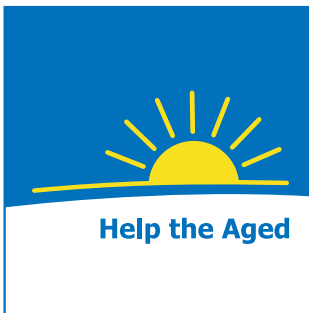


Directory of Housing Advice and Information Services **for Older People**



Produced by the Housing and
Older People Development Group (HOPDEV)



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Directory of Housing Advice and Information Services for Older People

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- Elderly Accommodation Counsel
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Housing and Older People Development Group

In 2001 the Department of Health and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) set up the Housing and Older People Development Group (HOPDEV) to monitor and help develop the Government's strategic framework, set out in *Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing*. One of the key aims of the group is to: 'Consider practical ways to develop and enhance advice, information and advocacy services, both nationally and locally, for older people and their carers to help them in making choices about housing, care and support options.'

For further information visit the ODPM website at:

www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=1356&l=3

For further copies of this directory and details of Help the Aged publications, please contact:

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Older people and housing advice

Many older people do not know where to go for advice and information on housing matters. They often rely for information on family, friends and staff from agencies with whom they are in regular contact, such as health workers. Staff and volunteers in health, social care and older people's organisations may not always know the full range of specialist advice and information available. Mainstream housing and legal advice agencies are concerned at the very low take-up of their services by older people.

Older people's housing needs

Older people's housing needs are varied and often complex. They extend beyond housing and link to other matters, including:

- social security benefits and financial matters;
- access to personal care and support; and
- abuse and harassment.

Some older people have particular housing needs because of ill health, impairment (eg hearing or sight loss) or disability. There may be faith or cultural issues to consider. Some will be able to manage with appropriate information and the help of relatives. Others will need emotional and practical support from agency staff and volunteers, and perhaps advocacy to represent their views and needs.

There are three broad groups of older people in need of housing advice:

- **staying put** – older people who are housed and who wish to stay in their existing home (with adaptations if necessary);
- **moving on** – older people who are housed but who prefer, or accept the need, to move to more suitable accommodation; and
- **homeless** – older people who are homeless, at risk of eviction or living in such bad conditions that they could be considered to be homeless (often in private rented housing).

Housing advice services for older people

Housing advice services for older people are many and varied. Some provide a national service from a single office base, while others are federations of similar local services, perhaps backed by a national telephone helpline service. Some serve only a local area, others a specific ethnic, faith or trade community. Finally, while a few focus specifically on older people's housing issues, many work with older people across a range of issues or concentrate on housing but for people of all ages.

Advice services for older people are provided by statutory agencies (local councils, government departments and agencies), by voluntary agencies (so-called because even though many have paid staff, these organisations are 'not for profit') and by private businesses.

Aims of this directory

It would not be possible to include in a directory of this size all those agencies, both national and local, whose services include some element of housing advice and information for older people. Rather we have tried to provide a starting point for older people who want advice on any of the most common housing issues we have identified. Many of the listed agencies are able and willing to refer on; that is, they have knowledge of other, smaller or more specialist agencies that can complement what they themselves offer with more expertise, affinity or time.

This directory concentrates on agencies that provide advice free of charge to older people, their friends and relatives and to the professionals working with them. There may be a small charge for certain publications (especially books). See page 5 for more information on paying for advice.

How to use the directory

- The main A–Z section provides details of the services offered by our selection of national and local agencies and groups of agencies and shows how to contact them. It also flags up what each agency cannot offer.
- The Quick Service Locator table on pages 40 and 41 lists different housing problems and suggests where to try first for help in each area.
- The Full Service Locator table on pages 38 and 39 summarises the services offered by all the agencies listed in the directory.

Confidentiality and consent

All organisations listed in the directory are able to give information or discuss options in general terms with friends and relatives, and with staff working with the older person. However, they may need to ask for the ‘informed consent’ (agreement) of the older person before being able to deal directly with someone other than the older person (eg their son or daughter). This is because of the need to maintain confidentiality. It is especially likely to be the case where there is a need for detailed advice, advocacy or representation, or in relation to financial matters. Professional staff are usually aware of this requirement. Friends and relatives can sometimes find it surprising or upsetting but it is an important safeguard, designed to protect everyone’s interests.

Quality marks and accreditation

Many of the organisations in this directory use a formal system of quality control, the most common being the Community Legal Service Quality Mark, and others are working towards such accreditation. Telephone helplines belong to the Telephone Helpline Association and abide by its guidelines. Some organisations have their own internal quality systems. Organisations providing detailed financial advice have to be authorised by law. Of the organisations in the directory, only **Nursing Home Fees Agency** (p 34) is authorised to give such advice and others will provide only general information on finance issues.

Other sources of information and advice

Many of the agencies included in the directory will be able to advise on local or specialist services in their field. Ask them.

The web

If you have access to the Internet (most libraries offer Internet access) or you can get someone else to look for you, there are a number of sites that can help.

For a wide range of general information and advice about housing and related issues, visit the websites of:

- Age Concern (www.ace.org.uk)
- Elderly Accommodation Counsel (www.housingcare.org)
- Help the Aged (www.helptheaged.org.uk)

To find out about services in your area or county, many district, borough or county councils now have web-based information on advice agencies.

Where organisations in the directory have a website, we have given the details.

UK Advice Finder is a comprehensive source of information about organisations in the UK that provide advice and help to the public. It is available only on subscription (from Resource Information Service, tel: 020 7939 0641; web: www.ris.org.uk). Many of the organisations in this directory and some libraries will have access to UK Advice Finder.

The **Community Legal Service** (CLS) website (www.justask.org.uk) is the most comprehensive site available free of charge to anyone. It covers a wide range of information and advice providers and allows you to search for agencies in your area in the CLS network (p 21).

Local information

Local directories (eg *Thomson Local*) include information about voluntary organisations and helplines, usually in a separate section at the front. Your council should also be able to refer you to local agencies, as should many of the organisations listed in this directory.

