

**Shaping attitudes
Challenging injustice
Changing lives**



Policy briefing

Housing and HIV: A survey into the housing advice and support needs of people living with HIV.

April 2013

Key findings

- HIV organisations have seen a rise in the number of people living with HIV who have housing support needs;
- Changes and cuts to housing benefit, rising homelessness, reduction in the supply of social housing, and issues with how local authorities allocate social housing have contributed to this rise in housing cases;
- Housing and HIV are closely linked. Their HIV status is usually cited as a significant factor for people with HIV needing housing support. Housing problems are also regularly reported to have a harmful impact on an individual's health.
- Local authorities need to be better, both in their policies and in practice, at assessing the housing needs of people living with HIV when they apply for benefits and housing support. They also need to consider the impact poor or unsuitable housing may have on an individual's health.
- Further research is needed into the way people living with HIV are assessed by local authorities when they apply for housing and the possible impact of the new housing allocation powers.

Introduction

In February 2013, in response to growing concerns and enquiries about housing, NAT conducted a short survey into housing and HIV. It was designed to capture how organisations which provide support and advice to people living with HIV view the impact that welfare reform and the Localism Act 2011 is having on their service users. We also wanted to ask service providers what housing policy areas they felt NAT should explore further.

NAT sent out a brief survey using 'surveymonkey' to members of NAT's HIV Policy Network, which is made up of organisations delivering services to people living with HIV across the UK. Eighteen different organisations responded to the survey, with most saying they provided a degree of housing advice to people living with HIV. It is these responses that provide the data for this briefing note.

NAT (National AIDS Trust) is the UK's leading charity dedicated to transforming society's response to HIV. We provide fresh thinking, expertise and practical resources. We champion the rights of people living with HIV and campaign for change.

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The geographical reach of the organisations that responded to the survey, while only covering England, is relatively wide and represented both rural and urban areas. The spread of organisations and the nature of their responses help to illustrate that housing is an important issue for people living with HIV across the country.

This briefing is designed to pull together and comment on some of themes highlighted in the survey results - in the context of a changing legal and policy environment – and to draw out some conclusions about the current relationship between housing and HIV.



Figure 1 - a visual representation of the areas covered by NAT HIV Policy Network members who responded to the survey.

The scale of the issue

To explore the scale of the issue, and the trends in demand for housing advice we asked a question about whether there has been a change in the last 12 months in the number of people living with HIV who are contacting Policy Network members for housing advice. Just over eighty percent of the organisations who responded said that their housing enquiry caseload had increased over the last 12 months and none reported a decrease. This is also a trend, in terms of direct enquiries, we have seen at NAT.

Question 12: Has there been a change in the last 12 months in the number of people living with HIV who are contacting your organisation for housing advice?

Increased – 81.3%

Stayed the same – 18.7%

Decreased – 0%

In two related questions we looked at the number of housing cases organisations were seeing in an average month, and the percentage of the overall number of advice and support cases they dealt with that involved housing. The results showed only three organisations, out of the sixteen who responded, handle more than

forty cases a month; however for nearly forty percent of organisations, housing represented more than forty percent of all the cases they saw.

We also asked an additional 'open' question about the issues that might be fuelling this rise in enquiries. The responses highlighted the link between welfare reform and benefit changes, and the problems people living with HIV are having in relation to housing. The then impending introduction of the 'bedroom tax' in April 2013; housing benefit caps; reductions in other benefits; wider welfare reform; debt and homelessness all came through strongly as significant issues, and possibly fuelling this rise in enquiries. We also found that the problems faced by people unable to access housing due to their immigration status (including European Union migrants) or those making the transition from UK Border Agency funded housing to local authority provided accommodation or renting privately remained a concern. For one organisation a significant number of service users were also having problems with their neighbours including issues of homophobia, noise, racism.

The key housing issues facing people living with HIV

We asked a set of questions to explore the current issues faced by people living with HIV, this included two 'open' questions which sought to explore with Policy Network members the most important issues which are reported by people living with HIV, and also separately, what was the most important housing issue concerning Policy Network members themselves. The answers to both questions capture a sense of what is happening on the ground to both service users and the organisations seeking to support them.

