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Poor housing set to contribute to almost 1 million more older people suffering falls-related injuries

New report authored by former Treasury economist calls for 30,000 additional homes for later living every year to boost mental and physical health of older people

The NHS could be overwhelmed by nearly a million extra older people suffering from falls related injuries, as new research reveals a link between good quality housing and physical and mental health outcomes for older people.

The findings are part of a major research project for Homes for Later Living, a new consortium of housing providers who specialise in homes designed for older people.

The report, authored by former Treasury economist Chris Walker, says that as Brits are living longer, the number of people aged 80 or over who will suffer from falls is expected to rise from 1.6 million today to around 2.5 million in 2032, a rise of 900,000. In line with this increase, by 2032 the total cost to the NHS of falls amongst the elderly will rise to £2 billion a year.

The report says more needs to be done to focus on the link between poor health and the quality of housing available to people in later life. It highlights a severe shortage of housing being built specifically for the growing numbers of retirees. The result is that many older people are often living alone in mainstream housing that is unsafe, unsuitable and unhealthy, and this is where they are most likely to suffer from falls, social isolation and dementia.

Key findings include:

- Each person living in housing specifically designed for later life enjoys a reduced risk of health challenges, contributing to fiscal savings to the NHS and social care services of c.£3,500 per year.
- Those in specialist housing are half as likely to have falls with resulting fractures, injuries and costly inpatient bed stays.
- Building 30,000 more retirement housing dwellings every year for the next 10 years, which is the estimated demand, would generate fiscal savings across the NHS and social services of £2.1 billion annually.
- Based on a selection of established national well-being criteria such as happiness and life satisfaction, an average person aged 80 feels as good as someone 10 years younger after moving from mainstream housing to housing specially designed for later living

According to latest government forecasts, the number of people aged over 80 is set to rise from around 3.2 million today to five million in 2032. Meanwhile, the number of people aged 100 or over has increased by 85% over the last 15 years, with 14,430 centenarians living in the UK.

John Slaughter, Homes for Later Living, said:

"There is currently a severe shortage of suitable housing for the growing numbers of people in retirement. The consequences are severe, both to the NHS, which will be under increased financial pressure from falls related injuries, and to individuals who are often living alone in mainstream housing that is unsafe, unsuitable and unhealthy. This is where they are most likely to suffer from physical and mental health problems."

Rachael Maskell MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Ageing and Older People said:

"As people in the UK get older, there is currently a severe shortage of housing being built specifically for those in later life. The result is that many older people are often living alone in substandard accommodation, where they are more likely to suffer from falls, loneliness and dementia."

"This is why we urgently need more specialist retirement housing. Building more homes across all tenures for later living every year would give people more choice and flexibility on how they live their lives."

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Case studies are available on request. For more information contact David Singleton at david@wpi-strategy.com or 0779 303 1784

NOTES TO EDITORS

Building 300,000 homes for later living could generate fiscal savings to central government and local authorities of at least £1.4bn a year. This comes on top of the fiscal savings already being delivered by the existing homes for later living market, thought to be at least £750 million a year. In total, £2.1bn a year in fiscal savings could be delivered if we had an additional 300,000 such properties built over the coming decade.

Specialist housing schemes for later living offer varying levels of support and social interaction for those who want to stay safe and keep their independence in later life. Case studies of current home for later living residents are available. They include Marjorie Carter, a grandmother from Bradford and former Olympian who is still performing gravity-defying gymnastics routines at the age of 84.

Homes for Later Living has been set up to promote greater choice, availability and quality of housing specifically for older people. It is comprised of Churchill Retirement Living, McCarthy & Stone and PegasusLife Group. Homes for Later Living exists to promote all types of housing which are specifically designed, built or adapted for people over the age of 60 who want to maintain the independence and privacy that comes with having a home of their own but may want access to varying degrees of support and care, plus an in-built social community.