

Supported housing census survey 2026

FAQs for NHF members

Section one: About the census

What is the census survey and how is it different from surveys you've sent us before?

Our new supported housing census will run this summer. It replaces our annual development survey, builds on last summer's survey of supported housing closures, and sits alongside our well-established [supply survey](#), which will continue to capture your development plans.

This new census is larger in scope than previous surveys, aiming to build a comprehensive picture of what the supported housing sector looks like now and to create an evolving picture of supported housing services in the future.

The census survey will collect detailed information on:

- The types of supported housing and housing for older people you provide.
- Who is commissioning services.
- Who your homes are serving in our communities.
- Where supported housing has been lost to the sector.
- Where supported housing is located across the country.

The survey supports our wider strategic work to make the case for a supported housing system that works better for residents, local communities, and the organisations providing homes and support.

This survey will also reduce the number of data requests we make to you, and will inform our media work.

Why are you running this survey?

Supported housing is a lifeline for the people who need it the most in our society, but not enough key decision makers understand and see first-hand the difference it makes, and what it takes to deliver lasting positive change. Data on supported housing is fragmented, and this survey is a key opportunity to address this knowledge gap.

We know that housing associations provide three quarters of England's specialist rented housing for people with care and support needs, including 70 per cent of our membership. Having a better understanding of the homes and services our members provide means we can provide more effective support to you as your membership body and advocate for the sector. This knowledge will also give us more confidence

in future research and policy development that we will share with key decision makers.

Why is it important that my organisation responds?

We know that our members provide homes and services that support a diverse range of people to live independently in their communities. This includes schemes for older people, people with a learning disability, people experiencing homelessness, veterans and women seeking refuge from domestic violence. However, we do not always know which members provide services for these communities, or where those services are located.

To make the case for a supported housing system that works better for residents, local communities, and the organisations providing homes and support, we need to understand more about the people you support and how these services are commissioned. This will help us present the challenges—and potential solutions—in a way that accurately reflects your experience. We can also use the data to tell stories about people, not just homes.

Because this survey aims to build a picture of the entire sector, we want to make sure that as many of our members as possible are included. We want to hear from small organisations, large organisations, specialist organisations, and organisations across the country.

Our organisation doesn't own any supported housing or housing for older people. Should we respond?

Most sections and questions in the census ask about supported housing and/or housing for older people that respondents own, using the definition in the Statistical Data Return that registered providers submitted to the Regulator of Social Housing. This gives us a clear and consistent definition for making statements about the data and what it tells us.

To avoid double-counting, we ask respondents to enter information only for the homes they own, because some housing providers may manage homes owned by other organisations. Less than 1 per cent of our members manage supported housing or housing for older people but do not own any homes.

We are a housing association that provides supported housing and/or housing for older people, but many providers of supported housing aren't registered providers. Will you try to survey them?

Although there are lots of ways to define and count supported housing and housing for older people, aligning with the definition of these homes under the SDR means that we have a consistent and comparable data source that covers the largest number of homes. However, many registered providers also provide vital homes and services outside the SDR definition, so we have included a question on accommodation-based support that falls outside the SDR remit, such as supported

housing let at market or non-social rents. We have also included questions on floating support, which plays an important role in the sector.

This census survey is one part of our strategic programme of work that includes the [Future of Supported Housing Project](#). This ambitious project will look across the wider system in which supported housing sits, including non-registered providers and supported housing outside of the social housing sector.

How will you use the information we provide?

We will aggregate the data you share through the census to build a national and regional picture of supported housing and housing for older people. We will not be publishing information about individual housing associations.

The data collected within the census is not considered to be personal data. We will store it securely in our internal filing system and manage it in line with our data retention policy.

Where relevant, we will share insights from the survey with our member intelligence and member relations teams to improve the support we offer you. This information will also be used to support our policy, influencing and engagement work in key areas relevant to your homes and services, such as responding to consultations.

Why carry out this survey every two or three years?

This census survey collects a variety of information, ranging from client groups to homes gained or lost, and commissioning arrangements. We recognise that it may take more time and effort to gather this information for some organisations than others, and this may require input from members of staff in multiple teams.

Collecting this information every two or three years reflects the effort required to respond and allows us to identify larger changes in the sector over time. Ideally, as many housing associations as possible would respond each time to ensure our sample is consistent.

Section two: How to complete the census

How do I access the census?

You can access the tool [via our website](#).

It is behind a member login. If your housing association is a member of the NHF, register with your work email address and the system should recognise you as belonging to a member organisation. You can then log in and download the tool. As it is Excel, you can work on and save the spreadsheet offline.

If you have any issues logging into our website, please [get in touch with our team](#).

How do I fill in the census?

The census is structured across the following tabs:

- **Contents**—this tab summarises the content of the census and explains who each section may be relevant to.

- **Notes & definitions**—this tab sets out key definitions used throughout the census and explains which information to include and why.
- **Stock**—information on the number of homes owned by service type, client group and region.
- **Losses & reason**—the three most important reasons that contributed to the loss of supported housing and/or housing for older people.
- **Losses outcome**— the number of homes lost and reasons for this, including homes that have been converted to another type of supported housing or general needs housing.
- **Gains & reason**— the number of homes gained and reasons for this, including homes that have been converted from another type of supported housing or general needs housing.
- **Commissioning**— homes that receive commissioned funding from various sources including the NHS and other public bodies.