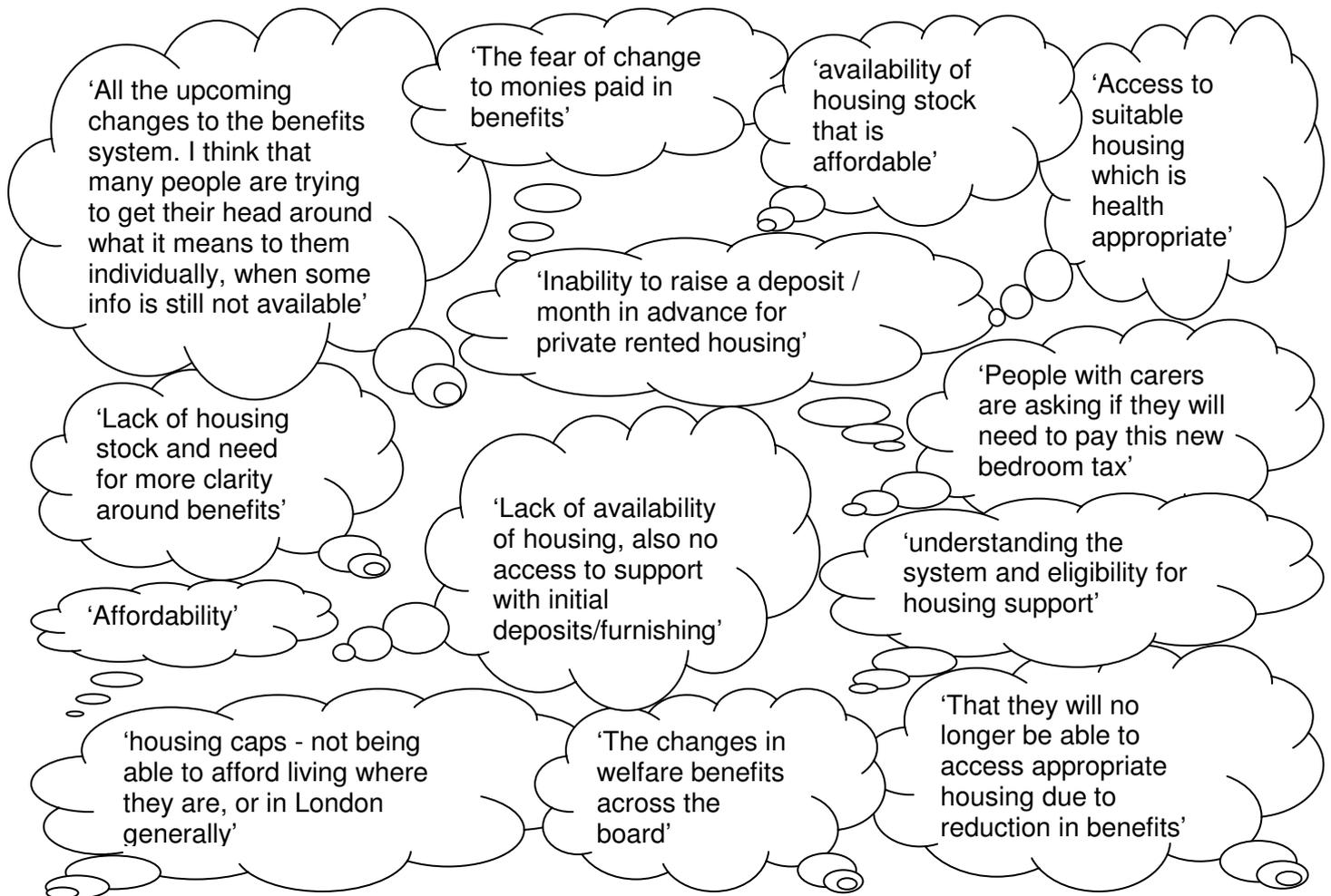


Figure 2 - selected responses to Question 19: In your opinion what is the most important issue concerning the people living with HIV you advise and support in relation to housing?

The housing issues highlighted above suggest a very challenging housing environment for people living with HIV, which is also reflected in the responses from the organisations that work with them. The detailed replies to these questions brought out key issues around how the housing needs assessment process, which is managed by local authorities, assesses the needs of people living with HIV. Responses highlighted the growing gap between the lack of available affordable housing in many parts of the country, due to static or decreasing levels of new housing supply and the increasing demand for housing across all tenures and sectors. While issues around HIV awareness, stigma, and harassment in the housing sector were mentioned, these problems appear not to be causing as much concern as other issues.

