



Mental health

Covid-19 briefing note: May 2020

This series of briefings address significant issues that are emerging in the UK as a result of Covid-19 that impact on the work of community investment. In each one, we have brought together available evidence to help you think about and plan future strategies and how resources can be directed. This briefing covers mental health.

The current situation

In the UK, mental health and wellbeing are important issues. An estimated **one in six people** report suffering from a common mental health problem each week,¹ whilst prescriptions for antidepressants nearly doubled between 2008 and 2018.²

Social housing residents are disproportionately more likely to experience poor mental health: **one in three people who live in social housing have a mental health issue.**³

The UK population is suffering from high levels of psychological distress, particularly for **women, ethnic minority groups and key workers.**⁴

The evidence suggests that the mental health impact of the current period will be significant, but short-lived for the majority. What's critical is in facilitating services that support people so that these short-lived mental health issues don't become long-term issues.⁵

Projections / trends

We can draw some inferences about the likely impact of Covid-19 by looking at the evidence from previous outbreaks of viruses, such as SARS.

Potential impact for people who have direct experience of Covid-19

Patients who recover:

- around 10% of people who are admitted to an ICU experience PTSD in the first year after hospital discharge.⁶
- 50% of patients who recovered from SARS showed anxiety, while 20% had negative psychosocial effects, including insomnia and depression.⁷

Family members of those who recover:

- 50% of family members of SARS patients had psychosocial issues, including difficulties with sleeping.⁸

Housing and mental health

Poor mental health often leads to struggles with housing costs, while struggling with housing costs often leads people to poor mental health.

According to CAB, people with mental health problems are twice as likely to fall into rent arrears.²⁶

The experience of mental health problems can result in changes to income, either through employment, benefit eligibility or personal circumstances. Typically a combination of these factors leads to rent arrears.²⁷

Given the groups most at risk, it seems likely that social housing organisations will house a disproportionate number of those who will experience poor mental health and wellbeing as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.



Mental health

Covid-19 briefing note: May 2020

Potential impact for people who have direct experience of Covid-19

Healthcare workers:

- the prevalence of anxiety, depression, acute and post-traumatic stress disorder and burnout was high in healthcare workers both during and after outbreaks of viral epidemics.⁹

Potential impact on people from measures taken to combat Covid-19

Self-isolation / the impact of being in quarantine

- self-isolation can have negative mental health impacts, in particular for children.¹⁰
- negative responses include confusion, fear, anger, grief, nervousness and sadness, guilt and insomnia.¹¹
- staff who had previously been quarantined were more likely to report feeling exhausted, detachment from others, irritability and insomnia.¹²
- longer-term impacts include alcohol abuse or dependence.¹³
- people tend to avoid others who are coughing or sneezing (54%), avoid crowded enclosed spaces (26%) or all public spaces (21%).¹⁴

The impact of social distancing

- two surveys in April 2020 found that social distancing had resulted in increased anxiety, depression, stress and other negative feeling.^{15 16}
- many of the consequences of social distancing are key risk factors for mental health issues, including social disconnection, lack of meaning/purpose, cyberbullying, bereavement and financial stress.¹⁷
- the deterioration of mental health could elicit behaviours dangerous to the self and others such as alcohol and substance abuse, gambling, domestic violence and child abuse.¹⁸
- during the 2003 SARS epidemic there was a 30% increase in suicide in those aged 65 and over.¹⁹

Potential impact of living through Covid-19

- vulnerable elderly people are more pessimistic and more likely to get overwhelmed by negative news, increasing anxiety and fear.²⁰
- a lack of information can exacerbate fears and anxieties.²²
- repeated media exposure also increases stress and worry.²³
- significant numbers of people do not expect to return to normal life until 2021, and most fear easing restrictions too early.²⁴

Measuring the impact of your mental health work

In 2018, HACT and Simetrica developed a mental health social value calculator to help social housing organisations, charities, contractors and councils to measure the impact of projects that improve their customers' mental health.

The calculator provides financial values for improvements made to people's mental health, depending on their age and location. [Find out more>](#)

The UK Social Value Bank, developed by HACT and Simetrica, is based on statistics from the Office for National Statistics. It is focused on improving wellbeing, which is inseparable from good mental health.

NB: residents over the age of 70 and other vulnerable people will be in quarantine for far longer than any of the people in any of the quarantine studies from which these statistics are drawn.

Mental health



Covid-19 briefing note: May 2020

Those most likely to experience negative impact on their mental health²⁵

- Low income households facing financial insecurity.
- Children, young people and families affected by school closures.
- Older adults and other vulnerable people who are isolating.
- People with existing mental health issues.
- People with learning difficulties and neurodevelopmental disorders.
- Frontline healthcare and social care workers.

What does this mean for social housing?

You are likely to see an increase in demand for mental health services.

Social housing residents suffer disproportionately from mental health issues. There is also emerging evidence that women, BAME residents and those who have been working on the health and social care Covid-19 frontlines will be disproportionately affected by poor mental health.

Your residents are more likely to suffer from short term mental health issues for which short term interventions will work. Others might require family intervention approaches. Involve external agencies in determining how to deliver these short-term interventions at scale.

Other residents might be affected by longer term mental health illnesses, for which you will need to partner with local and national mental health organisations. Don't try and deal with these issues alone.

As well as your residents, your staff are also likely to be affected by mental health issues because of Covid-19. Staff working on the frontline, in particular, will be meeting with increasing numbers of people with mental health issues, so there will be a need to equip them with the skills and support they need.

Community Insight datasets

Community Insight includes these geo-based datasets:

- People with mental health issues (receiving IB/ESA) (*DWP*)
- Indices of health deprivation and rank (*MHCLG*)
- Personal Independence Payments (*DWP*)
- Probability of loneliness for those aged 65 and over (*AgeUK*)

[Book a demo or find out more](#)

Further reading:

[The Lancet \(impact of quarantine\)](#)

[The Lancet \(impact of Covid-19\)](#)

[King's College, London \(reactions to the lockdown\)](#)

[Mental Health First Aid](#)

[MIND](#)

[Big White Wall](#)