



Building Healthier & Fairer Places

The Impact of Housing Constraints on NHS Hospitals' Discharge in Wales¹

March 2026

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¹ The document uses official statistics throughout the text unless otherwise noted. The statistics are drawn from <https://stats.gov.wales/en-GB>, last accessed on January 20, 2026.

Definitions

Delayed Discharge – A patient who is clinically ready for discharge but cannot leave the hospital because the necessary ongoing care and support, or suitable accommodation, is not yet available.

Discharge Delayed Days – The cumulative number of days experienced by adults who have been delayed by more than 48 hours in their transfer from the hospital after being clinically ready for discharge.

Discharge Delay – The number of individuals who have experienced a delay of more than 48 hours in their transfer from the hospital after being clinically ready for discharge.

Pathway of Care Delay – The pathway of care refers to the planned progression of a patient from hospital treatment to their next appropriate care setting. A delay occurs when a patient is clinically ready for discharge but cannot move on because the required care, support, funding, or accommodation is not in place.

About the Data

The report uses the Welsh government's data and definitions of data points. The data is a snapshot of a given day each month and does not include the total number of days in the month. The data reports the number of individual delays and the cumulative total number of days delayed. For any given data point, the number of days delayed is the cumulative number of days delayed for the reported number of individual delays.

Government data identifies patients with a discharge delay and the reason for the delay at a given point in a given month. It provides information on the number of adult patients occupying an NHS hospital bed who are clinically optimised and ready to return home or move on to the next stage of care. However, these adults experienced a delay of more than 48 hours in their transfer beyond the point at which they were clinically optimised.

The report uses aggregated national-level data, not data at the individual local health board provider level. Data for the local health board provider relate to the local health board where the service was provided and where the delay occurred.

1. Introduction and Summary

We all recognise the importance of homes to our overall health and well-being. When we are ill, this becomes even more crucial. Studies clearly show that once hospital treatment is no longer necessary, health outcomes are greatly improved when care is provided at home. Unnecessarily prolonged hospital stays pose a risk of infection and deterioration.² Government-aggregated data show that home-related care, step-down care, home adaptations, housing-related issues, and care home placements account for nearly 45 per cent of overall NHS hospital discharge delays. Breaking down the data by specific reasons, over 4.5 per cent of patients who spent 8.1 per cent of cumulative discharge delay days in hospital longer than necessary did so due to housing-related issues. Meanwhile, each delayed discharge day of 1401 patients costs the Welsh NHS £705,000 a night across Wales.

This report aims to understand these housing-related delays better to establish a foundation for consensus, collaboration, and action across the housing, health, and care sectors. The key findings, based on the recent December 2025 snapshot data, are:

- **Housing-related delays impact 5 in 100 patients:** over 4.5 per cent of patients (or 63 people) were delayed in leaving the hospital due to housing-related issues, resulting in 4,981 (8.1 per cent) cumulative delayed days.
- **The average length of housing-related delay has increased, whilst the average delay time has decreased:** the data suggests pressure is arising from the length of time people are delayed by housing issues, rather than from the increasing number of patients being delayed. While the average delay duration has decreased for the overall pathway of care, it has increased for housing. Since April 2023, the average delay for the overall pathway of care has fallen from 50 to 45 days. In contrast, housing has risen from 63 to 76 days.

Looking at monthly data going back to the beginning of 2023, housing-related delays consistently account for a disproportionate share of total delayed days relative to their share of delayed patients.

² Health Care Inspectorate Wales, "[Delays with Patients being discharged from hospitals in Wales is affecting the delivery of safe care](#)", Sept 2023.