Paid-for advice

There are also agencies in the private sector that offer advice for a fee, especially around options for care and support in the home or the need to move to a nursing or care home. The same applies to financial advice concerning these options. You can find out more about such services from: **Age Concern Information Line** (p 15), **Elderly Accommodation Counsel** (p 26), and **Help the Aged SeniorLine** (p 28).

Resources for older people from minority groups or specific occupations

Minority ethnic and faith communities

For older people from a minority ethnic or faith community, it may be helpful to ask advice from local or national community organisations. Some older people have always had language or cultural reasons for remaining within their own communities but find their housing needs change as they grow older. Others may have had less contact with their faith or ethnic group when younger but choose to have closer links as they age.

Some minority communities have significant numbers of elders and organisations providing a wide range of services. For smaller communities or in rural areas, specialist services may be limited or non-existent but community organisations should know what options are available or in the pipeline.

Many community organisations have developed partnerships with older people's or housing organisations, such as **local Age Concerns** (p 16) or **home improvement agencies** (also known as Care and Repair or Staying Put schemes) for older home owners (p 31).

Specialist services for older people from minority ethnic and faith communities include:

- ordinary and sheltered housing designed to meet the needs of people of particular faiths or from a particular ethnic background;
- culturally sensitive home care services; and
- advice provided in minority languages or by same-sex staff where staff from the opposite sex may be culturally unacceptable.

There are several ways to find a local or national community organisation. Some communities have highly developed services, and community or religious leaders will probably know the people to contact.

Elderly Accommodation Counsel (p 26) provides information about specialist housing and care provision for minority groups.

The following communities often offer specialist help in particular locations. The contact numbers are for the most relevant housing or advice providers we could find for each group, with an indication of the local area covered. These organisations may also be able to refer you to a local organisation if it exists.

Black and minority ethnic communities

Frontline Housing Advice is a London-based specialist housing advice service for people of all ages from black and minority ethnic communities.

📍 Elmfield House, 5 Stockwell Mews, London SW9 9GX
Tel: 020 7501 9573

The Chinese in Britain Forum works to promote equal access to public resources and services for Chinese people living in the UK and to assist the voluntary sector to participate effectively in voluntary activities and community development.

📍 First floor, Boardman House, 64 Broadway, Stratford,
London E15 1NG
Tel: 020 8432 0681
Fax: 020 8432 0685
E-mail: info@chinese-forum.co.uk
Web: www.chinese-forum.co.uk

Federation of Irish Societies supports Irish organisations, including Irish elders' organisations where these exist across the UK, and can refer you to a group in your area.

📍 The Irish Centre, 52 Camden Square, London NW1 9XB
Tel: 020 7916 2725
E-mail: federationfis@msn.com

Faith communities

Jewish Care is the largest provider of advice, support and specialist services to older Jewish people, working across London and south east England. Its HelpDesk provides advice on all its services, as well as contact details for similar organisations elsewhere.

- 🏠 Stuart Young House, 221 Golders Green Road, London NW11 9DQ
Tel: 020 8922 2222 HelpDesk
E-mail: info@jcare.org
Web: www.jewishcare.org

Gay men and lesbians

For older gay men and lesbians, it may help to seek information and advice from local or national gay and lesbian organisations. There are particular issues which affect older gay men and lesbians and their housing needs and choices. Because English law has not recognised same sex partnerships, there can be difficulties over such matters as transferring tenancies and inheritance tax. In June 2003 the Government began consulting on changing civil partnership legislation which may result in significant changes in the law. The current position should be checked with Citizens Advice Bureaux or lesbian and gay organisations offering information and advice.

There are two national gay and lesbian housing organisations which may be of help, although both are London-based, as well as national and local helplines:

Polari is a specialist organisation for older lesbians and gay men. Under its Polari in Partnership project, it is working in three London boroughs to improve housing, health, social care and community safety. Polari is not able to give detailed individual advice but can refer you to appropriate organisations.

- 🏠 2 Plough Yard, Shoreditch High Street, London EC2A 3LP
Tel: 020 7422 8649
E-mail: info-polari@madasafish.com

Stonewall Housing Advice provides housing in London for younger gay men and lesbians, but also provides housing information, advice and advocacy for gay men and lesbians of all ages. Telephone advice is available to callers from anywhere in the UK. Casework is available to people in London via the advice phone line.

- 🏠 Tel: 020 7359 5767

Lesbian and Gay Switchboard services. There are telephone-based advice lines in some towns and cities (check your Local Thomson directory) and a 24-hour national helpline, which can provide basic housing advice and direct you to other organisations. There is also an advice website.

🏠 Tel: 020 7837 7324
Web: www.queery.org.uk

Trades and professions

There are several advice services for older people who previously worked in particular trades or professions. Sometimes, housing and support services may be available from the same agency, and some also administer benevolent funds to alleviate hardship among their client group.

The Civil Service Benevolent Fund (CSBF) is a national organisation which provides advice and a range of services to people who work or have worked in the civil service or allied organisations.

🏠 Tel: 0800 056 2424 (free)
Web: www.csbf.org.uk

The Retail Trust helps people who are or were employed in the retail and wholesale drapery, clothing and associated businesses. As well as advice, it provides accommodation, grants and other financial assistance.

🏠 Tel: 0845 766 0113
Web: www.retailtrust.org.uk

The Occupational Benevolent Funds Alliance (OBFA) can advise on charities that may be able to help you if your main need is financial. Its telephone helpline is open Monday to Friday, 10.00am to 4.00pm.

🏠 Tel: 01707 651777
Web: www.aco.uk.net
E-mail: info@aco.uk.net

SSAFA Forces Help is a national charity for ex-Service men, women and their families, and is available to anyone who has served in the Armed Forces, and their widows or widowers. Many older people will have served in wartime or under National Service. For general welfare advice, look in your phone book for your local SSAFA Forces Help representative or contact the central office:

- ◆ Tel: 020 7403 8783
- E-mail info@ssafa.org.uk
- Web: www.ssafa.org.uk

SSAFA also offers free, confidential and impartial advice and information on a range of housing issues and options through its Housing Advisory Service. It has a database of organisations providing accommodation for the ex-Service community and has produced a booklet, which is available free, covering homelessness legislation.

