



# older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Winter 2024



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



Dear Members and Supporters,

With the winter firmly upon us, several of our staff have abandoned ship. Our communication worker Reuben, who usually puts together this newsletter, is off on long service leave, so for this edition we are taking a fresh new approach to the Older Tenants Voice.

Recently HAAG had the privilege of being guest contributors to the Parity magazine. Parity is Australia's national homelessness

publication, going out to all homelessness service providers around the country, helping to set the agenda for organisations right across the housing and homelessness sector.

In previous times HAAG has had to struggle to get political attention for issues facing older people specifically, so thanks to Noel at Council to Homeless Persons for the support and encouragement to put contribute to this edition.

We've reproduced some of the contributions of HAAG's staff to this edition of Parity, as a new addition to the contents of this newsletter.

We also have the regular member news and events, reports from our Canberra round table, the Warm Safe Home project, and much more. So get cosy and enjoy this latest edition of Older Tenants Voice,

Pam Young, Chairperson.



*Do you know a social housing renter or renter group making a big difference in your community?*

*Nominations for the Social Housing Volunteer Awards open on 29 July 2024. The awards recognise social housing renters and renter groups that contribute their time to support the local community.*

*Make sure to complete your nomination before the close date of 27 September 2024.*

[Social Housing Volunteer Awards](#)



Welcome to all our new workers!

**Moya Tucker** started with us in March, working in the carefinder team and focusing on assertive outreach and early intervention in the Mornington Peninsula region.



**Sally Saunders** joined our Tenancy and Retirement Team in July, as part of our newly expanded tenancy advice service. She will be a full time tenant advocate, supporting older renters in private rental and rooming houses, as well as residents of retirement housing.

**Ira Aggarwal** joined us in July, in a newly created role to support members as well as a project to engage with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) older people. She will be supporting our LGBTIQ+ group, our CALD group, our Retirement Accommodation Action Group (RAAG) and other member groups, as well as reaching out to new CALD communities with the view to training up some more bilingual educators .

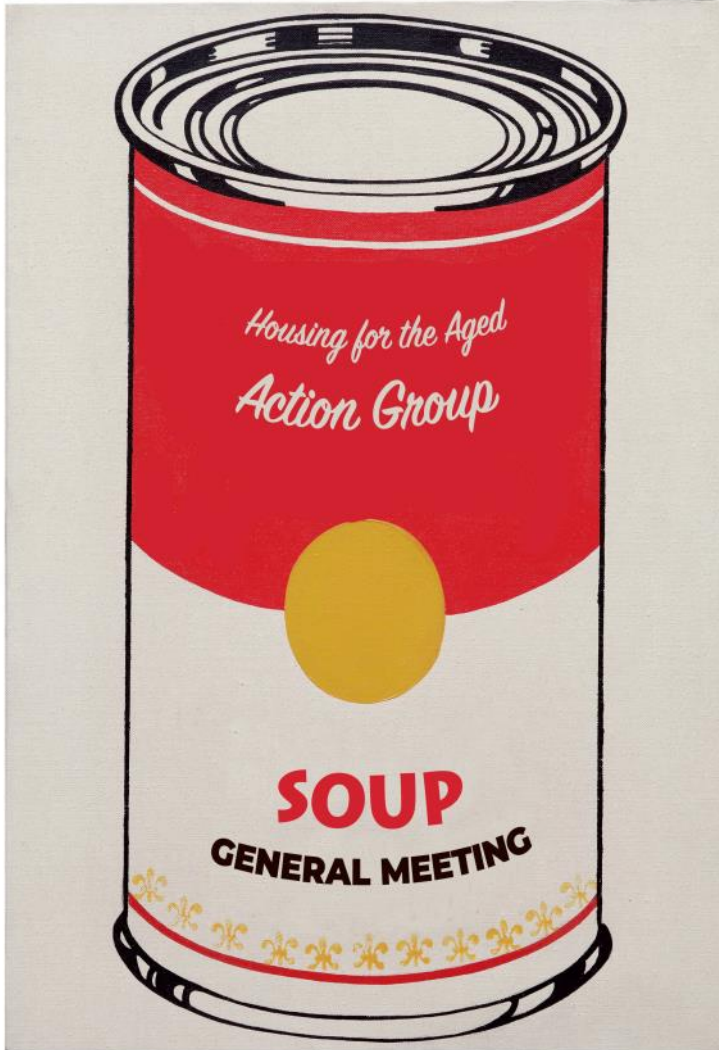


### Farewell to Fiona Waters!



We also bid a sad farewell to **Fiona Waters**, who has been a familiar face at HAAG for the last 5 years. Starting as a social work student on placement, Fiona worked in a variety of roles across the organization, including as an intake worker, a retirement housing worker and a carefinder. She also magnificently supported our LGBTIQ+ and RAAG groups over many years, and will be sorely missed! Her commitment to inclusion and participation will be forever remembered in the 40th anniversary quilt that she

made with members last year. All the best with your new role, Fiona!



## General meeting

Come along to HAAG's **August General Meeting**, in person, online or on the phone

Thursday 15th August

11am - 12:30pm

Level 4, 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne

online: [oldertenants.org.au/soup](https://oldertenants.org.au/soup)

on the phone: 03 7018 2005

Then enter the numbers 81800163677#

### Agenda

- Updates from our Canberra trip and plans for the Federal Election, including letter writing to MP's
- New tenancy service
- Soup served by staff

RSVP to [haag@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:haag@oldertenants.org.au)

or call (03) 9654 7389

### SAVE THE DATE!

#### OLDER PEOPLE'S HOUSING FORUM AT PARLIAMENT

HAAG is hosting an event at Victorian Parliament on older people's housing issues.

