Introduction
It has been consistently shown that good housing can help to sustain positive physical and mental health into older age. The aim of this research, carried out by the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, was to explore the extent to which co-living housing models might provide a good housing solution for people as they get older.
What is co-living?
Co-living can be defined as ‘a form of housing that combines private living spaces with shared communal facilities’. Co-living is therefore seen as an alternative to more traditional housing which facilitates social contact and a shared lifestyle through the living environment.

Is co-living growing in the UK?
There are many benefits associated with co-living. Some are common to all types of co-living, and benefits are often mutual and interrelated, addressing issues of loneliness and isolation among both older and younger people, as well as the lack of affordable or adapted housing options in the traditional housing market. Co-living supports older people to be more active, to engage in shared activities, and to share their daily life with other people. It offers a balance between private, personal space and common spaces where people can meet and interact. It enables older people to actively choose how they want to live in later life.

What are the benefits of co-living?
Benefits can vary depending on whether people live in an intergenerational setting, sharing experiences with different generations, or live with other older people with similar lifestyles and routines.

Who is it for?
Co-living can be chosen at every stage of life. Students who is it for? Co-living can be chosen at every stage of life. Students might choose to live in a co-living arrangement, either sharing with a group of people or on a one-to-one basis, in order to avoid the negative aspects of flat-shares or expensive single accommodation. Families can opt for co-living in order to raise children in a community environment, sometimes with family members from several generations, which brings about benefits for all generations. Finally, older people can decide to live in a co-living style home, either because they do not want to live alone or because they would like to avoid more traditional retirement or specialist housing.

Is co-living suitable for older people?
Co-living has been considered as particularly suited for older people for many reasons. On the one hand, it represents an alternative solution to traditional housing. On the other, it has been considered a housing option which has the potential to address some of the issues faced in older age, particularly those of loneliness and isolation.
Are there any risks associated with co-living?
Co-living models are regulated within a specific legal framework, which minimises risk for the individuals who decide to get involved. For homeshares, the agreement between the householder and the younger sharer is regulated by a specific set of policies, and a homeshare programme manager is in charge of overseeing the process and making sure both parties are satisfied. Even though it can sometimes be difficult for people who have been used to living alone for a long time to adapt to someone else's routine and presence in their house, the homeshare experience in the UK has proved to be very successful in a large majority of cases, and most challenges or mismatches were immediately addressed and resolved. Potential homesharers might need to talk to their local authority about possible impact on their Council Tax.

Groups or individuals committing to a cohousing community might face different inherent risks, including potential difficulties in finding a suitable site, securing funds for their project or the practicalities of building a community. However, the success of existing cohousing communities is likely to generate more support from local authorities, housing developers or mortgage companies to facilitate cohousing developments. More guidance and good practice guides are now available, and these are likely to make the cohousing development process less lengthy. However, involvement in a cohousing community requires the ability to work in a group, engage with the views of others, and be willing to allocate time and energy to the project.

“It was very difficult as a group to stay united and not to fall apart at every obstacle we faced, during endless negotiations and discussions, on finance issues, on the trouble of getting a site or deciding who was going to have this piece of land.”

Resident

How can I register or hear about co-living in my area?
Most of the information regarding cohousing communities in the UK can be found on the UK Cohousing Network (UKCN) website https://cohousing.org.uk/ which gathers updates on existing cohousing groups looking for members, guidance and good practices documents, general advice and feedback from existing cohousing communities. Information on how to set up a cohousing group, find a site and finance the project, design a community and settle in can all be found on the website.

For one-to-one intergenerational schemes such as homeshares, general information can be found on the UK Homeshare website. The central platform coordinates a national network of homeshare schemes in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. People with a spare room looking for a younger sharer can contact a local homeshare provider for help in finding the right match. Information on local homeshare providers and a list of local organisations can be found on https://homeshareuk.org/homeshare-areas-coverage-map/

More information about our housing research at the University of Cambridge can be found at https://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/