To complete the census, you may find it helpful to use your organisation's submission to the 2026 SDR for the year ending 31 March as a reference for answering questions on stock, losses and gains.

You may find it helpful to view or print off the [step-by-step guide to completing the census](#) so you can see all the information required in one place.

How do I submit my information to the NHF?

Please fill in the questions and tabs that apply to you. On the final tab, you can provide comments about the survey, including anything we should take into account when analysing your responses or anything that does not fit elsewhere in the survey. Once completed, please save the file using your organisation's name and send it to research@housing.org.uk by Monday 7 September.

What shall I do if I don't have the information the census is asking for, or some questions or sections aren't relevant to my organisation?

Please answer as many questions and sections as you can.

If a question asks for information that you do not collect or cannot share, you will be able to tick "Do not collect this data/not applicable". You can also enter information in the relevant columns/rows that indicate "Unknown/other".

It is still useful for us to understand where information does not apply to your organisation, or where it is not possible or feasible for you to collate the information requested in the census.

How long do I have to complete the census?

Please save your Excel file with your organisation's name and **send your completed data tool to research@housing.org.uk by 7 September 2026**. If you have any challenges with completing your census, [please contact us](#).

What do you mean by homes owned?

For the purposes of the census, homes owned means units of supported housing or housing for older people that you own and that meet the definition of supported

housing specified in the [Rent Policy Statement](#). For homes that are owned by you, please refer to the definition in the [Regulator's Statistical Data Return](#). By units, we mean all self-contained and non-self-contained units of housing.

For a detailed list of definitions used within the census, please refer [to our step-by-step guide to completing the census](#).

What do you mean by supported housing and housing for older people?

Please refer to units of supported housing or housing for older people you own that meet the definition of supported housing specified in the [Rent Policy Statement](#).

SDR guidance and the policy statement do not specify strict age criteria for classifying housing for older people. This could include housing for people aged 55 and over.

Questions will indicate where you can refer to other accommodation or support, such as floating support, or accommodation-based support that does not fall within the remit of the SDR, such as supported housing let at non-social rents.

For a detailed list of definitions used within the census, please refer [to our step-by-step guide to completing the census](#).

Should I include retirement living properties under housing for older people?

In [SDR guidance](#), properties only meet this definition "if they are made available exclusively to older people and fully meet the definition of supported housing specified in the Rent Policy Statement". "Age-restricted general market housing" is unlikely to meet this definition if it does not include support to live independently or care services.

Should I include care homes?

No, please do not include care homes. These are a separate category in the SDR if they meet the definition of care home in the [Rent Policy Statement](#). This means "an establishment that is a care home for the purposes of the Care Standards Act 2000". However, please do include specialised supported housing in your response, which may offer a level of "services or support which would be provided in a care home".

Should I include specialised supported housing?

Yes, please include specialised supported housing that meets the definition set out in the Rent Policy Statement. This covers supported housing that is "designed, structurally altered, refurbished or designated for occupation by, and made available to, residents who require specialised services or support in order to enable them to live, or to adjust to living, independently within the community" among other criteria.

Please indicate specialised supported housing in the Stock tab under the relevant categories separately. The remaining tabs collect information at a client group level, which can include specialised supported housing where this information is known.

How should I enter information for supported housing I own that serves multiple client groups?

If you know the detail of the support needs of residents currently living in these homes, you could enter each unit (whether a bedspace or a self-contained unit) that best applies to each individual. For example, if you own a scheme that includes extra care and sheltered housing with lower levels of support in the same building, you can enter the numbers of units under each category separately.

If you are not sure what the support needs are of residents in some of the supported housing you own, you could enter these homes in the category “Unknown/no primary client group”.

Should we enter information from a particular time period?

For the Stock, Losses and Gains tabs, please enter information for units of supported housing or housing for older people you own that meet the definition of supported housing specified in the [Rent Policy Statement](#), as you submitted in your return to the Regulator for the financial year ending 31 March 2026. This is to ensure that information is consistent across all responses and so we can track changes over time.

For questions on commissioning, please provide the most current information you have. We appreciate that commissioning arrangements may differ, such as spanning multiple financial years, covering a calendar year or another timeframe.

Is general needs housing excluded from the census?

This census captures information on supported housing and housing for older people. Please do not include information for general needs accommodation you own, except for questions relating to floating support.

Why have you chosen these categories of service type and client group?

The supported housing sector is complex, and people do not fit neatly into boxes. However, categorising based on support needs identified is one way of understanding the different support and services provided.

We have decided to structure data on service type and client group to be consistent with annual reporting information that local authorities will submit to the government under the new [local supported housing strategies](#).

Following this structure means we can interpret this data consistently and results can be compared in the future. Some of our members may also be familiar with the content of local supported housing strategies guidance as they work in partnership in their local areas.

We have also included a question that captures homes that address multiple needs and/or disadvantage to make sure responses also reflect the operational reality of providing these homes and services and the value they bring.