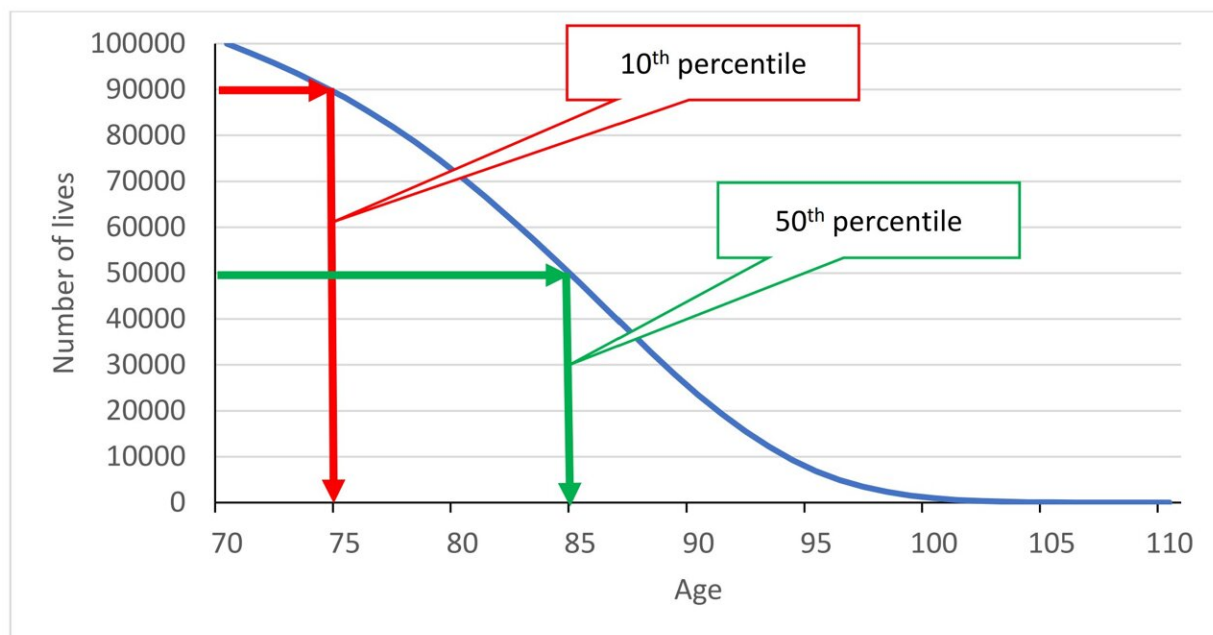


Living in an almshouse boosts life expectancy, UK report finds

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Survival curve for a 70 year old in 2020 (Source HMD, 2023). Credit: *Almshouse Longevity Study—Can living in an almshouse lead to a longer life?* (2023)

Living in an almshouse can boost the longevity of its residents by as much as two-and-a-half years compared to their counterparts in the general population, according to a new Bayes Business School report.

[Almshouses](#) provide affordable community housing for local people in

housing need. They are generally designed around a courtyard to provide a "community spirit," that is synonymous with the almshouse movement. They offer [independent living](#) but provide friendship and support when needed.

Analyzing up to 100 years' worth of residents' records from various almshouses in England, the research suggests that living in these communities can reduce the negative impact on health and social well-being which is commonly experienced by the older population in lower socioeconomic groups, particularly those individuals who are living in isolation.

The results are very encouraging. They show that, for several of the almshouses included in the study, residents can expect to live as long as wealthier members of the [general population](#) despite coming from the most deprived quintile. This shows that the disparity in longevity and health outcomes could be mitigated even after reaching retirement age, provided a suitable social infrastructure can be put in place.

The report, authored by Professor Ben Rickayzen, Dr. David Smith, Dr. Anastasia Vikhanova and Alison Benzimra, concludes that almshouses could help the Government's aims to reduce inequalities in mortality, which are observed between socioeconomic groups, by reducing the social isolation experienced by many in the older population.

