



# older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2024



**HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP**

**FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983**



## CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME



Pam Young with Shane McGrath at the Older Persons Housing forum in the Victorian Parliament

It was a satisfying moment to once again bring HAAGs demands for more government support for older peoples housing inside the Victorian Parliament House. I was happy to see so many Members of Parliament among the crowd, but now we'd like to hear their responses to our questions and see some action come out of it. Thanks to all the 80 people who attended in person and further 80 people who came along online, what a day! Let's keep the pressure up.

Our next big event will be the launch of the report *Falling through the Gaps*. Read on for more details and I hope to see all your faces there soon.

Love and Hugs,

Pam Young, Chairperson.

Dear Members and Supporters,

We are well into spring as this newsletter comes out, and that means its time for Seniors Festival. I hope you can come along to HAAG's events listed in this edition, but also do check out the whole program of events happening around Victoria at [seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festival-calendar](http://seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festival-calendar)

## WELCOMES AND FAREWELLS



Congratulations to Lorraine Stark on her hard earned retirement. Lorraine worked as our Executive Assistant. Our new Executive Assistant Nadine Pyatanitsa is preparing to step into her frame next week. We'll also be welcoming a new advocacy worker to fill in for Dini Liyanarachchi while she's on maternity leave.



Intrepid hikers Sarah Harris and Jackson Payne have joined our Housing Support and care finder teams. They come with a wealth of experience from Launch housing and an enthusiasm to outreach into the most isolated areas of Australia



Meanwhile home decorating enthusiast Allie Mitchell has joined the care finders as we continue to expand this program connecting older renters with the support they need to live safely and independently at home. Welcome everybody to the new and expanding team!

# OLDER PERSONS HOUSING FORUM

The Older Persons Housing Forum took place at the Victorian Parliament House on the 11th September. We had a fantastic turn out, with over 120 people attending, including 15 members of Parliament from all sides of politics. Cover photo Chuping Yu addressing the forum about her experiences and the benefits of living in safe, secure and affordable housing. Photos by Guruswamy Perumal.



HAAG's Fiona York addressed the forum with solutions the State Government can implement to improve housing for older people and prevent homelessness.



MP Katie Hall sponsored and spoke at the Forum. We also heard from Minister for Housing and Equality Harriet Shing. Big thanks to all the MPs who attended.



Vera Bloom speaking about her experiences in front of the participants attending from around the country via zoom



A packed room of attendees heard the troubling personal stories as well as the scale of the problem shown in HAAG's census data analysis.



HAAG member Dennis George chatting with Council to Homeless Persons CEO Deborah Di Natale. Big thanks to our partners in the homelessness sector who came to support.



Julia enjoying an afternoon tea with Terrence Thomas. Our Seniors Festival events also have afternoon tea provided so RSVP and come along!



HAAG's outreach on the Mornington Peninsula has been significantly bolstered by our new worker Moya Tucker, pictured here with Hanh Vu at the Seawinds Community Hub in Rosebud



At sessions like these participants can learn about their options for accessing affordable housing, whether in Public, Community or Retirement Housing, as well as getting help with Aged Care in the home.



HAAG continues its outreach in Culturally & Linguistically diverse communities. Here HAAG Volunteer and Committee Member Hoda Nahal is pictured speaking to the Assyrian Womens Group.



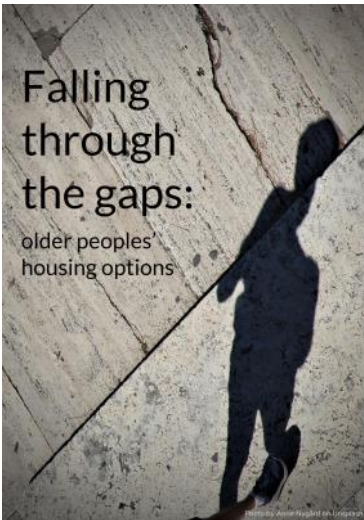
HAAG staff and members went along to the National National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) day march and elders ball.



As well as State and Federal Government politics, HAAG also gets involved at a local government level, getting candidates to pledge to support older peoples housing, and pictured speaking here at the Nillumbik Seniors Housing Forum.



We have expanded our services brochure as well as printing new tote bags and magnets. Come to our events to get some, and let us know if you would like brochures in your language to share in your community!