- ◆ Housing Advisory Service, c/o JSHAO, HQ Land Command, Wilton, Salisbury SP2 0AG
- Tel: 01722 436400

Services from your local council

In larger cities and urban areas, the same local council usually provides all services. In areas with a county council and district councils, housing comes under the district council, and social services under the county council. All councils should also be able to refer you to other relevant local and national agencies.

Where can I get information about council services?

As well as asking your local council, the following organisations provide factsheets and information: **Age Concern Information Line, Counsel and Care, Elderly Accommodation Counsel** and **Help the Aged**.

How can the council help?

Housing

People often think the council only provides council housing. But councils provide a much wider range of housing services: housing information and advice, services for private tenants, help with disrepair, and assistance to people who may become homeless. They also administer housing benefit (help with rent for council, housing association and private tenants) and council tax benefit (help with council tax for tenants and home owners).

Social services

Social services can assist with help and care at home, aids and adaptations, and moving into a residential care home or nursing home.

Housing advice services

Councils should provide information and advice for people of all ages and in all types of housing, including private tenants and owner-occupiers. Larger councils usually have a housing advice centre, run by the council, or sometimes under contract by a local voluntary organisation.

Housing advice centres are usually in central locations, with disabled access and open in normal office hours. There is often an appointment system, and usually they do not make home visits, although this may be possible by arrangement or by referral to a specialist agency. They can usually access interpreters or signers but may need to know in advance.

Some councils provide a specialist advice service for private tenants. Larger councils usually have tenancy relations officers who investigate and resolve disputes between private tenants and their landlords. Councils have specific legal powers if informal negotiations fail or if the matter is serious (eg harassment or illegal eviction).

In smaller councils, housing advice will be offered by staff from another section, perhaps rehousing or homelessness.

Some councils are developing links between housing and other advice services. Initiatives include staff running advice sessions based in other agencies and computer links (eg terminals in libraries or supermarkets).

Housing advice services vary widely across the country. The 2002 Homelessness Act emphasises that councils have a duty to provide housing advice to everyone who needs it, and that housing, health, social care and voluntary sector organisations need to work together.

Finding out about council, housing association and other housing for older people

Most councils provide council housing, including sheltered housing designed for older people. Some councils have transferred their housing to housing associations (also called registered social landlords) or tenant management organisations.

All councils should be able to provide information on other housing providers in their area, especially housing associations, and sometimes private landlords or sheltered housing for sale. There are formal referral procedures from the council to housing association vacancies, called nomination arrangements. Many councils operate a common housing register so you can put your name down for council and housing association properties through one application form. Sometimes, social services are also involved in assessing housing applications from older people, especially for sheltered housing and for very sheltered or extra-care housing.

Dealing with disrepair and improvements

All councils have environmental officers with responsibilities for disrepair and poor conditions in private housing (rented and owner-occupied). Councils have legal powers and can negotiate with landlords or take legal action if necessary. There is usually a specialist housing person or section. Councils also provide grants for repair and improvement works, although grants are now limited and means-tested. Some councils have their own in-house **home improvement agency (HIA)** and others will work closely with voluntary-run HIAs (p 31)

Homelessness

Councils have specific legal responsibilities towards people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. 'Old age' is one of the reasons people may be considered in priority need of housing. Most councils have a specialist homelessness section.

Everyone at risk of homelessness is entitled to advice but not everyone will be entitled to housing. Sometimes it is necessary to seek advice from Shelter/Shelterline or other independent or legal advice agencies to pursue a homelessness claim (see the Quick Service Locator, pp 40–41).

Further support from social and health services

There are many links between housing, health and social services. For example, occupational therapists may be involved in adaptations to the property (eg handrails, stairlifts). The health service can also be involved (eg when people leave hospital). Social services also provide or arrange many services through community care for older people to help them stay living at home. Social services are also involved when people need to go to a residential care home or a nursing home.

Independent advice

Independent advice agencies

There are hundreds of independent agencies that provide advice for people on a range of issues, including benefits and housing. Some are part of a larger organisation or a well-known network, for example **Citizens Advice Bureaux** (p 19) and those run by **Shelter** (p 35). Some are part of smaller networks or church-based organisations (see **Housing Justice** below). Others are individual local organisations. Many smaller advice agencies are members of **Advice UK**, which is a network of more than 300 advice organisations in the London area and others across the country. Most independent advice agencies will also be involved with local networks of the **Community Legal Service** (p 20) and will be in the CLS directory.

📍 **Advice UK**

Floor 12, New London Bridge House, 25 London Bridge Street,
London SE1 9ST
Tel: 020 7407 4070
Web: www.adviceuk.org.uk

Housing Justice is the new name for two church-based housing organisations, one of which was formerly CHAS (Catholic Housing Aid Service). There are 12 housing advice centres: central London (Westminster), Birmingham, Blackpool, Bradford, Bristol, Croydon, Harehills, Kirklees (2), Kingston, Lewisham and York. Details are on the website or from the London office. Housing Justice offers housing advice to people of all ages and from all communities. The main aim is to prevent homelessness. Advisers assist and support people who risk becoming homeless and those living in bad housing conditions.

📍 209 Old Marylebone Road, London NW1 5QT
Tel: 020 7723 7273
Web: www.chasnational.org.uk

A–Z of advice and service providers

Age Concern

(including Age Concern England, Age Concern Information Line and local Age Concerns)

Where are they? Where can we find them?

Age Concern Information Line is a freephone service supplied by Age Concern England that provides information and factsheets on issues affecting older people.

The Information Line is staffed from 7.00am to 7.00pm, seven days a week.

📞 Tel: 0800 009966

Factsheets are available from:

Freepost (SWB 30375), Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7ZZ

Local Age Concerns are supported by Age Concern England. There are over 400 independent, local Age Concerns in the federation. Their details can be found on the Age Concern website, from the Information Line freephone, by post or from local directories.

