



Housing for the Aged Action Group

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Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation of Senior Victorians Family and Community Development Committee Parliament of Victoria

Submission by Housing for the Aged Action Group

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Housing for the Aged Action Group wishes to address the *Inquiry into the Opportunities for Participation of Victorian Seniors* in terms of the following topics as listed in the submission guide:

- **Emerging issues for senior Victorians over the next 20 years**
- **What are the key issues for Victorians planning for ageing well?**
- **How can approaches to ageing be most effectively integrated in Victoria?**
- **What does “participation” mean for senior Victorians and in what ways are opportunities for participation enabled?**
- **What are examples of “age friendly” environments that facilitate access, mobility and independence of seniors?**

1. Emerging issues for senior Victorians over the next 20 years, and, What are the key issues for Victorians planning for ageing well?

The State Government has no strategic plan to address the current and future housing needs of older people on low incomes

Housing for the Aged Action Group is very concerned about the plight of older Victorians who have not aspired to or attained home ownership by the time they reach retirement age. There is a chronic shortage of low cost rental housing in Victoria that is forcing many older people into dire circumstances of housing poverty and the constant threat of homelessness. This is a political, planning and resources allocation issue that must be addressed now if we are to avoid the rapid expansion of an already chronic problem faced by many older Victorians. We need an all-party commitment from the state parliament to a policy platform that is based on the premise that all older people have the right to be housed well. It must also be recognised that housing is the fundamental cornerstone to ensuring that all older people have a right to age-in-place. In other words, housing must also be seen as a vital component of the aged care system. To begin to achieve these objectives Victoria needs to develop an Older Persons Housing Strategy, as has been established and implemented in Great Britain with its blueprint called LIFETIME

HOMES, LIFETIME NEIGHBOURHOODS, **A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society**¹. A similar strategy is needed to plan for Victoria's rapidly ageing population over the next 20 years. To ensure that a plan is well integrated with all other services that impact on the lives of older people, the State government must work closely with the Commonwealth government to obtain the best possible outcomes.

Recommendation

The Victorian Government must develop an Older Persons Housing Strategy.

¹ Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods, A national strategy for housing in an ageing society. Department for Communities and Local Government, London Feb. 2008

There is a growing housing crisis for older people on low incomes who are housed in the private rental market

The private rental market has for decades been a fraught housing option for older people. AHURI research demonstrates that this housing sector is now a major problem for more than 110,000 people over the age of 65 who have not achieved secure and affordable housing as either homeowners on one hand, or public and social housing tenants on the other. 80% of this population rely on the aged pension as their main source of income. Warnings about the plight of older private renters have been well understood for some time. For example:

In 1981 Professor Hal Kendig said that “the highest priority for government must be to provide more assistance to the worst off group, the private renters in poverty”.²

In 1992 Consultant Gerontologist Anna Howe, in one of the strategic documents produced as part of the Commonwealth Government’s National Housing Strategy stated that “all analyses have continued to identify older renters in the private sector as a priority needs group’.”³

and in 2005 Professor Andrew Jones stated that “Housing is one of the most neglected social justice issues on the ageing policy agenda” and that “housing should be moved from the periphery to the centre of our national, strategic response to ageing” because “housing is a key foundation for sustainable strategies to tackle the challenges of Australia’s ageing population. An integrated housing policy for older Australians is necessary, not only to ensure that older Australians are efficiently and equitably housed, but also to underpin health, aged care, income security and social participation objectives, policies and services.... ‘If Australians are to age well, they must be housed well’.”⁴

Projections of the housing needs of older Australians over the next 20 years are alarming. Serious planning must begin now to ensure that high proportions of older people are not condemned to living in poverty into the future.