**When:** 11 September 12.30-2.00pm

**Where:** Victorian Parliament House and online

#### Speakers include:

Hon. Harriet Shing MP, Minister for Housing

Hon. Katie Hall MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Housing

Professor Wendy Stone, Swinburne University,

HAAG members talking about their experience of housing stress

Other speakers to be confirmed.

RSVP [here](#) via our website or call (03) 96547389

### New Tenants Group

Thanks to new funding from Consumer Affairs Victoria's Rental Stress Support Package HAAG has restarted our tenancy service – helping older renters deal with problems like bond claims, rent increases, privacy and notices to vacate. And we need you to help us make this the best service possible.

We've always recognised older people as the real experts on their own housing needs, so as part of the service we'll be holding monthly meetings to get feedback from older renters about our work.

Meetings will take place both in person and online, on the first Monday of the month, starting in August. They'll include discussion about how the service should work, your experiences as a renter, the biggest issues affecting older tenants, and what organisations like HAAG can do to create change. You don't need any special experience or knowledge to participate; we just want to hear what you have to say.

If you're currently living in private rental, public or community housing or a rooming house, we'd love to hear from you – and will pay for your time.

**When:** August 5th at 2.00pm

**Where:** In person at HAAG or online For more information or to express interest please email [haag@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:haag@oldertenants.org.au) or call us on (03) 9654 7389

Our other regular working groups for our members are:



**National Alliance of Seniors for Housing**—members who have experienced housing stress and homelessness from across Australia, meets every 2 months on a Wednesday.

**Retirement Accommodation Action Group**—members who live in retirement villages, residential parks, caravan parks and ILU's, meets every month.

**LGBTIQ+ community reference group**—meets every month in person and online

**Culturally and Linguistically Diverse community reference group**—meets every 2 months., in person and online.

**NSW Lived Experience Group**—meets online every two months



*By Marie Sillars and Wendy Morris from the National Alliance of Seniors for Housing, and Susan Hawkeswood from the Ageing on the Edge New South Wales (NSW) Lived Experience Advisory Group*

*This article originally appeared in [Parity](#).*

As Australia's housing crisis has worsened, a diverse group of older people from across the nation has come together with a common goal. By speaking about their own experiences of this crisis they hope to build awareness of how it impacts people as they grow older, and to add their voices to those calling for a fairer housing system, one which ensures everyone living in Australia has access to a safe, stable, accessible and affordable home. We are three of those women and these are our stories.

## **Why Investing in Public Housing is So Important**

Marie comes from a generation of women who were stay-at-home mums. Around 20 years ago, following a marriage breakdown, Marie had to attempt to re-enter the workforce and find an affordable private rental.

'I found myself out in the big wide world trying to start again,' she says.

'It was a very tough time as most weeks I couldn't afford medications or healthy food. So, my mental and physical health deteriorated very quickly.'

Today high rents and low vacancy rates are forcing older people on low incomes to

move out of communities they've lived in for much of their lives and far from the friends, family and services they rely on. Marie knows all too well how difficult that can be. Her own search for an affordable property took her to the Central Coast of New South Wales, hours away from her family and grandchildren.

'It was a serious balance that became harder as time went along. After a few years my mental health deteriorated and I had a breakdown', she says. After a suicide attempt, Marie was supported to find an apartment in public housing closer to family.

'Admitting that I just could not cope anymore was the hardest thing I have ever had to do,' Marie says.

'I was given a one-bedroom apartment in Macquarie Park on the Ivanhoe Estate and it was an amazing community. I got involved very quickly and set up a Community Centre. It saved me and made life worth going on, helping others and setting up activities for people to enjoy.

'I felt at last I had found my forever home.'

Unfortunately, in 2012, plans were unveiled that would see the NSW government sell the Ivanhoe public estate at Macquarie Park and relocated many public housing tenants. Marie was involved in a fierce campaign to save the estate. After four years of campaigning, Marie moved out of the estate and into community housing. In 2018, redevelopment of the estate began, and it was replaced with a mix of social, affordable and private housing. Marie is still living in safe,

stable community housing and remains a staunch advocate for older people who are experiencing homelessness or housing crisis.

'I cannot stop until changes are made, and seniors are safe,' she says.

## **What It Means to Have a Stable Home**

Fourteen years ago Susan's life turned around when, after months in temporary accommodation, she moved into 21 stable accommodation with a community housing provider. It had been a turbulent period. Moving from lodge, to apartment, then back to a lodge with a bag of clothes and nothing more. The insecurity had taken its toll.

'I was emaciated and having panic attacks,' Susan says. 'I had no certainty about my future and had to take life one day at a time.' It was exhausting getting used to new locations, learning public transport routes and being disconnected from friends and family.

'Moving from temporary accommodation into stable accommodation turned my life around,' she says. Susan is still living in the same home in Sydney's inner west today. Community housing provided her the stability and support she needed to recover from that turbulent period of her life.

'My housing worker asked me to call her every morning so she could check I was ok,' Susan explains. 'She provided support and counselling that helped me cope with my new circumstances.'

