



## Position Paper on Housing and Health

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### Summary

- Adequate housing is a basic human right. Housing is a key socio-economic determinant of health. Improved housing conditions can save lives, prevent disease, increase quality of life, reduce poverty and help mitigate climate change.
- Homelessness and poor quality housing have been linked to asthma and other respiratory illnesses, the spread of infectious diseases including TB, Hepatitis A and C, increased healthcare utilisation, accidents, falls, poor nutrition, premature labour and delivery of low birth weight infants and poor mental health.
- Inadequate and over-crowded housing has contributed to the transmission of COVID-19 in Ireland, especially for Travellers, migrant workers and those living in direct provision centres and emergency accommodation, who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

### Recommendations

- Good housing policy includes the four pillars of healthy housing; **housing affordability, housing quality, residential stability and neighbourhood opportunity.**
- The goal of housing policy should be 'a triple win' for **health and wellbeing, equity and environmental sustainability.**
- Housing should be warm and well ventilated to promote health. Energy efficiency is also a priority in order to minimise the contribution to climate change. This must be balanced with the need for ventilation for good indoor air quality.
- All housing developments should prioritise active travel and public transport – this will also have a positive impact on air and noise pollution, as well as climate change.
- Access to nature, specifically green and blue spaces, should also be considered, because of the positive effects on health and biodiversity.

# Recommendations

## End homelessness and ensure housing affordability and stability

- People who are chronically homeless face substantially higher morbidity, in terms of both physical and mental health, and of increased mortality. Housing that is insecure, sometimes due to affordability issues or weak security of tenure, is stressful and also has a negative impact on physical and mental health.
- Poor housing conditions are one of the mechanisms through which social and environmental inequality translates into health inequality.

**Improve housing for the Traveller community and end direct provision, ensuring asylum seekers have own-door accommodation**

## Ensure all housing is of good quality

- The positive effects of **housing warmth** on respiratory health and wellbeing of children and adults is a consistent research finding. Improving thermal comfort through installing insulation and heating reduces GP visits and days off school and work. For countries with temperate or colder climates, **18 °C** has been proposed as a safe and well-balanced indoor temperature, with an upper limit of **23 °C**.
- **Ventilation** is also key to reducing health risks from radon exposure, aeroallergens, infectious diseases and heat waves.

## Ensure air and noise pollution are minimised.

Outdoor **air pollution** causes 4.2 million deaths every year, mostly through respiratory and cardiovascular disease. The major sources of air pollution are road traffic, industry, burning of fuel for domestic heating, power generation, air traffic and agriculture.

For average **noise exposure**, the WHO recommends reducing noise levels produced by **road traffic to below 53 dB L<sub>den</sub>**, as road traffic noise above this level is associated with adverse health effects, such as sleep disorders. There are also recommendations for railway, aircraft and leisure noise.

## Ensure neighbourhood opportunity and environmental sustainability

**Communities should be vibrant areas** which cater for the physical, social and cultural needs of their inhabitants.

**Green and Blue Areas** should be accessible in a nature-friendly and low-emission way so that individuals are able to enjoy the health benefits of spending time in nature, both within their neighbourhoods and the wider locality. Green and blue spaces are important for physical activity, relaxation and mental health. They can also play a role in community connectedness and cohesion.

**Active travel and public transport** should be promoted through design. The reliance on private cars for transport must be reduced in order to minimise air pollution and climate change.

### Key resources used in the preparation of this paper:

1. WHO Housing & Health Guidelines. Geneva: WHO; 2018.
2. WHO. Urban green spaces and health, a review of evidence. Geneva: WHO; 2016.
3. Ige J, Pilkington P, Orme J, Williams B, Prestwood E, Black D et al. The relationship between buildings and health: a systematic review. *Journal of Public Health*. 2018.; 41 (2): 121–132.
4. Lawlor C, McDermott R, Clarke A, Cooney F, Conlon M. Department of Public Health HSE-East CHO7 area Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow. Public submission for Kildare County Development Plan 2023–2029 from Public Health. Dublin: HSE East; 2021.