The National Housing Supply Council Report to the Commonwealth Government in 2010 states that “there are approximately 1.6 million older households in Australia, making up 18.6 per cent of all households in June 2008. This group is growing faster than younger household groups. By 2028, in the Council’s medium growth projections of underlying demand, that number will grow to 3.2 million representing 27.6 per cent of all households.”⁵

² Kendig, H 1981, ‘Housing and living arrangements of the aged’, in AL Howe (ed.), *Towards an Older Australia: Readings in Social Gerontology*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

³ Howe, AL 1992, *Housing for Older Australians*, National Housing Strategy Background Paper No. 8, AGPS, Canberra.

⁴ Jones, A. Housing: the foundation for sustainable strategies to tackle the challenges of Australia’s ageing population. Presentation to Australia’s Ageing Population Summit, 2005

⁵ P.141 National Housing Supply Council, 2nd State of Supply Report, Commonwealth Government 2010

While rates of outright home ownership amongst people over 65 years of age are high at approximately 80%, it is predicted that this proportion will decline over the coming decades.⁶ This will create further demand for rental housing amongst older people.⁷ This is a problem because, as the State of Supply Report 2010 states, “the increasing share of older people living in the private rented sector over the next 20 years is a concern because of the limited security of tenure in that sector.”⁸

Further, the Supply Council states that the “underlying demand for rental from older households is likely to increase by 120 per cent to 2028, with consequent pressures on both private and public rental markets. Private rental demand is projected to rise from 146,200 in 2008 to 321,400 by 2028. Public rental demand is projected to rise at a similar rate from 86,500 in 2008 to 189,900 in 2028.”

HAAG believes that the Supply Council’s separation of private and public housing, suggesting that demand for both sectors will continue to grow equally, fails to acknowledge considerable evidence that the private rental market is becoming unsuitable as a form of housing tenure for older people, particularly those on low incomes. Therefore the data should be combined to provide a true picture of the overall need for affordable housing. Conditions in the private market have become considerably worse over the past 5 years as vacancy rates have remained at an all-time historic low of less than 3% (equilibrium of supply and demand) for the whole period and the rate has dropped as low as .08%. It is currently about 2%. This trend created a massive escalation of rents and caused greater difficulties for aged pensioners to compete with younger working adults for any available properties.

In addition to the market trend factors, private rental housing is inappropriate to the needs of an ageing population for the following reasons:

- Private rental housing is too expensive for older people on aged pensions. The Supply Council reports that 35% of renters over 65 years of age are paying more than 30% of their income in rent (this includes the addition of rent assistance to their income).⁹ The average rent paid by HAAG clients is in the range of 50%-70% of income.
- Private rental housing offers limited security of tenure as leases, if a tenant is able to negotiate one at all, are rarely greater than 6 or 12 months in duration. Older people, to be able to age-in-place, need the security of long term tenure. It is evident that a lack of security of tenure is a major factor in the cause of ill health for older people caused by the stress of facing homelessness, having to find other accommodation and relocate.

⁶ P.137 National Housing Supply Council, 2nd State of Supply Report, Commonwealth Government 2010

⁷ P.19 Rental housing provision for lower income older Australians, AHURI May 2007

⁸ P.137 National Housing Supply Council, 2nd State of Supply Report, Commonwealth Government 2010

⁹ P.147 National Housing Supply Council, 2nd State of Supply Report, Commonwealth Government 2010

- There are no minimum housing standards in private rental housing. This means that many of the health and safety factors that are essential to the well-being of older people cannot be guaranteed in this form of accommodation. This is particularly the case for older people on low incomes who access the least expensive and therefore poorest quality, accommodation. Landlords do not have to provide housing that has heating, insulation or be draught-proof. Other aspects of housing standards that older people need, such as home security and reliable appliances, are not required to be provided by law in Victoria.
- Private rental housing is not adaptable as people age. There are no legal requirements for landlords to agree to allow home modifications such as ramps, rails, walk-in-showers etc. If a landlord provides permission for such alterations, they have the right to demand they be removed when a tenant vacates, further financially penalising older people on exiting their home. For aged pensioners this usually means foregoing the modifications completely, thus causing severe inconvenience and reliance on more substantial and expensive aged care services.



