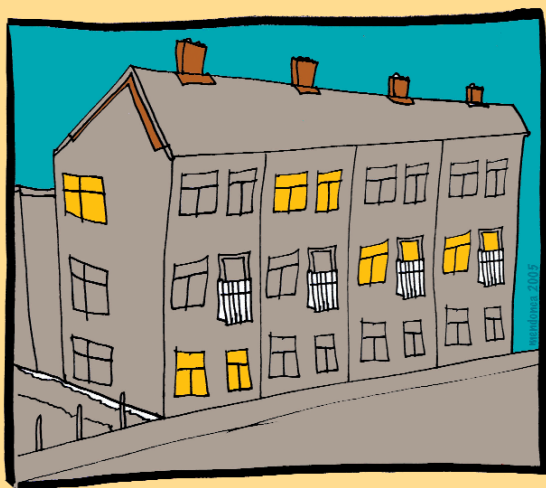


Age Equality in Housing

A guide to tackling age discrimination
for housing providers, commissioners,
planners and builders.



*30% of all UK households are headed
by someone aged 60+*



Housing and Older People
Development Group

What is age discrimination, and how does it happen in housing?

Age discrimination, in its simplest form, refers to situations where chronological age is used to determine whether or not people have access to employment or to goods and services. Whatever form it takes, it implies a devalued status for people due to their age, particularly older people.

This leaflet explains what age discrimination is, and how common it is within the context of housing. It outlines imminent changes in the law and social policy and the implications of those changes for housing planners and providers. Finally, it provides guidance for housing professionals who want to tackle age discrimination in their industry.

Consider these examples – what’s the common element?

‘Professionals involved in the major regeneration of an area called a meeting with local people. Virtually all of the presentation was about family housing. The planners were asked whether they had considered the fact that a high proportion of current residents were older people. They clearly had not done so, since their immediate response was that they would ‘of course look at building a sheltered housing scheme’.

'I don't have a spare bedroom now, so it's really awkward if my daughter and grandson come to stay. He's a teenager now, and some situations are just embarrassing, for him and me.'

'I'd like to spend more time outdoors, in the park, but since they renovated the area, there aren't as many benches, and those that there are have cobbles around them. I don't want to use them, because I might trip and fall, but I can't walk all the way there in one go – I end up too exhausted to enjoy feeding the ducks.'

'Along with my 70th birthday cards, I got a letter from the Housing Association reminding me of the rule that I should stand down from being a board member. Just like that, from one day to the next, I'm no longer of any use. I think I understand what the older residents want – how will the board hear their voices now?'

'I know I've got to move out of my place – it's too big, now that it's just me – but I want to still feel like I'm independent, and all they've offered me is sheltered housing. I'm not ready for that, I mean, I don't feel old...'

In all of these examples, the options offered to older people are not what they want. Those involved in planning or providing housing are making false assumptions about older people, their needs, and the way they choose to live their lives. The result? Older people are devalued, ignored, dismissed or badly served. A casual remark or a policy set in stone – the effect is the same.

What you need to know – your future customers, the older population:

- 73 per cent of people of state pension age are owner-occupiers, including 61 per cent of those aged 80 and over
- Half of owner-occupiers aged 50 and over own their homes outright
- 90 per cent of older people live in mainstream housing – only 5 per cent live in sheltered housing. 5 per cent live in care homes or other accommodation
- By 2007, the number of people over the age of 65 in the UK will exceed the number of children under 16
- 30 per cent of all UK households are currently headed by someone aged 60 or over – and this proportion is set to increase
- Older people contribute £200 billion a year to the UK economy
- 17 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women aged 65 to 69 are in paid employment
- The largest projected growth for all households is among those headed by people aged 55 and over
- Of all customers of housing and related services, older people are the most experienced

All of these statistics demonstrate that older people are a crucial part of the make-up of our society, yet research for McCarthy and Stone by The Planning Bureau Ltd has shown that very few local authorities (about 6 per cent) have a housing strategy for older people at present. Government figures show that 19 per cent of those aged 65-74 requiring specially adapted accommodation are in unsuitable housing. Too many older people are offered housing that is not suitable, that doesn't take account of their wishes and their individuality, that is far from local amenities, or that requires that they change their lifestyles in order to 'fit in', for example not being allowed to keep pets.

The fact is that older people simply do not fit outdated images and stereotypes. We are all different and we all age differently. Older people have differing needs, wishes, and priorities – just like any other group in society. It is simply not good enough to assume that ‘people need less space as they get older’. Older individuals must be part of the decision-making process about whether they need more or less space, where purpose built housing will be located, and what form that housing will take. Their needs and preferences will vary, and housing professionals must adapt their practices to include them.

What you need to know – thinking about ageing

Housing professionals must start to see older people as active citizens with equal rights, who may also have distinctive needs.

