



National strategy for housing in an ageing society

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Lead Group: Practice
Country Relevance: England

Purpose

To provide an overview of this strategy and the implications for occupational therapists in their daily practice.

This strategy also includes new reforms for the Disabled Facilities Grant.

Background

This strategy was launched on February 25th with endorsement from the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and also Baroness Andrews, Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The strategy is about ensuring that the government's policies for housing and planning positively reflect the aspirations and changing lifestyles that we all have. The strategy promotes choice relevant to lifestyle and circumstances, and above all, to allow older people to remain safely in their own homes, near friends and families for as long as they wish to. The strategy acknowledges that good housing is essential for both good health and well being.

The strategy covers many areas with an emphasis on what older people themselves have confirmed are their priorities for change and include: better information, more help with repairs and adaptations, the modernisation and reform of DFG, building lifetime homes and neighbours that will provide for lifetime changes and needs.

The strategy also includes information on:

- Investment in new housing
- National and local housing advice and information centres
- Rapid repairs and adaptations service
- Future HIA project
- DFG reforms
- Public planning and lifetime home standards
- Eco towns
- Improved joined up assessments
- Service provision and commissioning
- Preventative housing services
- New positive vision for specialised housing
- More homes and more choice
- An innovation panel



Housing

The vision that supports this strategy is backed up by further changes to the way services are monitored by:

- a) A new Public Service Agreement on backing poverty, promoting independence and wellbeing in later life. This contains 5 indicators that include: satisfaction with home and neighbourhood amongst those aged 65+ to the extent to which people over 65 receive the support they need to live independently at home.
- b) New National Performance Indicators for local government.

There is a commitment within the strategy to work with partners and key stakeholders and provide a new approach to the national housing infrastructure advice service, to ensure that older people can make active and informed decisions about their housing and finance options. In addition there will be a strengthening of local housing advice, information and 'moving home' services for older people.

Rapid Repairs and Adaptation Services and Home Improvement Agencies

The strategy outlines proposals to develop new rapid repairs and adaptations services, expanding coverage of handy person schemes across the country from 2009.

A bidding process for funding for targeted expansion of handy person services will be developed and implemented during 2008 with funding becoming available for 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

An evaluation of handy person schemes will be undertaken, to be completed by 2011.

Home improvement agencies are highlighted as having an increasing role to play in delivering improved housing related services for growing numbers of older people.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

There will be an increase in the national budget for DFGs, increasing to £146 million in 2008/9 to £156 million in 2009/10 and £166 million in 2010/11.

The main changes to the DFG system are:

- The DFG will remain a mandatory grant
- The DFG grant limit goes up to £30,000 from April 2008
- There will be changes to the means test including fast tracking/passporting for council tax benefit, housing benefit and tax credit recipients
- Future allocation of DFG funds from central government will be via Regional Assemblies (currently directly allocated to local authorities)
- There will be an abolition of the 60/40 matched funding split from April 2008
- The scope of use of DFG monies will be widened, enabling local authorities to use DFG funding for adaptations associated purposes e.g. recycling stair lift schemes, recyclable modular units and fast track minor adaptation services
- From 2010/11 DFG funds will become part of the Single Capital Pot
- Reclaiming DFG payments; where a DFG exceeds £5,000 local authorities will be allowed to put a charge on a property (repayable on sale if within 10 years). This will be a discretionary power available to Local Authorities from April 2008
- Access to gardens is now a specific criterion for entitlement for the grants, where this is reasonable and practicable.



The College is concerned about a number of these changes and is liaising with other strategic partners to influence the implementation. A Position Statement on the key areas of concern will be produced shortly.

Decent Homes and Lifetime Homes

The strategy states that of the monies allowed for the Regional Housing Pot, funding will be available for improvements to the existing stock in both private and social rented schemes.

The CLG have commissioned a review of the private rented sector as it is recognised that this tenure of housing is proportionately worse than all other sectors. Older people living in this sector face some of the poorest housing conditions.

All publicly funded homes will have to be built to Lifetime Home Standards by 2011. These standards will be made a mandatory part of the code for Sustainable Houses (details of the standards are contained within the strategy).

Inclusive design will be encouraged and incentivised via a number of routes including a new national awards scheme.

Summary

A strategy is needed for housing as we have an ageing society. Households where the main householder is over 65 will make up about half of projected growth in households to 2026. By that time there will be 2.4 million older households in England than there are today.

This strategy has sought to raise the profile of ageing within the housing sector.

Changing the bigger picture vision for housing provision is one of the major challenges being addressed by the strategy.

Implications for occupational therapists

Occupational therapists working within social care or housing will need to take note in particular of the changes to the DFG grant and potential for extended scope that may help deliver services more effectively locally.

Occupational therapists and managers will need to engage with local handy person schemes and become involved in rapid response adaptation schemes to ensure a seamless and efficient approach is taken.

The College is continuing to engage in discussions to influence the development of initiatives contained within the strategy.



References

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