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# Housing Conditions and Integrated Care for Older People

Tallaght University Hospital and partners, identifying common housing conditions affecting older people in South Dublin

## Key Findings and Recommendations Executive Summary 2024



Tallaght University Hospital

An Academic Partner of Trinity College Dublin

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# Housing Conditions and Integrated Care for Older People

## Tallaght University Hospital and partners, identifying common housing conditions affecting older people in South Dublin

### Key Findings and Recommendations Report 2024: Executive Summary

#### Written and prepared by:

Tom Grey<sup>1</sup>, Dimitra Xidou<sup>1</sup>, Jennifer O'Donoghue<sup>1</sup>, Simon Nicol<sup>2</sup>, Sean Kennelly<sup>3</sup>, Emer Coveney<sup>4</sup> and Desmond O'Neill<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>TrinityHaus, School of Engineering, Trinity College Dublin

<sup>2</sup>Building Research Establishment, UK

<sup>3</sup>Tallaght University Hospital

<sup>4</sup>Age Friendly Ireland

#### On behalf of:

The **Housing Conditions for Older People Group**

(See Acknowledgements for all members of the Research Group/Steering Committee)

#### Research Team:

This project was undertaken by TrinityHaus (TCD), AFI, BRE, and Tallaght University Hospital, in collaboration with the research group opposite. For more information on this research, or other work in this area please visit <https://www.tcd.ie/trinityhaus/>

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This report is available to download from the following websites:

**Age Friendly Ireland** - <https://agefriendlyireland.ie/news/housing-conditions-and-integrated-care-for-older-people-report-2024/>

**The Housing Agency** - <https://www.housingagency.ie/publications/housing-conditions-and-integrated-care-older-people>

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### Steering Committee:

Sincere thanks to the steering committee for their continued support and excellent advice. The overall steering committee included:

- **David Silke** – Housing Agency
- **Roslyn Molloy** – Housing Agency
- **Tara Doyle** – Housing Agency
- **Simon Nicol** - BRE
- **Chris Beer** - BRE
- **Helen Garrett** - BRE
- **Barry Lynch** – Meath County Council
- **Mark Harrington** – Age Friendly Ireland
- **Dr. Emer Coveney** – Age Friendly Ireland
- **Vicky Harris** – Age Action
- **Colm Ward** – South Dublin County Council
- **Dr. Ger Craddock** – Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (NDA)
- **Prof. Sean Kennelly** – Tallaght University Hospital



An Ghníomhaireacht  
Tithíochta  
The Housing Agency



comhairle chontae na mí  
meath county council



Centre for Excellence  
in Universal Design  
Údarás Náisiúnta Michumais  
National Disability Authority



Tallaght  
University  
Hospital

Ospidéal  
Ollscoile  
Thamhlachta  
An Academic Partner of Trinity College Dublin

### Integrated Care Team and Tallaght University Hospital:

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### Patients and Participants:

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## A. Project Introduction and Overview

Tallaght University Hospital (TUH) and the HSE Integrated Care Team are part of the Integrated Care Programme for Older People (ICPOP) aimed at promoting the development of services and care pathways to improve outcomes for older people in the community.

**These care pathways involve various aspects of the built environment including housing, which acts as critical infrastructure for the hospital and community care ecosystem. It is important to understand the impact of housing on the health of older people in the Tallaght area and the downstream consequences for the community and TUH in terms of preventative medicine and the ongoing care of older people.**

A research team consisting of TrinityHaus (TCD), Tallaght University Hospital (TUH), Building Research Establishment (BRE), and Age Friendly Ireland (AFI), working with a range of partners including The Housing Agency, Age Action, South Dublin County Council (SDCC), Meath County Council (MCC) and the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority (CEUD; NDA) conducted this study to explore the links between housing conditions and the health of older people. This research aims to inform housing providers (e.g., local authorities), policy makers, and healthcare providers about the key aspects of healthy homes as well as the most common housing hazards experienced by older people.

