

# What's next for adaptations?

## Summary

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In partnership with

**UNIVERSITY of  
STIRLING** 

 **Scottish Federation of  
Housing Associations**

**ALACHO**  
ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHIEF HOUSING OFFICERS

 **Chartered  
Institute of  
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Scotland

 **Economic  
and Social  
Research Council**



“Inclusive design  
is not a luxury  
– it’s the right design.”

Kay Allen, OBE | Director, Age Irrelevance



# Foreword

This report is both a timely call to action and a hopeful roadmap for change. It brings together evidence, insight, and vision to show how adapting our housing stock is not simply a matter of bricks and mortar, but a cornerstone of national resilience.

Accessible, adaptable homes enable people to thrive at every stage of life. They reduce pressure on health and social care systems, empower older and disabled people to live with autonomy, and support working families by removing daily barriers to wellbeing.

This report calls for the Scottish Government to prioritise accessible and adaptable homes, viewing them not as a budget for reduction but as vital investments in our future.

I add my call for action. We have decades of research and recommendations. Indeed, it is 30 years since the Disability Discrimination Act. Now is the time for collective action.

**Kay Allen, OBE | Director, Age Irrelevance**

**“Please read this welcome report, to inform planning to extend Scotland’s housing stock, enabling it to be better adapted to environmental and personal needs. The report is especially timely, as many people with special and increasing needs live longer, so that safer housing and relocation options are essential, especially as many unpaid caring friends and family also become very aged. Indeed, safer housing must not continue to be seen singularly as a matter of affordable rents, prices or service charges.”**

*ISPA Community Peer-Researcher*

**“Every £1 spent on equipment adaptations is a £6 saving across health and social care so it just has always seemed absolute lunacy to me that instead of actually investing in something that’s going to save you £6 across health and social care for every £1 you spend, we continue to actually cut budgets [and] kick the can down the road. It’s not the solution to the budget pressures. It’s one of the causes of the budget pressures.”**

*Occupational Therapist,  
Male, Mixed urban-rural area in Scotland*



To read the full report, please download it by scanning the QR code or visiting [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Whats-next-for-adaptations](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Whats-next-for-adaptations)



# Introduction

Scotland is ageing, but not necessarily ageing well. While life expectancy has risen, healthy life expectancy is declining, meaning more people are spending later life managing illness, disability, or reduced mobility.

At the same time, the majority of older and disabled people live in general needs housing that was never designed to meet changing needs. This puts increasing pressure on Scotland's housing, health, and social care systems.

Housing adaptations, which are the modifications and physical changes that make homes safer and more accessible, are a vital part of the solution. They help people stay independent, reduce hospital admissions, delay the need for care, and improve everyday quality of life. From grab rails to technology support to accessible bathrooms, adaptations are not optional extras - they are often the difference between staying at home and being forced into crisis.

Yet despite decades of research and recommendations, Scotland's adaptations system remains fragmented, reactive, and under-resourced. Innovative work is happening, but too often, help arrives only after a fall, injury or hospital stay and access varies depending on where you live, tenure, and what funding is available.

This summary of our new report highlights why adaptations matter and shows that the future will only see increased demand and need.

**The findings make one thing clear: we already know what needs to change. The question is when we will act.**





# Why this matters: The impact of adaptations

At its heart, this work is about people's right to live safely, independently, and with dignity in their own homes.

Adaptations enable you to bathe, sleep, or leave your home without risk. They reduce pressure on health and care systems, support recovery, and help people stay connected to their communities. But for too many people, support comes too late, or not at all.

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**"We're constantly reacting instead of preventing."**

*Occupational Therapist,  
Male, Mixed urban-rural area in Scotland*

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Stakeholders in the research note that delays and inequalities in access are widespread and the consequences are serious: more falls, avoidable hospital admissions, and missed opportunities for prevention.

