

Inappropriate housing causing disabled people 'physical and mental harm'

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Professor Isobel Anderson, Diane Theakstone, and Julia Lawrence. Credit: University of Stirling

Leading housing experts are warning that disabled home-seekers are experiencing adverse emotional and mental distress due to a lack of suitable accommodation.

It follows the publication of an [18-month long study led](#) by researchers at the University of Stirling, Housing Options Scotland and Horizon Housing Association, which looked at the effectiveness of allocations and lettings practice for accessible and adapted [social housing](#) in Scotland.

Of the 28 disabled home-seekers based in three local authority areas, who took part in the research, the majority received inappropriate housing offers, or no offers at all, during the course of the study. University of Stirling researchers Dianne Theakstone and Julia Lawrence adopted a co-production approach which ensured disabled people were closely involved throughout the study.

During interviews with researchers, one participant seeking a more suitable home described how, even with a stair-lift installed in her current accommodation, she had to make eight transfers between chair, wheelchair, stair-lift and toilet—and back again—in order to use the bathroom.

Professor Isobel Anderson, who led the research team, said: "Disabled people's extended lived experience of inappropriate housing, while waiting for a more accessible home, clearly causes considerable physical and mental harm. The key findings highlighted a proactive approach from local housing providers, yet distance between their aspirations and the experiences of disabled people.

"Disabled people and their families should have equal housing opportunities and the right to an accessible home in the community that ensures and protects their human rights. This academically rigorous report gives all stakeholders the opportunity and evidence to shape lettings policy and practice to optimize effectiveness in matching disabled people to suitable homes, as well as increasing our stock of accessible housing."

Supported by a research grant from the Disability Research into Independent Living and Learning (DRILL) program, the Match Me study also uncovered important evidence that the assessment of the suitability of a property should not only consider the access and internal features of the home, but should also look at the accessibility of the

external environment and the opportunities for the applicant to maintain local support networks.

Some disabled interviewees argued strongly that access to a garden should be recognized by housing allocation systems as a facilitator for emotional and mental wellbeing, and suggested that the needs of the entire household should be taken in to consideration—not solely those of the main applicant.

The [final report](#) offers practical and policy recommendations to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), local authorities, Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator linked to housing allocations, adaptations, design and new supply.

Bill Scott from DRILL said: "Previous research has shown that inappropriate housing causes harm to physical and mental health and this research showed how the stress of the allocations processes and waiting times experienced by the participants could also be harmful to their wellbeing."

Isla Gray, Interim Managing Director, Horizon Housing Association, said: "We are grateful for the grant support of DRILL, which has allowed us to build on our scoping study, Matching Up, resulting in this report. The report provides substantial insight into the experiences of disabled housing applicants and practice improvements that can address the inequality of housing opportunities and outcomes that persist for too many disabled households.

"The findings will be useful for government, the Scottish Housing Regulator and to housing and service providers—as well as for health and social care providers working with disabled people."

Moira Bayne, Chief Executive, Housing Options Scotland, added:

"Serving over 600 disabled households in need each year, we see first-hand the impacts of effective allocations policy and practice, but also what happens where services have not been accessibly designed and are insufficiently flexible to deliver the individualized solutions often needed.

"We warmly welcome this report as an important resource for RSLs, local authorities and Scottish Government, who are working to increase [housing](#) supply for disabled people."

More information: Match Me - What works for adapted social housing lettings? Action research to enhance independent living for disabled people: [www.housingoptionsscotland.org... housing-lettings.pdf](http://www.housingoptionsscotland.org...housing-lettings.pdf)

Provided by University of Stirling

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