- **Housing-related cumulative delay days cost £2.49 million:** Housing-related cumulative delays account for 8 per cent of the total estimated cost of all overall cumulative delay days. This is equivalent to:
 - Nearly 5 per cent of the NHS Wales Performance and Improvement Budget
 - The annual average rent for over 401 social homes
 - The grant required for c.16 new affordable homes
 - The investment needed to improve 42 homes up to the highest energy efficiency rating of EPC A,³ and
 - Over 1,000 adaptations to make social homes accessible.⁴

- **Housing-related delays put pressure on hospital capacity:** the data indicate additional pressure on hospital capacity because individuals whose discharge depends on housing-related issues remain delayed longer than patients delayed for other reasons. The impact of the discharge delay extends well beyond financial cost to the NHS system. The discharge delay reduces availability for incoming admissions, affects access to urgent and emergency care services, and contributes to emergency department waiting times and ambulance handover delays.⁵ In a system already facing workforce pressures, discharge delays intensify strain on staff and limited operational flexibility across hospital services.⁶

- **Supply and adaptations need to ramp up to meet demand:** If housing-related pathways were resolved at the same average duration as the overall pathways-of-care delay, the total cumulative delayed days would be materially lower. Most patients' discharges (about 40%) were delayed due to assessment issues, with an average discharge delay of 29 days. In contrast, housing-related delayed individuals accounted for almost 5% of the population, with an average discharge delay duration of 76 days in 2025.

³ Based on Savills estimates produced for CHC in 2025 of £59,000 per property on average, not adjusted for inflation.

⁴ Based on the average cost of adaptation in the social sector set out here, not adjusted for inflation: <https://www.gov.wales/spending-analysis-housing-adaptations-wales-summary-html>

⁵ Urgent and Emergency Care: Flow out of Hospital – West Glamorgan Region, March 2025, Audit Wales.

⁶ Science Research Evidence: Winter Modelling 2025 – 2026, 22 September 2025, Wales Gov Statistics.

This difference represents excess burden on the hospital system associated with prolonged housing-related delays, rather than the volume of housing-related cases alone. The supply of social housing and adaptations has to expand to reduce housing-related discharge delays, currently straining the health system. Looking at the total delayed days in December 2025:

- 5 per cent (3,331) were due to patients having no suitable abode
- 1 per cent (662 days) were waiting for extra care or supported housing availability
- Almost 2 per cent (998) were because of unsafe homes that require attention, and homelessness.
- Over 1 per cent (659) of days are spent waiting for an adaptation.

The findings of this report reinforce the need for a truly joined-up approach to housing.

We need a bold, deliverable plan to end the housing emergency.

As part of our *Homes: For every future* manifesto, we are calling on the next Welsh Government to develop a cross-sectoral plan for housing that includes the vital intersections with health and social care. To address the challenge that housing delays pose to patients' well-being and to the NHS, we are calling for a cross-government Hospital to Home Mission to bring together experts from across the housing, health and care sectors to rapidly identify ways to work more effectively together and to embed a Home First approach to patient recovery. Continued and increased investment in adaptations will also ensure people can remain at home for longer and avoid injuries that can lead to hospital admissions.

2. Hospital Discharge Delays

December 2025 data show that there were 1401 patients with pathways-of-care discharge delays across Wales, approximately a 4 per cent decrease from November 2025 data (Figure 1). The associated cumulative discharge delay days were 61,147, representing an almost 4 per cent decline from November 2025 (Figure 2). Of these, 63 (4.5 per cent) patients had discharge delays, representing 4,981 (8.1 per cent) cumulative delay days, due to housing-related issues.

Across the monthly data 2025, the number of individuals experiencing pathways-of-care delays shows a slight decline compared with 2024 and 2023. This

reduction is more pronounced in the cumulative number of delayed days in 2025, indicating improved overall system performance. Delays due to NHS bed and transfer-related issues declined from the start of 2025, and in the second half of 2025, no delays occurred due to NHS bed-related issues. The two factors have contributed to improved system performance. However, housing-related issues causing discharge delays have continued to put pressure on NHS Hospitals' capacity.