## **Falling through the gaps: Older Peoples' Hosuing Options**

**Wednesday 16th October, 11am – 12:30pm**

Launch of the report "Not rich enough, not poor enough: Older people falling through the housing assistance eligibility gap" followed by a discussion on solutions to address the needs of older people who are experiencing housing stress living in the private rental market but ineligible for Public or Community Housing.

Level 4, Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, and online via Zoom.

Lunch included. Please RSVP to attend in person or online at



## **Accessing Affordable Housing info session**

**Wednesday 16th October, 11am – 12:30pm**

Level 1, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Information session on how older people experiencing housing stress can access long-term, affordable housing.

Afternoon tea included. Please RSVP to attend in person or online at [oldertenants.org.au/seniorsfestival](https://oldertenants.org.au/seniorsfestival) or by calling (03) 9654 7389



## **Care Finder info session**

**Monday 21st October, 1:30pm – 3pm**

Level 1, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

An information session on the Federal Government's Care Finder program, which assists older people to access aged care services.

Afternoon tea included. Please RSVP to attend in person or online at [oldertenants.org.au/seniorsfestival](https://oldertenants.org.au/seniorsfestival) or by calling (03) 9654 7389

## **HAAG's Annual General Meeting**

Save the date for our AGM

28th of November 11am - 1pm



## Retirement village operator Pinnacle Living accused of 'reckless harassment' of elderly resident

By Adele Ferguson, Chris Gillett and Ben Butler of ABC Investigations

7:30 Older People

6h ago



Working with HAAG and our members and clients living in retirement housing, the ABC 7:30 report has published a series of major exposés into unfair exit fees, restrictive conditions, and unscrupulous management in Retirement Housing.

The first aired on [Monday the 15th of July](#) focusing on the opaque and sometimes predatory practice on charging exit fees, making residents feel trapped in a 'financial prison'. The reports of unscrupulous business practices wiped [\\$200 million dollars off the share price of one operator](#).

On Monday 30 September, they shifted attention to the Retirement Village sector, with a [shocking expose](#) into “corporatized elder abuse” and “cunningly designed rip-offs” in retirement villages across the country.

Then on [Thursday the 3rd of October](#) they followed up with a heartbreaking personal story of the “persistent and baseless harassment” of HAAG member Maurine Moore.

The ongoing media attention has put the spotlight on HAAG’s calls to

- Establish a retirement housing ombudsman
- Put a stop to unfair fees
- Address complex and ambiguous contracts
- Introduce training and accreditation standards for retirement village managers
- Protect residents’ right to sell.
- Involve residents in any reform process.

### Joining a working group

Have you ever wondered how members of HAAG can get more involved and make a bigger difference in their community for all kinds of older peoples' housing? Joining one several working groups is a great way to do just that!

#### Retirement Accommodation Action Group (RAAG)

If you've been horrified at the recent media stories about Retirement Villages and Land Lease communities and would like to help the campaign for these protections for residents, RAAG is the group for you!

RAAG is for residents of retirement housing, including ILUs, retirement and rental villages, land-lease communities and residential parks. This is a big year for HAAG's retirement housing advocacy, with major current affairs coverage and the government introducing legislation covering residential parks and (soon, we expect) retirement villages. That makes it a really important time for us to hear from residents about their experiences and what needs to change.

To get involved with RAAG please contact Ira on (03)9654 7389 or email [ira.aggarwal@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:ira.aggarwal@oldertenants.org.au)

#### Older Renters Working Group

Our newest working group represents older renters in private rental, rooming houses, Public or Community Housing. There are so many issues for HAAG to campaign about in this space including more public housing,

better public housing, better protections for private renters, and so much more. So we'd love more older renters to join our regular meetings on the first Monday of the month, 2-3pm. You can join online or in person.

To get involved call Shane on (03)9654 7389 or email

[shane.mcgrath@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:shane.mcgrath@oldertenants.org.au) or

#### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual + (LGBTIQA+) Working Group

Our LGBTIQA+ Working group have been really active holding information sessions to spread awareness about homelessness and HAAG's services in their community.

We also recently supported LGBTIQA+ Health Australia's statement on including important questions around gender, variations on sex characteristics and sexual orientation in the 2026 census.

If you'd like to join the LGBTIQA+ working group call Ira on (03)9654 7389 or email [ira.aggarwal@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:ira.aggarwal@oldertenants.org.au)

#### National Alliance of Seniors for Housing



### **(NASH)**

Our most national working group of older people from around the country takes on issues of national significance.

