Smoking and Social Housing: Data Report 2026

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Executive Summary

Social housing tenants in Wales smoke at more than twice the national rate. Without targeted action in these communities, smokers in the more deprived areas will be left behind Wales will not meet its Smokefree 2030 ambition. This data report outlines the latest statistics on smoking and vaping in social housing in Wales, carried out by YouGov for ASH.

Key findings

- **28% of social housing tenants currently smoke** compared to 12% across Wales, with one in five smoking every day. Social housing has the highest smoking rate of any tenure group.

- **57% of social housing tenants wrongly believe vaping is as harmful as, or more harmful than, smoking.** This misperception matters given that vaping is the most widely used cessation method among smokers in Wales, used by 45% of social housing smokers who have tried to quit. Correcting it is a direct route to increasing the number of people using the most effective quit method available.

- The health consequences of smoking are concentrated here. **COPD is nearly three times more prevalent than the Welsh average.** 33% report a mental health condition they received treatment for in the past year, double the rate among owner-occupiers, and nearly 1 in 8 is currently on an NHS mental health waiting list.

- **Nearly 1 in 4 social housing households has someone smoking indoors daily.** Social housing tenants are also more than three times as likely to have bought tobacco that may have been smuggled or untaxed in the last 12 months, weakening the impact of price as a deterrent to smoking.

- Support for action is strong. 91% of people living in social housing back smokefree school grounds and 91% back smokefree hospitals. **Social housing communities are not opposed to tobacco control.**

Social housing communities in Wales carry a disproportionate share of the harm caused by tobacco. **Targeted, evidence-based action in these communities is essential to reduce health inequalities and deliver a Smokefree Wales.**

1. Smoking Prevalence

1.1 Smoking status by housing tenure

Social housing has the highest smoking rate of any tenure group in Wales; more than double the national average.

Indicator	Social housing	Wales average	Owner-occupied	Private rental
Current smoker (net)	28%	12%	8%	17%
Daily smoker	20%	8%	6%	6%
Non-daily smoker	8%	4%	2%	10%
Never smoked	39%	54%	54%	51%
Ex-smoker	33%	34%	38%	32%

The social housing smoking rate (28%) is more than double the Welsh average and more than three times the owner-occupier rate. Daily smoking stands at 20%; one in five social housing tenants smokes every day. Only 39% have never smoked, compared to over half of owner-occupiers and the Welsh population overall.

1.2 Household and socioeconomic profile

Social housing tenants are more likely to be in lower socioeconomic groups, out of work, and living with children.

Characteristic	Social housing	Wales average
DE social grade	49%	29%
C2DE combined	71%	52%
Female	65%	52%
Unemployed or not working	25%	13%
Any children in household	49%	36%

Almost half of social housing tenants are in the DE social grade, and 71% are C2DE; compared to 52% across Wales. Three in ten have children under 18 at home, and nearly half have children at home including those over 18. These are the communities where smoking rates remain highest and where the health consequences of tobacco are most concentrated.

2. Vaping

2.1 Prevalence

Vaping prevalence in social housing is almost double the Welsh average. Vaping is highly concentrated among smokers and ex-smokers and is the most widely used cessation method in this group.

Indicator	Social housing	Wales average	Owner-occupied
Currently vape	21%	12%	8%
Ever tried vaping	43%	30%	23%
Heard of but never tried	51%	65%	73%
Never heard of vapes	6%	4%	4%
Indicator	Social housing	Wales average	Owner-occupied

21% of social housing tenants currently vape; almost double the Welsh average of 12%. 43% have tried vaping at some point. Vaping prevalence is higher in this group reflecting both greater tobacco dependency and active use of vaping as a route out of smoking.

2.2 Misunderstanding of vaping risks

Fewer than 1 in 4 social housing tenants believe vaping is less harmful than smoking.

Perception of vapes vs tobacco	Social housing
Less harmful than tobacco (net)	22%
Just as harmful as tobacco	42%
More harmful than tobacco (net)	15%
Don’t know	19%
Perception of vapes vs tobacco	Social housing

42% of social housing tenants aware of vapes believe vaping is just as harmful as smoking, and only 22% correctly understand it to be less harmful. A further 19% say they don’t know. Vaping is the most widely used cessation method among smokers in Wales. Where people believe it carries the same risk as tobacco, they have no reason to switch. Correcting this misperception is a direct route to increasing the number of people using the most effective quit method available.

3. Health

3.1 Physical health conditions

Conditions caused or worsened by smoking are more prevalent in social housing, with COPD nearly three times the Welsh average.

