



# Mental Health and Housing

“Mental health problems can lead to rent arrears which can lead to a cycle of decline and hopelessness leading eventually to homelessness. Caught early these problems are extremely easy to sort out. Caught late, they can be devastating.”

## Who is this for?

People affected by mental health problems, all those providing services for people affected by mental health problems, including primary care and voluntary sector staff, those involved in providing housing, housing-related services or advice.

## Key facts

- Over four out of five people with severe mental health problems live in mainstream housing, with the rest living in supported housing or other specialist accommodation. Half of those with their own home or tenancy live alone.



- Many people with mental health problems feel that they are not offered the same choices as other people when seeking a new home, and that they are frequently obliged to take hard to let properties.
- People with mental health problems are one-and-a-half times more likely than the general population to live in rented housing, with higher uncertainty about how long they can remain in their current home.
- Mental health problems are prevalent among homeless people with 30 to 50 per cent of rough sleepers having mental health problems, and as many as one in five homeless people having a mental health problem and a further issue such as substance misuse.

## Promoting social inclusion

### What can staff in the housing sector do?

- Liaise with Mental Health Trusts so that they are aware of local mental health facilities, and build links with health and social care staff.
- Work with residents and mental health and social care professionals to ensure that tenancies are sustained by providing clear advice on such matters as benefit entitlement, and by ensuring that appropriate support services are put in place, eg advice agencies or occupational therapists.
- Recognise that admission to hospital is not a reason for the person to give up their accommodation, as Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit will continue to be paid if someone is in hospital for up to 52 weeks.
- Inform the Housing Benefit department and Benefits Agency when a person is admitted to hospital, if they are unable to do so themselves.
- Draw an agreement up with the tenant that if concern exists about the person's mental health, the housing officer can raise the concerns with the tenant and/or their GP/Community Mental Health Team contact so that they can receive appropriate support before a crisis is reached.
- Support health and social care staff to retain the individual's link to the community and provide support (where required) to the individual on returning to their home.
- Access mental health awareness training to better understand the needs of this client group – many voluntary and statutory organisations are able to facilitate this training. People with experience of mental health problems should be involved in the delivery of the training.

## What can professionals in the health and social care sector do?

- Check a person's housing situation when they first access their service, ie hospital, Community Mental Health Team, GP surgery. Staff should work with the person to reduce the risk of losing their home, if the accommodation is appropriate. If the person will be homeless they should be referred to the local housing authority and work with housing services to identify and address their housing and support needs.
- Establish referral protocols with local housing advice agencies.
- Offer informal and formal support to housing staff on mental health issues and housing management.
- Recognise the role that housing staff play in supporting people with mental health problems in the community, and develop collaborative working relationships with them.

## What can housing and health professionals do together?

### **ASSESSMENT AND RESETTLEMENT TEAM, BROMLEY, LONDON**

The Assessment and Resettlement Team in the local housing department is responsible for everyone over the age of 16 who is deemed 'vulnerable', including those with mental health problems. The team links health, social care and housing services to ensure that people who are re-housed have the best opportunity to maintain their tenancy. Part of their role is to vet potential properties to ensure that they are suitable and to go with clients to the viewing. All team members specialising in mental health have previously worked in a Community Mental Health Team. In the last year the team has worked with over 400 people.

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- Organise regular meetings (possibly using the Care Programme Approach (CPA)) between the individual, care co-ordinator and the housing officer to ensure that correct support is identified and that support packages complement each other, eg housing-related support and care services.

- Set up regular meetings/good practice forums between the health and social care services and housing staff to increase understanding of each other's roles, pressures and priorities.
- Establish clear and effective channels for advice and referral for housing services.
- Implement joint training to raise awareness of, increase understanding and deal with mental health problems and housing/support needs.
- Develop systems for collecting and sharing information between services.
- Develop and monitor a shared outcome (between housing and mental health services) on improving mental health support for homeless people or those at risk of homelessness (see *Achieving Positive Shared Outcomes in Health and Homelessness*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004).
- Agree joint protocols between services on general and forensic hospital admissions and discharges so that people with a mental health problem who might be homeless or vulnerable to homelessness are identified and their support/housing needs are addressed as part of a planned discharge. (See *Discharge from Hospital: Pathway, Process and Practice*, Department of Health, 2003).
- Appoint a health and housing/homelessness champion to lead joint work in the Primary Care Trust/local authority.

## Further information

### Primary Care

The majority of people with mental health problems are supported by their GP and by other NHS staff who work in primary care. At this point anyone with a mental health problem needs to:

- have their mental health needs identified and assessed;
- be offered effective treatment, including medication and psychological therapies; and
- be able to access advice on social matters, including housing.

## Secondary Care

### Care Co-ordination

- If a person is referred to specialist mental health services they will have an allocated **care co-ordinator** whose role is to co-ordinate and have an overview of the different areas of care. This is not just in relation to health services but also to the areas where the individual requires support, such as employment, social networks or housing. The care co-ordinator is based within the local Community Mental Health Team.
- If a person is admitted to **hospital**, in-patient staff should identify any housing or support needs, and they should liaise with the care co-ordinator to ensure that appropriate housing is found and that support structures are in place before the person is discharged.
- A **written care plan**: this will set out the treatment and support to be provided. The care plan should also address the social needs of the person, including housing needs.