Figure 1: Path-Way-Care Delays – Individuals

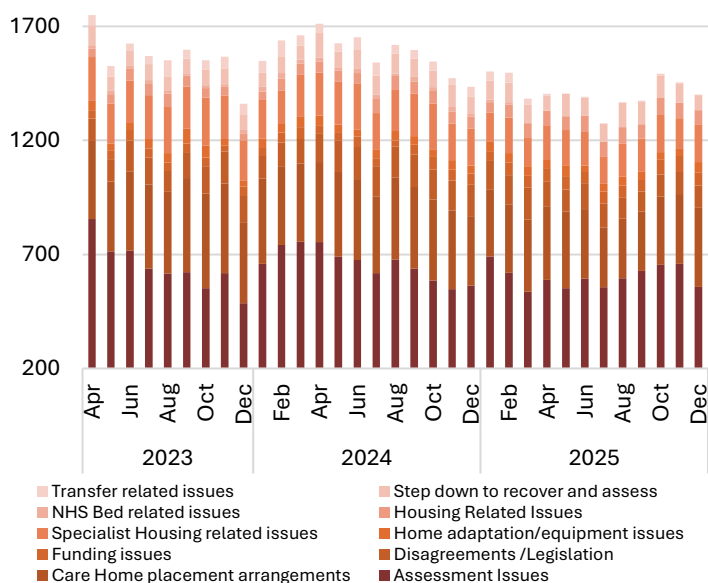
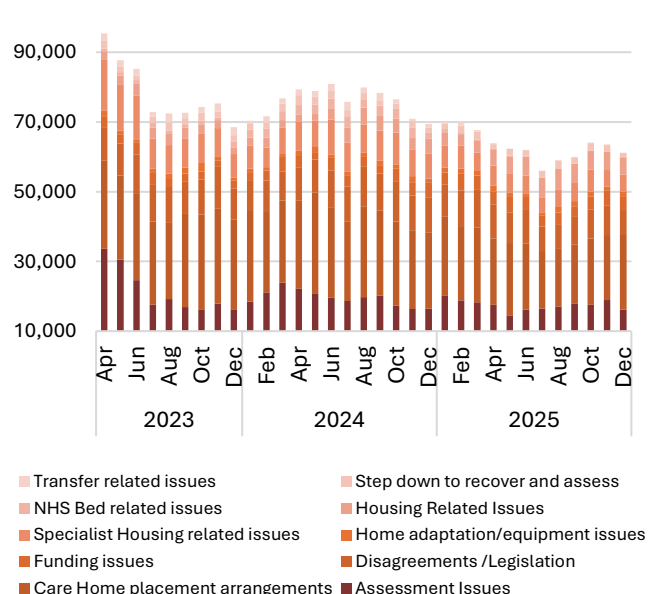


Figure 2: Discharge Delayed Days – Cumulative Days



Assessment issues (Table 1) were the main cause of delay for most patients (558), but the total delayed days were relatively small compared to the number of patients. Conversely, for care home placements (346 patients), home care (165 patients), and housing-related delays (63 patients), the number of delayed days exceeds their proportion among patients, indicating that these delays tend to last longer than those caused by other reasons.