🌐 Web: www.ageconcern.org.uk

What services do they offer?

Age Concern Information Line provides information by phone and through more than 40 written factsheets on housing and other issues affecting older people. Housing information and factsheet subjects include repairs and adaptations; heating; retirement housing; tenants' rights for private and housing association tenants; and equity release (to provide capital and income from their home for older home owners). There are also factsheets on community care and care homes.

For complex questions which cannot be covered adequately in the first phone contact, Age Concern will call back with further information. They have four specialist information officers who deal with complex matters such as income and benefits, community care, health, and housing and consumer matters.

Local Age Concerns are independent and vary in their opening hours and in the extent of housing information and advice they can offer. There are around 120 larger Age Concern organisations, usually based on a county or larger town or city and open most weekdays. They all have a specialist information and advice service and provide factsheets.

There are also well over 200 smaller local groups, based in rural areas or smaller towns. These usually have limited opening hours and may not offer a specialist information and advice service.

Many Age Concerns, both larger and smaller, have close links with other local advice organisations and some are developing specialist local services, for example, campaigns to encourage older people to claim the benefits they are entitled to.

The main areas of information and advice provided by local Age Concerns are:

- welfare benefits
- community care
- information on services for older people available locally.

Local Age Concerns also offer a range of services, some of which are housing-related. These vary according to the area, but may include a handyperson service (for small repairs for home owners), gardening or decorating (usually by volunteers), befriending and various social activities for people who are isolated or lonely.

Age Concern England is a leading agency for older people. It supports Age Concerns in the federation and provides a range of specialist services, including the Information Line and **AIMS** (the Advice, Information and Media Service) for people in sheltered housing (p 17).

What do they not do?

The Information Line is telephone-based and can tell people about other organisations but cannot offer face-to-face advice, home visits or ongoing casework to individuals.

Most local Age Concerns would not become involved in detailed and continuing advice on complex housing matters (eg landlord-tenant problems, adaptations and improvements) but would refer someone to a more specialist organisation such as **Shelter** (p 35) or a **home improvement agency** (p 31).

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

Age Concern specialises in the needs of older people. Many local Age Concerns have close links with local minority community groups. The Information Line can be accessed by people who are deaf or hard of hearing via Typetalk.

Staff

Age Concern England has specialist staff in a range of areas, including the Information Line and AIMS. Local Age Concerns vary greatly in their staffing arrangements but most have both full-time and part-time paid staff and volunteers.

AIMS (Advice, Information and Mediation Service)

Where are they? Where can we find them?

AIMS is a specialist service provided by Age Concern England for older people living in sheltered and retirement housing. It is based in London but can offer services anywhere in England and Wales. The phone lines are staffed from 9.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, with an answerphone outside those hours.

🏠 Astral House, 1268 London Road, London SW16 4ER

Tel: 0845 600 2001

E-mail: aims@ace.org.uk

Web: www.ageconcern.org.uk/aims

What services do they offer?

AIMS provides advice, information and mediation services for older people living in sheltered and retirement housing. This includes people who own their own homes on a retirement scheme (leaseholders) and tenants of housing associations or councils. The service is especially tailored towards resolving disputes and issues related to sheltered and retirement housing. It provides advice and information on all the areas in which housing-related disputes can arise, including noise, neighbours, repairs, interpreting tenancy agreements or leases, enquiries about the warden service, disputes with wardens and managers, service charges, consultation rights and tenant participation.

Older people living in sheltered and retirement housing can obtain advice, information and dispute resolution assistance by phone, in writing or by e-mail. They can also request AIMS' face-to-face mediation service, which can arrange home visits anywhere in England and Wales, if appropriate. Mediation is where an independent person helps people reach an agreement to resolve disputes. It is a way of resolving disputes without formal action (such as going to court). Both sides need to agree to the process. A trained mediator meets with both sides separately and then together to reach common understanding and a mutually acceptable agreement.

AIMS will also visit residents' associations to promote and explain its work. It provides information and advice to people who work in or manage sheltered housing. AIMS also works closely with **local Age Concerns** (p 16), providing local staff with specialist advice on sheltered housing problems, and with the Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

What do they not do?

AIMS only works with sheltered and retirement housing, not with other forms of housing. AIMS' services include 'very sheltered' or 'extra-care' housing. AIMS does not cover registered care homes or nursing homes and would refer enquiries to **Counsel and Care** (see p 24).

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

AIMS specialises in older people's issues in sheltered housing. They use Language Line to take messages in a range of languages and can provide interpreters for telephone consultations and mediation meetings. The website, poster and information sheets describing AIMS and mediation provide information in many languages.

Staff

There are six staff including a manager, experienced advisers and staff with specialist training in mediation.

CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau)

Where are they? Where can we find them?

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) service is a network of 2,000 independent charities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are listed in local directories. All belong to Citizens Advice (the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux). The central office and website can provide general information and details of your local CAB.

- Myddleton House, 115–123 Pentonville Road, London N1 9LZ
Tel: 020 7833 2181
Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

What services do they offer?

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) give information and advice to people of all ages and on all topics, including benefits and housing. Advisers can help fill in forms, write letters, negotiate about debts (including rent, mortgage or council tax arrears) and represent people at court or tribunal. Many CABx provide specialist advice, often in partnership with other agencies such as solicitors. **Shelter** (p 35) provides specialist support on homelessness and housing issues to CAB advisers. All CABx can refer you to other agencies which might be better able to help.

What do they not do?

CABx are only able to advise people who live in their local area, so try to contact the CAB which is nearest to you.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

CABx are there for people of all ages, regardless of race, gender, sexuality or disability. The buildings are usually wheelchair-accessible and each office should have access to interpreters and signers (British Sign Language) if necessary. The web-based directory allows you to search in languages other than English.

Staff

Of the 25,000 people working in the CAB service, most (nearly 80 per cent) are trained volunteers.