The Government has addressed issues of age discrimination in the National Service Framework for Older People (DH, 2001) and in the report Opportunity Age (DWP, 2005), which says: ***‘We want to achieve a society where increasingly diverse older people are active consumers of public services, exercising control and choice, not passive recipients of them. This requires a culture change, both by individuals and providers.’***

An excellent way to start changing attitudes from the bottom up (and the top down!) is to apply a model, a ‘way of seeing’, that challenges the assumptions that professionals sometimes make.

The HOPE (Housing for Older People in Europe) Network and the Housing Corporation, with the School for Policy Studies at Bristol University, produced a new, rights-based model of ageing for housing providers to use. It takes as its starting point a different way of thinking about ageing and age and views older people as active citizens with equal rights.

The model says that older people have the right to:

- Choice and control (self determination)
- Recognition of the importance of home
- Provision for diversity (everybody is different)
- A social life
- Acceptance of the ageing process
- An age-friendly environment
- A good quality of life

Nothing less, in other words, than what we would each expect for ourselves under the same circumstances. If these principles are used as a checklist, to be applied to all aspects of your business, from buying land to handing over the keys, then the outcomes that older people experience will start to improve.

Why you need to take action

You need to take action because there are benefits to be gained, not just for your organisation and older people, but for everyone. Older people are a tremendous resource. They are an essential part of the glue that holds the social fabric together. Partnerships formed with older people and their representative groups that take their rights and wishes into account will have positive benefits for everyone and result in integrated communities, improved environments and social cohesion. This is not about targeting one group in society in order to see their wishes fulfilled at others' expense – it's about building communities that reflect, and are fit for, all of their citizens.

The pressure's on: Be ahead of the game

Organisations in all sectors, private, public and voluntary, have had to adapt their thinking and service delivery to incorporate major changes in equality law over the last few years, from the Equal Pay Act to the Disability Discrimination Act and beyond. There are now few businesses or service

providers that believe that they can ignore these seismic shifts in the way employees, clients and the public are treated and regarded. Legislation is in the pipeline that will bring age explicitly into this arena. The Government has committed itself to tackling age discrimination alongside discrimination on other grounds in the provision of goods and services, and many organisations are not waiting for the vote in the House of Commons to develop 'across the board' equality schemes. Legal requirements and business interests are converging and will soon coincide.

Positive benefits – for your clients and your organisation

There are many reasons why housing developers, providers, funders and managers should address age discrimination:

- Firstly and most obviously – It doesn't make good business sense to discriminate against a large number of your customers!
- Older people already have rights, both as citizens and under the Human Rights Act, which should not be ignored
- Older people are a growing force within society. Many have the knowledge, finance and skills to identify, articulate and demand their housing choices. Many have considerable spending power and are confident in making decisions on their own behalf
- Older people do much to maintain social cohesion and their presence in a balanced community including all age groups reinforces both social inclusion and sustainable development
- The Government has declared a commitment to 'taking action to build a society where every individual is able to achieve their potential, free from prejudice and discrimination' and is setting up a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights to tackle discrimination on all grounds – gender, race, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability and age. The new Commission will spread awareness and enforce legislation amongst individuals, in businesses and the public sector; a Single Equality Act to create common anti-discrimination legislation will follow very shortly

- The Government says that it will 'ensure that an increasing proportion of older people live in decent accommodation'
- New legislation outlawing age discrimination in employment and training will come into force in October 2006
- Depriving older people of housing choices can discourage them from moving on from unsuitable properties that will make them more dependent in the long-term
- Taking older people's wishes and views into account can help your organisation to meet performance targets – for example, the Audit Commission has developed Key Lines of Enquiry to inform its Comprehensive Performance Assessments that will take account of
 - Local Authorities' approaches to older people and how they are addressing the issues that older people think are important
 - What Local Authorities and their partners have done to undertake meaningful dialogue with older people regarding their needs and preferences
 - How far they have realised the aim of delivering comprehensive and co-ordinated services to older people, beyond the sphere of health and social care

What you can do

Organisations should look at good practice in this field. There is experience to draw on and there are many resources available to help you.

Take a comprehensive approach – think about design, policy and procedures from the bottom up and the top down. For some organisations, this approach may mean radical change. This will need to be supported from the top and permeated throughout the organisation. Introduce an 'equality action plan', designed to apply equality tests at each stage of the planning process. For this to be effective, you will need to gather evidence throughout the process and proactively measure your progress against older people's expectations.

Listen to, and work with, older people – Engage with a wide and diverse spectrum of older people: people's needs and preferences differ. A phrase that is familiar within older people's groups and organisations is: 'nothing about us without us'. Consult your older tenants and other groups of older people. Organisations like Age Concern England, Help the Aged and IndependentAge should be able to help put you in touch with organisations and older people's groups in the relevant area. You should also introduce age awareness training for staff and members.

Understand the issues – There are many resources available that explore issues of housing and age. The 'Housing and older people: changing the viewpoint, changing the results' (HOPE Network/Housing Corporation, 2002, available from London and Quadrant Housing Trust <http://www.lqgroup.org.uk>) and 'Opportunity Age' (DWP, 2005) reports are good starting points. There's a list of further resources below.