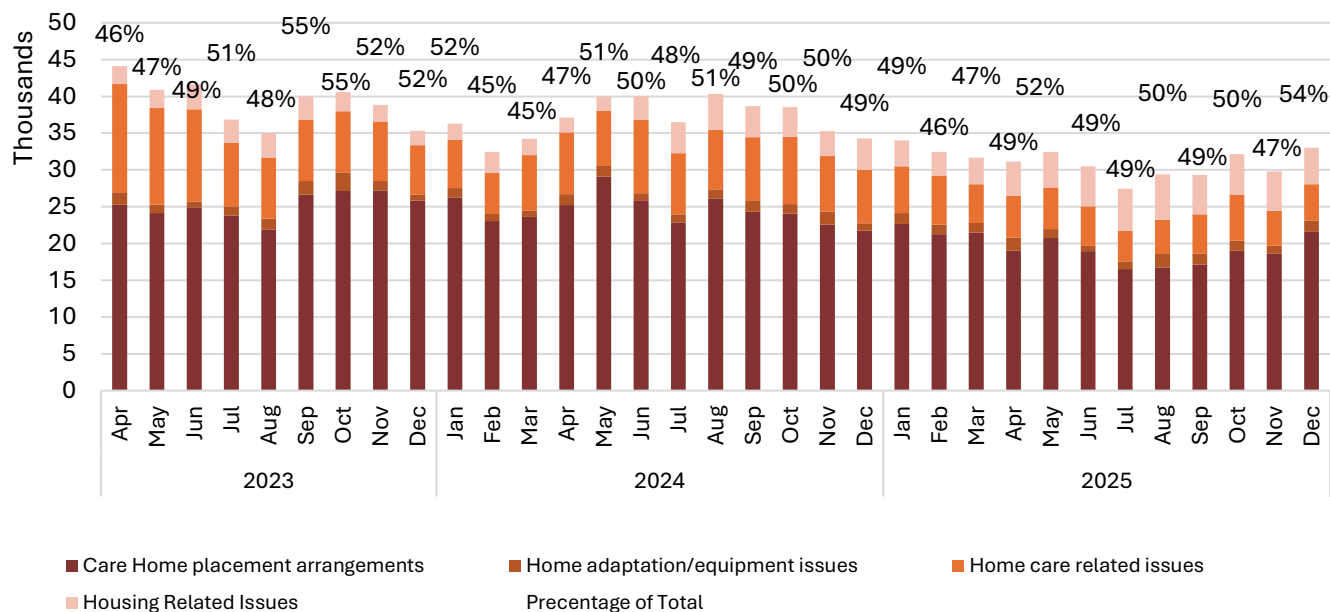
Table 1: Discharge Delayed Patients and Days Percentage of Total

	Patients	Delayed Days
Assessment Issues	39.8%	26.5%
Care Home placement arrangements	24.7%	35.4%
Home care-related issues	11.8%	8.1%
Disagreements /Legislation	7.0%	11.2%
Step down to recover and assess	4.6%	2.0%
Housing Related Issues	4.5%	8.1%
Funding issues	4.1%	6.2%
Home adaptation/equipment issues	3.2%	2.4%
Transfer-related issues	0.2%	0.1%
NHS Bed-related issues	0.0%	0.0%

More than half of discharge delays were linked to care home placement, home care, home modifications, and housing issues (Figure 3). Consequently, 619

patients, representing over 44%, experienced a total of 33,030 delayed days, which is 54% of all discharge delays recorded in December 2025. Housing-related delays contributed to over 8% of the total delayed days, amounting to 4,981 days, with 63 patients (4.5%) delayed specifically because of housing challenges.

Figure 3: Hospital Discharge Delayed Days



Since April 2023, data show a steady decline in the average delay duration across various care pathways (Figure 4), with an overall reduction in delay duration across all pathways. As illustrated in Figure 2, the total discharge delays have also been gradually decreasing. In the first half of 2025, individual discharge delays due to NHS bed shortages were infrequent, though the total number of days delayed remained high. Conversely, in the second half of 2025, no patient discharges were delayed due to NHS bed issues.

However, the average housing-related delay has increased, indicating that people whose discharge depends on housing are experiencing longer delays than those delayed for other reasons. As shown in Figure 4, this reflects a sustained upward trend in average delay rather than a short-term fluctuation.