Care and Repair see Home improvement agencies

Community Legal Service

Where are they? Where can we find them?

There are three main sources of legal advice concerning housing and related issues for older people: law centres, advice agencies and solicitors.

The Community Legal Service (CLS) is a government initiative to improve access to legal and advice services, particularly among people most in need of assistance. The main focus of the CLS is on the sort of problems that most impact on people's daily lives, including housing, community care and welfare benefits. A network of services is provided through law centres, solicitors, advice agencies and information providers in England and Wales.

- 📍 85 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8TX
Tel: 0845 608 1122 (Directory Line)
E-mail: info@legalservices.gov.org.uk
Web: www.justask.org.uk

What services do they offer?

The CLS website and directory JustAsk! allows you to search for services in your area and for legal information from more than 300 sites covering topics including benefits, and housing and homelessness. The telephone Directory Line offers a directory of solicitors, advice agencies and information providers. There are also free CLS information leaflets on issues including housing and welfare benefits and a telephone line charged at local rate.

CLS partnerships (in England and Wales) are local networks of advice agencies and information providers which work together and refer people to appropriate services. They include general advice organisations such as **Citizens Advice Bureaux** (p 19) and **local Age Concerns** (p 16), local councils, solicitors, law centres and local information points like libraries and community groups. Any agency within CLS should either be able to help you with your enquiry or pass you on to someone else who can.

Community law centres, solicitors and some advice services can advise on complex issues, especially:

- landlord-tenant problems, including rent arrears, harassment, failure to carry out repairs and threatened eviction;
- homelessness, especially if there have been problems when contacting the local council; and
- benefits problems, especially over claiming or being refused benefits, and with demands to repay alleged overpayments of benefits.

Community law centres

There are more than 50 law centres across the UK. Law centres provide free housing advice to their local community but they will not provide advice to landlords. They can usually offer home visits if needed. Law centres employ qualified lawyers and will take up individual problems concerning housing law (especially landlord-tenant problems) and benefits issues. Details of your nearest law centre can be obtained from the CLS website and directory JustAsk!, from local directories or agencies, or from the Law Centres Federation.

🏠 Duchess House, 18–19 Warren Street, London W1T 5LR
Tel: 020 7387 8570
E-mail: info@lawcentres.org.uk
Web: www.lawcentres.org.uk

Advice agencies

Advice agencies offer advice and support on legal matters. Some have specialist housing or other advice services for older people. These may include housing advice agencies, older people's agencies such as **local Age Concerns** (p 16) or general advice providers such as **Citizens Advice Bureaux** (p 19). See also **Shelter** (p 35) and **independent advice agencies** (p 14).

Solicitors

Local solicitors are funded to provide free or low-cost legal advice to people on low incomes (this used to be called Legal Aid and is now called the CLS Fund). There are both income and capital (savings) limits. Solicitors often specialise in different aspects of law and the local **Citizens Advice Bureau** (p 19) will provide initial advice and may be able to refer you to solicitors specialising in housing or related matters.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

Legal services should be available to the whole community but older people are sometimes reluctant to seek legal advice on housing and related issues. There is a fear of the legal process and the time, cost and stress involved. Taking legal action can certainly be stressful but most matters can be resolved informally without the need for formal proceedings or going to court. An older person may find it helpful to ask for support from a friend or relative, or a volunteer or staff member from an older people's organisation.

The JustAsk! website and the telephone Directory Line can search for information provided in Braille, audio or large print and services catering for specific groups, users of languages other than English, including BSL (British Sign Language), and people who need wheelchair access.

Legal Aid Direct, the CLS telephone advice line, is available to older people on low incomes and with limited savings living in some areas of England and Wales. Calls are charged at local rates and if necessary they will call you back. Legal Aid Direct provides free specialist legal advice by telephone and post for people who cannot afford or reach legal advisers, including older people with mobility problems or caring responsibilities. The service will take on casework and work with the caller throughout the case, or refer you to other sources of help.

In England, Legal Aid Direct services offering housing advice are available in North Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, North Kent, rural Dorset, North Devon, South and West Somerset and the West Midlands. Call CLS Directory Line for phone numbers and opening hours.

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) is the government body which funds and regulates all legal services and develops CLS. The Commission comes under the Department for Constitutional Affairs (formerly the Lord Chancellor's Department). The CLS Quality Mark is obligatory for organisations providing detailed legal advice. It is also the quality standard used by many advice and information providers, and all organisations in the JustAsk! directory hold or are working towards the Quality Mark.

Counsel and Care

Where are they? Where can we find them?

Counsel and Care is a London-based national advice and information service. The telephone advice line (charged at local rate) is normally staffed from 10.00am to 12.30pm and 2.00pm to 4.00pm, Monday to Friday.

- 🏠 Twyman House, 16 Bonny Street, London NW1 9PG
- Tel: 0845 300 7585
- E-mail: advice@counselandcare.org.uk
- Web: www.counselandcare.org.uk

What services do they offer?

Counsel and Care provides a telephone, letter and e-mail information service for older people and their carers, relatives, friends and involved professionals. They produce factsheets that can be obtained by post (or downloaded from the website) on issues including how to find and pay for a care home, welfare benefits, arranging care at home, and health issues affecting older people.

Counsel and Care specialises in all aspects of community care including:

- advice and information on local social services responsibilities for care services for older people (including assessments of need and care planning) whether staying at home or moving into a care home;
- advice and information on obtaining care at home, including how to obtain aids and adaptations (eg handrails, stairlifts) and issues which arise when older people leave hospital;
- advice and information on care homes and other options for older people whose housing is no longer suitable for their needs; and
- administering and obtaining small grants for older people.

Counsel and Care can offer immediate and extended support. Its advice workers can carry out detailed work on behalf of individuals. They will also provide support and backup for older people who wish to 'self-advocate' (stand up for their rights), and for relatives or friends to advocate on their behalf (with the older person's agreement).

What do they not do?