Examples of housing conditions HAAG has found in older tenants' homes. Older people will often not report these problems for fear of eviction and rent rises.

Current tax arrangements do not benefit people on low incomes

There is considerable evidence that investment incentives such as negative gearing provide no benefits in terms of increased housing supply or housing affordability and therefore serves no useful social purpose other than to boost the wealth of property owners.¹⁰ It is estimated that negative gearing accounts for up to \$4.6 billion in tax revenue foregone annually that could be used for the direct construction of affordable housing. For example, while most other advanced western nations do not have negative gearing, they have higher vacancy rates than Australia and therefore more available housing and lower rents. Also, negative gearing does little to increase housing supply as 92% of investors purchase existing dwellings. Third, if the abolition of negative gearing caused investors to sell their properties this would improve housing affordability for first home buyers due to greater supply of available dwellings. Such savings on the purchase of a home would be much more valuable than the First Home Owners Grant Scheme that now costs taxpayers more than \$2 billion per year and which has also been shown to have an inflationary impact on house prices.

Recommendation

The Victorian Government must acknowledge that the private rental sector is an unsuitable form of housing for older people and increase public housing supply to meet the high demand for affordable housing. The Victorian Government must also advise the Commonwealth Government to abolish negative gearing and invest the increased taxation into capital growth of public housing.

¹⁰ Saul Eslake, Time to Change the Unfair Rules for Negative Gearing, The Age 25 April 2011

There are three main areas of affordable housing that require significant reform if access for older people is to be improved. They are:

Public housing, not-for-profit independent living units and social housing

Public housing

Public housing provides all of the benefits that older people on low incomes require. It is affordable, provides security of tenure, is well maintained, is (mostly) designed to be adaptable as they age and is usually located near services and public transport. Unfortunately growth in supply of public housing has reduced significantly since the mid-1980's to the point where applicants are only able to be housed if they are eligible under categories of special need. Unfortunately priority access eligibility guidelines do not include an aged based assessment. Therefore a fit and healthy 90 year old applicant may not be deemed eligible for priority access. Even if an applicant is eligible on other criteria such as ill-health, the procedures for entry are now so complex that the 'red-tape' itself can dissuade an older person from applying. In fact, it is almost impossible for an older person to access public housing without significant support from a professional advocate who can help them to navigate through the system. While older people need considerable support and assistance, advocacy services alone have been severely limited since the Office of Housing changed its main funded tenant support program from the Public Housing Advisory Program (PHAP) to the Social Housing Advisory Program (SHASP) in 2006. SHASP services only assist existing tenants of public housing and do not assist prospective tenants with housing applications. This situation puts an enormous burden on organisations like HAAG to assist older public housing applicants, especially as HAAG receives no funding whatsoever from the Office of Housing to perform this function.

The critical issue regarding the public housing sector is that it is severely under-funded and struggling to cope with the increasing affordable housing needs of low income people in the community. The Commonwealth Government's Nation Building Fund provided \$1.265 billion to build 4500 dwellings in Victoria and has had a positive impact by creating a significant one-off boost to affordable housing supply.¹¹ However, because the funding was used as a strategic economic stimulus plan to support the building industry and soften the impact of the recent economic recession, there are no ongoing funds for increasing affordable housing supply in Victoria. Therefore public housing will continue to diminish relative to demand and continue to cause great hardship for older people and others on low incomes.