Figure 4: Average Delay Duration – Cumulative Days

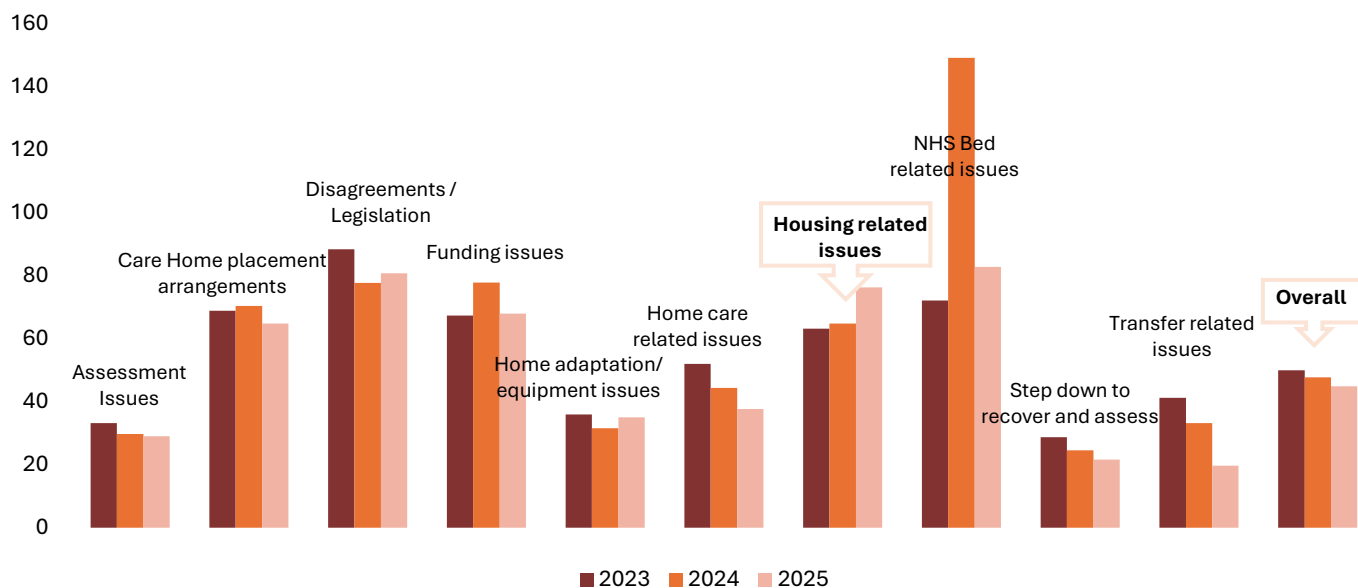


Table 2 demonstrates that this trend is accompanied by a widening distribution, with the range of housing-related average delay durations increasing from around 10 days in 2023 to over 33 days in 2025, driven by rising maximum average delay durations. In 2025, the average delay duration across all pathways of care was over 45 days, and for housing-related care, it was over 76 days. The gap (Range in table 2) between the lowest and highest average delay for any given month has been increasing for housing-related discharge delays. Taken together, these patterns suggest persistent constraints on access to suitable housing-related solutions, which place upward pressure on system-wide delay durations even when overall delay levels remain relatively stable.

Table 2: Average Delay Duration	2023				2024				2025			
	Min	Average	Max	Range	Min	Average	Max	Range	Min	Average	Max	Range
Overall Pathway of Care	45	50	57	12	43	48	48	5	43	45	49	6
• Care Home placement arrangements	61	69	79	18	65	70	78	13	59	65	77	18
• Home adaptation/equipment issues	28	36	48	20	19	32	41	22	25	35	48	23
• Home care-related issues	39	52	76	38	38	44	51	13	30	38	49	19
• Housing-related issues	58	63	68	10	40	65	84	44	57	76	90	33

3. Cost of Discharge Delays

In a published NHS Confederation briefing in October 2023, the average cost of a night in hospital was estimated at £500.⁷ This estimate is further validated in the Audit Wales committee report at the West Glamorgan Region Committee meeting in March 2025.

Looking at all discharge delays on the December 2025 snapshot day, patients had experienced a cumulative delay of 61,147 days for all pathways of care, costing the NHS £30.5m in lost bed capacity. Housing-related delays alone cost the NHS £31,500 a night, or cumulatively £2.49 million, for the 4,981 discharge-delay days due to housing-related issues.

Cumulative discharge-delay days (21,635) due to home care placement arrangements had cost the NHS system £10.8 million; similarly, home care placement and home adaptation each had costs of £2.4 million (4,933 cumulative days) and £0.7 million (1,481 cumulative days) respectively.

Although the estimated cost of the discharge delay is a fraction (0.2 per cent) of the total NHS operating budget for 2025/26, it is a sizeable expenditure compared with other NHS programs' budgets and has a detrimental impact on both those waiting for hospital care and those ready to return home.