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**"I was living in a house where I couldn't go to bed because the bedrooms were upstairs... So I was ending up having to sleep on the couch and just washing in the kitchen sink... because I couldn't really access upstairs anymore."**

*ISPA Community Peer Researcher,  
Female, Urban area*

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**The system remains largely reactive, rather than proactive or aligned with a preventative approach.**

# Adaptations are a statutory duty

This isn't a moral or practical failure – it's a legal one. Adaptations are a statutory duty in Scotland. But the way services are delivered through fragmented funding, inconsistent assessment, and no national oversight means that this duty is often not fulfilled in practice.

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**“For me, I would say it's like three words, legislation, legislation and legislation... So unless it's actually forced upon local authorities, I think you will see variances in practice and you'll see a continuation of what we see happening locally and nationally. Guidance has no teeth.**

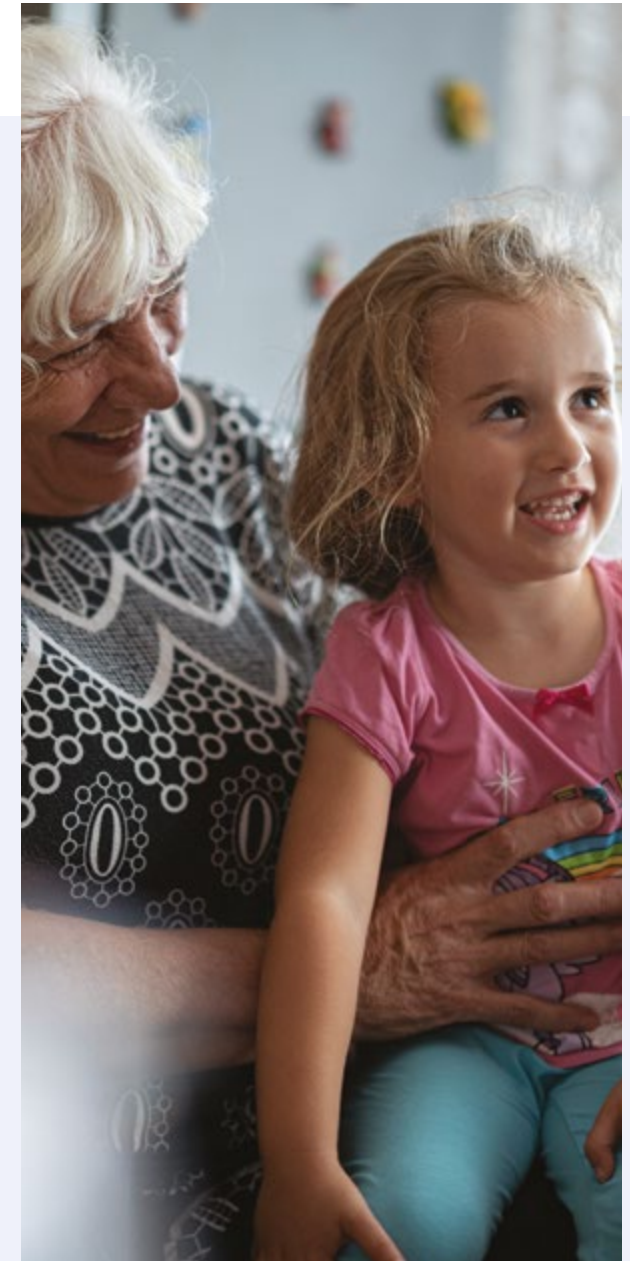
*Occupational Therapist,  
Male, Mixed urban-rural area in Scotland*