### Crisis Resolution

- **Crisis Resolution/Home Treatment** teams can respond promptly when someone is in crisis, as this service should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The twin objectives of the team should be to resolve the crisis and to prevent any unnecessary admission to hospital, therefore preventing potential loss of accommodation. The person's care plan should identify any action to be taken in the event of a crisis, including dealing with any issues concerning accommodation.

## Housing

### Ensuring appropriate allocations

Housing authorities are under a number of obligations in relation to housing allocations. They must:

- ensure that advice and information are available about the right to make an application for accommodation with assistance for those who need it;
- ensure that applicants are informed of certain rights, for example the right to be informed of any decision about the case and the right to review certain decisions; and

- publish their allocation scheme, including a policy on offering people a choice of accommodation.

The Choice-Based Letting scheme aims to improve the level of choice available to people when taking up local authority housing. Practice differs in local areas, so contact local housing departments to find out their arrangements.

### **Enabling someone to keep their home**

- The **Supporting People** programme funds services that provide housing-related support to vulnerable individuals who need assistance in order to enable them to maintain or improve their ability to live independently. Such support can be provided to individuals either in their own homes or in specialist accommodation, eg sheltered schemes, hostel-type accommodation and shared houses.
- Authorities are also strongly encouraged to ensure that, where relevant, the housing-related support services are provided as part of an integrated package of services. The levels of support offered will vary depending on the needs of the individual and the type of service, and they should be tailored to meet the individual's need through an Individual Support Plan.

Information about the financial support to help people with their housing costs (Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Community Care Grants) is included in the **Benefits** fact sheet.

### **Preventing/addressing homelessness**

- People who are in housing need or vulnerable to homelessness can apply to a local housing authority for assistance and have their housing needs assessed.
- Housing authorities must ensure that free advice and information on homelessness and preventing homelessness is available to everyone in their area.
- Where an applicant is eligible i.e. unintentionally homeless, in priority need for accommodation (which includes mental health problems), and has a local connection, the housing authority has a duty to ensure that accommodation is available until the applicant finds a settled home or circumstances bring the duty to an end.
- Further information on housing and homelessness can be found at Shelter (see Useful Contacts and Resources below).

**THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT REPORT ACTION POINTS**

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Housing Corporation will identify best practice and will draw up guidance for local authorities and registered social landlords on preventing and managing rent arrears that reflects the needs of vulnerable tenants, including people with mental health problems, in mainstream housing.

Good practice guidance on Choice-Based Lettings will address how vulnerable people – including those with mental health problems and from ethnic minorities – can be assisted and supported in making appropriate housing choices. ODPM will consider the need to issue further guidance on appropriate allocations when the current National Institute for Mental Health in England/Housing Corporation research reports in summer 2004.

In revising the Code of Guidance on Homelessness, ODPM will ensure that it reflects homelessness and mental health issues.

ODPM will work with the Chartered Institute of Housing to ensure that mental health awareness is fully reflected in mainstream education and in training for housing professionals.

Research will be commissioned to develop practical ways to access mental health services for people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation. (Department of Health research to report in 2005.)

**Useful Contacts and Resources**

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Code of Guidance establishes the framework in which local authorities carry out their duties and allocate properties. It also contains details of consultation papers, the Government's press releases and Decent Homes ([www.housing.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.housing.odpm.gov.uk)).

For a range of information and publications on homelessness, see [www.homelessness.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.homelessness.odpm.gov.uk)

Choice-Based Letting – contact your local authority's Housing Department for more information on this new scheme as practice differs within each locality.

For information on Supporting People see [www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)

Shelter helps people find and keep a home, and they provide advice and information for housing professionals. Their web-site is [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk) and they also have a helpline, *ShelterLine*, on 0808 800 4444. Shelter's Homelessness Act web-site is aimed primarily at local authorities and focuses on the practical issues following the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002 (see [www.HomelessnessAct.org.uk](http://www.HomelessnessAct.org.uk)).

Information and policy advice for the housing and support sector can be found at [www.sitra.org](http://www.sitra.org)

For advice on funding see the Housing Corporation's web-site at: [www.housingcorp.gov.uk/](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/)

The Citizens Advice Bureau web-site provides advice on a range of topics. ([www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)). Contact details for local Citizens Advice Bureau can be found at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/cabdir.ihtml](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/cabdir.ihtml) or in the local phone book. The Citizens Advice Bureau is preparing a National Directory of Citizens Advice Bureau services specifically for people with mental health problems, which is due for publication in autumn 2004.

Revolving Doors have worked in improving access to care and housing for people with mental health issues who have had contact with the criminal justice system ([www.revolving-doors.co.uk](http://www.revolving-doors.co.uk)).

NIMHE has a Knowledge Community where people can exchange information and experiences relating to mental health. This can be found at [kc.nimhe.org.uk](http://kc.nimhe.org.uk).

Scottish Executive – for information on mental health policy and services in Scotland, contact the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being (part of the Scottish Executive). Visit [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk)

[www.socialexclusion.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk)  
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