Soon she would be enrolled in TAFE and over the next four years achieved a Certifi-

cate III, IV and Diploma of Community Services. After nine years of unemployment Susan returned to work, finding a job at the community centre where she had completed her diploma placement.

'I gradually gained weight and my panic attacks abated,' Susan says. 'In 14 years, I have gone from poverty to savings in the bank. I have gone from fearfulness to confidence. I have experienced the difference that support makes.'

'Community housing has provided me with a firm foundation to build on. Key to this foundation is subsidised rent to help tenants climb out of poverty. But community housing, and other forms of social housing, offers so much more than just affordable accommodation.'

'Emotional support and encouragement to achieve provided by community housing workers are just as central to my story as subsidised rent. And so too is the stability that long-term housing provides — I have a home.'

## **How An Unfair Tax System Makes It Difficult to Bounce Back from Crisis**

At 23 Wendy was married, had four children, and owned a suburban house in Perth. A qualified drafts person she worked for mining companies, and later, while raising her children, as an English tutor and newspaper proof-reader.

When her marriage broke down, she was 48. Her share of the family home, which sold for \$38,000, was not enough to buy another

dwelling as a single mother without a full-time job. What followed was a period of prolonged insecurity. Nine months in a granny flat before the landlord needed it for a family member. Another nine months of homelessness, house sitting for a friend.

'On unemployment benefits, affordable private rental was impossible to find,' she says.

Through a Catholic Church community Wendy found seven years of stable accommodation in a not-for-profit housing cooperative. Rent was 25 per cent of your income and it this stability that helped her find full-time work.

When the co-operative dissolved, Wendy left and retrained as a librarian which proved to be a very successful late career and provided her with many fulfilling roles until retirement. However much of the work she was able to pick up early in this career were short term contracts. She was ineligible for Newstart between contracts, and this took a toll on her savings.

Wendy moved in with her daughter and house-sat when she could. One day, after a house-sit, her daughter asked her not to return. At the time she was 65, working part-time and planning to retire.

Unable to afford a private rental and in a panic, she made what she calls a disastrous decision. Drawing on almost all of her superannuation, she purchased a portable home in a residential caravan park close to where she worked. She bought the dwelling outright but had to rent the land it was

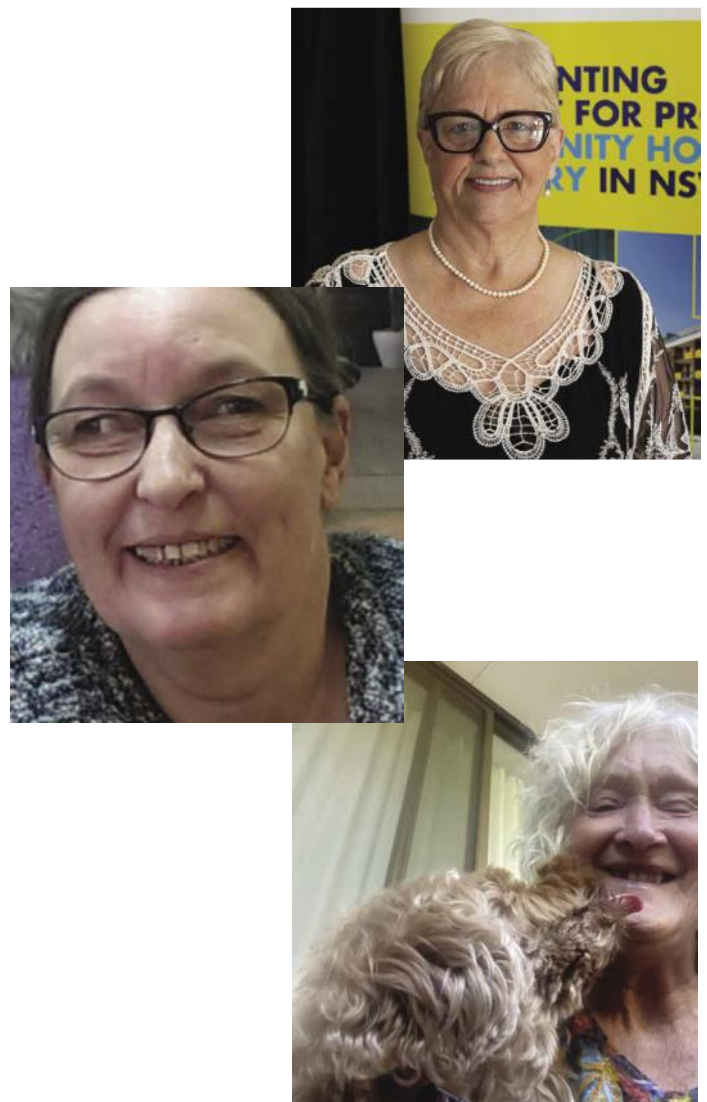
sitting on from the park.

Four years later, when the park was sold, the residents who had no legal protections to rely on, lost their homes with no compensation. The cost to relocate these 'portable' homes was prohibitive to nearly all the residents, even if they could find somewhere to relocate them.

Wendy currently lives in a tiny home she rents from a young couple at the back of a bush block in the Perth Hills.

'I worry what my future looks like as I grow older without a secure home,' she says.