Counsel and Care does not work with people under 60 or people who need specialised financial advice. It cannot offer home visits or face-to-face advice.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

Counsel and Care specialises in older people and care issues. Factsheets conform to guidelines on visibility and plain English. They can use Language Line for translation for languages other than English, but most calls come from staff of black and ethnic minority support groups on behalf of their older clients.

Staff

There are six advice workers and one advice line manager.

DIAL UK (Disablement Information and Advice Lines)

Where are they? Where can we find them?

There are 150 local advice centres in the DIAL network across England, Scotland and Wales. Details can be found from local directories or from DIAL UK, which is open from 9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Thursday and 9.00am to 4.00pm Friday.

📍 St Catherine's, Tickhill Road, Doncaster DN4 8QN

Tel: 01302 310123

E-mail: enquiries@dialuk.org.uk

Web: www.dialuk.org.uk

What services do they offer?

Local DIALs are independent disability advice centres run by and for disabled people of all ages. They provide information and advice to disabled people and those working with them, on subjects including housing, community care and independent living. Local DIALs vary in

opening times and level of advice, depending on their resources and staff. All will offer information. Some have a wider range of services, including advocacy and specialist representation (eg at tribunals for benefits or employment issues). Many local DIALs will make home visits.

DIAL UK is the national organisation for the DIAL network. It provides a range of specialised support services to the local groups.

What do they not do?

DIAL UK provides further advice to local DIALs, and staff have particular expertise in welfare benefits, employment and public law. It does not have a specialist housing rights service. However, local DIALs have their own local networks.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

A high proportion of people seeking advice from local DIALs are older people because of the number of older people with disabilities. The DIAL network offers specialist knowledge of disability issues, especially disability access issues, and links to other local agencies.

Staff

Local DIALs vary in their staffing. DIAL UK has 24 paid staff and six volunteers.

Elderly Accommodation Counsel

Where are they? Where can we find them?

Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC) is based in London and provides a UK-wide advice and information service. The phone line is staffed 9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

- Third floor, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP
- Tel: 020 7820 1343
- Fax: 020 7820 3970
- E-mail: enquiries@e-a-c.demon.co.uk
- Web: www.housingcare.org.uk

What services do they offer?

EAC provides information and advice by phone, post and e-mail, and also, printed leaflets and a website which includes detailed information on local housing options (eg sheltered housing schemes), care homes and (in development) care and support services. The aim is to help older people decide the way forward knowing all the options. Phone advisers experienced in the housing and care fields are available to talk through the options on the phone.

The service covers four main areas:

- Remaining at home and accessing support or care to improve life there.
- Moving to more suitable housing.
- Moving to a care environment.
- Paying for any of the above.

EAC also offers a subscription service, used by 12 large companies as a service to their employees and retired staff.

What do they not do?

EAC has no income limits and offers a service to people in all types of accommodation. The service does not provide home visits, face-to-face meetings, advocacy or practical support. Although general information is provided on financial matters and welfare benefits, specific financial advice is not given because that has to be provided by individuals or organisations regulated by the Financial Services Authority.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

The service is geared specifically to the needs of older people and has specialist staff. People are encouraged to have repeat or ongoing contact while they resolve whatever issues they are facing.

The information databases include information of specific relevance to minority groups, for example, sheltered housing and care homes for people from particular ethnic groups. There is also a new joint initiative with **Counsel and Care** (p 24) and Relatives and Residents Association

to reach older people from minority groups through agencies that are closer to them.

Staff

There are three full-time staff and one part time for the advice service and five full-time equivalent staff and three part-time volunteers for other functions, including information gathering and maintaining the database.

Help the Aged and SeniorLine

Where are they? Where can we find them?

Help the Aged provides the SeniorLine service and, in conjunction with **Nursing Home Fees Agency (NHFA)** (p 34), a care fees advice service. It also provides or supports a number of local initiatives to promote home safety and personal security, and to improve access to transport for older people. Details of Help the Aged services can be found on its website.

🏠 Web: www.helptheaged.org.uk

SeniorLine is a free telephone advice service, which promotes independence by offering advice or information on a range of welfare rights issues. Phone lines are open 9.00am to 4.00pm, Monday to Friday.

🏠 Tel: 0808 800 6565 (England, Scotland and Wales; free)

Tel: 0808 808 7575 (Northern Ireland; free)

TextTel: 0800 26 96 26

E-mail: seniorline@helptheaged.org.uk

What services do they offer?

SeniorLine provides information on a range of issues, including:

- welfare benefits
- disability benefits
- housing options and adaptations

- getting help or care at home
- residential care
- access to health and community services

It can also provide copies of Help the Aged factsheets and booklets covering many subjects in the areas of:

- finance
- housing and home safety
- health and care
- leisure

What do they not do?

SeniorLine is telephone-based and can tell people about other organisations but it cannot offer face-to-face advice, home visits or ongoing casework to individuals. The advice workers are not trained in counselling or legal matters, neither can they offer medical advice. Financial advice is restricted by the terms of the Financial Services Act 1986. SeniorLine does not recommend tradespeople.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

SeniorLine specialises in the needs of older people. People with hearing impairments can access it by textphone.

Staff

Help the Aged SeniorLine has ten trained telephone advisers plus a manager.

HoDis (National Disabled Persons Housing Service)

Where are they? Where can we find them?

HoDis is a national organisation of and for disabled people with an office in York. A website is being developed. The office is staffed on a

variable basis and HoDis aims to respond within seven days of receiving an enquiry.

📍 17 Priory Street, York YO1 6ET

E-mail: info@hodis.org.uk

Web: www.hodis.org.uk

What services do they offer?

HoDis provides housing advice for disabled people of all ages and in all types of housing by mail or e-mail. It also promotes and develops local disabled persons' housing services, a type of **home improvement agency** (p 31) and disability housing registers.

What do they not do?

HoDis cannot offer home visits or practical support but can refer you to agencies that offer such services.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

HoDis is a national membership organisation with more than 50 organisations among its members, including:

- local disabled persons' housing services and home improvement agencies;
- local organisations and coalitions of disabled people offering advice and other services in their local communities;
- national organisations covering specific impairments; and
- housing associations providing home improvement agency services and accommodation for disabled people.