Through stakeholder and research activities, and 10 housing case studies in the Tallaght/SDCC area, the project investigated the links between housing conditions and the health of older people, and their impact on the TUH Integrated Care Team for Older Persons (ICTOP; HSE).

This research was conducted as part of **The Meath Foundation** funded project **‘Supporting Tallaght University Hospital’s (TUH) Integrated Care for Older Persons: Testing an approach to identify the common housing hazards in housing affecting older people in South Dublin (Funded by the Meath Foundation)’**

### Research aims and objectives

**Research aims:** The research investigates the link between common housing conditions and hazards and the health and wellbeing of older people, explores existing housing data and

potential auditing methodologies, and outlines the implications for key organisations responsible for the integrated care of older people in the South Dublin area.

### **Objectives:**

1. Identifying the common conditions and hazards in housing that affect older people and impact on their health. Poor housing conditions affect the work of the Integrated Care Team through poor general health outcomes for older people in the hospital catchment area, hospitalisation due to poor housing or hazards, or patient discharge issues due to housing that is unsuitable for recovery or rehabilitation.
2. Working with the TUH-based Integrated Care Team, SDCC, and AFI to determine how these findings can be used to enhance care pathways and inform decision making around housing adaptations.
3. Initiating a wider conversation about the relationship between housing conditions and the health of older people, the role of housing in the integrated care of older people, and the relationship between TUH and local housing in terms of preventative medicine and healthcare delivery.
4. Using this project to investigate and identify opportunities for further investigation of housing conditions for older people and the interaction with integrated care. This primarily involves the identification of appropriate technical assessment methodologies and processes to be used in any future projects.

## **B. Key Findings and Recommendations**

This research highlights three main issues including:

- **The serious implications that poor housing conditions have for older people in Ireland, the consequences for health and wellbeing outcomes, and the impact this has on the integrated care for older persons.**
- **The urgent need for better housing data, national housing condition surveys, and centralised data platforms.**
- **The need to support and expand integrated approaches to housing and the care of older people in Ireland by bringing together key partners including: hospitals; the Integrated Care Programme for Older People; local authorities; and the Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme.**

Expanding on these three main issues, a set of Key Findings and Recommendations, organised into seven themes (see Fig. 1 below), are presented in the following sections. These themes are informed by the research activities, namely: the focus groups, expert interviews, case studies, various literature reviews, and steering committee feedback.