*This article originally appeared in [Parity](#).*





In late June, a HAAG delegation went to Canberra to host an Older People's Round table, supported by the Parliamentary Friends of Housing. The event was chaired by Fiona York and featured two speakers from HAAG who have experienced homelessness—Vanessa and Helen—as well as Dr Wendy Stone, who presented our research on Ageing in a Housing Crisis. We also heard from Josh Burns (ALP) and Angie Bell (Lib), who expressed their support for addressing homelessness for older people.

The event was attended by representatives from National Shelter, Community Housing Industry Association, Homelessness Australia and Council on the Ageing, as well as parliamentary advisors and staff.

We asked decision-makers to support five recommendations to fix older people's housing:

- Increase public and community housing so that it is 10% of the total housing stock by 2050, and set aside some for people over 55 based on area and need
- Make “affordable housing:” truly affordable by legislating a definition in the Housing Australia Future Fund to cap rents at 30% income for people on lowest incomes
- Implement a fairer tax system to recognize housing as a human right
- Provide more support for older people at risk of homelessness by funding specialist support services for those who can't access aged care due to insecure housing

- Make homes climate safe for older people by prioritizing public and community housing to withstand extreme weather events.

While in Canberra, we met with 11 politicians and their advisors, (see next page for photos) to seek support for our recommendations, and were very happy to hear Zoe Daniels focus on the issues of older people and housing in her speech the next day.

We also attended the launch of the Blueprint for Fast, Fair and Inclusive Climate Action, hosted by ACOSS, to highlight the need for climate safe housing, especially for older renters on low incomes.

We were thrilled to connect with Victoria Cornell, at the Churchill Fellowship Policy Breakfast, who has been researching the housing needs for older people.

Big thanks to Emma Greenhalgh from National Shelter and the staff at Josh Burn's office who assisted us with this event.

We will be following up with decision-makers over the coming months to continue our advocacy for housing justice.



# OLDER PERSON'S ROUND TABLE IN CANBERRA



Our trip to Canberra included meetings with decision makers from all sides of politics. Pictured are our delegation with Cassandra Fernando, Josh Burns (ALP), Kylea Tink, Andrew Wilkie and Helen Haines (Ind.) and Larissa Waters (Greens).

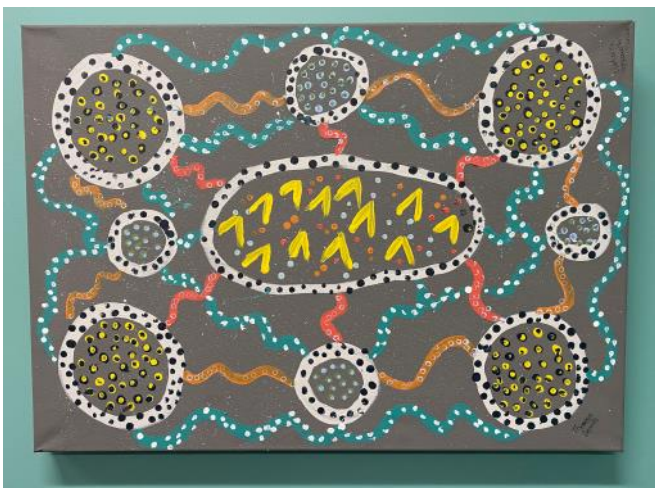


We are excited to announce that we have completed our first ever Reconciliation Action Plan!

HAAG is an organisation built on human rights and social justice principles and is committed to Reconciliation.

Colonialism, racism, the impact of stolen generations, dispossession from land, culture and traditional social structures, have contributed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experiencing disproportionately high levels of financial stress and homelessness.

HAAG believes in a society where all older people have access to safe, secure, appropriate and long-term housing; and our First Nations Elders have a fundamental right to have such housing on Country



The design in our Plan is in HAAG colours and represents the sometimes tangled and complex journey towards finding housing, and the importance of working together.

### About the artists:

Teresa Jasper Dennis (pictured left) is a proud Mutti Mutti woman from NSW. Nat

McLaughlin is of Yorta Yorta and Wemba Wemba descent. Both are workers in our regional team



Our staff Lorraine and Esme attended the NAIDOC march in July.



Our regional workers are at the following locations every fortnight or every month (see website for more info)

- Murchison Neighbourhood house
- Rushworth Community Centre
- Tatura Community Centre
- Echuca Neighbourhood house
- Nagambie Lakes Community House
- Cobram Community House

*Come chat about your housing options!*



## Member event in Seymour

Members of our Committee of Management traveled to Seymour to hold a meeting for our members in the region. Hosted at the Salvation Army Community Room, the event was attended by our regional staff who answered questions about the Home at Last Service., as well as some of our members from the region.

We were really happy to be joined by someone who had seen the ABC 7.30 report the night before, and reached out to us after finding us on the internet!

This is part of the Committee's focus on better engaging with our members in rural Victoria.



Teresa, Anne, Nat and Fiona travelling the region

## Goulburn Valley Hume Program

Our workers in the region continue to regularly hold drop in sessions at a number of community centres and neighbourhood houses across the region.

You can catch Teresa, Nat and Anne regularly at the Nagambie Lakes Community House, Tatura Community Centre, Cobram Neighbourhood House, Rushworth Community Centre, Murchison Neighbourhood House and Echuca Neighbourhood House. Check our website for details or contact us for more information.

