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Ymateb gan: | Response from: Back the Bill Coalition





The impact of inadequate housing on mental health

A joint response by CIH Cymru, Shelter Cymru and Tai Pawb (Back the Bill coalition)

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Who we are?

Led by Tai Pawb, Chartered Institute Housing Cymru and Shelter Cymru, the Back the Bill coalition envision a Wales where everyone has the right to a safe and adequate home. Providing this will ensure health, social, economic, and environmental benefits for current and future generations.

Since 2018, the campaign has [generated signatories](#) across the housing and charity sector as well as cross party support in the Senedd, culminating in the agreement of a White Paper on the Right to Adequate Housing in the new [Programme for Government](#).

For further information visit: <https://www.taipawb.org/policy-influencing/backthebill/>

Which groups of people are disproportionately affected by poor mental health in Wales? What factors contribute to worse mental health within these groups?

1 The link between poor housing and mental health

Introduction

- 1.1 [One in four people](#) experience mental health problems or illness at some point during their lifetime. Mental health problems are common – but they are not suffered evenly across society. We are beginning to understand there are experiences that affect your likelihood to suffer from poor mental health. For instance, [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#), discrimination or pressures around [sexuality](#) or [racism](#) can increase your risk of experiencing mental health problems. As a society, our understanding of these factors and the wider pressures that contribute to poor mental health is thankfully evolving.
- 1.2 As a coalition, we know experiencing inadequate housing can have a negative impact on people’s mental health, whether through the condition and suitability of the property, security of tenure or how safe a home is. As the private rental sector has higher levels of inadequate housing for people with poor mental health, the two issues can combine, meaning some in the private rental sector can be particularly vulnerable.
- 1.3 Recognising the link between inadequate housing and poor mental health means looking more widely than (purely) operational/service-level responses and better understanding inequalities in society.

The impact of poor housing on mental health

- 1.4 Poor housing affects people’s physical and mental health, increasing their use of the NHS and reducing life expectancy. In 2019, [Public Health Wales](#) found that 18 per cent of homes in Wales pose an unacceptable risk to health, while poor housing costs Welsh society over £1bn a year. Specifically, this report highlights the mental health impact of inadequate homes. [Overcrowding](#) is likely to lead to mental health problems, especially those associated with childhood development disorders and a lack of privacy. Causes of overcrowding, including financial insecurity, are also known to contribute to poor mental health. Colder homes may more obviously impact our physical health yet improving the heating and thermal efficiency of homes in this study improved the mental health of two fifths of households. Shelter Cymru’s [Broken Foundations](#) report also demonstrated the impact of poor housing on students in Wales, with 65% of students surveyed reporting that bad housing had a negative impact on their mental health.

Floored

- 1.5 In 2020, [Tai Pawb](#) in partnership with TPAS Cymru investigated the provision of inadequate flooring in social housing. Its [Floored report](#) identified it is common practice for social landlords to not provide any carpet or flooring to new-lets, meaning some social tenants end up living without carpets or appropriate flooring for years. As well as being a safety issue, colder homes lead to increased fuel use or aggravating respiratory problems such as asthma, a lack of adequate flooring has a mental health impact. As one mother who responded to the survey said:

“I became/am very depressed. I am a very house-proud mother and having difficulty returning to my career because I am taking care of two young one’s full time since the family split. I have repaired every room including the stairs. I have filled in, sanded, removed dangers and scraped what I can....and covered over what I can’t. I am forever grateful for our home, but I was shocked at the lack of basic necessity and safety when it came to the floors. I am too embarrassed to let visitors in or let the children have playmates to socialise. The stress affects us all. Especially when I see them hurt themselves and I have to tell them not to walk certain areas in each room.”

Covid-19 and inadequate housing

- 1.6 The impact of the pandemic has been a deeply unequal experience across the population, with a stark difference evident in housing. Lockdown policies forced many of us to spend time in our homes shining a light on those who have good homes and those who do not. Shelter Cymru’s [Life in Lockdown](#) showed that during the initial Covid-19 lockdown, 75 per cent of people with a lack of space in their home said their mental health deteriorated during lockdown, compared with 53 per cent of people who did have enough space.
- 1.7 A Health Impact Assessment jointly authored by Chartered Institute of Housing and Public Health Wales [‘No place like home?’](#) found housing quality, and a lack of space as contributing factors to worsening mental health and well-being. Conversely, housing and housing security were identified as a key determinant of positive mental health and well-being. In terms of dealing with these challenges, private sector tenants are less likely to know where to access support, while their landlords are less aware of housing-related support.

The Private Rental Sector and poor mental health

- 1.8 As of March 2020, the private rental sector accounted for 14 per cent of dwellings in Wales. The private rented sector (PRS) generally has the oldest housing stock and a higher proportion of poor-quality housing (e.g., containing damp or other hazards) which have profound effects on mental health. The Housing Act (Wales) (2014) provides new powers for local authorities to prevent homelessness meaning more vulnerable people placed in the PRS as a means of preventing homelessness.

