

No place like home

Findings from the
NatCen panel Homes
and Communities
Study 2020

March 2021



About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

The NatCen panel

The NatCen panel is a representative sample of people across England. The sample, which comprised 3390 adults, included a boost to attain a greater representation of Ageing Better's cohort of interest, people aged 50 to 69 (giving 2010 in this age group). The study comprised two surveys (July and December 2020) plus 30 in-depth, qualitative interviews. This data briefing pertains to the data obtained from the first survey only.

Ageing Better has a focus on where we can make the biggest difference. We know that what we do before we are old greatly affects our prospects for a good later life. That's why our focus is on those approaching later life, a life stage between mid-life and later life (approx. aged 50-70).

How people feel about their Homes

The vast majority of people of all ages were satisfied with their homes during the first lockdown

- 90% of people aged 50-59 and 93% of people aged 60 and above. But there is a socioeconomic trend:
 - 94% of people aged 50-69 who own their home were satisfied with their home during the first lockdown compared with 79% of social renters.
 - People aged 50-69 who are living comfortably were more likely to be satisfied with their home during lockdown than people who are finding it quite difficult to get by (98% vs 75%).

But the experience of lockdown has many of us thinking about our homes and what we need from them

- 70% of all adults are more aware of problems or improvements needed in their home and a quarter have a greater desire to move home than before lockdown.
- More than half of people aged 50-59 have a stronger desire to make changes to their home.
- There's variation by socioeconomic status and the presence of health conditions:
 - Three-quarters of 50-69 year olds who are finding it quite hard to get by say they're thinking more about their home compared with two-thirds (65%) of those who are living comfortably. This likely indicates that those who are finding it hard to get by have homes in a worse state of repair.
 - More than a third (35%) of people aged 50-69 with long-term conditions or illnesses that greatly affect their day-to-day activities have a stronger desire to move home compared with just one in ten people with no long-term conditions.

As poor health is associated with poverty, it is likely that the people who are finding it quite hard to get by are those who have long-term conditions.

Important features of our homes during lockdown

- Outside space was the single most important feature of people's homes during lockdown and its importance increased with age - cited by 88% of people aged 70 and over.
- For people aged 50–69, outside space and good internet connection were by far the most important aspects of their homes during lockdown.
- In terms of difficulties during lockdown, the most common for 50-59 year olds were noise, inadequate internet connection and a lack of privacy from neighbours.
- There was a striking difference by tenure type, with noise levels an issue for a quarter of social renters but just 9% of owners and 6% of private renters. Lack of privacy was an issue for one in five social renters but just 6% of owners and 7% of private renters.

Our homes are not suitable for us as we age

- No fewer than 39% of people aged 50–69 and a third (32%) of people aged 70 and over say that their home needs work done to make it suitable as they get older.
- The proportion aged 50–69 who say they need work done is the same whether they are home-owners or social or private renters.
- Among people aged 50–69, the proportion rises to almost a half (48%) of who have long-term conditions or illnesses that greatly affect their day-to-day activities.
- People aged 50–69 who are living comfortably were much less likely than those who are finding it quite difficult to get by to say that their homes need work done to make them suitable as they get older (31% vs 50%). It is likely that those who are finding it difficult to get by are more likely to have long-term conditions. It's unlikely that this is a reflection of those who are comfortably well-off are living in homes that are suitable for them as they age.

People recognise problems in their homes but face barriers addressing them

- The biggest issue for people of all ages when it comes to getting needed changes made to their homes is cost (cited by 70% of people aged 50–59).
- But more than a quarter of people aged 70 and over and close to a quarter of people aged 60–69 say that they would be prevented by not knowing how to find trusted tradespeople and a lack of information about what's needed and how the work should be carried out.
- Both social and private renters also cite the need for others to agree and or pay for changes (cited by three in five in both groups).

Conclusion

There are 4.3 million non-decent homes in England. Of the homes headed by someone aged 75 or over, 21% were classed as non-decent in 2017. These homes put people at risk of poor health outcomes in later life.

- The experience of lockdown has caused people to be more aware of their homes than previously; to have a stronger desire to make changes; and a stronger desire to move. But there are barriers to making the changes needed: although cost is the most significant of these, a lack of information and not knowing how to find tradespeople are also cited.
- The data suggests that those in greatest need of a good home are least likely to have them (for example, people with long-term health conditions).
- We need a major programme of action and investment to support people on low incomes, across all tenures, to improve their housing condition. This includes investment in retrofitting existing homes to make them safe, digitally connected and energy efficient.
- Home builders should go beyond current mandatory standards, building sustainable homes that are digitally connected; with outdoor space, good access to natural light, good transport links to amenities and parks and that can be adapted to suit everyone as they age.

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



This report is part of our work on Safe and accessible homes and is freely available at ageing-better.org.uk

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