

Equalities
and ageing



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Equality and Ageing Digest #2

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Equality and Ageing Digest: Housing, Inequality and Ageing

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The picture of housing

The quality of housing makes patterns of social inequality highly visible. In fiction and non-fiction writing, descriptions of housing are often used to tell readers about the context of poverty, inequality and diversity of the story or article. Sometimes this language is a kind of code specifically about race. On TV the introductions to [Coronation Street](#) and [Emmerdale](#) tell viewers not just where the stories are set, but also give clues about class and the types of community in the stories.

Our second Equalities and Ageing briefing looks at equalities issues in relation to housing for older people. The Greater Manchester Older People's Network (GMOPN) [Insights and Recommendations report](#) has made three recommendations about appropriate housing for older people. They say that housing must be of good quality, must be part of and contribute to inclusive neighbourhoods, and should adapt to people's change needs as they age.

Quality

Black and ethnic minority communities experience housing deprivation at [much higher rates than white British community](#). They are more likely to live in lower quality housing because of current inequality, and [because of historic discrimination](#) and [economic disadvantage](#). This has resulted in communities living in clusters of deprived and often inadequate housing. Increasing numbers of older people are living in private rented sector housing, which is [often inadequate, and not adapted](#) to their needs. BAME communities are more likely to be in the private rented sector, [where more housing is of poorer quality housing and there is less security of tenure](#).

Some BAME communities have higher rates of living in multigenerational housing. Although this may be a cultural preference, the lack of appropriate family housing makes these communities more likely to live in inadequate housing as multigenerational living may not always be by choice. Those who have arrived in the UK more recently are much more likely to live in inadequate housing, and this disproportionately affects BAME communities – [as the Grenfell Tower fire revealed](#).

Disabled people, both newly disabled in older age and those who age with impairments or chronic illness, are also disproportionately likely to be poorly housed. Poor quality housing [causes or exacerbates many chronic health conditions](#). Due to the lack of accessible housing older disabled people remain trapped in inappropriate housing as their impairments worsen. In addition, [application and assessment processes are often difficult to access](#).

Unequal housing [also creates unequal risk of COVID-19 infection](#) - poor quality housing can cause and exacerbate conditions which place people at higher risk of severe illness, and crowded housing with little access to outdoor space increases the chances of being infected.

For older LGBT people housing safety is also about being free to be who you are, and [having your identity valued and respected](#). Many older LGBT people find themselves [going “back into the closet” when they enter a care home](#), for fear of discrimination from staff or other residents.

Homelessness is [also related to inequality](#), as it is both an unequal experience and a more common experience for people from marginalised communities. BAME families [form a disproportionately high percentage of homeless household cases](#), and BAME people more likely to be in the uncountried / non statutory “hidden homeless” population. Almost [one in five LGBT people have experienced homelessness](#) during their lives. The figures are higher for trans people, LBT (lesbian, bisexual or trans) women, disabled, and poor LGBT people, demonstrating the effect of intersectional discrimination. Homelessness is implicated in poorer outcomes in later life, and can cause long term health problems and a shorter life expectancy.

Inclusion

Housing is an important factor in creating and sustaining safe, accessible, inclusive neighbourhoods.

Appropriate housing is well located. For disabled people of all ages, [neighbourhoods have to be safe and accessible](#) in order to live independently, be able to meet with friends and family, get to shops and services, and be free from harassment. The Equalities Board [“Ageing Equally?” research projects](#) found that hate crime is a major concern for a number of marginalised communities, including people with enduring mental ill health and recent migrants.

Safety is a key consideration for older LGBT people, one-third of whom do not feel safe in the areas where they live, according to [Houseproud](#). This figure rises to nearly two-thirds for trans people. Where over 80% of general survey respondents felt they belonged in their neighbourhood, only just over 40% of LGBT Houseproud survey recipients answered the same way.

BAME communities have experienced unequal effects of poor planning and regeneration. [Gentrification of estates has led to dispossession and breaking up](#)

[communities](#), impacting on the resilience of individuals and communities, and increasing the risk of social isolation for older people.

The increase in private renting among older people [has implications for loneliness and social isolation](#), particularly for those with more fragile social networks and at higher risk of isolation. There are many reasons for this, including lack of secure tenure forcing people to move and undermining their local social relationships, and being unable to have pets. Some local AfA projects found it easier to connect with tenants in social housing, underlining the likelihood of social isolation for people in private rented accommodation. The [cost of private rented housing is at an all time high](#), albeit there are sizeable regional variations in cost, with implications for financial exclusion for the 10% of private renters who are older people. [Fresh research](#) into the financial effects of coronavirus [particularly on younger older people](#) raises concerns that this could be an even bigger problem in the future.

Lifetime homes

For many people safety and security is a home that you don't have to leave as you age. Government policy can have a big impact for working age older people on benefits affected by [the Bedroom Tax](#). Those affected may struggle to find alternate housing appropriate for growing older, due to the [lack of accessible housing currently available and planned](#).

The lack of accessible housing [negatively affects individuals' mental wellbeing](#), forcing people to remain in unsuitable accommodation, and also undermines the creation of inclusive neighbourhoods and safer social spaces. Poorer disabled people, who are likely to disproportionately include disabled people from BAME communities, [are less able to navigate the systems](#) to get the housing they need.

Solutions and responses

There is a [long history of BME-led housing organisations](#), which have sprung from community initiatives to meet housing need that is not well-understood by mainstream service providers. Work will soon start on the [first LGBT-specific extra care home](#), in Manchester. Self-organised [community-led housing may also be an option](#) for those with capacity and access to economic and social support. In some areas, local authorities are supporting [co-housing for seniors](#) and other [community housing schemes](#) specifically for older people. Equalities initiatives within existing housing schemes address the needs of minority community residents, [such as LGBT people with dementia](#). In addition, national and local organisations, and tenants and residents associations are calling for [more and better quality social housing](#), and Age UK has [produced this guide](#) for older private renters.

In the same way that Coronavirus has highlighted health inequalities, it has shown up housing inequality, with issues of overcrowding, affordability of housing on benefits, and homelessness becoming important in public policy discussions. "Building back better" means looking at a fairer housing system for all, [that will meet people's lifetime needs](#).