

THE CONVERSATION

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Four simple ways landlords and letting agents can make life better for tenants

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A little help goes a long way in a new home. Shutterstock.

Everyone knows how important it is to have a home. It's no surprise that being homeless is bad for a person's health: it can even kill. And it's just as obvious that housing which is damp, cold, overcrowded or riddled with toxins is a recipe for poor health. Yet the place you call home can also affect your health and well-being in subtler, but similarly important, ways.

In particular, our research shows that tenants' health is affected by whether they feel at home – and this, in turn, is heavily influenced by the treatment they get from their landlord. We followed more than 70 tenants renting from three different social and private housing organisations in and around Glasgow over the first year of their tenancy.

Through interviews with the tenants, we discovered that there were four simple things that landlords, letting agents and housing associations could do to reduce stress and make tenants feel more at home in their properties.

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Tenants rate their health and well-being after moving into a new property

This graph shows what percentage of tenants rated their health and well-being worse, the same, or better, at two intervals after moving into a new property. A greater proportion of tenants felt better 9 to 12 months after moving into their new home.

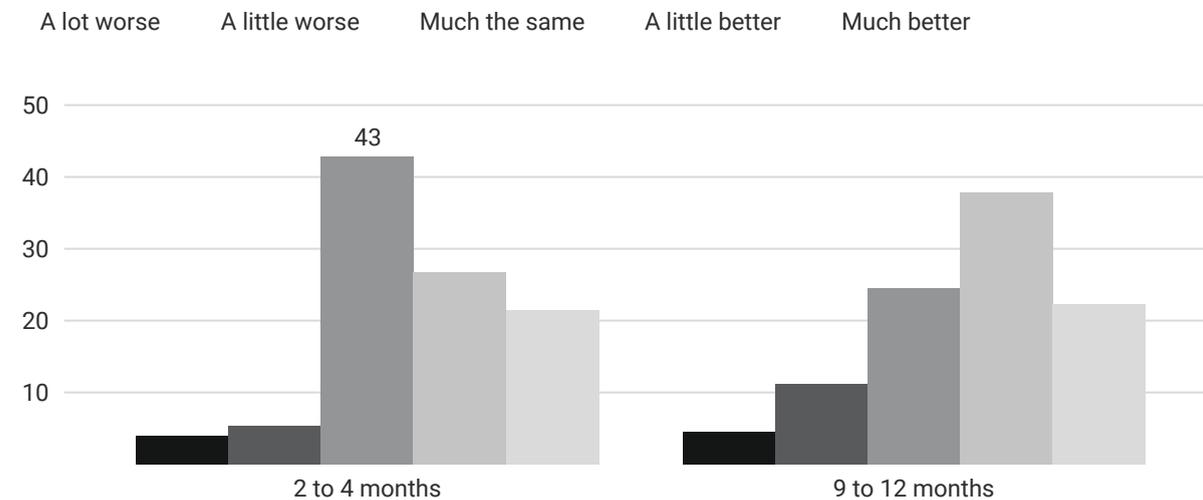


Chart: The Conversation UK. Source: Steve Delfo, University of Glasgow. [Get the data.](#)

1. Have a good relationship

The tenants involved in our research told us how important it was to be able to deal with a named member of staff, who knows them personally and understands their situation. This was particularly true when tenants had had difficult experiences in the past:

How can I describe it? I feel I have some good people in my life now that I can depend on and I feel very comfortable in the situation that I'm in right now. There's no deception there, there's no sleazy landlords, nothing like that. – Jane, 57, Glasgow, UK.

Where landlords built a positive relationship, this not only helped tenants to settle and feel at home, but also gave them confidence to get on with the rest of life – finding work, reconnecting with friends and family and trying new things.

2. Focus on property quality

You don't need to have watched every episode of *Grand Designs* to know that the finishing touches are crucial in making somewhere feel like home. But people have different expectations, aspirations and capacities.

Some tenants told us that they needed a property which was already well furnished and decorated, while others wanted an empty shell to refurbish in their own style. So landlords need to understand these differences and give tenants the support they need.

Where this goes wrong, it can undermine the whole tenancy, as with this tenant who moved into a property with seriously damaged plasterwork:

The walls in here are pretty bad and at one point I phoned the housing officer and I says to her, I'm going to have to give you that house back. That's far too much work for me... I feel dead unsettled and anxious. I still can't sleep at night in it. – Laura, 26, Glasgow, UK.

3. Being sensitive to housing costs

Concerns about housing affordability in the UK often rest on rent levels or fuel poverty, while other housing-related costs are sometimes overlooked. Tenants told us how stressed they were by the costs of moving, furnishing and decorating their new property, and generally coping with the financial chaos of a new tenancy.



Stressful times. Shutterstock.

Again, landlords need to have a relationship with tenants, so that they can understand their financial situation. Where landlords were able to offer flexibility and support to tenants with paying the rent and managing other housing costs, this helped to sustain the tenancy – which not only contributes to tenants' health and well-being, but also keeps the rent coming in for landlords.

The fact that they are looking out for my own well-being... helps me get through. I mean, money's stressful, especially when it's tight. So when you know your landlord is not just... wanting the money through the door every month, he's actually hoping that you're okay and you're able to afford it, it's reassuring. It helps... keep the stress levels down. – Alex, 36, Ayrshire, UK.

4. Offer choice in location

It's a cliché, but our research shows that location really is important. When tenants have a choice of where to live, it can make a real difference to their health and well-being. For some people the key factor is being close to friends and family, while for others it's more about peace and quiet:

I'm 100% happier. I'm basically not depressed anymore, as soon as I moved out of that flat in [previous area] and moved here it was such a huge change... I want to go outside and meet people and stuff like that, whereas back there it was 'I don't want to go out, I just want to curl up in a ball, I'm dying for this to all go away'. So now it's just like aye, bring on life! – Patrick, 37, Renfrewshire, UK.

The UK's housing crisis is about more than just supply and demand, or bricks and mortar – whether people feel at home in their property can have a significant impact on their health. Housing organisations, landlords and policy makers all need to take these issues seriously, to build the solid foundations necessary to look after tenants' health and well-being.

Tenants' names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

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