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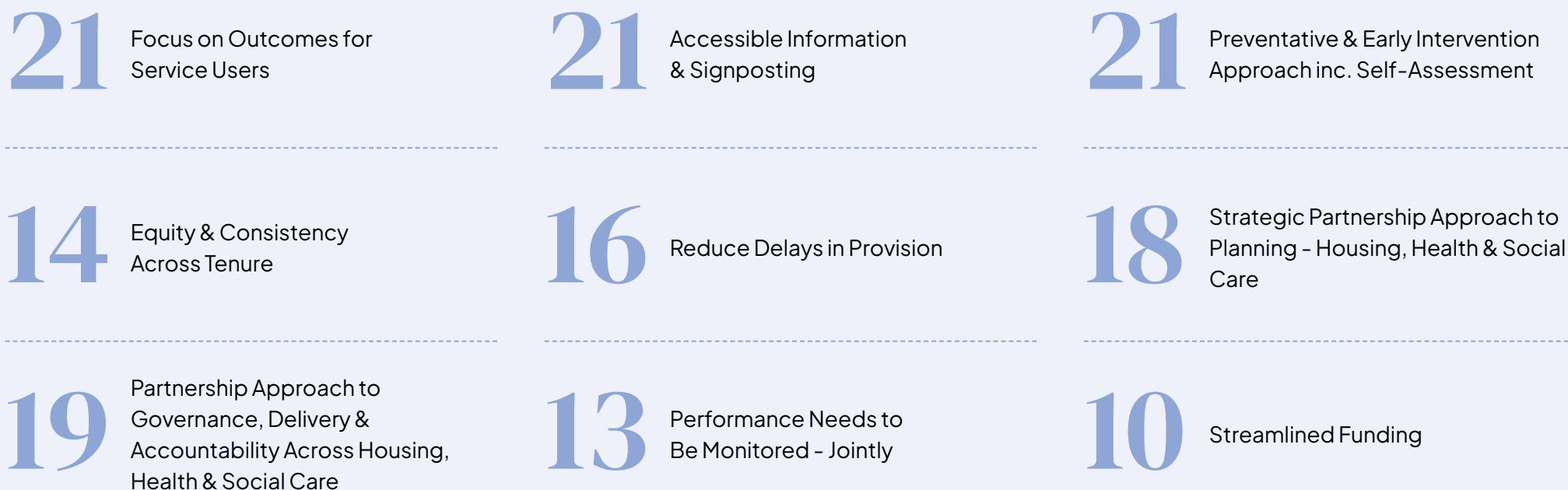
Despite the wide range of legislation and guidance that underpin the delivery of adaptations in Scotland, the landscape remains strikingly ambiguous in practice. There is no single body responsible for overseeing or

coordinating adaptations across housing, health, and social care and this lack of leadership contributes to significant inconsistency in how rights are interpreted and implemented locally. Definitions vary, responsibilities are blurred, and the term “adaptations” itself is used in different ways across services and sectors. This ambiguity creates confusion not only for service providers, but more importantly, for those trying to access support.

Over the last 25 years, a series of national and sector reports have consistently surfaced the same themes, pointing to well-evidenced solutions that have often stalled at the point of implementation.



## Number of times recommendations have been repeated across reports since 2000 (n=28)



Graphic showing the frequency of key themes throughout the 28 reviewed reports

The repetition of the same recommendations across multiple policy eras points not only to systemic inertia, but to a mismatch between local innovation and national resourcing and accountability. Reports have surfaced the problems, generated solutions, and yet the wider system has failed to evolve in ways that fully support timely, equitable access to adaptations.

# Growing Demand for Adaptations

Our research found growing demand for adaptations with significant variation by geography and tenure. Those in rural areas, private tenancies, or non-standard accommodation (such as Park Homes) face particular barriers.

Key groups, including those with terminal illness, neurodivergence, dementia, and learning disabilities are often overlooked or delayed due to a mixture of barriers including bureaucratic thresholds and funding constraints.

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**“...you’ve got a backlog of people waiting for things and you’re constantly working in deficit.”**

*Policy Lead, Female, has a Scotland-wide role covering both urban and rural areas*

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Total spend by social landlords exceeded £26.8 million in 2023. Meanwhile, grant-funded adaptations fell by almost £378,000 between 2022 and 2023 – a concerning trend given increased need.

Alongside growing demand, the cost of the average adaptation continues to rise (due to a mixture of increased complexity, inflationary costs of materials, labour and construction):

- > For Social landlords (ARC), the average cost rose from **£1,798 in 2019** to **£2,204 in 2023**
  - For LA landlords average cost rose from **£1,763 in 2019** to **£1,943 in 2023**
  - For mainstream RSLs average cost rose from **£1,804 in 2019** to **£2,255 in 2023**
- > For homeowners (SoA), it increased from **£3,432 in 2014** to **£5,286 in 2023**

Projections also show that Scotland is still not delivering the number of adaptations we would expect based on pre-COVID trajectories.

