as home within a community.
* Housing is part of the causal chain of health inequalities.
* In Scotland, many people do not live in a house that is warm, dry and affordable.
* Housing tenure has changed considerably since the turn of the century, with a reduction in social housing and an increasing number of households relying on the Private Rented Sector to meet their needs.
* Raising and maintaining the quality of housing stock remains an ongoing challenge as does the provision of affordable housing.
* Fuel poverty is a significant problem for many households; the definition of fuel poverty is changing to better identify those most in need.

# Introduction

Housing has an important influence on health and wellbeing through several routes, including affordability; quality; fuel poverty; and the role of housing as home within a community. Overcrowding is another important aspect of housing quality. Although improvements in housing in the 20th century reduced overcrowding, it remains an issue for many families.  A significant proportion of households in Scotland struggle to afford fuel, putting them at risk of experiencing cold and damp housing, or conversely having to make difficult choices between heating and other vital expenditure.  This is particularly the case for those with low incomes.

Moreover, the costs of housing influence where people live, the size and quality of the home that they can afford, and how much money they have left, after housing costs, to support their health and wellbeing. Housing costs can negatively affect mental health through anxiety and stress associated with factors such as rent or mortgage payments or fuel bills.

The relationship between health and housing is largely driven by the – unequal - distribution of income, wealth and dependency on welfare.  Owing to this, housing is one of the factors that contributes to health inequalities.

Higher and more economical housing standards, have the potential to help improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.  The extent to which Scotland is committed to tackling health inequalities via housing is reflected in [Scotland’s Public Health Priority 1](https://publichealthreform.scot/the-reform-programme/scotlands-public-health-priorities)– a Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities. This dedication is also reflected in the [Local Housing Strategy: Guidance 2019](https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-housing-strategy-guidance-2019/pages/14/) which recommends that ‘everyone should have access to an affordable, safe, and warm home’.   This focus on housing is not new, instead, it is returning public health back to its historical origins.

The availability of quality housing, designed and sited to meet people’s needs, and that people can afford, is an increasingly important challenge. Changing demographics, coupled with market drivers such as the ‘right to buy’ (which has reduced social housing stock) and investment in buy-to-let (which has increased the number of small-scale landlords), have resulted in an ongoing need for more high quality and affordable housing in Scotland. Related to this, the distribution of housing tenures in Scotland has changed in the last few decades. There has been substantial growth in the Private Rented Sector. Although the increased share of tenure that is most pronounced in younger age groups, many people, including families, rely on that sector to provide their home. It is vital that housing supply is able to meet demand and that all tenures provide good quality, affordable homes, to meet different needs.

Housing also affects health and wellbeing by influencing where people live, and by extension the physical and social environments that they experience, and their access to employment opportunities. More information on how neighbourhood and community affect health and wellbeing is available in the [Physical Environment](https://www.scotpho.org.uk/life-circumstances/physical-environment/key-points/) and [Social Environment](https://www.scotpho.org.uk/life-circumstances/social-environment/introduction/) sections of the ScotPHO website.

Housing also has a role to play in supporting independent living; housing that meets people’s needs can help with enabling health care at home rather than in hospitals and care homes, preventing accidents, and keeping people active.

Housing, through its availability and affordability, is part of the complex set of factors that cause homelessness. More information on this critical issue, and the profound impact of homelessness on health (and health services), can be found in our [Homelessness section](https://www.scotpho.org.uk/life-circumstances/homelessness/key-points/).

# Policy context

## **National policy context**

Scotland's housing strategy is set out in ['Homes Fit for the 21st Century'](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/02/03132933/0), which addresses supply, choice and quality, all of which have important implications for health and wellbeing.[The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/reform/housing-bill) includes measures to improve housing quality, particularly in the private rented sector. A [Strategy for Housing for Scotland’s older people](https://beta.gov.scot/policies/housing-and-independent-living/national-strategy-for-older-people/) highlights the particular needs of this group and the importance of housing in supporting independent living. Reform of the Private Rented Sector to ensure that it offers more secure long-term tenures has been progressed through the 2016 [Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/19/contents).