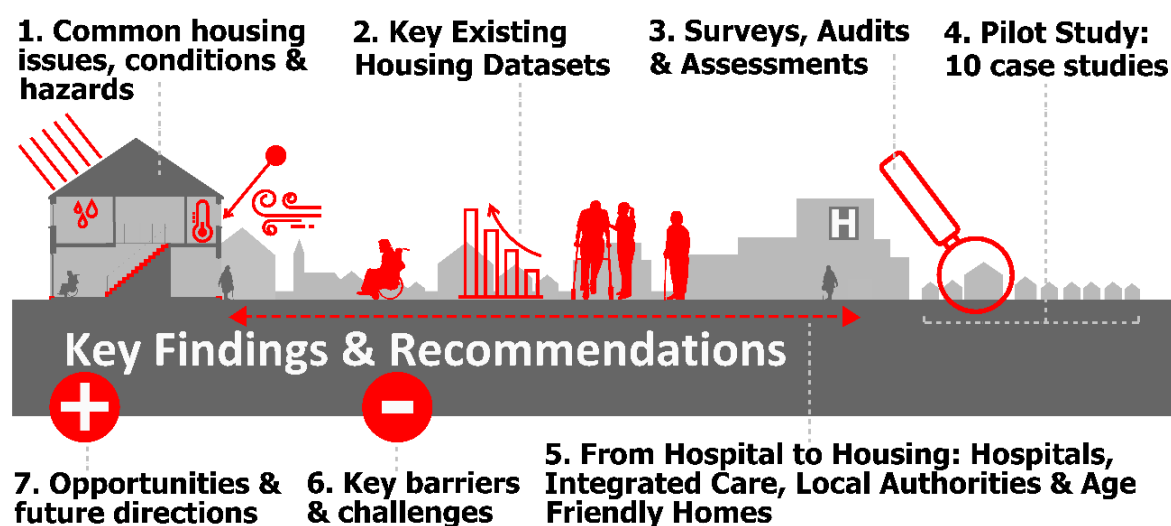


Figure 1: Key Findings and Recommendations

This project was solely focused on housing for older people, particularly those who are patients of TUH-based Integrated Care Programme for Older Persons. However, where relevant, the recommendations refer to a) a general housing conditions survey; b) a housing survey for older people; and c) the housing conditions for ICPOP patients (with relevance for Tallaght and the wider country).

## 1. Common housing issues, conditions, and hazards

### Common housing hazards

The 2020 scoping study, 'The Cost of Poor Housing in Ireland 2020'<sup>1</sup>, conducted by the BRE Trust, used international research, data from the 2016 Irish national census, and the 2016 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey, to estimate the likely health impact of poor housing in Ireland. This concluded that approximately 160,000, or 8% of Irish homes, are likely to present serious health and safety risks, the most common and severe of these relating to cold and home accidents – particularly falls. According to the report, the estimated total health impact is costing the state approximately €1.25 billion a year, plus the distress and lost opportunities to residents and families. Furthermore, the report highlights

<sup>1</sup> Nicol et al 2020 The Cost of Poor Housing in Ireland – See [https://files.bregroup.com/bretrust/BRE\\_Trust\\_The\\_Cost\\_of\\_Poor\\_Housing\\_in\\_Ireland.pdf](https://files.bregroup.com/bretrust/BRE_Trust_The_Cost_of_Poor_Housing_in_Ireland.pdf)

that older people are particularly affected by poor housing conditions because a) in the first place, older people are more likely to live in poor housing conditions; b) they often spend more time at home and as a result face greater exposure to housing hazards; c) are typically more vulnerable to housing hazards (i.e. more likely to be affected by the cold or a fall).

The 2016 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey, as mentioned above, used the 'Housing Health and Safety Rating System' (HHSRS) to identify and measure housing hazards. The HHSRS was also used in this current research to identify the potential housing hazards that would affect older people in typical private dwellings in Ireland.

The HHSRS has four categories containing a total of 29 potential hazards. These include Physiological Requirements (e.g., damp & mould growth, or excessive heat and cold); Psychological Requirements (e.g., crowding, poor lighting, noise); Protection from Infection (e.g., hygiene, food safety, poor sanitation and drainage); and Protection from Accidents (e.g., hot surfaces, scalding, and collision). Using the HHSRS as a starting point, key findings from the literature, and feedback from participants across the various research activities, were overlaid on the HHSRS hazards to highlight key concerns as follows:

**HHSRS hazards and impacts on older people** are of particular concern due to a range of typical age-related difficulties such as physical frailty; physical, sensory, and cognitive impairment; or comorbidity.

**HHSRS hazards and issues related to accessibility, usability, and safety** are closely linked to age-related impairments. Among other challenges, heat and cold, lighting, and fires are some of the major concerns for people with disabilities. Lack of space is also an issue, primarily due to mobility issues, and the use and storage of mobility devices.

**HHSRS hazards and implications for dementia and cognitive impairment** are important considerations in terms of safety, comfort, accessibility, and independence. Many of these are covered by the various hazards in the HHSRS categories, however, there are specific issues that are either exacerbated by dementia or that are unique to dementia and cognitive impairment in relation to thermal comfort, lighting, circadian rhythms and sleep disturbance, falls, and noise.

### **Key Recommendations: Common housing conditions and hazards**

- Building on 'The Cost of Poor Housing in Ireland 2020' report and this project, conduct a focussed systematic literature review, coupled with stakeholder engagement, to further examine the impact of common housing conditions and hazards in Ireland for a) older people (accounting for emerging challenges and new age-related research); b) persons with disabilities accounting for accessibility, usability, and safety for a wide diversity of people; and c) people with dementia and cognitive impairment.

