**Building our Future: Laying the Foundations for Healthy Homes and Buildings – Response from Mind**

**Question 1:**

Mind believes that the paper underplays a substantial and current issue: mental health. In particular, the section entitled ‘Homes and Buildings: The Nation’s Health’ needs substantially expanding to include information about the impact of unhealthy home and buildings on mental health. Mental health problems should then be mentioned throughout, on a par with the impact of physical health. It is now widely accepted that mental health is as important as physical health and must be given parity of esteem. Below is evidence of the impact of housing and buildings on mental health which would add to the evidence base of the paper and make the overall argument stronger.

*We have used points from our upcoming report ‘Heading Home’ in order to inform our response, due for publication in the autumn. Please bear this in mind and let us know if you would like to use a significant amount of the content in the Green Paper.*

One in three people in the UK live in poor quality housing[[1]](#footnote-1) and the poor physical condition of a property is strongly predictive of mental health problems[[2]](#footnote-2). There is particularly strong evidence for the negative impact of damp[[3]](#footnote-3), mould[[4]](#footnote-4), and cold[[5]](#footnote-5). These kind of housing issues also make physical health worse and this can impact on mental health and recovery.1Research by Shelter found that 1 in 5 adults had a housing issue which negatively impacted on their mental health in the last 5 years. 3 in 10 of these previously had no issue with their mental health. Shelter’s research with GPs found that they spontaneously identify housing problems as a factor in patients’ mental health problems, both as a contributing factor and sometimes a sole cause. Condition of property was one of the main issues GPs saw as causing mental health problems in adults and children. Many GPs felt they had a knowledge gap in knowing where to signpost patients for housing help. [[6]](#footnote-6)

**Question 2:**

More attention needs to be paid to the private rented sector, and the section detailing issues and solutions should be extended. Possibilities for solutions to issues in the private rented sector include: a landlord register, LA funds to tackle rogue landlords, and funding for refitting homes (changing the ‘wear and tear’ allowance).

**Question 3:**

We would suggest that the recommendation to carry out further research is broken down into specific areas. A wealth of research already exists on many aspects of healthy homes, so we feel a more detailed recommendation would be more tangible and therefore more likely to be acted on.

This Green Paper poses an opportunity to elicit actions that can have real impact, which is why Mind believes that the recommendations should be much more ambitious. Recommendations could include:

* A call on the Government to reinstate legal aid for disrepair cases (as we know the drastic impact non-decent homes can have on health).
* Extend regulations on new builds to include physical and mental health considerations (for instance by extending section 106 agreements with new developers beyond physical accessibility regulations).
* Commitment from government to work with local authorities and housing associations to update social housing allocation policies to take into account physical and mental health issues.
* Commitment to an awareness raising campaign to highlight the connection between conditions in and around the home and mental and physical health problems.
* Call on local authorities to commit to keeping children and young people out of overcrowded accommodation.

**Question 4:**

* The Government’s mental health and housing group could be asked to further scrutinise the activity of the government on healthy homes.
* In order to build evidence around housing, research will need to be commissioned and therefore funding will need to be acquired.
* Involvement in the scrutiny of the Industrial Strategy could further the goal of making housing an infrastructure priority.

**Question 5:**

‘Wellbeing’ is not an adequate way to refer to a person’s mental health. The Green Paper uses this inaccurate terminology throughout. The paper should not just hint at mental health problems, but should be explicit about them in order to represent the full impact of unhealthy homes and buildings. Rather than using the phrase ‘health and wellbeing’, it would be more accurate to use ‘physical and mental health’.

Under the section ‘Homes and Buildings’, the paper mentions stress, anxiety and depression. These are important points and have clear links with housing quality. These are mental health problems and need to be highlighted as such.

Figure 2 includes ‘mental wellbeing’ as a subjective outcome of the physical environment. However, there are well known methods for measuring mental health and wellbeing[[7]](#footnote-7), and the link between this and housing is clear, as established in the research outlined above. Referring to ‘mental wellbeing’ as subjective denies it parity of esteem with physical health. We will approach the UK Green Building Council to discuss this and would recommend that if the infographic is kept in the paper, that a note is included to clarify this.

The paper would benefit from a person-centred approach, perhaps through the use of case studies, focusing on the people that poor quality buildings impact. Starting by looking at people, and what we need to stay healthy, could provide a more persuasive angle to the paper.

*Mind will be publishing original research on mental health and housing in the autumn, which includes information and insights pertinent to healthy homes and buildings. Please let us know if you would like a copy of the research when it is published.*

1. Barnes, M., Caullinane, C., Scott, S. & Silvester, H. (2013) People Living in Bad Housing: Numbers and Health Impacts. London: National Centre for Social Research. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Evans, G.W., Wells, N.M., Chan, H-Y.E. & Saltzman, H. (2000) Housing Quality and Mental Health. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 68(3), pp.526–530. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Krieger, J. & Higgins, D.L. (2002) Housing and Health: Time again for public health action. American Journal of Public Health, 92(5), pp.758-768. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. What Works Wellbeing (2017) Housing and Wellbeing: Policy Briefing. London: What Works Wellbeing. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gibson, M., Petticrew, M., Bambra, C., Sowden, A.J., Wright, K.E. & Whitehead, M. (2011) Housing and Health Inequalities: A synthesis of systematic reviews of interventions aimed at different pathways linking housing and health. Health & Place, 17(1), pp.175–184. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Shelter (2017). The impact of housing problems on mental health. Available: <https://england.shelter.org.uk/assets/images/for_professionals/Housing_and_mental_health_-_detailed_report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. NHS Health Scotland (2015) Measuring mental wellbeing. Available: <http://www.healthscotland.com/scotlands-health/population/Measuring-positive-mental-health.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)