

- A partnership of public health researchers across the five universities in North East England
- Focused on working with policy makers and practice partners
- A founding member of the NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR)
- A UK Public Health Research Centre of Excellence

Creating healthy places in the North East: the role of housing

As the *Due North: health equity in the North* report emphasised, housing is an important social determinant of health and health inequalities. Four Fuse research projects on welfare rights, the bedroom tax, housing improvements and sheltered accommodation are investigating the role of housing in improving public health.

Through the Health Inequalities research programme Fuse is contributing to the evidence on the link between health and housing by:

- Evaluating the effects of a welfare rights advice service provided by social services departments in north-east England for low income older people (Do-Well study).
- Studying the impact of the UK 'bedroom tax' in Newcastle.
- Assessing the effects of social housing improvements on residents in high-rise flats (High-rise health).
- Exploring the impact of sheltered housing developments in South Tyneside.

The Do-Well study followed two groups of in total 755 older volunteers for 24 months who received welfare rights advice in their own home, including a full benefit assessment and help with claiming benefits and other entitlements. The study also assessed whether the service offered good value for money and was acceptable to professionals.

A second study by researchers at Newcastle University looked at the effects of the UK 'bedroom tax' on health and wellbeing; social relationships and the wider community. It followed people living in Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne, which is in the top 10 per cent most deprived areas of the UK.

The third study on High-rise health surveyed 65 residents and interviewed 11 residents in Jarrow, South Tyneside, who received external and internal improvements to their socially

rented flats in three high-rise blocks. The residents were asked about their views of the improvements in relation to their health and wellbeing.

The fourth study was developed in partnership with South Tyneside Homes, which refurbished their Housing Plus accommodation for older people, including residents in the early stages of dementia. The housing association was keen to evaluate the health and wellbeing impacts of the programme for their tenants. It commissioned a team of Fuse researchers to conduct an evaluation using a range of research methods with residents, families, friends and staff.

Key Findings

The Do-Well study:

- Older people in poor health are more likely to need extra money, aids and adaptations to allow them to stay in their homes and remain in good health, yet many do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled.
- Welfare rights advice service provided by social services departments in north-east England for low income older people, increased the benefits they received.
- Older people who receive welfare right advice report increased feelings of independence, self-esteem and confidence.

Impact of the UK 'bedroom tax':

- Income reduction affected purchasing power for essentials, particularly food and utilities.
- Participants recounted negative impacts on mental health, family relationships and community networks.
- The hardship and debt that people experienced adversely affected their relationships and ability to carry out normal social roles.
- Residents and service providers highlighted negative impacts on the neighbourhood, as well as added pressure on already strained local services.

Key Findings continued...

High rise health:

- Tenants increased feelings of positivity towards their homes, thereby improving dimensions of psychological and social wellbeing.
- Residents reported warmer homes and reduced heating costs.
- Perceived safety improved, with residents citing modifications as making them less anxious about falls.
- The intervention facilitated the adoption of healthy behaviours (less smoking at home; less microwave meals and more purchasing of higher quality foods).

Sheltered accommodation:

- Improved quality of life for many participating tenants (e.g. conservatory, wifi, sensory rooms and gardens).
- Some of these improvements were 'under-used' and providers need to be aware of the differing needs and consider 'age appropriate' services;
- Older people feel safe, supported and satisfied but fear that the complex care needs of new tenants may impact this security and their social environment.

“Poor housing is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases and depression and anxiety, costing the NHS at least £600 million per year”

(Briefing note on Housing and Health, 2011)



Photograph 'Derelict house in Leith' (130771212_56107007a_3) by Peter Van den Bossche via Flickr.com, copyright © 2006: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/thoon/130771212/>

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

Fuse organised a Quarterly Research Meeting (QRM) on health and housing on 20 October 2015. The meeting brought together practitioners and academics from across public health, housing, and local government to consider how we can work together to create healthier places in the North East. The event was jointly organised by Fuse, Public Health England - North East, the Association of Directors of Public Health and the National Housing Federation.

This brief demonstrates the range of possible interventions that housing providers can collaborate on with health practitioners and researchers. The event facilitated ongoing conversations between both sectors to inform the design, commissioning and evaluation of housing-based health and wellbeing interventions in the North East.

For more information please visit: www.fuse.ac.uk/events/fusequarterlyresearchmeetings

FURTHER INFORMATION

Professor Clare Bambra

Email: clare.bambra@durham.ac.uk

Telephone: 0191 334 3496

Fuse is one of five UKCRC Public Health Research Centres of Excellence. It brings together public health researchers from across the five universities in North East England.

Website: fuse.ac.uk/research/briefs

Blog: fuseopencienceblog.blogspot.co.uk

Facebook: [facebook.com/fuseonline](https://www.facebook.com/fuseonline)

Twitter: @fuse_online

Email: info@fuse.ac.uk

Telephone: 0191 222 729



REFERENCES

- S. Moffatt, S. Lawson, R. Patterson, E. Holding, A. Denison, S. Sowden, and J. Brown (2015) *A qualitative study of the impact of the UK 'bedroom tax'*, J Public Health, March 15, 2015.
- C. Haighton, S. Moffatt, D. Howel, E. McColl, E. Milne, M. Deverill, G. Rubin, T. Aspray and M. White (2012) *The Do-Well study: protocol for a randomised controlled trial, economic and qualitative process evaluations of domiciliary welfare rights advice for socio-economically disadvantaged older people recruited via primary health care*, BMC Public Health, 12:382.
- S. Sowden, M. White (2014) *High-rise health: a qualitative study of the effect of social housing improvements on the health and wellbeing of residents in high-rise flats*. The Lancet, meeting abstracts, 19 November 2014.