The Scottish Government have committed to [increasing the number of affordable homes across Scotland](https://beta.gov.scot/policies/more-homes/) so that everyone has access to a good quality home that meets their needs.  A vision for what Scotland’s housing landscape ought to look like [beyond 2021](https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2018/09/housing-beyond-2021/documents/housing-beyond-2021-discussion-paper/housing-beyond-2021-discussion-paper/govscot%3Adocument/Housing-Beyond-2021-Sep.pdf) was discussed through a series of workshops with stakeholders.  The ideas discussed were consolidated in Scotland’s first long-term housing strategy - [Housing to 2040](https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-to-2040/pages/housing-to-2040-vision/).  This strategy lays out the visions and guiding principles which will shape the efforts to construct the future of Scotland’s houses, homes and communities.  Some of the central priorities include a target to [deliver 100,000 affordable homes by 2032](https://www.gov.scot/news/100-000-more-affordable-homes/), with at least 70% of them being in the social rental sector.  Another priority is to introduce a set of housing quality standards that apply to residential properties regardless of tenancy type (i.e. owned, privately rented, or socially rented).  These efforts will, in turn, help to create a Scotland where all of its residents can thrive.

The[Joint Housing Delivery Plan for Scotland](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/05/3392) sets out priority actions for realising the vision of providing all people in Scotland with high quality sustainable homes that they can afford and that meet their needs.

The [Scottish Planning Policy](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/06/5823) sets out national planning policies, whilst the[National Planning Framework](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Framework) provides a framework for spatial development in Scotland.

[Scotland’s Sustainable Housing Strategy](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/06/6324) highlights the ambition to provide warm, high quality, low-carbon homes and the actions necessary to achieve that. In response to reports by the [Scottish Rural Fuel Poverty Task Force](https://beta.gov.scot/groups/fuel-poverty-strategic-working-group/) and the [Fuel Poverty Strategic Working Group](https://beta.gov.scot/groups/fuel-poverty-strategic-working-group/), the Scottish Government have [consulted on a new Fuel Poverty Strategy](https://consult.gov.scot/better-homes-division/fuel-poverty/?_ga=2.155676795.1758773359.1520594663-674459211.1507897089) and subsequently published the[Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill 2019](http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108916.aspx). This bill proposes a new definition of fuel poverty which not only considers the ratio of household income to fuel costs but also the sufficiency of remaining income to maintain an ‘acceptable standard of living’. This will help to focus action on those households who are struggling as a result of fuel bills, and the Bill sets a target based on the proposed new definition. [The Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/10/enacted)sets out actions that will be taken to help reach these targets.

Energy efficiency is a National Infrastructure Priority, and the [Energy Efficient Scotland: Route Map](https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/05/1462) sets out plans for homes, as well as businesses and public buildings, to become more energy efficient. The Route Map also describes energy efficiency standards to be applied in the Private Rented Sector, alongside plans for improving energy efficiency in private homes. For Social Housing, there are clear [energy efficiency standards for social housing (EESSH) in Scotland,](https://www.gov.scot/publications/energy-efficiency-standard-social-housing-eessh-scottish-government-guidance-social-landlords-revised-february-2019/) with targets set for 2050.

In 2015 the[Commission on Housing and Wellbeing](http://housingandwellbeing.org/), which was set up by Shelter Scotland in 2013, published a report ‘A blueprint for Scotland’s future’, that outlines a range of recommendations for how to develop a housing system which contributes to eight different types of wellbeing – housing as ‘home’, community, employment, income, health, education, and environmental sustainability. In this report wellbeing is defined as “the outcome of a society where everyone can realise their potential, enjoy their environment, work meaningfully and contribute to their community.” The Scottish Government has published a[response to these recommendations](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/02/4621).

## **Local policy context**

As each local authority is responsible for its own housing stock, local housing policies and strategies play a critical role in helping to shape a Scotland with houses that are conducive to health and wellbeing.  One of Public Health Scotland’s predecessor, NHS Health Scotland, produced a [Housing Strategies Briefing Paper](http://www.healthscotland.scot/publications/housing-strategies-briefing-paper) which contains detailed information on local housing policies and the role these can play in helping to tackle Scotland’s health crises.

The [Housing Need and Demand Assessment](https://www.gov.scot/publications/hnda-tool/) (HNDA) is an evidence based assessment undertaken by Local Authorities to estimate the number of homes required to meet current and future housing needs. Scottish Government provide a [guide to developing an HNDA](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/supply-demand/chma/hnda/HNDAPG), which lists data sources in ‘Section 3 Evidence & Analysis’. The HNDA is used to plan for local housing management and development and for the provision of housing related services over a 5 year period. Local authorities form Housing Market Partnerships to undertake the HNDA, and there are opportunities for Public Health professionals to form part of these partnerships.

