

## Appendix 2 MSP template letter

(Patient address)

(Date)

### Re: THE IMPACT OF A COLD DAMP HOME ON MY HEALTH

Dear (enter name of local MSP)

I am living in a cold, damp home with a significant negative impact on my health, and I am writing to ask for your help in addressing this.

The UK already has some of the least efficient housing stock, and the highest winter mortality in Europe. The current cost of living crisis, and specifically the cost of fuel, will worsen this further, with an estimated 66% of households living in fuel poverty by January 2023.

Cold damp homes make people ill, with impacts on the NHS, on education, on work, and on the economy.

It is known that living in cold, damp homes has negative impacts on many aspects of physical and mental health, including:

**Childhood development** – children who are cold need more calories to stay warm, grow and develop. Children living in a household with fuel poverty are also more likely to struggle to have access to adequate nutritious hot food. Cold homes impact negatively on the mental health of parents and carers, causing adverse childhood experiences, with the lifelong impacts that these have.

**Lungs** – cold damp homes make people more prone to respiratory infections, as more viruses circulate in cold environments, and immune systems are less resilient. It is estimated that around 10–15% of new asthma cases are caused by the dampness, mould or poor ventilation (therefore more dust) in homes that are difficult to keep warm and dry. This was highlighted by the recent inquest into the avoidable death of two-year old Awaab Ishak, who died from a respiratory condition caused by mould in his home.

**Heart** – indoor temperatures of less than 12<sup>o</sup> cause blood vessels to narrow and blood to thicken. This in turn, causes a rise in blood pressure and an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes.

**Brain** – cold damp homes have negative impacts on the mental health of both children and adults. It has also been shown to worsen dementia.

**Social** – the negative impacts on health as listed above, and the financial impact of heating inefficient homes when fuel costs are high mean less money is left over to buy food, spend on transport, keep up with rent, and maintain social connections. Living in a cold damp home impacts on sickness absence from work and education. If only one or two rooms can be kept warmer, this impacts on privacy, and on having space to work and study. Overcrowded cold damp homes with higher levels of stress have been associated with higher levels of domestic violence and homelessness.

It is known that some groups in society are more at risk than others of fuel poverty and living in cold damp homes, for example people who are living in poverty, people with chronic diseases or disability (especially if having to operate medical equipment at home), people who are frail and elderly, pregnant women, young children, single parent households and people from ethnic minority groups.

It is estimated that 867 people die prematurely in Scotland each year due to living in cold, damp homes. Please do not let me become a statistic.

Yours sincerely

(Patient name)