

Partnership Approaches

# Health and Hoarding



It is estimated that **5%** of the population suffer from hoarding.



The average cost of an eviction is over **£10,000**.



**25%-35%** of deaths caused by a house fire were in hoarded properties.

# Introduction

**Hoarding disorder is a complex mental health condition characterised by the excessive accumulation of possessions, leading to clutter and difficulty discarding items.**

Despite hoarding disorder being a recognised mental health issue, the impact of hoarding on a persons mental and physical health is often underestimated. This paper aims to explore the relationship between health and hoarding.

We will examine the physical, mental, and social implications of hoarding, as well as potential interventions and strategies for promoting health in individuals affected by hoarding disorder.

We will also look at the role social landlords have when tackling hoarding issues. Often our housing colleagues report that they find it difficult accessing the right support for their tenants and feel that hoarding is often viewed as a housing issue, as opposed to looking at the bigger picture in relation to a person's health. We know that hoarding has significant impacts on both social landlords and tenants, affecting not only the physical condition of the property but also the wellbeing of the individual involved. Social landlords do provide a lot of practical and emotional support to their tenants but ultimately they have a duty to ensure their properties remain in a safe and habitable condition. Severely hoarded homes will often be a breach of tenancy and therefore social landlords may have no choice but to result in enforcement action.

# Physical Health & Care

Someone living in a hoarded home is twice as likely to suffer from a physical health condition such as respiratory disease, heart disease, stroke, trips and falls etc. If a person's home is deemed unsafe, they may also face implications on them receiving the right care and support at home, for example, a care package is unlikely to be accepted for someone living in a hoarded home due to risks this poses on the carer and the individual.



## Respiratory Issues

Clutter in hoarded environments often harbours dust, allergens and mould, contributing to respiratory issues such as asthma and other breathing difficulties.



## Infections

The accumulation of possessions is likely to impact on the ability to keep a home clean and hygienic. This can create unsanitary conditions increasing risk of infections and other health related issues.



## Slips, Trips and Falls

Overly cluttered homes with obstructed pathways increase the risk of slips, trips and falls especially amongst elderly individuals, which could result in admission and treatment in hospital. Patients can therefore face further discharge delays from hospital if their home environment is deemed unsafe for them to return.

# Housing

**Social landlords will often be the first organisation to identify someone has a hoarding issue.** This can be challenging when having to navigate legal and ethical considerations, balancing the rights of tenants with the need to maintain safe and habitable homes. Working in collaboration with other services to address the causes of hoarding requires a comprehensive, empathetic, and collaborative approach. Without the right support in place, our social landlords can face some of the toughest challenges when it comes to tackling hoarding within their properties including:



## Structural Damage

Hoarding can lead to structural issues within a property, such as compromised integrity of walls or floors due to the excessive weight of stored items.



## Hygiene and Sanitation

Hoarded properties often present sanitation challenges, which may result in increased maintenance costs and the need for specialised cleaning services.



## Health and Safety Regulations

Landlords have a legal responsibility to maintain a safe and habitable environment. Hoarding that poses health and safety risks may lead to breaches in an individual's tenancy agreement and they could therefore face potential legal consequences.



## Tenancy Enforcement

Evictions or legal actions may be necessary in extreme cases, incurring additional costs.



## Neighbour Disputes

Hoarding can negatively impact relations with neighbours, leading to complaints.

# Mental Health

**Hoarding can often present as a symptom to many other mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, OCD and ADHD.**

Early intervention is crucial to preventing the worsening of symptoms and improving the prognosis for individuals with hoarding disorder. Although hoarding issues are likely to present themselves during a person's adolescence, it is often not until later in life (over 50) that the individual will seek help.

## **Anxiety**

Individuals who hoard often experience chronic worry and anxiety related to the thought of discarding possessions, even if those items have little or no practical value.

## **Stigma and Social Isolation**

The stigma associated with hoarding can lead to social withdrawal and isolation. Individuals may avoid social interactions to prevent others from discovering the extent of their hoarding behaviours.

## **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

Hoarding disorder shares some features with OCD. Compulsive acquisition of items and the difficulty discarding them are central features of both conditions.

## **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

Some individuals with hoarding disorder may also have attentional difficulties and impulsivity, which can contribute to challenges in organisation and decision-making.

# Why Health and Housing

Many of the important building blocks of health are outside of the control of Public Health, so working in partnership is an important enabler.

Housing is one of those building blocks and by working with housing providers, we can make better progress to reduce health inequalities.

Where we live and how we live has a significant impact on our health and wellbeing.

Housing associations and local authority landlords can play a key role in health when aligned with strong partnership working to help tackle health inequalities.