The HNDA acts as an evidence base on which the Housing Supply Target is based. The Housing Supply Target describes the additional housing that can actually be delivered, and it feeds into the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) which sets out a local authority’s desired outcomes over a 5 year period along with detailed actions to achieve these outcomes. All housing tenures and housing related services (i.e. homelessness, housing support, & fuel poverty) are represented in the Local Housing Strategy. LA are encouraged to collaborate with public health staff to undertake a [health inequalities impact assessment (HIIA)](http://www.healthscotland.scot/tools-and-resources/health-inequalities-impact-assessment/what-is-an-hiia) on the LHS while it is still in draft. [Strategic Housing Investment Plans](https://beta.gov.scot/publications/preparation-of-strategic-housing-investment-plans-guidance-note-2017/) present a local authority’s strategic investment priorities for affordable housing to achieve the outcomes set out in their LHS.

[Housing Contribution Statements](https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/5619/0) are the key mechanism through which housing is integrated into the Strategic Commissioning Plan developed by Integration Authorities.

# Data

## Data Introduction

These pages contain some examples of data on housing as it relates to health and wellbeing.

See the data sources page of this section of the website for examples of where other physical environment related data may be accessed.

The table below shows the dimensions and geographies for which data are presented within the data pages of this section of the website.

| **Data presented? (y=yes, n=no)** | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data dimensions/ geographies** | **Availability and affordability** | **Quality and Overcrowding** | **Fuel Poverty** |
| By **gender** | N | N | N |
| By **age group** | N | N | N |
| By **deprivation group** | N | N | N |
| By **NHS board** area | N | N | N |
| By **local authority** area | N | N | N |
| By **community health partnership** (CHP) area | N | N | N |
| **Tenure** | Y | Y | N |
| **Time trend** | Y | N | N |
| **National target** | N | N | N |
| Comparison with **UK/GB** | N | N | N |
| **International** comparisons | N | N | N |

## Availability and affordability

Housing costs have a big influence on poverty. In the three year period from 2015-2018, a net addition of 150,000 people experienced absolute poverty once housing costs were taken into account (pensioners are less likely to be in poverty after housing costs). This includes 50,000 children. Where households are struggling with housing costs this will impact on their ability to afford other necessities required to support health and wellbeing.

There is a need to build more affordable housing so that everyone can have a home that meets their needs. Current targets for delivering new affordable homes build on success in exceeding the previous target of delivering 30,000 affordable homes by March 2016. The current target is to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes by 2021. Building new properties is the principal means of achieving this, and Chart 1 illustrates the number of affordable homes completed in 2020/21 and the times series going back to 2000/01.

Despite progress on affordable housing the challenge of delivering sufficient affordable housing in a context of changing demographics, social trends and economic influences remains substantial. It is worth noting that across the period 2001 to 2019, the [number of households in Scotland has increased](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/household-estimates/2019/house-est-19-publication.pdf) by around 301,000 homes, or 14 percent. In 2019 there were 2.50 million households in Scotland.

Shelter Scotland published a report called [‘Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2021’](https://www.scotpho.org.uk/%E2%80%98Affordable%20Housing%20Need%20in%20Scotland%20Post-2021%E2%80%99) in which they prescribe delivering an additional 53,000 affordable homes between 2021 and 2026 as part of the efforts to tackle child poverty, meeting housing needs, and helping to re-start the economy.  These additional affordable homes can also contribute to improving the populations [health and wellbeing](http://www.housingandwellbeing.org/).  The report highlights the importance of considering how affordable houses are distributed within the community as well as the size, density, and type of dwellings built.  Shelter has also noted that reaching this numerical target may still fall short of what is [required to meet housing need](https://blog.scotland.shelter.org.uk/time-face-root-cause-housing-crisis/). Suitability of housing and the provision of appropriate adaptations to support independent living are vital considerations in meeting housing needs, and changing demographics add to this challenge. Currently, waiting lists for social rented housing are long, with nearly 160,000 applicants on a housing register at the end of March 2018.

