



Research summary

Community-led housing and health: a comprehensive literature review

There is a growing interest in community-led approaches to housing at both citizen and government level in recent years. Shortages in affordable housing for sale and rent are increasingly apparent and alternative approaches to housing delivery are receiving greater recognition. Housing, being a key determinant of good health, may have added value to offer residents and developers when it is community-led.

This systematic literature review looks to examine the existing literature on the relationship between community-led housing (CLH) and health and wellbeing. In particular it focuses on identifying what evidence is available and where future research may further strengthen this knowledge base.

Key findings

The findings from this review show how a range of different CLH models support improved health and wellbeing. Our review evidences how CLH can contribute toward:

- **Healthy ageing**- evidence suggests that CLH can support healthy ageing. Literature documented how cohousing communities in particular may reduce health costs associated with ageing. Stronger social ties and intergenerational support were evidenced to reduce the need for external care and enable people to age in their own homes. The reviewed literature suggested that in some cases, living in a CLH project was perceived to slow age-related health decline through actions such as supporting each other to exercise and eating healthy meals together. Additionally, some literature evidenced that living collectively supported residents to maintain higher perceived quality of life despite age related health deterioration. These studies demonstrate the potential economic benefits of CLH, for individuals, but also for public sector health spending.

- **Social inclusion**- This review found clear links between CLH and social inclusion, such as increased social capital and social cohesion. Residents of CLH schemes reported an increased sense of belonging and connection to their neighbours. Additionally, literature reported a willingness to share tasks and resources which not only led to people feeling more connected but provided more practical outcomes such as shared childcare, or reduction in time spent preparing meals.

- **Improved physical health**- A small but notable collection of literature referenced physical health benefits from CLH. Support to undertake physical activity and healthier eating behaviours were the key physical health benefits recorded in this review.

- **Tackling multiple disadvantages**- This review found evidence on the scope for CLH to provide housing for people who experience multiple disadvantages or barriers. This is a small but important theme within the literature on CLH and health and wellbeing. Studies included in this review demonstrated how CLH models may support people who have experienced homelessness or mental health difficulties, as well as refugee and asylum seekers, to find secure and supportive housing options.

- **Meeting additional support needs**- This review evidenced how CLH can create positive environments for people with additional support needs. Studies included within this review reported on a therapeutic community supporting people with learning disabilities and a residential mental health community.

The review also revealed that existing research in this field is heavily weighted towards qualitative, small scale studies with very limited numbers of quantitative or larger scale studies being undertaken. In addition, the benefits associated with CLH were not often framed through a health lens, despite offering the potential to make significant contributions to public health agendas. In light of this, the following suggestions to further research have been made:

- Broaden out the scope of research to be less heavily weighted towards cohousing communities
- Employ a more diverse range of methods and measures, including larger scale quantitative studies
- Explore more anecdotal claims around increased green space and high environmental standards and build on existing research in this area to create a rigorous evidence base
- Explore in greater depth the scope for CLH to provide short and medium term housing solutions

About the research

The research was undertaken by a small team based at the University of the West of England's Department of Geography and Environmental Management. A semi-systematic review approach was taken to address the research questions, this included identifying, screening and reporting on key findings of relevant studies. Both grey and academic literature were reviewed. In order to review only the most relevant literature the search was restricted to English language studies, from OECD countries between the period of 2009 to 2019. The majority (40%) of the studies were conducted in the United Kingdom, 23% in the United States and some in Canada, Belgium, Germany, France, Netherlands, Sweden, Australia.