### **Hazards and issues across the key spatial scales**

The focus groups, expert interviews, and case studies identified housing issues and hazards across key spatial scales including: Location (e.g., importance of neighbourhood quality, community connectivity); Site Design (e.g., level pathways, lack of space for extension); Entry and Internal Circulation (e.g., level access, stairs); Key Internal and External Spaces (e.g., ground floor bathroom); Internal Environment (e.g., excess cold); Finishes, Fittings & Furniture (e.g., non-slip floors); and Technology (e.g., fall alarms, security).

### **Key Recommendations: Built environment issues across key spatial scales, and the relevant HHSRS categories**

- Ensure that measures to improve housing conditions are considered across all spatial scales including: Site Location (Safe, well-maintained neighbourhood, community connectivity, public transport, etc); Site Design; Entry & Internal Circulation; Key Internal & External Spaces; Internal Environment; Finishes, Fittings, & Furniture; and Technology.
- Ensure that flexibility and adaptability underpin both new-build and retrofit/upgrade projects to cater to the diverse, varying, and ongoing changes in care needs that people experience over the short, medium, and long term.

### **Overall issues and emerging concerns**

Several other themes arose from the research activities and the literature including challenges related to renting in older age; under-occupation and difficulties managing the home, rising energy costs and increased cost-of-living; and the impacts of climate change.

### **Key Recommendations: Overall issues and emerging concerns**

- Further research is required at a national level to explore emerging concerns including: tenure, under-occupation and difficulties managing the home, inaccessible homes, cost-of-Living and Rising Energy Costs, and the impacts of climate change.
- The development and updating of housing policy related to older people should be informed by these issues and underpinned by evidence from research in these areas.
- Future housing surveys and assessments should take account of these key emerging issues and ensure that quantitative and qualitative data is collected in relation to these concerns.



## 2. Key Existing Housing Datasets

Despite the importance of housing-related data, and a relatively high volume of data being gathered by a range of Irish organisations, there is no centralised database that collates key data regarding the condition of the Irish housing stock. Instead, data is largely spread across numerous key housing-related datasets. Lack of detailed national data regarding tenure types, age profiles of residents, and housing conditions hampers research, policy, and practice.

### Key Recommendations: Housing-related data

- Provide a centralised, integrated, and accessible database for all publicly available data on housing, health, disability, and ageing.
- Datasets should disaggregate data to include a) the ages of household members; and b) housing tenure (e.g., privately owned, private rented, local authority etc).
- Datasets should collate data on Universal Design dwellings, Age Friendly dwellings, adapted dwellings, energy retrofitted dwellings, and should include information about existing dwellings and dwellings at planning stage.
- Liaise with The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) to explore options for including more in-depth housing-related research in their longitudinal studies on ageing.
- Datasets should identify the proportion of households with disabilities or those with health conditions which may be impacted by their housing and housing conditions.
- A national database of information gathered by Integrated Care Teams (ICTs)/Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) nationwide would allow for detailed information about the health, housing, and social wellbeing of older people throughout the country to be accessed by relevant organisations. It would allow the ICT to identify information or care gaps, or to identify older people who are not being reached by the programme.

**Note: See Section 4.4 of the full report for a discussion and recommendations related to future housing conditions survey**

## 3. Surveys, Audits and Assessments

Following a review of the HHSRS methodology, this research confirms that the HHSRS is a very comprehensive housing survey tool. Furthermore, it should be noted that the UK methodology contains a social survey element that gathers qualitative information on residents. Notwithstanding this, it may be beneficial to consider some additional survey questions/topics to account for the specific needs and vulnerabilities of older people, those with dementia or cognitive impairments, and particularly patients of the Integrated Care for Older Persons Programme (ICPOP). Additional elements may also need to be considered in terms of emerging challenges including under-occupation, or the impacts of climate change such as excess heat or extreme weather events, which can disproportionately affect older people or people with impairments or health conditions.