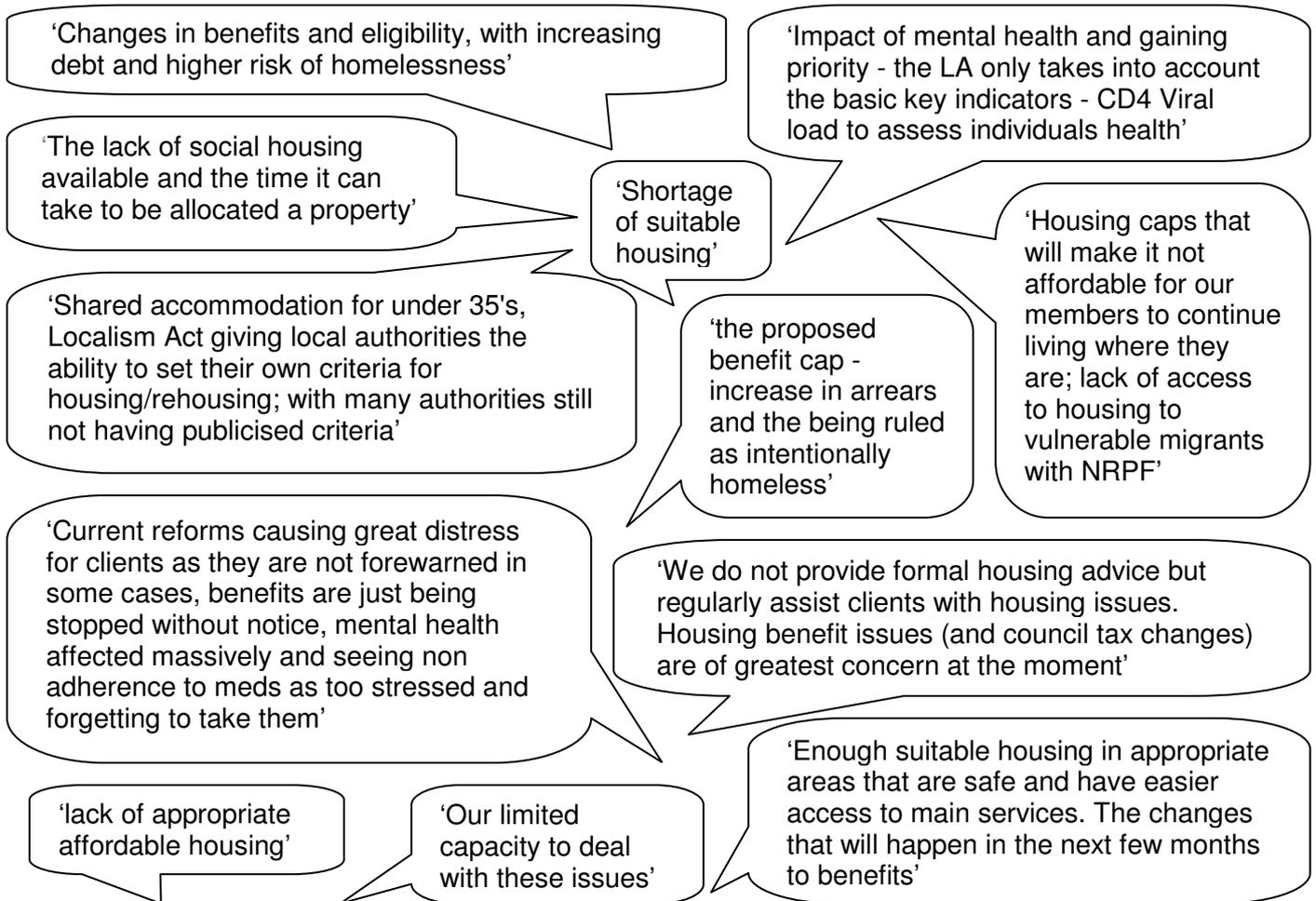


Figure 3 – selected responses to Question 17: As an organisation providing housing advice and support, what is the most important issue concerning YOU about housing and HIV?