They are gearing up for campaigning for solutions for the housing crisis facing older people as we head towards a Federal Election in 2025, so if you'd like to get involved call Rebecca on (03)9654 7389 or email [rebecca.cook@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:rebecca.cook@oldertenants.org.au)

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Working Group**

We have recently recommenced our Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) working group meetings. The group aims to address the gaps in service delivery to people in the CALD community and help HAAG can make our service more accessible.

The group is looking for more bilingual volunteers to join who will engage the community in their language and with cultural sensitivity.

If you'd like to join the CALD working group call Ira on (03)9654 7389 or email [ira.aggarwal@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:ira.aggarwal@oldertenants.org.au)

Our brochures are also being translated into more languages. If you'd like to help distribute brochures and information about HAAG's services in your community, also contact Ira.

### **NSW Lived Experience Action Group (LEAG)**

LEAG has been looking at the impact of NSW budget and the recent changes in law around no-grounds evictions which were a big win for the rights of older renters in the state.

If you're in NSW and you'd like to find out more contact Dini by email at

[dini.liyanarachchi@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:dini.liyanarachchi@oldertenants.org.au)

### **Queensland Housing Older Women's Movement (HOWM)**

HOWM are friends and members of HAAG although HOWM is not a working group of HAAG. They've been really active in establishing community-led alternative housing models as well as campaigning for change in the upcoming Queensland state election.

Find out more and get involved with HOWM at [housingolderwomen.org.au](http://housingolderwomen.org.au)

### **Save Public Housing Collective**

Another group of friends of HAAG are the Save Public Housing Collective. They've been active in amplifying the voices of residents of the Public Housing towers across Melbourne that are slated for demolition.

To find out more and get involved go to [savepublichousing.com](http://savepublichousing.com).



## Flemington High Rise Residents concerned about relocations



In September, the Save Public Housing Collective held a residents meeting at 120 Racecourse Road in Flemington. It was attended by approximately 60 residents of the estate, many of whom were older tenants. It was a great example of how to hold a public meeting that caters for cultural diversity, with interpreters for 8 different languages present (Arabic, Somali, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Turkish, Tigrinya and Tigre) and a fantastic spread of food from the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre.

### Voices of residents

Residents were asked to contribute to the discussion, and we think more than anything else, it's important to hear directly from older residents about their concerns. What follows is some of what they said.

"I am originally from Sudan. When we heard the announcement on the news, the community was very upset and confused. The Government didn't come to us. During

COVID-19 we were surrounded by police."

"Public housing is not just a building. It's our heart, our community, our connection. We help each other and help our elders when they come here. We need to fight for the public house."

"I've been living here almost 25 years. This building is our heart. We are suffering a lot because of the plan to demolish this building. As a community – all cultures whether black or white – we look after each other. We are connected. We help each other because we believe in this place. We fought for years to get a playground and a place for elderly people to meet."

"There are a lot of buildings being demolished. We don't have masks. Our children can't play because they say there is asbestos."

"They are forcing us to move. We don't want to go. We want to tell them we want to stay. A lot of us can't sleep. They are forcing us, just like during COVID. They are saying if we don't accept the first house they offer, we lose our chance of a house. Every day they knock at the door and say are you ready to move out. A lot of us have language barrier. We are scared. We move. We don't understand."

"I am very emotional – I am dealing with a lot. They are offering different people different things. Its very confusing and upsetting."

"We need a signed agreement that we will be guaranteed that we can come back to live

here – in a public house.”

“I am a renter living on the estate 25 years, many people here know me well. They locked us down without any prior notice – again no notice when they are trying to demolish the buildings. No democratic country in the world would do this. I’ve lived in many countries including Vietnam, Hong Kong and Singapore and I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“Even though we are nobody and we don’t speak English we shouldn’t be discriminated against. They want to demolish our homes and they are going to do it. The new places are like tofu – just very small cubes. I’ve been to the new places – I’ve seen the kitchen. If you put a table in the kitchen you can’t even fit a chair to sit on to watch TV. There are two rooms, but only a window in one room. There is no sunlight and no fresh air. No light or air in the bathroom. At least where we are living now every room has a window. The reason we want to save our homes is first because it’s a good design. There is no reason to demolish it.”

“They want to demolish our buildings, get us to move out of our homes and then get rich people to move in. They want to be able to sell these homes to rich people. They are doing this for money. It will be the same as hundreds of years ago when Aboriginal people were kicked out of their homes. There is no democracy. Tell the government – don’t demolish our homes!”