Independent Living Units

Independent Living Units (ILUs) are a housing sector that developed from the Aged Persons Housing Act in 1956. It was a Commonwealth Government initiative that provided partnership grants for not-for-profit organisations to build affordable

¹¹[http://www.vicurban.com/cs/Satellite?c=VPage&cid=1264061802473&pagename=VicUrban%2FLay
out](http://www.vicurban.com/cs/Satellite?c=VPage&cid=1264061802473&pagename=VicUrban%2FLayout)

housing specifically for older people. It was a very successful scheme that built 34,000 units across Australia and approximately 9,000 dwellings in Victoria. However, funding ceased for this program in 1986 and the housing stock is now often quite run-down and poorly designed for adaptability as people age. Many organisations have sold their housing stock due to the high cost of maintaining the housing and the current level of housing has dropped to about 6,200 dwellings. Other providers have expended funds to improve the housing but this has been done by the payment of lump sum contributions from applicants that are used for refurbishment and sinking funds. Therefore the amount of housing available to those most in need, older people on low incomes with no assets, has diminished significantly. Due to demand for this form of housing, there are significant waiting times before an applicant can be housed.

Because ILUs were developed during an era when land in inner-ring suburbs of Melbourne was more affordable, there are significant opportunities to redevelop this housing stock at low cost. In many cases the current housing could be converted into medium density sites, and therefore boost the size of the sector many times over. Such a strategy would require either land being given back to government for public housing use, or through the establishment of partnerships with not-for-profit housing providers.

Social Housing

Over the past 10 years the Victorian Government has focused its affordable housing funding on the expansion of the social housing sector through funding 8 Registered Housing Associations. The RHAs manage about 5000 dwellings and 1600 dwellings are leased by the Office of Housing to not-for-profit agencies.¹²

There are three main problems HAAG faces when assisting older people to access social housing: There is limited stock available to older people on low incomes because the Housing Associations are required to offer a significant proportion of their accommodation to tenants on moderate incomes to ensure they have an adequate revenue stream to maintain payments for their financial borrowings.

Secondly, there is little transparency about the eligibility guidelines for entry in housing association stock. Unlike the Office of Housing, which displays its entry guidelines and policies on the internet for all to see, the Housing Associations do not make the information publicly available. Therefore, it is often unclear under what criteria a person can apply under and the decisions made by Housing Associations are difficult to negotiate or challenge due to the lack of transparency. In some cases HAAG has been asked by social landlords to provide references for applicants, which seems to be a contrary process to the most important factor of demonstrating housing need.

Third, HAAG has experienced a number of instances, while advocating for clients, where Housing Associations have stated that they do not have enough funds to

¹² <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/housing-and-accommodation/social-housing>

expend on renovations to ensure older persons housing is adaptable. This has restricted the mobility of our clients and severely impacted on the liveability of their environment. This is in stark contrast to our cases involving public housing applicants where housing modifications have always been a budget priority for the Office of Housing. The Office of Housing are able to draw upon larger resource pools to ensure that housing adaptation can be relatively quickly organised if, for example, an older tenant had an injury or health problem that required such works to be done.

Recommendation

The Victorian Government must work with the Commonwealth to increase public housing supply; negotiate with not-for-profit housing providers to reform the Independent Living Unit sector; and, more effectively regulate the social housing sector to provide better outcomes for older people on low incomes.

Lack of homelessness support services for older people

In addition to diminishing affordable housing supply there is also a significant lack of support services that are required to assist older people at risk of homelessness.

For 16 years Housing for the Aged Action Group has provided a homelessness outreach service to older people through the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Program. ACHA provides one-to-one intensive support to older people threatened with losing their accommodation, particularly in the private rental market. Funded by the Department of Health and Ageing, it is primarily viewed by government as an aged care support scheme that ensures older people are well housed to be able to receive the care that they need. For this purpose the focus is on assistance to the frail aged and many clients are over 80 years of age. ACHA has been recognised universally to be the right model of assistance for vulnerable older people because it provides the medium term personalised assistance that suits the needs of a target group that is often unable to act independently or is reluctant to seek out help. The ACHA model provides great outcomes because ACHA workers sort out all the nitty gritty problems that can arise when an older persons has rented their accommodation for 20 years and then, for example, receives a 60 day Notice to Vacate because the landlord decides to sell their property. ACHA workers assist their client to sort out their personal belongings, find them stable and affordable long term housing and link them into their new community with all of the necessary supports, including aged care, which they require. Recent research has shown that this form of intensive support at an early stage of being threatened with homelessness, along with an outcomes focused approach, can have a significant impact on the duration of the crisis and obtaining a successful outcome.¹³