Welfare Reform, Housing Benefit and Housing

There has always been a close relationship between housing and benefits, and that the interaction between the two can lead to issues for people in housing need. What has changed since 2009, and NAT’s last report into [Housing and HIV](#), is the rapidly developing agenda of welfare reform, the Localism Act since 2011, and the ongoing impact of the recession. While people living with HIV can be found in all types of housing and can come from every background they are still more likely to be from marginalised groups and live in or need social housing. We asked a question to find out what are the main housing benefit related issues that people living with HIV were facing.

The responses to the survey question showed a strong trend of rising anxiety and uncertainty about benefits, reflected in the number of people living with HIV in need of advice and support. Forty percent of responding organisations cited a ‘general fear about the changes to the housing benefits system’ as the most important

issue raised with them from their service users. People represented in this figure are also likely to include those who aren't immediately affected by changes to benefits, but may be in the future.

A common theme in responding to people affected, or likely to be affected, by welfare reform is the need to offer timely and accurate advice. At NAT we have been careful to make sure people living with HIV are aware in advance of when different benefit changes are likely to have impact on them, so that they can start to prepare for them.

In terms of specific benefits being raised by people living with HIV, the main issues respondents reported in descending order of importance were:

- universal credit and the benefits cap;
- accessing housing benefit;
- local housing allowance caps;
- the 'bedroom tax';
- the extension of the shared (single) room rate to under 35 and direct payments.

In a related question we asked HIV Policy Network Members to rank the four most common housing related problems people living with HIV raise with them. Two thirds of the organisations who answered this question ranked 'problems with benefits' as the most common issue raised with them by people looking for support and advice.

The above list of housing benefit related issues shows the range of issues faced by people living with HIV, and how interlinked benefits and housing are for many people needing advice or support. It is also worth reflecting that in terms of Universal Credit and the 'bedroom tax', this survey took place before these changes had been implemented. Although it is possible people living with HIV may have been contacted by the Department for Work and Pensions or their local council to tell them they are likely to be affected by these changes and were then seeking help and advice – it is also likely to reflect anxiety about these issues.

The next six most common housing (non-housing benefit related) problems faced by people living with HIV were:

- debt/paying the rent;
- homelessness or the risk of homelessness;
- access to suitable housing;
- repairs and damp;
- allocations and the housing waiting list;
- no recourse to public funds (NRPF)/migrant access to housing.

This list of responses show that even when we sought to explore the non-benefit related housing issues, the top two problems could still be linked to issues with accessing housing benefit or cuts to these and other benefits. Going forward as further changes to housing benefit are implemented there is likely to be a continuing rise in debt and rent issues, which in turn could lead to rising homelessness.

The relationship between housing and HIV.

Two questions in our survey sought to explore the relationship between housing and HIV. While it is often difficult to disaggregate the multiple issues that can impact on people living with HIV seeking advice and support, we wanted to get some indication from HIV Policy Network members how they viewed and thought about the impact of HIV on housing problems faced by people approaching them for assistance.

In responding to Question 21, sixty percent of organisations who answered said that eighty percent of people did have an HIV or health related problem linked to their housing issue.

Question 21: What percentage of people approaching your organisation for housing advice and support would you say didn't have HIV or related health concerns as the significant factor of their housing problem?

- **0-20%** **60% or 9 organisations**
- **21-40%** **6.7% or 1 organisation**
- **41-60%** **33.3% or 5 organisations**
- **61-80%** **0% or none**
- **81-100%** **0% or none**

This also supports the responses we received to Question 20, where two thirds of the organisations responding said that more than 60% of people approaching them for housing advice/support felt their housing problem had an impact on their health and HIV treatment.

Question 20: What percentage of people approaching your organisation for housing advice/support would you say felt their housing problem had an impact (or a potential impact) on their health and HIV treatment?

- **0-20%** **6.7% or 1 organisation**
- **21-40%** **6.7% or 1 organisation**
- **41-60%** **20% or 3 organisations**
- **61-80%** **33.3% or 5 organisations**
- **81-100%** **33.3% or 5 organisations**

This is only a snap shot of the position, and people living with HIV and approaching organisations for support are more likely to be having interrelated problems. However, from these responses it is possible to suggest that there might be a cyclical relationship for some people of having HIV and a housing problem; this in turn can then have an impact on their health and well-being.