The team continues to have amazing client outcomes, and are raising awareness of housing issues for older people across the region. In the last three months, the team have housed 7 people, mainly in public housing,

This program is wholly funded by philanthropy, thanks to the generosity of the Ian Rollo Currie Foundation.



Our regional team Teresa, Nat and Anne at Echuca

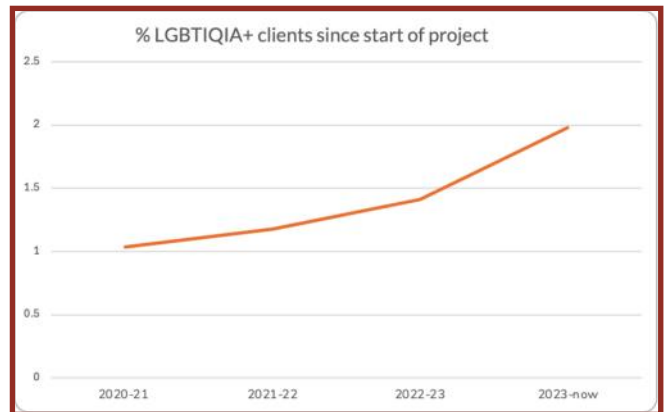
In May we released our new report with updated survey information about older LGBTIQA+ people's housing circumstances, coinciding with the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT).

Key findings include:

- Lower rates of home ownership
- Relying on friends and family for housing
- Limited knowledge about where to access help
- High proportions have experienced discrimination when finding a home
- Strong support for LGBTIQA+ retirement housing

In June, we presented the findings at the Better Together Conference in Geelong. Members of our LGBTI community reference group attended the event, and we had a HAAG stall shared with our friends from Switchboard.

In July, one of our Committee members spoke about the report on 3CR's Rainbows Don't Fade with Age, a radio show focusing on older LGBTIQA+ people's issues, by Val's Ageing and Aged Care.





HAAG, Seniors Rights Vic (SRV), Council on the Ageing Vic and the City of Melbourne held an event at the Melbourne Town Hall on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024 for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD). The event was opened by The Right Honourable Deputy Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Nicholas Reece, and hosted by COTA Victoria board member and the former Ambassador for Elder Abuse Prevention, Gerard Mansour.

The event also featured presentations from the Victorian Minister for Ageing, The Honourable Ingrid Stitt; Fiona York, COTA

Vic Acting CEO Ben Rogers; and Homes Melbourne Director Jo Cannington.

Our volunteers Ross Dawson and Robert Brierley assisted HAAG staff in running a stall at the event. There were approximately 150 people in attendance.

In the lead up to the event, our volunteers Hoda and Jaquie attended a number of Warm Safe Home events, hosted by local government. These were opportunities for the issues of housing and elder abuse to be discussed in the context of “what does a safe home mean”.



Photo of the audience at the event, courtesy of COTA Vic



*This article originally appeared in [Parity](#).*

The power imbalance between tenant and landlord in Australia in 2024 is well known.

Thankfully governments have started taking the first steps towards addressing that imbalance and provide better protections for renters. But for people who live in retirement housing there is often an even greater power imbalance between them and their housing provider.

For these 250,000 older people in Australia, this power imbalance, created by serious gaps in consumer protection laws and access to justice frameworks, can destroy their ability to enjoy a happy retirement.

Retirement villages, residential parks and independent living units provide critical affordable housing options for people as they grow older. However, unlike the relationship between renters and real estate agents, there is no regulatory framework in Victoria that sets out the rights and obligations of owners, managers and residents.

Retirement housing is particularly important for older women who are part of the 'missing middle': those who retire without owning a home, have minimal assets, and are ineligible for public or community housing, but cannot afford other housing options. Women are disproportionately represented in this 'missing middle' due to disparities in wages, workforce participation and lower superannuation. The number of older women renting increased at a greater rate (77 per cent) than the number of men

renting (69 per cent) in the decade to 2021.

Take 72-year-old Glenda. She's currently living in a unit she owns in a retirement village in regional Victoria. When her marriage broke down, she was left with enough assets to be ineligible for public or community housing, but too little to afford a house of her own.

'Obviously I needed to find something quickly when the marriage failed,' she says.

'I probably didn't realise it at the time, but I was caught in the middle. I didn't have many options. The money I've invested in this little unit was the best option for me at that time.

'I considered buying a campervan and just being a nomad. But that probably wouldn't have suited me. We pay a maintenance fee here monthly, which is a small amount compared to what rents are these days.

'Even though my place is tiny, it's a wonderful thing to have that security of tenure and you're not at the mercy of a landlord who might evict you because they're selling or something like that.'

With the private housing market becoming more and more unaffordable for those on low incomes, the number of people relying on different forms of retirement housing is expanding.

Housing for the Aged Action Group's (HAAG) Retirement Housing Assistance Service (RHAS) supports people living in retirement housing who are experiencing difficulties which often arise from the aforementioned power imbalance between them and their housing provider.

Over the past year the RHAS team has supported older people who have signed holiday agreements in caravan parks which forego their rights as residents, despite their intention to reside in the park as their principal place of residence. We have heard from residents in retirement villages which have attempted to ban their friends from entering the premises for trivial reasons, an issue that took many months to be resolved. One resident sought support when management attempted to raise the monthly maintenance fee by 23 per cent. The average service charge for a two-bedroom unit is around \$518 per month.