*Thanks to Save Public Housing collective for the notes from the discussion.*

### **Background**

In September 2023, the Victorian Government announced plans to “retire and redevelop” the public housing towers over the coming decades. The first high-rises due for redevelopment are in Flemington and North Melbourne. Residents have been assured that they will be relocated into alternative housing at no cost to them, and that they will have the right to return after the housing is redeveloped. The housing that is proposed to replace the towers includes a small increase in the number of “social” housing units (10%) but with three times the number of apartments, the majority likely going to private developers, although this is unknown. The details on ownership, transfers, development types and other information have not been released. It is not clear what proportion, if any, will remain as genuine “public housing”, that is publicly owned and managed housing.

### **Our concerns**

Many older tenants, such as those in Flemington, do not live in 55+ older person’s housing so they are less visible than residents in the older persons high rises and do not have an existing dedicated support service, such as the Older Persons High Rise Program.

They require specific support to receive information in an accessible way and support with relocations, if they are to occur, and this is even more important for non-English speaking residents.

The relocation process is disruptive and breaks up close knit communities. For many older people, accessing medical support,

public transport and remaining connected to their communities is extremely important. If relocations are necessary, older tenants require additional support to move and to understand their options.

It remains unclear what proportion of the newly built housing will remain as public housing (that is, publicly owned and managed) and how much will be owned and/or managed by community housing providers. Our position is that all housing should remain in public ownership, and there should be no loss of public housing. If a proportion of this housing is to be managed by community housing providers behalf of the government, then they should be held to the same standards of allocation, tenancy management, rent setting as public housing.

### Submissions

We have been busy making lots of submissions to Government about housing issues for older people.

#### **Plan for Victoria: A blueprint guide to how Victoria grows and develops**

We were invited to make a submission by the Planning Minister Sonia Kilkeny when we recently met with her. Our recommendations were:

- Build 60,000 public and community housing dwellings by 2030 and a long-term mechanism for ongoing funding to increase and maintain housing supply. At minimum, 20% of all public and community housing should be ringfenced for older people over 55.
- Increase public and community housing in Victoria to 10% of the total housing stock by 2050 with 30% of the housing ringfenced for older people to reflect the population growth and demographic changes.
- Accelerate incorporating accessibility standards including installing ramps, handrails, accessible bathrooms in all Victorian homes including in private rental properties and rooming houses.
- Ensure that the 'Small Second Homes' on existing properties are used for long-term housing as opposed to temporary housing such as AirBnbs or holiday homes.
- Legislate a definition of 'affordable housing' capped at 30% of household income for people in the lowest 40% of income households for State or local government funded housing, including where private developers are incentivised or with State capital/land contributions for the developments.
- Increased stock of affordable housing options with at least 20% ringfenced for older people from low to moderate income households.
- Incorporate consistent policies on Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning through the Plan with clear targets for housing developments on public and private land in perpetuity. Land that is currently being used for public housing should remain 100% public housing and at least 20% of housing should be public

and community housing.

- Increase funding to revitalise the Independent Living Units (ILU) Sector and examine other affordable housing options for older people who are ineligible for public and community housing due to a small amount of savings or superannuation balance.

Regulate Retirement Housing sector by:

- Reducing contract complexity in retirement villages by introducing standardised contracts to ensure that contracts are expressed in plain English, properly address common issues and do not include unfair terms.
- Establishing a Retirement Housing Ombudsman to provide free, fair, and binding determinations for retirement housing disputes, including residential parks.
- Stopping excessive fees including exit fees to ensure they are charged in fair, consistent ways to prevent exploitation and misconduct by site owners and managers.
- Introducing Training and Accreditation Standards for Retirement Housing Managers should be required to hold a Certificate IV qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework and meet a fit and proper person test.
- Invest in making homes heatwave safe, starting with the homes of older people, including funding a wide-spread retrofitting program for existing homes.

### Submission to Financial Regulatory

### Framework and Homeownership 2024

HAAG recommends that the Federal Government

- Identify financial products and banking options to prevent older people in the lowest income households paying mortgages on their primary residence from falling out of homeownership due to mortgage stress.
- Fund the construction of public and community housing for older people who are not likely to find market based housing solutions to provide housing security for older people to age in place

### Submission to National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024

Recommendations

- Ensure representation of older people in the National Housing Consumer Council along with other identified cohorts.
- Ensure the National Housing and Homelessness Plan include expansion of alternative housing options that are affordable for older people such as retirement villages, co-housing models and co-operative housing models.
- Incorporate a definition for affordable housing capped at 30% of household income into the Housing Australia Future Fund Act 2023 for all Federal Government funded affordable housing properties for people in the lowest two income quintiles.