Clearly this isn't the situation in all cases, with a third of organisations saying HIV wasn't the root cause of between 40-60% of housing problems. Here it is possible that, as with people not living with HIV, other factors such as poverty, family make-up, and location are having a significant impact on their ability to access affordable, good quality, suitable and sustainable housing.

NAT explored the issue of how HIV can impact on someone's housing needs and how housing providers should respond in more detail in our ['HIV and Housing: A practical guide for housing officers on HIV and its impact on housing needs.'](#) Poor quality or unsuitable housing, and instability as people wait for housing can all have an impact on health. In, for example, the case of shared accommodation, NAT would also have concerns

about confidentiality and stigma; an issue likely to be exacerbated by the extension of the shared room rate for people up to the age of 35.

Housing policy priorities

NAT is always keen to gather views on the types of policy issues we should focus on. The final part of our Housing and HIV survey was designed to explore with HIV Policy Network members the housing policy areas they thought NAT should be focusing on over the next year.

The overwhelming majority (88.9%) of respondents selected the 'Assessment of homeless and transfer applications by local authorities – including how well the impact of HIV and other health related conditions are assessed' as the most important area. The full results can be found below, and it was clear that issues around stigma, discrimination and awareness seemed to be comparatively less important to Policy Network members than changes to benefits and the operation of local authority allocation schemes.

There may be a variety of reasons for this weighting, and while we don't draw the conclusion that the issues around stigma identified as a lower priority have disappeared, this does not appear to be the area most HIV Policy Network Members wanted NAT to focus our policy work on. It is worth noting that the issues that came higher up the list are the very policy areas that have seen the most rapid legal and policy change in the last few years, and are also having the biggest impact on people living with HIV. Given the further housing and benefit policy changes to come, these issues will remain a priority.