Don't make assumptions – Review services by asking older people what is good about them, and what is not so good. The Housing Corporation reviewed its policy on ageing by bringing together housing professionals and older people for discussions on an equal basis. The experience, commitment, direct involvement and skills of older people enabled the Corporation to change fundamentally the direction of its policies and procedures. Do something similar within your organisation, and consult other service providers and stakeholders with whom you work in partnership.

Act positively – Plan, design and build housing and environments to take account of people's aspirations, preferences and the way in which they want to live. Some people may want separate provision and segregated environments, but others may well not. Remember that a high proportion of older people are already owner-occupiers, but may be on low or fixed incomes. Future housing will have to be flexible and age appropriate, with different types of housing coexisting. Ensure that your procedures, from initial bids to finished development, pass muster with the people who will be affected by them.

Review – Look at your existing policies and procedures to make certain that they do not contain any direct or indirect discrimination on grounds of age. Where necessary, develop new ones. Age Concern's 'Age Proofing Toolkit' (see below for details) contains a set of useful tools. The HOPE Network/Housing Corporation report mentioned above contains useful questionnaires on ageism for older people and housing professionals.

Use outside expertise – Work with older researchers on projects involving ageing issues. For instance, the University of Lancaster has a panel of fully trained older researchers.

A move into the mainstream

Taking a fresh approach to age needn't be a difficult transition. This is, in fact, a move into the mainstream. You will be applying the changes in the law regarding disabled people already. You should regard age in a similar way to how you regard disability, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Older people must be involved in the decisions that will shape their lives, and you and your organisation can be at the forefront of driving this change.

Get involved! We all grow old – this affects everyone's future, and the future of our communities.

What help and advice is available:

Housing and Older People Development Group (HOPDEV) – information, advice and contacts:

<http://hopdev.housingcare.org>

HOPDEV's AT HOME Audit Tool for Housing and Related Services for Older Minority Ethnic People (available on the above website)

Age Concern's 'Age Proofing Toolkit':

http://www.ace.org.uk/AgeConcern/Documents/regions_age_proofing_toolkit.pdf

DH: National Service Framework for Older People, 2001:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/07/12/83/04071283.pdf>

DWP: Opportunity Age, 2005:

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/

Social Exclusion Unit: A Sure Start to Later Life: ending inequalities for older people
<http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=797>

ODPM: Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing: a strategic framework, 2001:
<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1153618> and

Preparing Older People's Strategies, 2003:
<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162273>

Housing Corporation: Housing for Older People, 2002:
<http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/olderpolicy.pdf>

National Housing Federation: campaigning for decent housing for all:
<http://www.housing.org.uk/>

Housing Corporation Regulatory Code and Guidance:
<http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/conWebDoc.3832>

The Government's agepositive site:
<http://www.agepositive.gov.uk/>

Constructing Excellence:
<http://www.constructingexcellence.org/resourcecentre/themes/themeinfo.jsp?id=4008>

Help the Aged: Age Discrimination in Public Policy: a review of evidence, 2002:
http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/_policy/AgeEquality/_default.htm

Better Government for Older People:
<http://www.bgop.org.uk>

Care Services Improvement Partnership: Housing Learning & improvement network:
<http://www.changeagentteam.org.uk/index.cfm?pid=10>

Disability Rights Commission
http://www.drc-gb.org/uploaded_files/documents/4008_471_ded_leaflet.pdf

Equal Opportunities Commission
<http://www.eoc.org.uk/>

Commission for Racial Equality
<http://www.cre.org.uk>

Institute for Public Policy Research: A Mature Policy on Choice, 2005:
http://www.ippr.org.uk/ecomms/files/A_mature_policy.pdf

University of Lancaster, Dept of Applied Social Sciences
<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/apsocsci/decisions/home.htm>

Older people's organisations:

Age Concern England: www.ace.org.uk

Help the Aged: www.helptheaged.org.uk

IndependentAge: www.independentage.org.uk

- How to recognise age discrimination
- What you need to know
- Why you need to take action
- What you can do
- What help and advice is available

About HOPDEV

The Housing and Older People Development Group (HOPDEV) was established in 2001 by the then Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (now the Department for Communities and Local Government) and the Department of Health (DH) to help Government deliver on the strategic framework *Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing*.

The Housing and Older People Development Group (HOPDEV) is the body charged with advising government on matters related to housing and older people. HOPDEV has 4 work stream groups: Housing Strategies, Ageism, Black and Minority Ethnic Elders and Information & Advice. This leaflet forms part of HOPDEV's Ageism work stream programme.

Written by Ben Harding, April/May 2006.

Text © HOPDEV.

Illustrations © Pen Mendonça (email: penmendonca@btinternet.com).

Reproduction of the illustration is by prior permission of the artist only.

June 2006

Further copies of this document can be downloaded, and hard copies requested, from <http://hopdev.housingcare.org>
Further information about HOPDEV can be found at www.odpm.gov.uk/housingandolderpeople