While the ACHA Program is an effective service model for older people, the ACHA Program is very poorly funded, and is not integrated with other homelessness and aged care programs. Funding, at \$4.6 million nationally, has not grown in real terms since it began as a pilot program in 1995. ACHA funding represents barely 1% of the total homelessness support funding in Australia. Geographically, ACHA services are only able to cover small parts of Victoria (with no ACHA services in regional and rural Victoria), there are no brokerage funds to help older people with removalist costs and other moving expenses, and they operate as unintegrated stand-alone agencies doing the best they can on shoe-string budgets. ACHA should be transformed from its current piecemeal approach to become the national model of homelessness prevention for older people.

Older Persons' Homelessness Prevention and Re-Housing Service

In co-ordination with the ACHA Program HAAG has recently established a pilot project that aims to improve the co-ordination of service responses to older people who are at risk, or who are being threatened with, homelessness. This has been developed in response to unprecedented demand from older private rental tenants

¹³ P.29 Westmore, T. & Mallett, S. (2011) *Ageing in what place? The experience of housing crisis and homelessness for older Victorians*. Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne

who are in danger of losing their homes. Working towards the eventual development of an Older Persons' Homelessness Prevention and Re-Housing Service, we have transferred some of our scarce resources from our ACHA Outreach Service to establish a Victoria wide ACHA intake, assessment and referral process.

The response from older people since the pilot was established has been overwhelming and a huge challenge to our existing services. In its first year in 2009-2010 HAAG assisted 2,500 older people with housing enquiries and 727 clients were provided with more intensive support through the ACHA intake process. The service is on track for the 2010-2011 year to reach more than 1000 clients, an increase of 37% in one year. This boost in client numbers has been achieved without the resources required to effectively promote the service and establish the necessary agency networks needed to maximise comprehensive assistance to all vulnerable older renters. While other agencies are also reporting greater demand from vulnerable older people in the private rental market, HAAG is trying to highlight the importance of a specialist systematic response to ensure that the most effective services are available.

Such a specialist approach has been endorsed in a recent report produced by Hanover Welfare Services called *Ageing in what place: The experience of housing crisis and homelessness for older Victorians*. The report recommends a simplified and streamlined approach to homelessness responses for older people with a focus on prevention and early intervention, including the provision of one-stop shops to ensure vulnerable older people do not slip through the safety net systems. The report states that "Early identification of older people who are at risk of or currently in housing crisis is the most effective method of preventing homelessness. First Contact Agencies should take a lead role in identifying those in housing crisis and referring them to appropriate support." They add: "For those in housing crisis or those newly homeless, dedicated services that provide a timely and tailored response to vulnerable older people should be further developed and funded."¹⁴

HAAG's service summary report for 2009-2010 is attached to this submission.

Recommendation

The Victorian Government must develop a comprehensive specialist support service system for older people who are at risk of homelessness.

HAAG also requests that the State Government support HAAG's project that aims to develop a 'one-stop shop' that would link older people at risk of homelessness with effective services and suitable affordable housing outcomes.

The Victorian Government must lobby the Commonwealth Government to increase funding to the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) Program

¹⁴ P.4 Westmore, T. & Mallett, S. (2011) *Ageing in what place? The experience of housing crisis and homelessness for older Victorians*. Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne

Lack of protection for older people living in new forms of retirement housing

In the past decade there has been a rapid expansion of retirement housing models developed by the private sector that are provided for older people on low incomes and low assets. While HAAG supports the development of new housing options that are responding to changing needs of retirees, we are concerned that governments need to be more active in regulating these enterprises to ensure that older people are adequately protected.