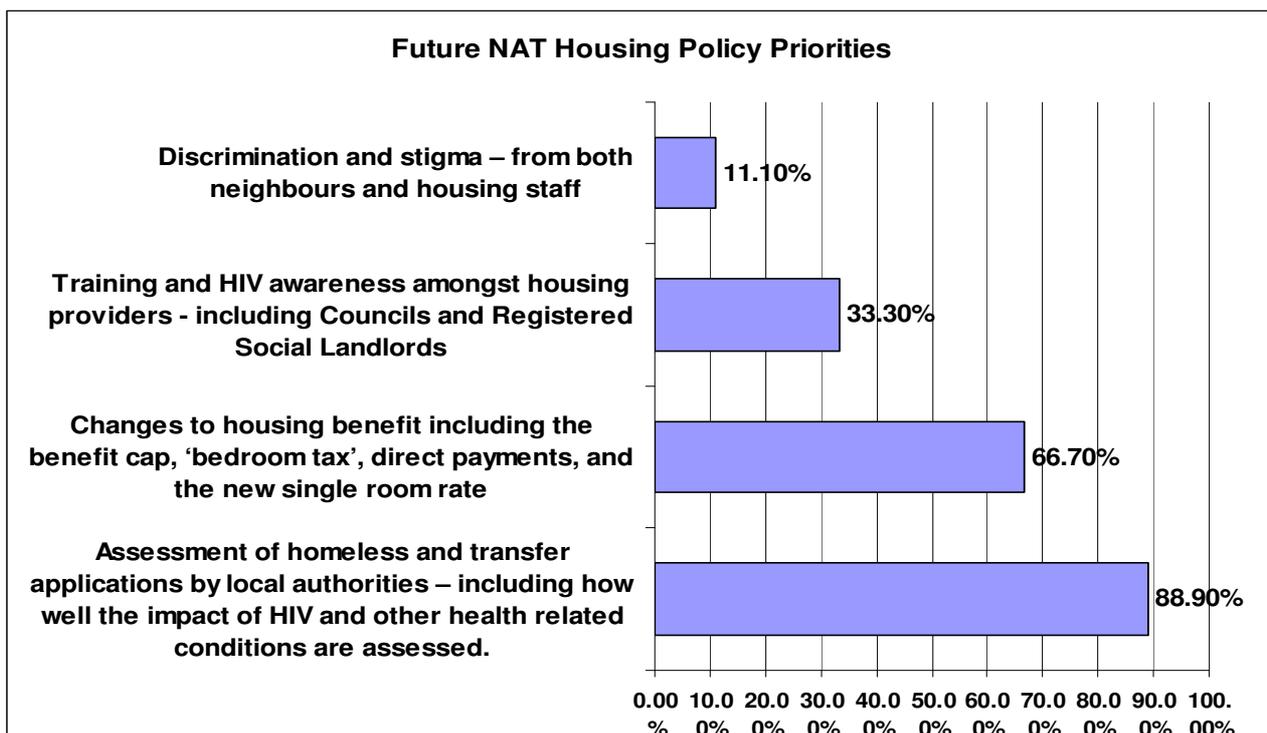


Figure 4 - responses to Question 22 NAT continues to work on housing related issues and the impact they have on people living with HIV. If we were to explore in more detail some housing related issues over 2013/14, which areas in your view should be a priority?

Conclusion and next steps

NAT acknowledges that this survey only captures a snapshot of the housing issues raised with HIV Policy Network members supporting and advising people living with HIV in England. However, it still represents a good indication of the increase in, and types of, housing problems faced by people living with HIV.

The trends from the survey results indicate an increasing number of people living with HIV are approaching organisations for help and support with their housing. While there can be a variety of reasons why people need housing advice and support, the fact that the recent welfare reforms and the local authority housing assessment process came through so strongly from the survey, suggest that these are areas that have a significant impact on people living with HIV and require further investigation.

In our previous [*'Practical guide for housing officers on HIV and its impact on housing needs'*](#), NAT sought to produce guidance on, amongst other things, assessing the housing needs of someone living with HIV. Without reproducing that guidance here, the issues around the need for privacy, the impact homelessness might have on HIV treatment adherence and health, and the need for an assessment of the impact of HIV on an individual's housing needs have not changed. If anything, the importance of getting such an assessment right for people living with HIV is only increasing given the changes to housing law ushered in by the Localism Act 2011.

The survey clearly shows the already high levels of anxiety and the significant support needs of people living with HIV in relation to housing. The changes to allocation powers in Localism Act 2011, along with the changes to benefits, are likely to make the situation more challenging and will have a big impact on those seeking housing or housing support from local authorities now or in the future.

NAT is keen to ensure that when hard pressed local authorities assess the suitability of a housing offer, especially one in the private rented sector or outside the local area, they take into account all the needs of people living with HIV. This should include considering the impact that poor or unsuitable housing can have on health as well as the need for someone living with HIV to be near their HIV clinic and any support organisations, given how critical this can be to them staying well.

NAT will continue working with HIV Policy Network members to make sure that people living with HIV have their voices heard and have access to the correct information and support about housing, welfare reform, and benefits. NAT will also continue to campaign to ensure that the needs of people living with HIV are addressed as local authorities revise and update their assessment and allocations policies.

The results of this survey have made an important contribution to NAT's workplan development and our understanding of the constantly evolving relationship between housing and HIV.

NAT would like to thank all the organisations that took part in the survey and discussions at our 27 February 2013 Policy Seminar:

- BHA Leeds Skyline
- Body and Soul
- The Brigstowe Project
- Cara Trust
- Central YMCA - Positive Health
- The Eddystone Trust
- Forum Link
- George House Trust
- Herts Aid
- Hestia Housing and Support
- LASS
- Living Well
- Positively UK
- Positive East
- River House Trust
- Sahir House
- Staffordshire Buddies
- Terrence Higgins Trust

If you want more information on NAT's housing and HIV work and resources, or want to contribute your experience of housing and HIV please email policyandcampaigns@nat.org.uk or visit <http://www.nat.org.uk/Information-and-Resources/Housing.aspx>.

A full copy of the NAT Housing and HIV survey which was live in February 2013 can be found on our website: [http://www.nat.org.uk/media/Files/PDF documents/Housing and HIV Policy Network Survey April 2013.pdf](http://www.nat.org.uk/media/Files/PDF%20documents/Housing%20and%20HIV%20Policy%20Network%20Survey%20April%202013.pdf)

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