Chart 2 shows how the distribution of housing tenures in Scotland has changed in recent years. Whereas home ownership levels have remained fairly stable since the turn of the century, renting a home in Scotland has changed dramatically. The private rented sector has more than doubled its overall share since 2001, reaching 14% in 2018. In contrast, the social rented sector has shrunk from 28% to 23% in the same timeframe. The biggest increase in private sector renting has been in the under 35 age group, many of whom are unable to afford their own home or to access social housing due to the high demand and associated long waiting lists. The relationship between tenure and the aspects of housing that influence health is complex but important, particularly in relation to health inequalities. Rents in the private rented sector are often higher than for social housing, and, although recent policy and legislation has improved matters, tenants in the private rented sector have less security of tenure. In terms of aspirations, the 2016 Scottish Household Survey found that only 3% of householders want to live in private rented accommodation, whilst 14% want to live in social rented housing. The vast majority (79%) aspire to home ownership.

A 2014 [report](https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/referendum-briefing-housing-and-low-income-scotland) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighted that the number of households in poverty in the private rented sector had doubled in the previous decade, whilst the number in social housing almost halved. A 2017 [report](https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-scotland-2017) provides more recent information on the relationship between tenure and poverty.

The combined influence of the welfare system and the affordability of housing can have a substantial impact on poverty and on health inequalities. The [Income and Employment section](https://www.scotpho.org.uk/life-circumstances/income-and-employment/key-points/) has more information. Many households in Scotland rely on benefits to meet their housing costs; principally Housing Benefit for social housing, and Local Housing Allowance in the private rented sector. These don’t necessarily cover the full cost of rent, particularly in the private rented sector, and the shortfall can contribute to housing affordability problems.

## Housing quality and overcrowding

The link between poor-quality housing and health and wellbeing means that housing quality is an important health inequalities issue. In particular, cold and damp housing is associated with respiratory conditions and poor mental health and wellbeing. There is an ongoing need to raise and maintain the quality of existing housing across all tenures.

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) is a key measure of housing quality in Scotland. Currently, only social sector landlords are obliged to meet the SHQS, but data for all sectors are collected for comparison purposes. Chart 1 shows that a large proportion of dwellings across all tenures did not meet this standard in 2019. Failing the SHQS may be as a result of a single criterion, and does not necessarily mean that a dwelling has negative health implications, but it does provide an indication of quality and energy efficiency. [Analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-scotland-2017) has shown inequalities in housing quality according to this measure. Importantly, a number of dwellings in Scotland (around 24,000 in 2018) do not meet the ‘tolerable standard’ – meaning that the quality is such that it is not reasonable to expect people to live there. Shelter Scotland analysis shows that a significant proportion of housing in Scotland fails to meet their [Living Homes Standard](https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/50/living_homes_standard) on grounds of space and quality.

Overcrowding relates to both affordability and quality of housing. There are marked inequalities in overcrowding (and in fact, it is one of the variables that comprise the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation). It can affect physical health, mental health and educational outcomes through several interrelated routes. In 2019, 51,000 Scottish households were defined as overcrowded according to the bedroom standard. Chart 2 shows that Housing Association households are most likely to be overcrowded according to this definition.

## Fuel poverty

There are four drivers that, in combination, determine whether a household experiences fuel poverty:

1. Energy performance of the building
2. The cost of fuel
3. How fuel is used within the home
4. Household income

Households were previously defined as being in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, they would need to spend more than 10% of their income before housing costs on household fuel. By this definition, 24.9% of households were in fuel poverty in 2018. However, the [Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill 2018](http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108916.aspx), published in June 2018, proposes a new definition in response to a wide-ranging consultation. This would define households as being in fuel poverty if they meet both of the following criteria:

* The required fuel costs must be more than 10% of the household’s net income after deducting housing costs and;
* The household’s remaining net income, after the payment of fuel costs and childcare costs (if any), must be insufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living for the household.

Under this definition, it is estimated that 24% of households were in fuel poverty in 2017. The Scottish Government’s [guide to the Bill](https://beta.gov.scot/publications/guide-fuel-poverty-target-definition-strategy-scotland-bill-2018/) provides more information. Of note, the definition will use 90% of the Minimum Income Standard thresholds as the basis for determining if income is sufficient to meet an acceptable standard of living. This definition will therefore include households above the income poverty line who are struggling with fuel bills.

A [Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy for Scotland](https://beta.gov.scot/publications/draft-fuel-poverty-scotland-2018/pages/9/) was also published in June 2018. It sets out a range of ambitions for tackling fuel poverty, including the progress necessary to meet the target set out in the Bill of reducing fuel poverty to less than 5% by 2040.