Without structural reform, complaints like these will become more and more commonplace. HAAG is currently advocating for a four-pronged approach to secure the rights of older people living in retirement housing to ensure they are protected from exploitation and abuse.

### **1. Address complex and ambiguous contracts**

There are no standardised contracts in the retirement housing industry. These contracts can be quite complex and, as one resident explains, there is often an urgency to sign:

‘We were given the lease on the day we were meant to sign it. You’re meant to be given 20 days to look at it. We were sitting at the desk with the owner and the manager, and we had to try and read it then,’ they said. ‘We were also given a piece of paper and they said ‘oh, sign this too’ and it’s a piece of paper to say we have to sell it back

through them. You’re sitting there with a truck full of furniture, there’s lots of pressure and it’s not explained clearly.’

Making matters more difficult is a lack of expertise within the legal sector to assist residents regarding these types 45 of contracts. Then, when disagreements arise, it is often a large organisation, with lawyers to match, taking on residents who cannot afford the same level of legal help.

Organisations are incentivised to approach matters in an adversarial manner to dissuade other residents from bringing up grievances of their own.

### **2. Introduce training and accreditation standards**

Residents frequently report that managers lack basic skills in working with older people, or management skills generally. Manager conduct can range from disrespect to overt ageism and discrimination, harassment and bullying. This is a common reason that older people seek support from HAAG’s RHAS team.

Unlike property managers in residential real estate, there is limited training and no accreditation standards for managers working in retirement housing. Because it is more difficult for them to move elsewhere, people in retirement housing are more vulnerable to these kinds of behaviours. A resident of retirement housing has fewer options available and may be charged an exit fee they can’t afford (more on those fees later).

### 3. Establish a Retirement Housing Ombudsman

An industry-funded ombudsman service would provide free, fair and binding determinations when disputes do arise across the full spectrum of retirement housing types. Currently, residents must go to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to resolve their disputes with operators. Running a substantial matter through VCAT is beyond the financial capacity of most people living in retirement housing, and certainly those women who find themselves in the missing middle. As a result, many are unable to take their claims to VCAT.

### 4. Put a stop to excessive fees

Some forms of retirement housing require residents to pay a significant fee if they decide to leave a property. This is sometimes called an exit fee.

These types of fees are currently unregulated. They often appear to have no relationship to the value of the services provided. One of the most problematic exit fees is a deferred management fee.

These are generally between 20 per cent and 40 per cent of the sale price of a unit and are applied in both residential park and retirement village contracts. These fees may not be clear to residents when they move in, making informed choice and comparison difficult, if not impossible.

Proper reform and regulation would ensure they are charged in fair, consistent ways and do not incentivise exploitation and

misconduct by site owners. This reform should also seek to ensure that residents can decide how and when to sell their dwellings.

Retirement housing is an important affordable housing option for many people as they grow older. As other affordable housing options have declined, retirement housing has experienced a period of rapid growth. That has created a mismatch between existing legal regulatory frameworks and dispute mechanisms, and the size, scale and nature of housing of this type. A robust consumer protection and dispute resolution framework would improve trust and confidence in the sector, and foster growth and innovation. Implementing these solutions would improve daily life for the thousands of older people living in retirement housing and make a huge difference for those older women stuck in the missing middle, for whom retirement housing is one of their only affordable housing options.

#### **Join the Retirement Housing Campaign!**

We are keen to build on the momentum arising from ABC's 7.30 report into "Life-style communities and the issues with land lease" (residential parks).

If you are interested in joining our Retirement Accommodation Action Group, please contact us on 03 9654 7389.

The Manufactured Home Owners Association is an organization for and by residents of this type of housing.

Find out more about them on their website: [www.mhoavic.com](http://www.mhoavic.com)



Public housing is an appropriate housing option for older people, as rents are capped at 25% of income, and it provides security of tenure. Every year we assist approximately 150 older people to obtain public and community housing. The success of our service partly depends on the availability of public housing. The recognition of the special needs of older people is embedded into the current public housing system in Victoria, where we have both 55+ older persons public housing as well as 55+ priority on the Victorian Housing Register (the waitlist).

In September 2023, the Victorian Government announced plans to “retire and redevelop” the public housing towers over the coming decades. 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 going to private developers to sell at market prices. It is not clear what proportion, if any, will remain as public housing.

### **Older tenants in the older persons high rises**

There are 18 older persons high rises, which currently house residents between the ages of 55-98 years old. These high rises are not slated for redevelopment for a number of years.

Tenants we have spoken to are positive about their housing, particularly, its close proximity to services and transport, community, access to open spaces, accessibility and affordability. But many have examples of long waits for repairs and maintenance, difficulty in contacting Homes

Victoria and shoddy workmanship by contractors.

The key concerns of residents we have spoken to are:

- the lack of certainty about when and how these relocations and redevelopments will occur.
- ongoing maintenance and repairs being neglected in the meantime,
- loss of green space and access to community gardens,
- loss of community, and moving away from familiar areas where they have supports (for example, doctors who bulk bill, public transport etc).
- the gradual decline of the Older Person’s High Rise Program over a number of years (for example, staff going part time, staff turn over, staff being used as a go-between by Homes Vic to deliver bad news or deal with complaints).
- previous lack of action on complaints and repairs, and ongoing lack of information about the redevelopments.

