

Health impact, and economic value, of meeting housing quality standards: a retrospective longitudinal data linkage study

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Plain English summary

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Background

We know that cold, damp and unsafe homes can make people ill, make illness worse or even cause early death. Council homes in Carmarthenshire, UK, were improved to bring them up to a new national standard. Up to eight improvements were made: wall and loft insulation, new windows, kitchens, bathrooms, electrical systems (including extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms), heating systems and safe garden paths.

The question we aimed to answer

Our aim was to study if improvements to housing standards could lead to better health in people. Housing improvements and hospital visits are expensive, and we wanted to see if there was a reduction in the number of people going to hospital for emergencies among those living in homes that received improvements, compared with people whose homes did not receive those particular improvements.

How we tried to answer

To measure home improvements and health events for people living in the homes in question, we linked information about the person, their home and any hospital visits. We looked at emergency hospital admissions resulting from injuries such as falls in the home, breathing difficulties, and heart and circulation problems.

What did we find?

Our results suggest that meeting housing quality standards is related to a reduction in emergency hospital admissions for people living in social housing. We calculated the costs associated with the reduction but, beyond cost savings, a reduction in emergency admissions is most likely to make hospital beds available to others in need. We will share this information with people who live in the improved homes. We aim to influence policy and practice to spend money improving housing quality to improve people's lives.

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