Following the implementation of the Act the number of Welsh people living in the PRS with self-diagnosed mental health problems was proportionally increasing year on year, with the figure at 11 per cent in 2016-2017 and up to 14 per cent in 2018 - 2019 (translating to 24,640 people in Wales) (National Survey for Wales, 2019). It is unsurprising that Tai Pawb's Open Doors project found 62 per cent of landlords surveyed had experienced or were currently experiencing issues due to a tenant's poor mental health. A further 86 per cent of private landlords surveyed as part of the project felt that because of the planned ending of no-fault evictions in Wales, they needed to know more about the law around mental health and how to sustain tenancies. Research undertaken by Tai Pawb on behalf of Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru's [Tyfu Tai Cymru](#) project evidenced a gap in mental health support in the PRS which is proving to be a real barrier to tenants with mental health issues, keeping their homes and successfully sustaining their tenancies.

For the groups identified, what are the barriers to accessing mental health services? How effectively can existing services meet their needs, and how could their experience of using mental health services be improved?

2. More information for private landlords to support tenants

2.1 Tyfu Tai Cymru also found [nearly half of private landlords](#) (45 per cent) felt that they 'never had enough support or information to support tenants living with mental health problems'. A further, 85 per cent felt that information currently available online is not specific for the private rental sector and should be aimed specifically for letting agents and landlords.

2.2 July 2022 will see huge changes to the Private Rental Sector through the [Renting Homes Act](#). As some of the largest changes involve in the eviction process, the Welsh Government should review the lessons learnt from the Tyfu Tai Cymru in particular:

- The Welsh Government provide comprehensive information for private rented sector landlords and letting agents regarding local and national mental health support.
- Re-licencing through Rent Smart Wales should require all private sector landlords to complete a module on mental health to improve their knowledge of how to access support for tenants with mental health problems
- Representatives from the PRS should be included in the governance structures of the Supporting People programme to increase the housing related support for private rented sector tenants with mental health problems
- All local authorities should develop crisis/ emergency housing related support services for people with mental health problems in the private rented sector to support tenants to stay in their own homes

- 2.3 Tai Pawb's [Open Doors](#) project identified a need to create online, flexible information, that is available for landlords to understand some of their tenants' issues and know how best to deal with them. Doing this can help sustain a tenancy, preventing mental health and housing situations from worsening.

To what extent does Welsh Government policy recognise and address the mental health needs of these groups? Where are the policy gaps?

3. The Right to Adequate Housing

- 3.1 The Welsh Government's recent Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru included the announcement of a White Paper on Rent Control and a Right to Adequate Housing. We fully support this White Paper and look forward to contributing towards its development and further consultation. [Back the Bill](#) Partners, Tai Pawb, Shelter Cymru and Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru have commissioned independent research into the impact of the Right to Adequate Housing in Wales. [Phase 1](#) of the research has identified that Wales can be a world leader in realising this right, understanding the cost of inadequate housing on the economy, society and individual while benefitting from international good practice. Phase 2 of the report published in July 2022 and will contain a cost-benefit analysis of implementing this policy, including from a health perspective. While there have been lots of progressive changes to address housing and homelessness in Wales over recent years, introducing this right will fundamentally underpin and enforce these changes. When considering the Right to Adequate Housing in their White Paper, it is essential the Welsh Government and policymakers fully understand the costs and impact of inadequate housing on poor mental health.
- 3.2 The Welsh Government are committed to building 20,000 low carbon social homes over the next five years: a response to the housing crisis in Wales. Recognising the role inadequate housing has on mental health, it is necessary these homes meet the needs of those who will be living there to support their well-being. Adopting principles of [inclusive design](#) could help ensure these homes meet the mental health needs of those living there in relation to size, space, heating, and accessibility.
- 3.3 In undertaking recommendations from the [Floored](#) report, the Welsh Government should:
- Review Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) to include provision of appropriate flooring as per this report.
 - review the terms of the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) and or other crisis funds, to include provision of appropriate flooring as per this report.

What further action is needed, by whom/where, to improve mental health and outcomes for the groups of people identified and reduce mental health inequalities in Wales?

4. Stronger recognition of the link between mental health and housing in policymaking

- 4.1 Evidence cited in this response by Public Health Wales, Shelter Cymru, Tai Pawb and the Chartered Institute of Housing have highlighted the impact of poor housing on mental health. While this evidence base is growing, more research to understand in specific elements of inadequate housing and how they impact on people's mental health will improve future policy making around housing.
- 4.2 Once established amongst policymakers, monitoring of housing needs to better measure the impact policies are having on people's mental health and where possible, the costs and benefits both financially and socially of any changes.