

FORUM FOUNDED TO ADVANCE GREENER, HEALTHIER HOMES

A new forum has been established to ensure that there is no compromise between health and energy efficiency in new build homes and to address the health problems caused by existing low-quality homes. Healthy Homes Ireland hosted its first inaugural virtual meeting in December 2021 to advance a greener and healthier living environment in Ireland's homes.



Pictured at the official launch of Healthy Homes Ireland in Dublin were (l-r): David Gallagher, Housing Specialist, VELUX; Marion Jammet, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Irish Green Building Council (IGBC), and Kevin O'Rourke, Chair of Healthy Homes Ireland.

Founded with the support of the Irish Green Building Council and VELUX, Healthy Homes Ireland brings together a steering group of 15 stakeholders across the construction, engineering, architecture, public health and the environment sectors, to influence public policy.

Stressing the importance of the forum's work, the Chair of Healthy Homes Ireland, Kevin O'Rourke, said that Irish homes are estimated to be 1.9 times more likely to have dampness and 2.4 times more likely to have insufficient daylight compared to our EU counterparts.

"Improving the energy efficiency of our homes and making them healthier must go together. While decarbonising our homes is critical to reach our climate targets, health risks from poor indoor air quality, insufficient light, damp, and noise pollution must also be addressed," he noted.

The overall impact of Covid-19, including the requirement to work from home, has further highlighted the importance of our health and living environments. This is especially important for children as the effect of a poor

living environment, not to mention the school environment, can have long term consequences.

HEALTHY HOMES BAROMETER

One in four Irish children are living in unhealthy homes, and growing up in an unhealthy environment is associated with a higher likelihood of childhood health issues such as asthma and eczema, according to VELUX's pre-COVID Healthy Homes Barometer research study.

Dr Jens Christoffersen, VELUX Senior Researcher, said that their previous research showed that air quality, cold, damp, lack of soundproofing and insufficient daylight is an issue in the Irish housing sector.

"Since 90% of our time is spent indoors, two thirds of which is in our homes, we must look at ways to improve the health of our living environment. We look forward to the research results study in 2022, which will shed light on potential gaps in public policy and practice that may compound this issue, and what we need to do in the years ahead to protect our health at home."

Healthy Homes Ireland (HHI) will also consider aspects of the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD). This requires all new builds and major renovations to meet the Nearly Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) requirement

as well as the health and well-being of building users.

POLICY CREATION AND EDUCATION

Marion Jammet, Head of Policy and Advocacy at Irish Green Building Council (IGBC), said that Healthy Homes Ireland is aligned to IGBC's overall objective to transform the Irish building industry to sustainable practices through policy creation and education.

"All housing construction in Ireland should be well thought out and delivered to protect the health and wellbeing of the population. A healthy home is not just bricks and mortar, it is also one that allows homeowners to connect to the local community and access services such as childcare and public transport," she added.

The HHI Steering Group will meet quarterly and a wider forum of stakeholders with an interest in, and responsibility for, delivering better, healthier homes in Ireland will come together twice a year to fulfil the aim of HHI.

The outcomes from the forum's work will see the presentation of evidence-based solutions to government, to provide an improved understanding among policymakers of what is a healthy home and how to achieve it.

For further information visit www.igbc.ie