Smoking is a leading cause of or significant contributor to COPD, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer. The elevated rates below reflect the higher smoking prevalence in this group.

All health condition data in this section is self-reported by respondents.

Condition	Social housing	Wales average
COPD	7%	2%
Diabetes	16%	
High blood pressure	21%	
Osteoarthritis	19%	
Heart disease	6%	
Asthma	14%	
Stroke	4%	
None of these conditions	40%	47%

COPD (7% vs 2%) is significantly more prevalent in social housing. Only 40% of social housing tenants report none of the listed conditions, compared to 47% across Wales.

3.2 Mental health conditions

Nearly a third of social housing tenants report a mental health condition they received treatment for in the past year; double the rate among owner-occupiers.

Condition	Social housing	Wales average	Owner-occupied
Depression	26%	13%	9%
Anxiety	20%	16%	11%
PTSD	4%	2%	1%
Personality disorder	4%	1%	0%
Any mental health condition (net)	33%	22%	16%

33% of social housing tenants report at least one mental health condition. Depression is reported by 26%; nearly double the Welsh average of 13% and almost three times the owner-occupier rate of 9%. The relationship between smoking and mental health is well established, and this data reflects the compounding disadvantages faced by this group.

3.3 NHS waiting lists

Social housing tenants are almost three times more likely than owner-occupiers to be on an NHS mental health waiting list.

Indicator	Social housing	Wales average	Owner-occupied
On physical health waiting list	21%	18%	18%
On mental health waiting list	11%	6%	4%

11% of social housing tenants are on an NHS mental health waiting list, compared to 4% of owner-occupiers.

3.4 Household smoking environment

Nearly 1 in 4 social housing households has someone smoking indoors daily.

Indicator	Social housing	Wales average
Someone smokes in the home most days	23%	12%
Any children in the household	49%	36%
Vehicle not fully smokefree	26%	17%

23% of social housing households have someone smoking indoors daily; double the Welsh average of 12%. With 30% of households containing children under 18, the risk of regular second-hand smoke exposure for children in social housing is significant. Nearly one in ten households with children under 18 (9%) have someone who smokes in the home most days.

4. Illicit Tobacco

Social housing tenants are more than three times more likely to have bought tobacco that may have been smuggled or illicit.

Indicator	Social housing	Wales average
Bought tobacco that may have been smuggled or untaxed (last 12 months)	8%	3%

8% of social housing tenants may have bought smuggled or untaxed tobacco in the last 12 months, compared to 3% across Wales. Illicit tobacco is cheaper than legal products, undermining price as a deterrent to smoking and making cessation harder.

5. Policy Attitudes

5.1 Support for tobacco control measures

Support for smokefree spaces is near-universal in social housing, though lower than the Welsh average on more ambitious policy measures.

Net support (strongly support + tend to support).

Policy measure	Social housing	Wales average
Smokefree school grounds	91%	93%
Smokefree children's play areas	91%	93%
Smokefree hospital grounds	66%	79%
Smokefree public transport waiting areas	59%	77%
Ban sweet names and cartoons on vapes	66%	80%
Tobacco industry levy	61%	75%
Protecting health policy from industry	59%	72%
Generational tobacco sale ban	51%	63%

Support for smokefree schools (91%) and children's play areas (91%) is almost identical to the Welsh average. The gap widens on structural measures: 51% back the generational sale ban vs 63% overall, and 59% back protecting health policy from industry vs 72% overall. In both cases those in favour still substantially outnumber those opposed.

5.2 Government action on smoking

Social housing tenants are more likely than the Welsh average to say government is doing too much on smoking.

View	Social housing	Wales average
Not doing enough (net)	38%	43%
Doing about right	24%	31%
Doing too much (net)	18%	11%
Don't know	20%	16%

18% of social housing tenants say government is doing too much on smoking, compared to 11% across Wales. The near-universal support for smokefree schools and children's play areas in the same population indicates this should not be read as general opposition to tobacco control.

Methodological Note

Survey conducted online by YouGov plc for ASH Wales Cymru. Total sample: 1,119 Welsh adults aged 18+. Fieldwork: 18 February – 19 March 2026. Sample weighted to be representative of the Welsh adult population by age, gender, social grade, and region.

The social housing sub-group (local authority or housing association tenants) has an unweighted base of 130. All figures in this briefing are drawn from questions asked of the full sub-group (n=130).

All health condition data, including physical conditions, mental health diagnoses, and NHS waiting list status, is self-reported by survey respondents and has not been verified against clinical or NHS records.