### **Key Recommendations: Building and housing assessment tools and processes**

- The HHSRS methodology is a comprehensive housing survey tool and should be considered as part of any Irish housing condition survey.
- Consider how an additional/supplemental module of the HHSRS could be introduced to focus specifically on housing conditions and hazards for a) older people, b) people with disabilities and, and c) for older people with dementia or cognitive impairments.
- Consider how the HHSRS could account for emerging challenges such as under-occupation, or the impacts of climate change.

## **4. Pilot Study – 10 case studies to test a methodology and identify typical hazards**

The research team completed 10 case studies in the SDCC/TUH catchment area. These were based on patient file reviews, interviews, and technical dwelling assessments using the House Condition Survey and Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). There were three main outcomes from these cases studies. Firstly, the House Condition Survey and HHSRS methodology was found to be an appropriate tool in the Irish context (as recommended above). Secondly, it performed well in relation to housing for older people (notwithstanding the potential additional features outlined above). Thirdly, it provided data for a small sample of Irish houses from which to identify some typical hazards and challenges<sup>2</sup>. These align with the housing conditions highlighted in the HHSRS categories, literature review, and stakeholder feedback, and include damp and mould growth, excessive cold, falls on stairs and steps, lack of ground floor bathrooms, under-occupation and management issues, among others.

An overall learning from the case studies includes the value of using the House Condition Survey and HHSRS, and the evident need for a comprehensive housing survey in Ireland.

### **Key Recommendations: Overall learnings from the case studies**

#### **Housing condition surveys for the general population**

- There is an evident need for a housing conditions survey of the housing stock in the Republic of Ireland for the general population at least every five years (data to be collated and stored as recommended in key finding 2 above).
- In advance of a national survey, conduct a nationwide pilot project with approximately 1000 dwellings across representative geographical locations and key housing typologies.

#### **Housing conditions survey and Integrated Care Teams for Older People**

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the focus, scope, and nature of this research, the selected sample of dwellings were generally of a high quality, and therefore not fully representative of older people's housing in South Dublin, nor nationally.

- Consider a survey to focus on older people who are patients of integrated care teams across the country to assess and understand housing conditions for older people with complex health issues and high care needs. This would enhance the work of the National Integrated Care Programme for Older People, while also collecting data and supporting policy and practice around older persons' housing in general.
- Considering the complex health issues and high care needs, and prevalence of dementia and cognitive impairment found within ICPOP patients, any such survey should take account of the additional assessment questions and topic areas recommended throughout **section 4.3 of the full report**.

## 5. From Hospital to Housing: Hospitals, Integrated Care for Older People, Local Authorities, and Age Friendly Homes

The TUH-based Integrated Care Team (ICTOP; HSE), SDCC, and AFI and the Healthy Age Friendly Homes (HAFH) Programme are working closely to address health and housing in the South Dublin area.

The TUH ICTOP provides multi-disciplinary care to older persons living in the surrounding area who are referred to the programme. The team allows for improved coordination between all aspects of care, health, and housing, supporting older people in their homes. SDCC provide support for older people through their numerous adaptation grants as well as their Age Friendly Homes Technical Advisor. Similarly, AFI and the HAFH Programme provide a local coordinator in each local authority, including SDCC, to assess the needs of older people living in the community and provide advice and support regarding adaptations, grants, and other services available to them.

### Key Recommendations: Integration across key partners and programmes

#### TUH: The role of the hospital and the integrated care team

- Examine ways to anonymise, digitise, and make available the data collected by the ICT to inform housing and health-related research, policy, and practice, including issues related to older people with complex care needs.
- All members of ICT teams should be fully briefed on the HAFH Programme and carry referral forms for HAFH when they undertake home visits to patients.

#### The role of local authority

- Investigate how relevant local authority housing data can be made available to the ICT as part of their assessments in relation to the housing conditions of specific patients, where available.
- The SDCC Age Friendly Housing Technical Advisor should attend ICT/MDT meetings where appropriate, to reinforce the exchange of information between different sectors and to increase the local authorities' understanding of the lived experience of older people living in the community.