- Make homes climate safe for older people by prioritising retrofitting of public and community housing to withstand extreme weather events.
- Ensure Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety is part of the groundwork for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill.
- Make provisions in the Bill to address parallel policy areas such as changes in Aged Care, domestic and family violence, elder abuse and as part of a broader framework to recognising housing as a human right.

### Meetings with Decision-Makers

We've been especially busy meeting politicians of late, from Victoria and NSW as well as in Federal Parliament.

- Minister for Planning Sonia Kilkenny (Victoria)
- Jerome Laxale MP (NSW) meeting online with HAAG & members
- Anna Haigh, Advisor to Anika Wells MP Minister for Aged Care
- Alex Greenwich MP Member for Sydney
- Alex Green, Senior Adviser to Gabrielle Williams MP Minister for Consumer Affairs
- Peter Khalil MP electoral office meeting
- Kate Chaney MP (Federal)

### Local Government Elections this October!

All levels of government, including local



Victorian Housing Minister Harriet Shing addressing our Older Persons Housing Forum.

government, have a responsibility to solve the housing crisis.

Ways that Local Government can help solve the housing crisis include:

- Work with Federal and State Government to coordinate the provision of more public, community and affordable housing,
- Advocate for mandatory inclusionary zoning,
- Scope land within each LGA that has the potential for the development of more public, community and affordable housing,
- Educate local residents on the importance of diverse housing, including low-cost housing, for social cohesion and to end homelessness,
- Co-ordinate and provide services for low income tenants, including residents

of caravan parks, residential parks, public and community housing, and

- Maintain local data about housing issues and regularly make this public

Many local governments in Victoria are doing a great job in their local communities by talking about housing and supporting older residents. However, some local governments could be doing more, especially to combat misconceptions about public, community and affordable housing.

This October, we are asking candidates in the local government elections to take the pledge to address housing stress and homelessness.

### Taking the pledge to address housing stress and homelessness

If elected, I will:

- Recognise that housing solves homelessness,
- Advocate for a growth in public and community housing, and other low-cost housing for people over 55 in my area, and
- Stand up for housing as a human right and recognise that public and community housing is core infrastructure that strengthens our community and allows older people to “age in place”

Download a copy of the pledge on [our website](#) and ask your candidate what they will do about housing issues for older people.

## New Survey for people living in Residential Parks!

The Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) in partnership with the Commissioner for Residential Tenancies and in collaboration with Housing for the Aged Action Group and the Manufactured Home Owners Association, are undertaking research exploring the residential parks market in Victoria.

As part of this research, CPRC is conducting a survey of residents to understand challenges and benefits they experience living in residential parks.

The survey will be available to current residents, former residents as well as family members of residents who wish to share their views.

The survey is yet to be launched, but will run through the month of October. The survey will be available to complete online and published in our next e-bulletin. If you need assistance to complete the survey, or would like to complete it but don't have access to the internet, our Retirement Housing team can help! Call them on (03) 9654 7389.



**Mother** tells the story of Christie, a homeless woman in a world detached, unforgiving and destructive.

Stephanie Agius presents her review of the play by Daniel Keene and performed by Noni Hazelhurst at the Melbourne Arts Centre, in the form of a poem:

Leaves scattered  
seagulls squawking  
An abandoned park or cemetery  
The stage is set

She waits for us to settle down  
To take our place among the crowd  
Back turned  
talking to herself  
gesticulating  
setting the scene for us to be transformed

We wait to be entertained  
Enlightened  
Illuminated  
awakened from the darkness that envelops  
us

She addresses us  
invites us in  
tells her story  
we listen  
captivated by its misery

we come to understand why she is alone in  
the park  
with nowhere to call home  
and no one to come home to  
she is not to blame  
it is what has been done to her  
there was no other way to cope  
wailing in lamentation  
from the loss of her life  
from everything that mattered

now her only hope is in the memory of  
what was  
clinging to life so draws life from the past  
remembering the joy

what awaits us all  
if we fail to cling to hope  
if life is unkind to us  
how will we survive  
you and I

## Housing for the Aged Action Group

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Fighting for Housing Justice for older people since 1983

HAAG offers FREE confidential advice, housing and support to over-50's



Staff members Melis Cevik and Nese Duran serve up soup at HAAG's August General Meeting

- Housing Options Information
- Outreach Housing Support
- Retirement Housing Advice & Support
- Research & Policy Development