

How to talk about supported housing

We all need a decent, affordable home that supports our wellbeing. It's the foundation for our lives. And for those of us who need some assistance in order to live well, supported housing is vital.

But supported housing is often absent from the conversation about how to improve housing in the UK. People tend to have a limited understanding of what supported housing is, the value it brings to people's lives and to our wider society.

We can frame our communications in ways that will help to build this understanding and make a stronger case for decent, affordable supported housing for all of us who need it.



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1) Build a bigger 'us' to bring more people into the conversation

Supported housing may not seem relevant to people who do not have direct experience of it, so we need to find common ground early on in our communications. By talking about what we all need, and then highlighting the needs that supported housing fulfils, we can connect with a wider audience and bring more people into the conversation. Building a bigger 'us' can also help to overcome a sense that this is just about 'other' people.

What to do

- ▶ Use the tested metaphor of home as 'the foundation' for our lives to talk about the shared need for a home that allows us to live well.
- ▶ Talk about the things we all need for a good life, before talking about specific needs and how these are met by supported housing. Sequencing in this way allows us to start with what we all have in common and primes more collective thinking.
- ▶ Use inclusive language like 'we', 'us', and 'our' to make this about all of us not just 'other' people.

For example

- "Home is the foundation for our lives, and we should all be able to live in a home that benefits our health and wellbeing. Many people living with mental health conditions don't require the level of care given in a hospital or care home, but do need some additional support at home. Supported housing offers support to meet people's needs, which could include practical help with things like managing medication, as well as counselling, and help with building confidence and independence."
- "We all need to feel connected to the people and places we love. But without the right home and support, a disability or health condition that makes it harder for us to get out and about can lead to isolation and loneliness. Supported housing isn't just about adapted homes and practical help; it can keep us connected to other people."



Tip

Highlighting the link between our homes and health is a framing strategy we recommend when talking about homes, so consider talking about our universal needs for health and wellbeing.

Recent research on framing social care also found that the need for human connection is a familiar and helpful idea to tap into. There are, however, many different shared needs we can talk about to establish common ground.

2) Spell out what supported housing is and what it enables people to do

To build people's understanding, we need to spell out what supported housing is and what it's for – what it enables people to do, and how it makes a difference to people's lives. We can also build understanding of the different forms supported housing can take. But rather than sharing a long list of different types of supported housing in every piece of communication, consider focusing on one or two examples. By working together as an organisation – and as a sector – we can paint a varied picture.

What to do

- ▶ Don't rely too much on the term 'supported housing'. Explain what it is and the difference it makes to people's lives.
- ▶ Spell out what we really mean by phrases like 'living independently' to show what supported housing is for, not just what it is.
- ▶ Keep people in the picture when explaining what supported housing is, and use people-first language. For example, 'people' is preferable to 'residents', and 'people leaving care' is preferable to 'care leavers'.
- ▶ Give examples – but you don't have to list all types of supported housing in one piece of communication.



For example

- "Supported housing is designed to meet people's needs in different situations and stages of life. For example, it can provide the scaffolding to support young people leaving care as they transition to living independently as an adult. Equally, it can offer the support we may need as we get older, like practical hands-on help with day-to-day living."
- "Supported housing allows people to live independently. It means people can live on their own terms, and access the support and resources that will enable them to participate fully in society."
- "How long someone stays in supported housing will depend on their needs and the type of housing. For example, some forms of supported housing are designed to meet short-term emergency needs, such as the safety offered by domestic abuse refuges and homelessness hostels. Others meet medium-term needs, such as housing to support people with physical disabilities adapting to new circumstances, or individuals with mental health conditions working towards recovery. And there are examples of long-term supported housing too, designed to offer familiarity and routine, such as for people with learning disabilities or autism."



3) Show how supported housing works, and why it's good for our whole society

When people understand how something like supported housing works, it's much easier for them to see the value of it. Supported housing is a vital component of our society – supporting and taking the pressure off everything from healthcare to criminal justice – but we need to explain the beneficial role it plays. We can harness explanation to deepen understanding of how different types of supported housing work, and why it's good for our whole society.

As much as possible, weave in an explanation of how supported housing benefits people's health and wellbeing – as we recommend when talking about homes more generally.

What to do

- ▶ Use step-by-step explanation to show how supported housing interacts with other areas like healthcare, homelessness, women's safety, and criminal justice.
- ▶ Focus on explaining one type of supported housing at a time, and give yourself the time and space to do this well.
- ▶ Make the connection between supported housing and its positive impact on people's health, as much as possible.