*“you can smell the paternalism”*

### **Older residents in other high rises**

Many older tenants do not live in 55+ older person’s housing but in general public housing. They require specific support to receive information in an accessible way and support with relocations. However, they are less visible than residents in the older persons high rises and do not have an

existing dedicated support service,

## **Older tenants on the waiting list and eligible to be on the wait list.**

There are thousands of older people aged 55+ who are living in expensive private rental or homeless, or on the waitlist. Losing such a large amount of public housing stock, with existing public tenant transfers being prioritized, will mean that there will be longer wait times for housing.

In addition, our case workers report that older people are refusing offers in the high rises due to fear of being moved out and relocated.

## **Use of public land**

The proposal to redevelop the public housing high rises, on the information currently available, will include a mix of “social” and affordable housing, as well as privately owned housing. We have seen similar plans under the previous Public Housing Renewal Program result in “ghettoization” of public housing tenants who have been physically separated from private housing residents (for example, by walls or in separated apartment blocks).

## **Demolition vs renovation**

It is not clear that the current high rises are beyond repair, and if all towers are at the same level of disrepair. There are issues with ventilation, and thermal comfort in some of the high rises. It is not clear if this can be repaired, or requires “starting again”.

## **Relocations**

The relocation process is disruptive and breaks up close knit communities. Older

tenants require additional support to move and to understand their relocation options.

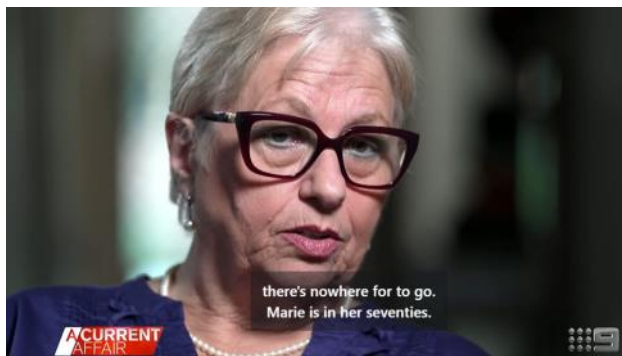
## **Transfer of stock to the community housing sector**

It remains unclear what proportion of the new 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 on behalf of the government, then they should be held to the same standards of allocation, tenancy management, rent setting as public housing.

## **Our recommendations**

- Ensure that 100% of housing built on public land remains in public ownership, and ensure no loss of public housing
- Commission independent expert building reports for each of the 44 high rises that provides an accurate condition report and any options for refurbishment and renovation to modern energy efficiency and accessibility standards
- Fund dedicated support to older renters to understand their rights and options,
- Adequately fund repairs and maintenance of public housing
- Exempt refusals of offers in high rises from being considered “valid offers” and provide tenants with timelines.
- Implement the recommendations of the Social Housing Regulation Review.

We have had a busy couple of months raising awareness of the issues for older people's housing in the media.



Our members Marie Sillars and Lyn Bailey appeared on the ABC, A Current Affair and SBS. Fiona appeared on ABC 7.30 and ABC Queensland. Our members Judy and Carmel, from the Manufactured Home Owners Association, featured on the ABC.

And as always, you can listen to us every second and fourth Wed on 3CR!

## Government funding vital to reducing homelessness

Data from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) showed in 2022-23 about 274,000 people sought help from specialist homelessness services.

The Housing for the Aged Action Group welcomes any plan encouraging young people to think about their financial future.

"It's great to start saving young but we also need a strong safety net to ensure nobody, let alone children, finds themselves without a safe, stable, secure place to live," executive director Fiona York said.

Ms York says older women, in particular, are at risk of homelessness.

"These are people who worked for most of their lives but have ended up homeless due to something unexpected," she said.

"Older women have taken time out of their careers to raise children only to be forced into homelessness by a marriage breakdown or health crisis."

She says more government funding in public and community housing and prevention services is vital to reducing homelessness in Australia.

Housing for the Aged Action Group executive officer Fiona York says there's been a 71 per cent increase in the number of older renters between 2011 and 2021.

"All of a sudden, they're competing in a very competitive, very expensive rental market," she said.

"Fundamentally, the private rental market is an insecure place for older people, and it's not appropriate for them to age there."



Fiona York said the private rental market is insecure, especially for older Australians. (ABC News: Scout Wallen)



Fiona being interviewed for ABC 7.30



Victoria is also one of the only states that doesn't have its own dedicated legislation for land lease operators. Instead, it operates under a section of the Residential Tenancies Act.



Fiona York believes Lifestyle's exit fees are likely to be illegal. (ABC News: Danielle Bonica)



### My HAAG story - *Dennis George*

I first came to know HAAG in mid 2006 when I was living in what was supposed to be a rooming house in Laverton, Victoria. I was living in a converted garage that had no proper heating let alone proper ventilation or anything to call a living area.

This area had cracks in the wall you could easily fit your hands through. I had a sheet of plastic that I had to place over the cracks so the rain would not get in and damage the carpet. Not that the carpet was worth protecting anyway. It was heavily stained, smelly and rotting in places. The toilet was constantly blocking and flooding. The laundry was inadequate for the number of people living there, as the washing machine was old and sometimes smoked.

When tenants reported smells from the sewage outlets the owners decided to raise the rent to have the repairs carried out. The raise was \$45 per week! This meant that other much needed services were lessened such as heating and cooking facilities, the gas to the gas stove was turned off all together.