ScotPHN have published [a series of reports](https://www.scotphn.net/projects/fuel-poverty/fuel-poverty-documents/) highlighting key issues, research and information on the relationship between [health and fuel poverty](https://www.scotphn.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016_11_02-Addressing-Fuel-Poverty-DPH-Guidance-Final-1.pdf).  In particular, fuel poverty is linked with increased excess winter deaths in the elderly.  In older adults, it is linked with circulatory and respiratory disease, greater risk of falls and injury, and aggravation of arthritis.  For younger age groups, it is linked with asthma, respiratory problems, as well as impaired physical growth and cognitive development. Fuel poverty is also linked with increased anxiety and depression across all age-groups.

# Key Data Sources

Scottish Government publish quarterly [Housing & Regeneration](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration) statistics on Housing in Scotland, covering affordable housing, new housing supply, rents in the private sector, local authority housing, and social housing.

[Scottish Statistics](http://statistics.gov.scot/) hosts a number of housing related indicators.

[Poverty Statistics](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/IncomePoverty) describe poverty before and after housing costs.

The Scottish Government’s [Centre for Housing Market Analysis](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/supply-demand/chma/hnda/HNDAPG) provides statistics relating to the housing market.

A range of relevant data sources can be found in Scottish Government guidance for preparing a [Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA): A Practitioner’s Guide](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/supply-demand/chma/hnda/HNDAPG) (see section 3, ‘Evidence & Analysis’).

A range of information relating to housing is available from the [Scottish Household Survey](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/16002).

The [Scottish House Condition Survey](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SHCS) collates in-depth information on a national annual sample of around 3,000 dwellings in Scotland. This includes details of properties below tolerable standard, in disrepair, with relevant amenities, as well as information on dampness and condensation, energy efficiency and fuel poverty. Note that the Scottish House Condition Survey has been incorporated into the Scottish Household Survey from 2012.

The Scottish Government produces data on a set of performance indicators for measuring progress on [housing and regeneration outcomes](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/reform/HARO/Indicators).

The [Scottish Housing Regulator](https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/) provides information on social landlords and social housing stock.

A new look up tool, called the [CURL file](https://www.scadr.ac.uk/our-research/creating-new-datasets/addressing-people-scotland-linking-chi-and-uprn), has been developed by linking together CHI numbers, unique property reference numbers (UPRN), and the Scottish census for the Scottish population. This was developed by the [Scottish Centre for Administrative Data Research](https://www.scadr.ac.uk/) at the University of Edinburgh and Public Health Scotland.  This tool has created the unique ability to identify the health, household characteristics (including household structure, the highest level of education, and occupation of household members), and the urban-rural classification individual properties in Scotland.

# Key References and evidence

**Note**: this page includes only a small number of key references. It is not, and is not intended to be, comprehensive. More detailed lists of references on housing can be found within some of the publications cited below.

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## **Effectiveness evidence**

ScotPHO's purpose is to describe the pattern of health across the Scottish population. As a supplementary service to users, we include the following links to external sources of quality-assured evidence on effectiveness of interventions which may include relevant material for this topic. These links are provided as an aid to users. They are by no means exhaustive nor should they be necessarily viewed as authoritative.

[NHS Health Scotland: Scottish briefings on NICE public health guidance](http://www.healthscotland.com/scotlands-health/evidence/NICE.aspx)

[Centre for Reviews and Dissemination](http://www.york.ac.uk/crd/)

[Cochrane Library: Browse by topic](http://www.cochranelibrary.com/home/topic-and-review-group-list.html?page=topic)

[EPPI-Centre: Evidence library](http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=56&language=en-US)

[National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Evidence services: Evidence search](http://www.evidence.nhs.uk/)

[National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidance: Find guidance](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance)

[Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN)](http://www.sign.ac.uk/)

# Useful links

[Shelter Scotland](https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/)

[Commission on Housing and Wellbeing](http://housingandwellbeing.org/)

[Scottish Government Housing](https://beta.gov.scot/housing/)

[Chartered Institute of Housing (Scotland)](http://www.cih.org/scotland)

[Scottish Housing Regulator](https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/)

[Architecture & Design Scotland](http://www.ads.org.uk/)

[Creating Places](http://creatingplacesscotland.org/)

[UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE)](https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/headline_521225_en.html)