For example

- “Supported housing helps to reduce homelessness, **because** it provides more than a place to live. People get help to address the underlying pressures that pushed them into homelessness in the first place. **And since** these pressures differ from person to person, **this means** each person’s needs will be different too. **That’s why** the tailored assistance that supported housing offers is an essential part of reducing homelessness.”
- “When supported housing is working well, it offers dignity, choice and control to people with a learning disability – and helps them to thrive. But a shortage of suitable housing is holding people back. **It means** that many people who could live well with the right support in their community are stuck living in hospitals, **because** they have no other option. **So**, they are missing out on the opportunity to live more independently. Many people would benefit from living in a self-contained flat, with supportive visits from a social worker, or living in a shared home with other people who have similar needs, for example. Choices like these offer a sense of purpose and community, and allow people more opportunities to take part in society. **This is why** we need greater funding from government to fix this shortage.”



4) Balance urgency with efficacy so that change feels necessary and possible

Research on framing a wide range of issues shows that crisis framing frequently fails to deliver the hoped for effects. Crisis framing typically leads to one of two things: people either dismiss the claim outright, or conclude that the problem is too big or complex to solve. Rather than positioning supported housing as being in a state of crisis, we need to balance urgency with efficacy. Instilling communications with a sense of efficacy can help to boost support for solutions, and avoid triggering a sense of fatalism. For people to get behind supported housing, they need to believe that change is possible, as well as seeing the need for action.

What to do

- ▶ Move away from crisis messaging. Instead, highlight problems and offer solutions.
- ▶ Try a 2:1 ratio. For every dose of urgency (we need to act now) we should add two doses of efficacy (we can fix this). This applies to both content – like specific solutions – and tone.
- ▶ Think about sequencing. For example, you could start with efficacy (we can act) before urgency (we need to act), or start with what we have to gain, before what we stand to lose.

Instead of...

"Supported housing is in crisis. Schemes are closing their doors across the country while demand gets higher and higher. If decisive action isn't taken soon, this system of support risks collapsing entirely."

Try...

"Bold action from our government could shore up supported housing in the UK – and improve the health and lives of thousands of people. Demand is rising, but schemes are being forced to close their doors due to a lack of funding. We need our government to act now and reverse this trend."



5) Don't make saving money your main argument

FrameWorks' research on a range of issues has shown that when we rely on talking about economic benefits – such as saving money – in order to show why an issue matters, this often does not boost support. It can even backfire and trigger zero-sum thinking (the idea that any gain must come at the expense of something else). Making the economic case for supported housing will be necessary for some audiences, like policymakers, but we need to be mindful about when we choose to do this, and not rely on saving money as our main argument.

What to do

- ▶ If you need to use an economic argument, use it to support your story, rather than making it the whole story.
- ▶ Talk about the problems supported housing solves beyond saving money. Lead with explanation like this before talking about cost savings.
- ▶ Sequencing is key. If you're making an economic argument, do this after first establishing 'why' supported housing matters: the positive impact it has on people's lives and wider society.

Instead of...

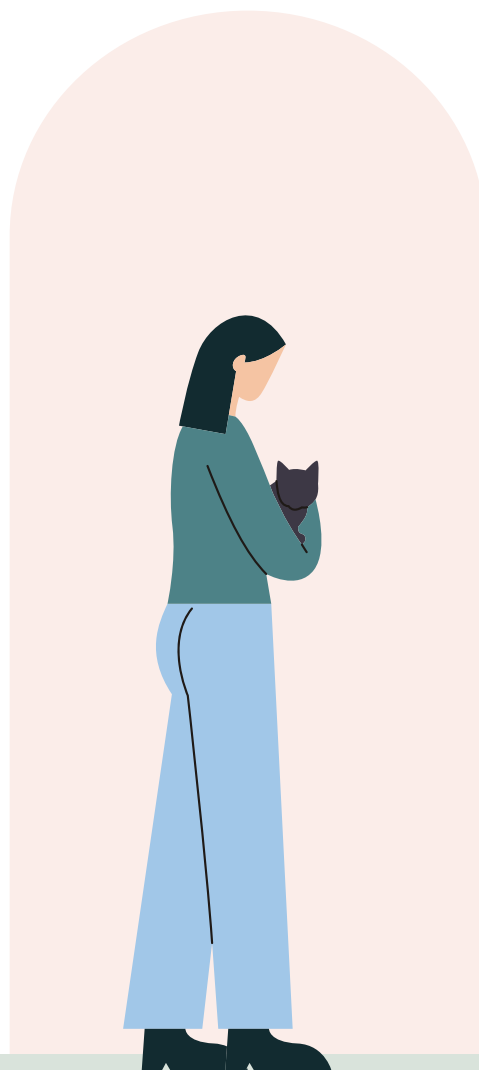
"Supported housing saves taxpayer money every year. For example, it eases the burden on our criminal justice system by reducing reoffending rates. This reduces the financial strain on law enforcement, courts, and prisons."

Try...

"Supported housing enables people to live better lives – and it's good for our whole society. For example, when people leaving prison receive the right support in a stable home, they are less likely to be drawn back to crime by pressures like homelessness."

If supporting this with an economic argument, you could add:

"The right support can reduce reoffending and the costs of repeat law enforcement, courts, and prison sentences."





Further framing guides on how to talk about homes can be found at www.jrf.org.uk/housing

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