Titled "Almshouse Longevity Study—Can living in an almshouse lead to a [longer life](#)?", the report's key findings are:

- Residents in almshouses in England receive a longevity boost relative to people of the same socioeconomic group from the wider population.
- The best-performing almshouses in the study so far have shown a longevity boost which increases [life expectancy](#) to that of a life in

the second-highest socioeconomic quintile—a remarkable outcome.

- As an example, the authors estimate that a 73-year-old male entering an almshouse such as The Charterhouse today would receive a longevity boost of 2.4 years (an extra 15% of future lifetime at the point of joining) compared to his peers from the same socioeconomic group, and 0.7 years when compared to an average 73-year-old from the general population.
- This longevity boost could be due to both the strong sense of community and social belonging within almshouses which lead to better physical and mental health. Enhanced well-being helps to mitigate loneliness which is endemic in older age groups.

Professor Ben Rickayzen, Professor of Actuarial Science at Bayes Business School, said, "It is well known that, on average, the lower a person's socioeconomic status, the lower their life expectancy. However, intriguingly, our research has found that this doesn't have to be the case. We discovered that many almshouse residents receive a longevity boost when compared to their peers of the same socioeconomic status from the wider population."

"More research is needed to ascertain exactly what factors cause almshouse residents to have a longer life; however, we postulate that it is the sense of the community that is the most powerful ingredient. For example, a common theme within the almshouses included in the study is that they encourage residents to undertake social activities and responsibilities on behalf of their fellow residents. This is likely to increase their sense of belonging and give them a greater sense of purpose in their everyday lives while mitigating against social isolation."

"We would encourage the Government to invest in retirement communities, such as almshouses, which would be in keeping with their overarching leveling up agenda. While this agenda is commonly

associated with enhancing equality on a regional basis, it is important that leveling up should also aim to combat health inequalities experienced by people from lower socioeconomic groups across the country."

"There is an opportunity to improve the Government's leveling up agenda by incorporating the best features of communal living into their social housing policy. This should make a significant difference to the quality of life experienced by the older population across the UK."

"The findings from this research are important as they could offer solutions to the social care problems currently being experienced in the UK."

Alison Benzimra, a co-author of the report and Head of Research at United St Saviour's Charity, said, "Many almshouse trustees and staff members anecdotally believe that almshouse living is beneficial for residents. The results from this study demonstrate that the [community spirit](#) provided by almshouses does in fact result in longer life expectancy."

"These findings are encouraging to those living and working in the almshouse community and provide the motivation to continue to explore what it is about almshouses' physical design and support services that result in positive outcomes for older residents. This study strengthens the case that this historic form of housing is addressing the evolving needs of older people living in our modern-day society."

Nick Phillips, CEO, The Almshouse Association, said, "We are delighted to read this report. It is further evidence that the almshouse model—1,000 years after its inception—seems to be adding something special to the lives of residents. There is a growing body of research that is suggesting this model of community housing seems to be right for the

future. This must now beg the question, where are the philanthropists to lead this robust charity housing model into the next century?"

Susan Kay, Chief Executive of Dunhill Medical Trust, said, "It's been great to support this piece of work and to see it take its place in the wider body of work about the characteristics of age-friendly living spaces and supportive communities. A one-hundred-year life is now a realistic expectation and we need to build on this learning to create the homes and communities that will be so important for the health and well-being of us all."

Nigel Hulme, a [resident](#) of the United St Saviour's Charity almshouse, explained how much living in the almshouse has helped him in his later years: "Moving to Hopton's Gardens has been a godsend. To have a roof over my head has helped me to deal with my addiction issues, and having the support from the staff and my neighbors has made my recovery possible."

More information: Report: www.bayes.city.ac.uk/_data/as...ity-Study-Report.pdf

Provided by City University London

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