I made contact with HAAG where I spoke to April and Jeff, they came and saw the so called sleeping area and made an investigation.

Eventually with the help of HAAG, the dwelling was deemed unfit to be a rooming house. Hobson Bay City Council made a ruling that the rooming house be closed. The remaining residents were rehoused by other housing organisations.

HAAG made a successful case to have the owners pay compensation for hardships while living at the derelict property. The owners were so brazen as to seek

compensation for loss of income for losing their tenants!

It was later found out that the owners were banned from operating rooming houses in Victoria or any other state. They had applied to operate under different business names, and in fact operated at least three other illegal rooming houses around Melbourne. They are now banned from owning or operating rooming houses in the future.

Since this experience I have been a member and strong supporter of HAAG and the work it does. I was also a member of the Retirement Accommodation Action Group, and regularly attend meetings and events at HAAG. I have to say if it was not for the actions of HAAG, I am sure those living at the Laverton rooming house would still not have been treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.



Dennis George with the 'Warm Safe Home' he designed at the February General Meeting.

## CASE STUDY

Harold\* is in his late 70's and has disability. He is a wheelchair user living in a rooming house with a private room and a bathroom and shared kitchen. He has lived in the same property for 13 years and considers it his home. The Community Housing Provider that manages the rooming house referred Harold to HAAG's Care finder service. At the time of referral, Harold had no hope of living and was smoking and drinking heavily as a result of stress and the unliveable condition of his unit.

Harold has complex needs due to his mobility. Although the building is wheelchair accessible, the main entrance to the rooming house is a heavy door that is not automatic. Harold needs support from another person to enter and exit the building or has to get off of his wheelchair to physically open the door which is a significant safety risk. Given his challenges with the entrance door to go out for smoking, he sometimes smokes inside his unit which is another safety risk.

Also due to the challenges with the main entrance, he is often unable to take his garbage out. If food or anything else falls on the floor of his unit, he's unable to clean it due to lack of room to manoeuvre his wheelchair inside the unit. As a result of his health issues, he has also had issues with using the bathroom that he has been unable to clean.

He has been approved for an entry level Commonwealth Home Support package (CHSP). However, given the situation of his unit, the service providers consider it a

health and safety risk and are not providing him with any services.

The HAAG Care finder team member immediately worked with the Community Housing Provider to get a new mattress and is working on organising an industrial cleaning of his unit. The staff member is also working with others to get the entry door changed to an automatic door so it does not pose a safety risk. She is also working on getting Harold reconnected with health services and obtaining a number of support letters that accurately reflect the level of his support needs.

Harold's current living situation and health issues make it evident that he needs a Home Care Package that includes in home intensive support. However, he cannot access these without exhausting his CHSP package funding. Without the industrial cleaning and support to find providers who would deliver the necessary supports.

Since the Care finder team member started supporting Harold, his drinking has reduced significantly. He is optimistic about living in the unit and receiving support once the industrial cleaning is completed.



Harold's room before receiving help from HAAG's Care finder program.

\*Name and other identifiable details have been changed



### Forgotten Australians – Life Stories Project

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians ( [forgottenaustralians.org.au](http://forgottenaustralians.org.au) ) have produced a series of Life Stories about the lives of some of the Forgotten Australians who endured hardship, poverty and cruelty at the hands of people who were supposed to care for them. Many of them were child migrants who were brought from overseas orphanages and sent to institutions run by religious organisations. They were often forced to work long hours instead of receiving care and an education.

The Life Stories Project has given many Forgotten Australians or Care Leavers as they are sometimes referred to, an opportunity to tell their story and have their life experience affirmed and validated.

As a service that provides assistance with care and housing for vulnerable older adults it is important for us to be aware of people's life stories so that we can ensure that we refer them to services that are culturally safe for them and don't evoke memories of past trauma. An example of the way we do this is not referring them to organisations that are run by the religious organisations which were complicit in their suffering and trauma.

Listening to people's stories is one of the most respectful and nurturing services that we offer at HAAG and all of our staff are empathetic and caring and know the importance of this most valuable service.

My brother in law, Alex Agius was a Forgotten Australian and we have a copy of his incredible story on our windowsill bookshelf in the HAAG office. He overcame extreme trauma and suffering and after joining the Jesuits he dedicated his adult life to helping the homeless on the streets of St. Kilda in the 80's and later in his life helped many forgotten Australians to access the National Redress Scheme for those who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse.

You can also view videos of other peoples stories at [forgottenaustralians.org.au/resources](http://forgottenaustralians.org.au/resources)

*-Stephanie Agius*

#### **Our Seniors Festival Program : Save the Dates!**

- 2 October**—Loud, Proud and Unhoused—an in-person info session on housing experiences of older LGBTIQ+ people for LGBTIQ+ people
- 4 October**—Retirement Housing online information session
- 6 October**—Seniors Festival Stall with Fair Go for Pensioners at Fed Square
- 9 October**—Accessing Affordable Housing—an in-person information session
- 16 October**—Falling through the gaps: research into the “missing middle”
- 21 October**—Care finder in-person information session

See our website and the Seniors Program for more information



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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



- Housing Options Information
- Outreach Housing Support
- Tenancy & Retirement Housing Advice
- Research & Policy Development
- Help to access Aged Care

Carefinders Steph and Paola at the Ageing Well Expo in Whittlesea