Furthermore, fragmented processes, under-resourced assessment pathways, and unclear responsibilities all contribute to preventable delays that are reactive and often only prioritised after a fall, injury, or hospital admission and can lead to higher costs.

While many local areas have made genuine progress in improving the delivery of adaptations, the underlying funding framework has remained largely unchanged, and it is this structure that continues to drive many of the system’s inefficiencies and inequities.

To read the full report, please download it by scanning the QR code or visiting [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Whats-next-for-adaptations](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Whats-next-for-adaptations)





## Looking ahead, the pressure will only intensify

Using 2022 population projections and 2014–2022 Scottish Household Survey data, we estimate that:



The number of homes with adaptations will rise from **342,448** in 2022 to **372,627** by 2040



Adaptations delivered by Social Landlords (LA and mainstream RSLs) will increase from **20,675** in 2025 to **22,601** by 2040



Homeowner-installed adaptations will rise from **4,744** in 2025 to **5,186** in 2040

The challenge is no longer knowing what to do, but when we will act. The evidence is consistent, the need is growing, and the cost of inaction will mount. Adaptations are key to a truly tangible preventative approach to future-proofing our homes and environments in response to inevitable demographic change.

**“There’s a build-up of people who are waiting years now to get their property adapted, and that can obviously then mean they can’t actually live a very full life, or they’re having a very restricted life at home... And so, I’m not saying it’s an easy feat at all, but it’s something we need to look at more, as policy. And everyone’s got warm words, but warm words don’t adapt a house.”**

**Policy Maker, Male, Mixed urban-rural area in Scotland**

# Predicting future needs

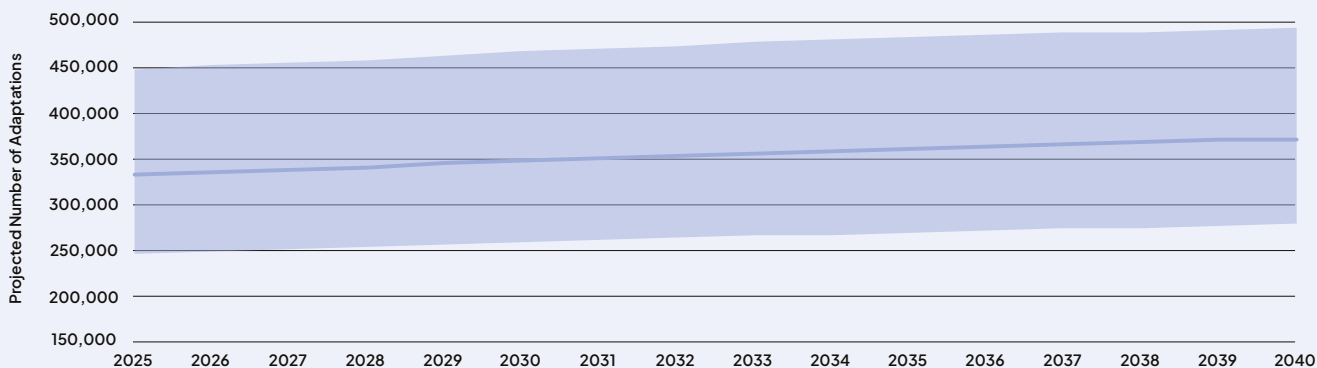
Using 2022 census-based population projections (NRS, 2025b), we predict the number of future adaptations using SHS data (2014–2022).

Proportions of people with adaptations observed by age and sex were multiplied by the projected numbers of men and women at each age in the population over the next 15 years . We estimated 342,448 adaptations in 2022, by 2040 there will be an estimated 372,627 (95CI: 280,004 – 493,382) adaptations in Scottish households.

There is a lot of very positive delivery in very difficult environments, but stakeholders across Scotland agree that systemic challenges are making the delivery of essential adaptations ever more difficult to sustain.

By 2025, Scotland could be spending over £68million a year on housing adaptations across sectors, and this could rise to over £76million by 2040. Most of that spend will fall to local authorities and housing associations unless more support is provided for homeowners.