### **AFI and the Healthy Homes Programme**

- Continue and increase the support for the HAFH Local Coordinator's attendance at the ICT/MDT meetings.
- Local coordinators should continue to collaborate with local authorities, ICTOP, and other key agencies to provide an essential overview of the housing issues being experienced by individual older people and to ensure a more informed and less fragmented approach.
- Research, feedback, and experiences from the HAFH should be better utilised to inform housing, and age-related housing issues at local authority and national level.

### **Key integration issues and opportunities**

- Provide a coordinated and centralised housing database to support the work of the local authorities (e.g., housing provision and adaptations), the HAFH programme, and ICTs. This should provide detailed information on the housing stock within each local authority and where supports may be best needed.
- In many cases, the ad-hoc nature of the relationships between patients, carers and family members, healthcare professionals, housing professionals, or local authority undermines support for older people in the context of housing, care, and health. To address this there should be an overarching care professional who provides continuous support for the patient from hospital or short-term residential care to home, or at home if this is the main setting for their care journey.

## **6. Key barriers and challenges**

Throughout the various research activities, several barriers and challenges that impede older people's ability to, or likelihood of completing housing adaptations were identified. These are critical issues which must be overcome in order to better support older people to adapt their homes and allow them to age in their home. These include a complex grants process; occupant decision-making difficulties; financial costs; disruption and having to leave the home during works; and fragmentation between various healthcare and housing professionals and support.

### **Key Recommendations: Barriers and Challenges**

- The continued expansion of the HAFH Programme, and the roll-out of the Local Coordinator across all 31 local authorities in Ireland, will provide much-needed support and advice for older people and help them navigate the grants process.
- The potential of an overarching care professional who would provide continuous support for the patient from hospital or short-term residential care to home, or at home if this is the main setting for their care journey. This would help deal with the fragmentation between various healthcare and housing professionals and support as experienced by some stakeholders, as highlighted in Section 4.5.4.

## 7. Opportunities and future direction

Despite the challenges outlined above, there are many developments and initiatives that can be used to improve housing conditions for older people in Ireland. The Housing Options for Our Ageing Population policy statement, the HAFH programme, and new national documents such as the upcoming Universal Design Dwellings standard create greater awareness and knowledge around better housing for older people. In terms of broader urban planning, policies such as ‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements: Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ and the upcoming revision of the National Planning Framework, recognise the need to improve the built environment for Ireland’s ageing population. All of the above, which deal with housing across key spatial scales, from individual dwellings to the wider community, provide opportunities to reinforce the connections between health, ageing, and housing, and help improve conditions for older people in existing, and in future housing.

### **Key Recommendations: Opportunities and future direction**

- Capitalise on the current interest and momentum for change regarding housing policy for older people and the expansion of the HAFH programme, to ensure that improved housing conditions for older people and the impact on health, wellbeing, and inclusion, are central to upcoming and future national and local authority housing and planning policy, practice, and initiatives.

## Next Steps

To advance the ambitions set out above a number of actions are necessary:

- Promote the findings set out in this report and engage with key stakeholders to discuss the key issues and identify next steps beyond those outlined here.
- Explore the development of a national housing condition survey conducted at five-year intervals. While this survey should be based on the HHSRS, the development of additional survey questions or topic areas should involve key stakeholders, a representative group of residents and family members, disabled persons organisations, and other groups as required.
- In advance of any large-scale nationwide survey, conduct a nationwide pilot project including approximately 1000 dwellings across representative geographical locations and involving key housing typologies.
- Based on this current research, and drawing on the HHSRS, conduct further pilot studies in a range of health regions in Ireland to further explore the connection between age-related health and housing and provide support to the National ICPOP.
- Liaise with TILDA regarding the data they have in relation to housing and explore options for including more in-depth housing-related questions as part of their longitudinal studies.
- While this research carried out a brief review of available housing and ageing related datasets, a more comprehensive analysis is required to identify all existing data sources and potential data gaps.

**Please find full report on the HAFH website: <https://agefriendlyhomes.ie/> and on the AFI website: <https://agefriendlyireland.ie/age-friendly-resources/>**



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