For context, the estimated £30.5 million is approximately 56 per cent of the £50.2 million allocated to NHS Wales Performance & Improvement in the 2025–26 national budget. Housing-related delays alone, at £2.49 million, account for approximately 5 per cent of the NHS Wales Performance & Improvement national budget allocation. This comparison highlights the scale of structural pressure that discharge bottlenecks place on targeted performance funding.

Table 3: Estimated Cost – December 2025

Housing Related Issues	Cumulative days	Estimated Cost
<i>Awaiting extra care availability</i>	107	£53,500.00
<i>Awaiting supported living availability</i>	555	£277,500.00
<i>Home unsafe and requires attention</i>	436	£218,000.00
<i>Homeless</i>	552	£276,000.00
<i>No suitable abode - requires rehousing</i>	3,331	£1,665,500.00
<i>Total</i>	4,981	£2,490,500.00

Within housing-related issues, almost 67 per cent of the cost (£1.6 million) was due to the unavailability of suitable abode, and homelessness accounted for 11 per cent of the cost (Table 3).

⁷ "Briefing: Minister for Finance and Local Government Statement on the 2023-204 financial position," NHS Confederation, 17 October 2023.

For comparison, the average rent set by registered social landlords for all self-contained social housing (general needs, sheltered, other supported, and extra care) was £119.40, which adds up to £6,208 for 52 weeks, or one year of average rent. The estimated cost of the housing pathway-of-care discharge delay is equivalent to 52 weeks' average rent for 401 self-contained social housing units. The government planned to spend a grant of around £163,000 per dwelling,⁸ through the Social Housing Grant to build new affordable homes. Discharge delay costs equal government spending on 16 dwellings. By comparison, 36 people's discharge was delayed due to being homeless (13) or having no suitable abode (23). While NHS hospital beds are resource-intensive, reducing housing-related discharge delays by building more social homes would help alleviate prolonged NHS bed occupancy and improve NHS performance affected by these delays.

4. Conclusion

Housing-related discharge delays represent a structural constraint within the NHS rather than a temporary operational fluctuation and demand a systematic and coordinated response. While the number of housing-related cases remains relatively modest compared with overall pathways-of-care delays, the duration of those delays is materially longer. As a result, housing-related pathways account for a disproportionate share of cumulative delayed days and occupied hospital bed capacity.

These findings reinforce the case set out in Homes for Every Future, which calls for a sustained and deliverable programme to increase the supply of affordable homes across Wales. Increasing the supply of general housing and Specialist Housing would support more timely hospital discharge, improve patient outcomes, and strengthen NHS performance. This will enable the Welsh government to act on "A Hospital to Home Mission" and to work together with housing, health, and care systems to reduce delayed transfers of care and promote a "Home First" approach to recovery.

Building Healthier & Fairer Places is therefore not solely a housing ambition. It is a practical systems intervention that supports health, prevention, and public service performance across Wales.

⁸ Affordable housing, Audit Wales, September 2024, https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/Affordable_housing.pdf



Appendix 1

Discharge delay days by category: the data show a decline in total numbers; however, they remain elevated.

Category	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025
Assessment Issues	17,587 Delayed Days	18,944 Delayed Days	16,198 Delayed Days
Care Home placement arrangements	19,014 Delayed Days	18,653 Delayed Days	21,635 Delayed Days
Disagreements /Legislation	8,206 Delayed Days	8,538 Delayed Days	6,849 Delayed Days
Funding issues	3,823 Delayed Days	4,265 Delayed Days	3,806 Delayed Days
Home adaptation/equipment issues	1,359 Delayed Days	1,055 Delayed Days	1,481 Delayed Days
Home care-related issues	6,287 Delayed Days	4,743 Delayed Days	4,933 Delayed Days
Housing Related Issues	5,465 Delayed Days	5,365 Delayed Days	4,981 Delayed Days
NHS Bed-related issues			
Step down to recover and assess	2,180 Delayed Days	1,835 Delayed Days	1,218 Delayed Days
Transfer-related issues	213 Delayed Days	160 Delayed Days	46 Delayed Days
Total	64,134 Delayed Days	63,558 Delayed Days	61,147 Delayed Days