

Renters (Reform) Bill: Second Reading House of Commons Briefing

About Independent Age

Independent Age is a national older people's charity that supports people facing financial hardship in later life. We offer free and impartial advice and information and give grants to community organisations. We use the knowledge and understanding gained from our frontline services to improve policy for the older people we support.

Independent Age response to the Bill:

Decent affordable homes are the foundation of a good life. The Renters (Reform) Bill provides a once in a generation opportunity to improve a dysfunctional rental system and ensure that everyone can benefit from a solid foundation. It is critically important that this bill supports private tenants at all stages of their life, including those in older age.

While we believe more needs to be done as soon as possible to address the affordability crisis private renters face, we do welcome the Bill and its plans to shift from Assured Shorthold Tenancies to periodic tenancies alongside the end of Section 21. These are important measures that will give older private tenants more stability. But the Bill must be strengthened so older renters can live with dignity and feel secure in their homes.

Independent Age's key recommendations

- The Government must outlaw blanket bans on benefit recipients as part of the Renters (Reform) Bill. We also want to see further action on other areas of discrimination such as age discrimination in lettings, requiring several months of rent upfront or asking benefit recipients to have guarantors.
- The Government should lengthen notice periods from two months to four months when the tenant has not breached the tenancy agreement.
- The Government must extend the protection period at the start of a tenancy from six months to two years, in line with its original proposals.
- The Government should introduce measures to apply the Decent Homes Standard to homes in the private rented sector.

Older renter insight

The number of older renters is growing. Between 2009–10 and 2020–21 the number of privately renting households in England with someone living in them aged 65 or over increased from 258,000 to 403,000 – an increase of 56%.¹ It is likely that this number will continue to increase as more working age adults move into later life without owning a property, so this is an issue for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

"I'm living in my friend's house, but he needs me to move out...I really don't know what I'm going to do. Not having a secure place to live is an unpleasant situation, you have no peace of mind... I have just over £800 a month, it wouldn't be enough to rent a place. When I'm trying to rent somewhere I think people do look at you and put you to the back of the queue. I spoke to a letting agent, and I told her I'm on Pension Credit and I'm not employed, and she said 'there's 40 to 50 applicants for every one of these one bedroom flats that come up. I'll be honest with you unless you are showing £2,500 a month, every month, you haven't got a prayer.'" Michael, 69 years old.

Older private renters often live in poverty and are vulnerable to unfair rental practices. Our Independent Age advisers hear regularly from renters whose health is suffering from cold and damp homes, who are experiencing difficulties managing spiralling rents on a fixed income and who say they feel constant dread due to insecure tenancies. These problems can take over someone's life, causing physical and mental distress.

While people of any age can find renting difficult, the lack of robust protections for tenants can be particularly damaging for renters in later life. The health of older renters is often more vulnerable to poor quality homes. They can find it particularly hard to find new rental properties due to the practical difficulties of moving. And older renters are very exposed to rising rents as they usually live on a fixed income and are often on benefits which help them afford their housing costs. This means rather than being able to move somewhere more affordable or suitable, older private renters often resort to cutting back on essentials - like food and energy - in order to pay their rent.

Key issues to raise at Second Reading:

1. Ending discrimination against older renters in financial hardship

It is essential that the Government's planned blanket ban on 'no DSS' is included in this Bill. Such practices are particularly discriminatory to older renters, many of whom are on Housing Benefit or receive Pension Credit.

"Over the time, [the rent] has increased and it's a lot of money... I do get Housing Benefit, which pays for quite a lot of it, and it leaves me about between £200 to £300 out of my pension to pay the rest.... My pension is, I think, it's about £174 a week, and so it takes up quite a lot." Toni, aged 67

Independent Age commissioned research from City, University of London which shows that 1 in 4 older private renters in the UK are in long term poverty (experiencing poverty for seven to nine years). This research also found that older renters (both social and private) are significantly more likely to enter poverty past State Pension Age.ⁱⁱ

An important step to tackling poverty in later life is to increase the take up of benefits including Pension Credit and Housing Benefit, which political parties across the board are working towards. There can be multiple reasons why someone is eligible for a means tested benefit in later life, including working all their life in low paid roles, taking time out to care for family or experiencing health challenges which impacted their ability to work. Eligibility can also be triggered in later life when someone experiences a bereavement or separation, throwing their financial stability into disarray. While more action on benefit take-up is required, Government should ensure that those who receive benefits in later life aren't penalised when trying to find a home. Tackling discrimination by landlords of benefit recipients is critical to ensuring older people on low incomes can live with dignity.

In England 195,745 older private renters are on Housing Benefit - almost half of all older private renters.ⁱⁱⁱ And given that take up is only 84%, the number of renters that could potentially move on to Housing Benefit could be much higher.^{iv} Furthermore, 77% of older private renters on benefits are aged 70 or older. Older renters are already likely to face challenges finding a home, but with such a high proportion of them on housing benefits, they are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory practices targeted at those in receipt of benefits.

"I've registered round all the agents, and one by one, they turned me down. Not openly, but they've said, 'What's your financial situation,' and I've said, 'Well, I'm on a pension,' and before I've got any further, they've said, 'Oh, well, you need at least three times your annual rent as income.'" Sally Anne, aged 70

Independent Age urges the Government to outlaw blanket bans on benefit recipients in the Renters (Reform) Bill. We also want further action on other areas of discrimination such as age discrimination in lettings, asking for several months of rent upfront or asking benefit recipients for guarantors.

2. Ensuring secure tenancies

Older renters should have confidence that, if they abide by their tenancy agreement, they won't be unreasonably evicted. Where the landlords must evict the tenant – to sell and live in their property – it's important that enough time is provided for older tenants to find alternative accommodation, especially given how challenging this is for older people who rent.

Independent Age recommends the Government should lengthen notice periods from two months to four months in circumstances where the tenant has not breached the tenancy agreement.

It is also essential that older renters have peace of mind that once they find a home to rent, they can stay there for a reasonable period so long as they abide by the tenancy agreement. This was included in the Government's original proposals.

Independent Age recommends the Government extends the protection period at the start of a tenancy from six months to two years.

3. Making homes a decent standard

We believe that the government should follow through on its commitment to expand the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) to the private rented sector (PRS). Older renters are particularly vulnerable to the health consequences caused by cold homes and health risks such as mould. Currently 30% (124,000) older private renters live in non-decent homes, compared with 15% of older homeowners, and 10% of older social renters.^v Expanding the DHS to the PRS is an important step to ensure that all older people can live safely in their homes and can make it easier for tenants and authorities to require improvements where homes are in poor condition.

Independent Age recommends the Government introduce measures to apply the Decent Homes Standard to homes in the private rented sector.

Contact

If you have any questions or would like any further information on this briefing, please contact Public.Affairs@independentage.org

ⁱ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2022) English Housing Survey: 2021-2022. 15 December 2022, [English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: headline report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

ⁱⁱ Independent Age (2022) Poverty in later life: How people in older age move in and out of poverty, and what should be done to reduce it. 12 January 2022. [Poverty in later life: How people in older age move in and out of poverty, and what should be done to reduce it | Independent Age](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ DWP (2023) Housing Benefit Caseload data accessed from [Stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk](#) June 2023

^{iv} [Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year 2019 to 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

^v Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2022) English Housing Survey: 2021-2022. 15 December 2022, [English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: headline report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)