

Housing

Older people's homes are fundamental to their health, well-being and quality of life. It is therefore important to keep sight of the centrality of 'home', as opposed to 'accommodation', when thinking about our ageing society.

It is widely assumed that most older people live in residential or supported accommodation but 90% of older people live in general housing (1), and 75% of older people are home owners (1).

Housing quality and suitability are major determinants of the need for social care. They also affect the likelihood of experiencing loneliness. 'Home' and 'independence' are inextricably linked in the minds of many older people. Having somewhere warm and comfortable to live that is well located can make all the difference to quality of life in retirement. Keeping on top of repairs and making necessary adaptations can make a huge difference to being able to live independently but sometimes managing these can be difficult.

These are the most frequently mentioned factors in determining the **suitability** of someone's home in later life:

- *Location* – proximity to family, friends, church, social opportunities, public transport, GP/health facility, library, shops, good neighbours.
- *Design* - warm, with affordable heating; safe; secure; adaptable/adapted; with space – for belongings, to socialise for family; privacy – “My own front door”.

The main reported housing **difficulties**:

- Cold – “Cost of heating is greatest worry”, “My home is damp & cold”
- Repairs – “My biggest worry is repairs & maintenance” and even the garden can become a burden.
- Adaptations – “I have mobility difficulties, steps to kitchen and bathroom mean I need help... ramps would make all the difference”

So - what makes a 'good home' in later life? An aspiration of actively ageing at home, remaining part of a community and involved with family and friends emerges strongly from older people's key messages about 'home'. Most older people are happy where they live. They either need no help to stay living independently, or may need just 'that little bit of help' to stay that way. Older people's economic and social circumstances vary widely and change over time.

It may be that the decision to move is seemingly taken out of people's hands either by medical professionals or family, particularly after a hospital stay. But it doesn't have to be this way and choosing where people call 'home' should be an informed decision made after taking everything into account and a rushed decision made in a crisis may not be the best choice.

Getting to know all the local options available may be better than moving close to family who already have established lives, when you could remain in touch with local contacts in the community or church.

For people with various long term health conditions, there may be some things that could make home a better place to live rather than facing the upheaval of moving.

References: (1) DCLG (Annual) Survey of English Housing

Some useful contacts

FirstStop

National advice line 0800 377 7070

<http://www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk/>

or email info@firststopadvice.org.uk

Care & Repair England

for links to 'Making your home a better place to live with'

<http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk/>

Almshouses

<http://almshouses.org/>

MHA Care

<http://www.mha.org.uk/>

Adaptations

<http://www.housingcare.org/downloads/kbase/2953.pdf>

Equity release

To seek an independent financial adviser

<http://www.fca.org.uk/>