## Shared goals



By working in partnership to tackle hoarding, we will see improved outcomes when it comes to:

### Health

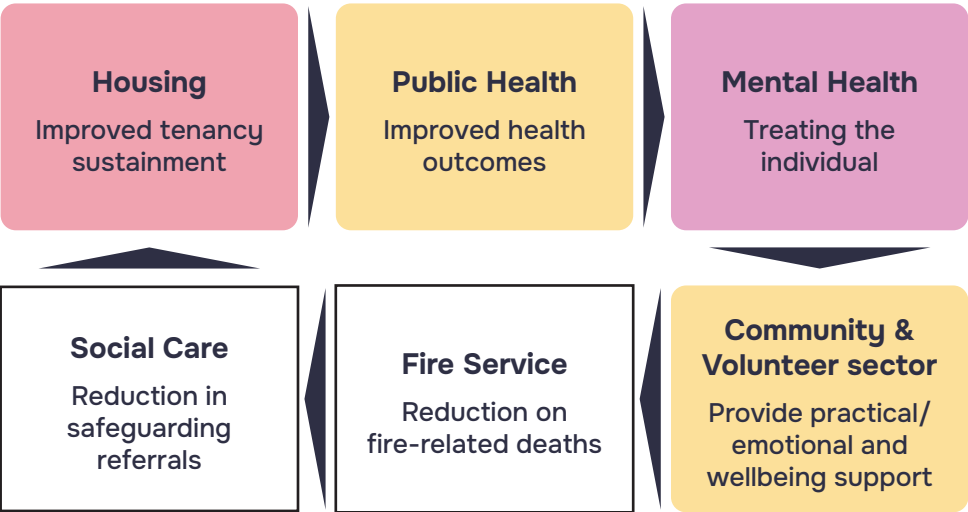
- Hospital admissions
- Life expectancy
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Better reach of public health services

### Housing

- Tenant wellbeing
- Tenancy sustainment
- Reduction in eviction
- Health and safety
- Finances
- Long term sustainable change

# Multi-Agency Approach

Hoarding is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive and coordinated response. Working collaboratively across multiple organisations will provide better outcomes for the individual and organisation themselves.



By working across multiple organisations we can bring diverse perspectives, expertise and resources. By considering factors such as mental health, housing and social and emotional wellbeing, will ensure we look at the causes of hoarding as opposed to the consequences. Multi-agency collaboration will also enhance the likelihood of early identification of hoarding behaviours. Early intervention can prevent the escalation of the issue, making it easier to address and potentially improve outcomes.

Some examples as to how we could work in collocation with other organisations could include:



A Hoarding Panel



A shared Health & Hoarding commitment



Multi-agency Hoarding project group

# Engagement

Individuals who hoard may be resistant to accessing support for various reasons, and understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies.

Some of the reasons may include;

## Loss of autonomy:

Individuals may fear that others will force them to get rid of items they are not ready to part with.

## Insight:

Some individuals may be in denial about their hoarding. They may not recognise the impact on their wellbeing or their living conditions.

## Belief that change is impossible:

Some individuals may feel they have an inability to change or improve their situation.

## Stigma:

Hoarding is often stigmatised, and individuals may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their condition, leading to fear of judgement from others.

## Lack of trust in professionals:

A history of negative experiences with authorities may lead to a lack of trust.

## Tips for supporting

- Use open non-judgemental language
- Be realistic of your expectations
- Be sympathetic and understanding
- Maintain regular communication
- Seek additional support through family/friends and other services



# Lived Experience

Lived experience groups play a crucial role in engaging individuals by providing a supportive and understanding environment, where people with similar experiences can share insights, challenges, and coping strategies. The benefits of lived experience groups for engagement are numerous, and they contribute to a sense of community, empowerment, and mutual support.

Here are ways in which lived experience groups can help when engaging individuals who hoard;

## Relatability

Lived experience groups create a space where individuals can connect with others who have faced similar challenges.



## Validation

Feeling understood and acknowledged can empower participants to take positive steps towards change.



## Inspiration

Individuals can be inspired by the successes and coping strategies shared by their peers in the group.



## Constructive Feedback

Group members can provide constructive feedback and hold each other accountable for personal goals and commitments.



## Trust

Participants often find it easier to trust and engage with others who have lived through similar experiences.



## Shared Language

Working with lived experience groups can also help with our own communication by ensuring we use the correct language.



# Preventing Hoarding

**Social landlords play a crucial role in preventing and addressing hoarding behaviours within their properties.** By implementing proactive strategies and collaborating with multiple agencies, social landlords can create a supportive environment that promotes tenant wellbeing and tenancy sustainment.

## Training:

Deliver regular training for housing colleagues and tenants to raise awareness about hoarding behaviours, their potential impact on living conditions, and available support services.



## Property Inspections:

Identifying early cases of hoarding during property inspections can help identify issues before they escalate. Ensure there is a clear referral pathway for contractors and maintenance teams so they know how they can alert someone to these issues.



## Sensitivity and Compassion:

Approach hoarding situations with sensitivity and compassion. Stigmatising attitudes can hinder tenants from seeking help.



## Hoarding Policies:

Clearly communicating policies related to hoarding can set expectations and provide a basis for intervention when necessary.



## Support Groups:

Consider organising a tenant support group where individuals facing similar challenges can share experiences and learn from one another. Alternatively you may find these groups exist already within your community, which you can help promote to tenants.



# Resources

Please find links to a variety of resources that can provide information and training on hoarding.



[We need to change the way we think about hoarding | hqnetwork.co.uk](http://hqnetwork.co.uk)



[Useful contacts for hoarding | mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)



[Specialist advice for people affected by hoarding behaviours, chronic disorganisation and extreme clutter | hoardingdisordersuk.org](http://hoardingdisordersuk.org)



[A range of co-created, online educational courses and resources | recoverycollegeonline.co.uk](http://recoverycollegeonline.co.uk)



## Healthy Places and Communities



**BEDFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



**Central  
Bedfordshire  
Council**



**Milton Keynes**  
City Council