HoDis offers specialist knowledge of disability and housing issues and can refer you to appropriate agencies.

HoDis has access to interpreters and facilities for deaf, blind and partially-sighted people, including information in large print and on audio tape. HoDis is an organisation of disabled people and, although it recognises the importance of specific needs arising from an individual's health or impairment, it considers this to be simply part of understanding all aspects of housing need.

Staff

HoDis has one full-time and three part-time members of staff.

Home improvement agencies

(also known as Care and Repair or Staying Put)

Where are they? Where can we find them?

Home improvement agencies (HIAs) help people to remain at home in comfort, warmth and security. They are recognised and funded by government through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

There are more than 220 agencies across England covering most but not all areas of the country (there is no HIA in approximately 100 local council areas). The national HIA co-ordinating body, Foundations, or your local **Citizens Advice Bureau** or council housing department, can tell you if there is one in your area. Contact Foundations at:

- ◆ Bleaklow House, Howard Town Mill, Glossop, Derbyshire SK13 8HT
Tel: 01457 891909
E-mail: foundations@cel.co.uk
Web: www.foundations.uk.com

Which organisations provide HIA services?

HIA services are provided by:

- small, not-for-profit voluntary organisations or charities, many of which take local names, ie (Townname) Care and Repair or (Townname) Staying Put;
- regional or national housing associations and trusts, including Anchor Trust (58 local agencies) and Hanover (10 agencies); and
- local councils, some of which have an in-house HIA, usually closely linked to the administration of improvement and repair grants.

In some areas, similar services are offered by local disabled persons' housing services (see **HoDis**, p 29).

What general services do all HIAs offer?

HIAs vary in size, scale and types of service offered. All HIAs offer advice, information and support for home owners and private sector tenants who are older or disabled and on low incomes, to help them stay in their own homes. Some also provide services to council and housing association tenants. HIAs usually make home visits, although they generally have an office which older people, relatives or staff can go to for an initial enquiry. Offices may not always be accessible so it is worth checking. They usually work normal office hours, Monday to Friday.

Typically, services include information, advice and support on problems relating to the property and available options, including:

- technical support;
- home visits and inspections;
- consultation with the older person, agreeing necessary repairs and designing improvements;
- arranging repair and improvement works (eg roof repairs, installing downstairs WC, better heating);
- help with choosing reputable and reliable builders;
- appropriate contracts and documentation;
- monitoring builders' performance;
- arranging security works (eg fitting better locks);
- advice on finances;
- advice on benefits and charitable funding;
- obtaining independent financial advice;
- releasing equity and accessing loans (to raise money from the property to pay for repairs/improvements);
- accessing any grants that are available from the local authority, including help with completing forms; and
- insurance claims

What other services do some HIAs offer?

Some, usually larger, HIAs have a wider range of services, which include:

- handyperson service for low-cost small repairs, and sometimes minor adaptations and home security improvements;
- hospital discharge services (eg to make minor alterations to the home to enable the older person to leave hospital sooner);
- development of services for people with specific disabilities or impairments, eg dementia;
- arts and activities groups aimed at reducing isolation;
- services to people in private rented housing as well as owner-occupiers for improvements (eg heating, home security), although generally not for repairs as this would be the landlord's responsibility – for repairs problems you will need to contact a specialist advice agency (see Quick Service Locator, pp 40–41);
- advice and support for deciding whether to stay or whether to move, and finding and moving to alternative accommodation (eg sheltered housing) if appropriate; and
- in some HIAs, a dedicated move-on service with specialist staff offering support and detailed information on move-on options.

What do they not do?

HIA services are usually aimed at low-income groups, often defined as people eligible for (although not necessarily receiving) means-tested benefits. Priority may be given to people on a low income. Some HIAs limit their services to home owners. Even if willing to work with tenants, many HIAs exclude council or housing association tenants. They cannot get involved in landlord-tenant disputes, and would generally need the landlord's agreement to help a tenant.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

HIA staff specialise in working with older people and they can provide both practical and emotional support over time (for example, the duration of the repair or improvement work).

HIAs usually have access to interpreters and information in specialist formats, eg large print, Braille, audio. Some will have developed links with minority groups, have staff from Asian, African-Caribbean or other minority communities, and be aware of the particular needs of elders from these communities.

Staff

Small HIAs have only a few staff, usually including someone with building knowledge (eg a surveyor) and administrative staff. Larger HIAs have significant staff teams including caseworkers, technical staff and handypersons as well as administrative support and managers.

Nursing Home Fees Agency

Where are they? Where can we find them?

The Nursing Home Fees Agency (NHFA) has an administrative centre in Oxford and a national network of care fee advisers (with Northern Ireland covered from Manchester). The Care Advice Line (freephone) is staffed 8.45am to 5.15pm, Monday to Friday.

- 🏠 St Leonards House, Mill Street, Oxford OX29 4JX
- Tel: 0800 99 88 33 (NHFA Care Advice Line; free)
- Tel: 0500 76 74 76 (Help the Aged Care Fees Advice service; free)
- E-mail: enquiries@nhfa.co.uk
- Web: www.nhfa.co.uk

What services do they offer?

NHFA provides free advice and information on obtaining and paying for care by phone and through information sheets and publications (including a long-term care guide). Its network of around 40 care fee advisers will make home visits by appointment, in the evenings if necessary. NHFA also provides the Help the Aged Care Fees Advice service.

NHFA aims to enable older people to meet the cost of their chosen care for life. The information and advice also covers many complex issues which older people need to consider when paying for long-term care. These include local council social services charging procedures, the responsibilities of the health authority, benefits issues and legal matters.

NHFA care fee advisers will provide detailed and specific financial advice for which no fee is charged. As required by law, they are regulated by the Financial Services Authority and NHFA may receive commission payments from the sale of financial products. This income funds the free advice given to other older people. The NHFA care development team will provide free training, talks and seminars to older people's groups and those advising others.