Projected total adaptations each year 2025–2040 with 95% confidence intervals



Line chart showing the projected number of adaptations each year from 2025 to 2040 with 95% confidence intervals using NRS population estimates and SHS data



# What Needs to Change

The need for adaptations is not just increasing, it is shifting, becoming more complex, and more urgent.

The need for adaptations is only growing. With Scotland's population ageing and more people living with long-term conditions, accessible housing is no longer a specialist concern it should be a national priority. The next 15 years will see tens of thousands more homes requiring adaptations, not as crisis interventions but as core infrastructure for healthy, independent living.

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“...if you look at the adaptations budgets like a cake, all you're really doing is you're dividing up the cake as best you can and then, you know, next year you realise, oh we've forgotten about, I don't know, people with dementia or adults on the autistic spectrum, oh we better give them a bigger slice of the cake. The cake doesn't really get any bigger. I think the cake could be cut more equitably and I think that's probably back to data and understanding.”

*Senior Housing Sector Leader, Female, national remit*

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This report makes clear what needs to change:

- > **Establish a national legal and policy framework for adaptations**, underpinned by strengthened statutory guidance and clear consumer standards. This should define minimum delivery expectations, ensure tenure-neutral access, and support consistent, rights-based provision across Scotland. The Scottish Government must follow through on its commitment to review adaptations policy, ensuring it leads to updated statutory guidance and national standards that eliminate postcode inequality.
- > **Secure sufficient, sustained funding to cover both the cost of adaptation works and the staffing, assessment, and coordination** required to deliver them well. Funding should be multi-year, transparent, and enable earlier intervention and not crisis-led responses.



- > **Create a single, coordinated pathway for adaptations**, with shared referral routes, clearer roles, and joined-up working between housing, health and social care. Opportunities include embedding housing in hospital discharge planning and developing cross-sector liaison roles, such as “trauma connectors” or housing navigators in GP practices.
- > **Strengthen data systems and feedback loops to connect policy, practice, and lived experience**. This includes tracking what works, where demand is growing, and whether adaptations are meeting their intended outcomes and supporting continuous learning and responsive commissioning.
- > **Embed early intervention, inclusive design, and smarter use of technology to future-proof Scotland’s housing stock**. A national framework should move beyond minimum compliance (e.g. “wheelchair accessible”) toward adaptable, inclusive design from the outset.
- > **Clarify and expand the role of Self-directed Support (SDS)**, particularly Option 1: Direct Payments, as a funding mechanism for adaptations. This will require improved guidance for both practitioners and the public, wider promotion of SDS options, and access to trusted contractors with quality assurance safeguards.
- > **Scale up effective local models and improve public awareness**, ensuring earlier access to adaptations, more informed choices, and stronger support across all housing tenures. This must be matched by greater political leadership and visibility, with adaptations recognised and resourced as essential infrastructure across housing, health and social care, not treated as an optional add-on.

We already know what works, as evidenced from the last 25 years. As the adaptations process is to be reviewed, now is the time to act to avoid the human cost of inaccessible, non-decent, stigmatising homes now and in the future.

The challenge is no longer knowing what to do, but when we will act. The evidence is consistent, the need is growing, and the cost of inaction will mount. Adaptations are key to a truly tangible preventative approach to future-proofing our homes and environments in response to inevitable demographic change.

**Based on projected demand and current average costs, Scotland is likely to spend over £68million annually on housing adaptations by 2025, rising to over £76million by 2040.**

**The largest share of this investment will fall to local authorities and housing associations, though homeowners will also require sustained support. These projections underscore the scale of future demand and the need for coordinated long-term funding strategies across all sectors.**

Our goal is not to re-tell  
lived experiences of  
adaptations but to highlight  
why adaptations matter.

# For more details please see our full report

This summary draws on national datasets, practitioner insights, and over 25 years of policy learning gathered through the **What's Next for Adaptations?** project.

Led by the University of Stirling in partnership with SFHA, CIH Scotland and ALACHO, this work forms part of the wider Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) research programme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of the Inclusive Ageing call: Grant reference: ES/W012677/1

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Download the full report here

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