What do they not do?

The emphasis is on paying for care in residential care homes or nursing homes, or in people's own homes. They refer to other agencies (especially **Elderly Accommodation Counsel**, p 26) for issues concerning housing.

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

NHFA specialises in advice for older people and people with disabilities.

Staff

There are 20 administrative and development staff and 40 advisers, including specialist staff (accountants, tax, welfare benefits, community care law).

SeniorLine see Help the Aged

Shelter

Where are they? Where can we find them?

Shelterline is a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week, free telephone helpline for anyone facing housing problems or homelessness:

🏠 Tel: 0808 800 4444

Shelter also provides a national network of more than 50 Housing Aid Centres across England, and surgeries at other organisations. There is usually at least one Shelter Housing Aid Centre in each county, and

often more than one. You can find out if there is a local centre from Shelterline or from local directories.

What services do they offer?

Shelterline staff provide detailed advice on housing problems and homelessness over the phone. They have a particular knowledge of people's legal rights when faced with a range of housing problems: for example, rent arrears; problems with repair; harassment; threats of eviction, and problems with housing benefit. They advise tenants (private, council and housing association), people in hostels, bed and breakfast or shared housing, housing tied to their job, and home owners. Staff will suggest other sources of help and advice, including your nearest Shelter Housing Aid Centre.

Shelter Housing Aid Centres provide face-to-face and/or telephone advice, depending on the local service. They cover the same range of problems as Shelterline. Some can offer home visits if needed. Shelter advisers will help with filling in forms. They can often (but not always) provide detailed and continuing help for individual cases, including advocacy, to help people get what they are entitled to from their local council or other official bodies.

Shelter also provides expert consultancy and housing advice to advisers working at **Citizens Advice Bureaux** (p 19) and other advice agencies. A few local Shelter centres provide specialist services (eg resettlement) but do not provide housing advice.

What do they not do?

Shelter and Shelterline are especially concerned with housing problems such as rent or mortgage arrears, landlords refusing to do repairs, and threats of eviction or homelessness. For matters such as housing options and choices for older people, or care issues, it would be better to contact a specialist older people's agency such as **Elderly Accommodation Counsel** (p 26).

What can they offer older people and those from minority groups?

Shelter and Shelterline provide housing advice to people of all ages, and they are keen to offer their services to older people. At present, there is one specialist service for older tenants in Sheffield. They are developing links to provide more advice surgeries to older people in a number of areas.

Shelterline is accessible to people with disabilities and uses Minicom and Typetalk. It also has access to interpreters through Language Line. Calls may be referred to a local Housing Aid Centre which may also have links to minority groups in the local community.

Staff

Shelterline and Shelter advice staff receive specialist training. Some Housing Aid Centres employ solicitors, and all staff can receive extra information and help from Shelter's central legal team.

Staying Put see Home improvement agencies

Full Service Locator

	Page	Housing choices & options	Help at home	Personal & nursing care	General signposting	Problems linked to disability & ill health	Benefits; financial advice	Repairs & improvements (home owners & private tenants)	Repair problems (all tenants)	Harrassment; eviction; homelessness	Problems in sheltered housing	Factsheets
GENERAL SERVICES												
Age Concern Information Line	15											●
Age Concern local organisations	16		●	●	●		●					●
AIMS (Advice, Information and Mediation Service)	17										●	
Citizens Advice Bureaux	19				●		●		●			●
Community Legal Service	21				●				●	●		●
Counsel and Care	24	●		●	●							●
DIAL UK	25				●	●						
Elderly Accommodation Counsel	26	●	●	●		●						●
Help the Aged Seniorline	28	●	●				●					●
HoDis (National Disabled Persons Housing Service)	29	●			●	●						
Home Improvement Agencies	31	●						●				
Independent advice agencies	14						●		●	●		

	Page	Housing choices & options	Help at home	Personal & nursing care	General signposting	Problems linked to disability & ill health	Benefits; financial advice	Repairs & improvements (home owners & private tenants)	Repair problems (all tenants)	Harrassment; eviction; homelessness	Problems in sheltered housing	Factsheets
Nursing Home Fees Agency	34			●			●					●
Shelter Housing Aid Centres	36								●	●		
Shelterline	35								●	●		
SERVICES TO MINORITY GROUPS												
Chinese in Britain Forum	7				●							●
Civil Service Benevolent Fund	9		●	●	●		●					●
Federation of Irish Societies	7				●							●
Frontline Housing Advice	7				●		●		●	●		●
Jewish Care	7	●	●	●	●	●	●					
Lesbian and Gay Switchboard	9				●							●
Occupational Benevolent Funds Alliance	9						●					
Polari	8				●							●
Retail Trust	9	●					●					●
SSAFA Forces Help	10	●	●		●		●			●		●
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Quick Service Locator

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			21	Law Centres network (see Community Legal Service)

Subject/problem	Page	National services	Page	Local services
Harrassment; eviction; homelessness	35	Shelterline	11	Local council housing advice services
			14	Independent advice agencies
			21	Law Centres network (see CLS)
Problems in sheltered housing	17	AIMS		
General signposting & factsheets	15	Age Concern Information Line	16	Age Concern local organisations
	24	Counsel and Care		
	28	Help the Aged SeniorLine		

Written by Jenny Pannell and edited by John Galvin and Margaret Wallace, this book is designed specifically to direct older people to the housing advice and information services best suited to meet their needs.

Housing and home can be crucial issues for older people. Health, mobility and finance influence how and where we live, whatever our age, but for older people they can present particular challenges. And later life can force us to make tough decisions – whether to stay living at home, making adaptations if necessary, or to move on to more suitable, possibly sheltered, accommodation or residential care.

The *Directory of Housing Advice and Information Services for Older People* will be an invaluable resource for older people, their families and carers, and the professionals working for and with them. It provides an easy-to-use guide to services across England that offer older people help to:

- find housing
- maintain their home
- adapt their home to meet changing needs
- get help, support or care in the home
- find a more suitable home