Two examples of housing developments that have emerged over the past decade are rental villages and residential parks:

Rental Villages

Rental villages are clusters of older persons housing units (40-100) where older people can live semi-independently. Residents rent their own unit with limited kitchen facilities and are provided with 3 meals per day and a linen service. They pay no ingoings and rent is typically 85% of their income.

Nearly 90 villages have been established since their inception in 1998, housing about 4000 people across Australia. AHURI research has estimated that this form of housing has been the fastest growing segment of affordable rental housing for older people since the year 2000.¹⁵

In 1995 HAAG conducted a series of consultations at 5 Village Life villages to find out what residents think of their housing. HAAG found that many older people are attracted to this accommodation for the following reasons: It provides independent housing linked to services; it is a good option for older people wishing to downsize from a large family home; it offers companionship; there are no up-front fees; and meals are provided.

However, there were also a number of problems identified. Paying 85% of the pension in rent puts into question whether the accommodation is affordable for those with little or no assets; it lacks security of tenure as it's covered by the Residential Tenancies Act; a number of residents have reported concerns about the quality of the meals; and resident participation in decision-making is discouraged.

Also, past events have put into question whether it is a viable ongoing housing model. Things were looking quite good for this form of housing in 2004 when the chairman of Village Life stated that governments and charitable organisations won't be able to satisfy the "desperate need" for affordable accommodation in the future. He said "Everybody wins here; the Government doesn't have to build these sorts of facilities because private capital is doing it, the people investing are making reasonable returns, and those renting the facilities are getting a better environment than they otherwise would have had."¹⁶

¹⁵ Rental Housing Provision for Lower Income Older Australians. Jones, Bell, Tilse and Earl: AHURI 2007

¹⁶ 'Grey Money' The Brisbane Courier-Mail June 12, 2004

Less than a year later Village Life's share price plummeted, and was then suspended, when its market value kept spiralling downwards.

Events came to a head in April 2007 when a dispute between the owners of ten villages (MFS Group) and Village Life as the managing operators, sparked an absolute debacle when 450 residents were informed that their villages would be closing. A public outcry and state governments' intervention brokered a compromise between the parties and the eventual transfer of most of the villages' management across to a company called Sunny Cove. While the environment appears to be more stable lately, this incident has left residents with a great feeling of uncertainty for their future.

This crisis raised many questions. What if a business has a short term investment outlook for this form of housing? What if they decide that there is more money to be made in providing housing for older people with more assets and income? Who would take responsibility if the business failed altogether and 4000 older people were facing eviction?

In 2011 residents still do not have secure tenure in rental villages, even though some governments, such as in New South Wales, gave a commitment in 2007 to the introduction of legislation to ensure that residents in rental villages could obtain long term leases.

This event emphasised the fact that governments ultimately must take responsibility for affordable housing supply, or at least actively regulate the private market, to ensure that housing outcomes are driven by the needs of older people, not the profits of private companies.

Residential Parks

HAAG's Residential Parks and Villages Working Group has been actively seeking law reform for this type of accommodation since 2005. The very first meeting was held in secret (such was the climate of fear) in a pub in Collingwood. Over time HAAG assisted residents to get together to discuss their problems and the working group now comprises some 140 residents. HAAG then started the dialogue with politicians and the relevant government departments. Initially HAAG was told that our concerns could be dealt with by negotiation or legal action against park owners who were causing problems for tenants. In other words, we were told there is nothing wrong with the laws; we just needed to use them. One of the fundamental problems however, was that most people were so afraid to exercise whatever rights they had as they feared being evicted if they spoke out. This highlighted the fundamental problem faced by most, if not all, residential parks and villages residents in Victoria - the lack of security of tenure. Most residents are not adequately covered by long term lease arrangements, and those who have leases as long as 99 years, are unclear whether such leases are binding if the owner decided to sell their park or village. So security of tenure, articulated by our working group as a lease agreement of at least 50 years, became the central objective of an ongoing campaign that also included

many other issues such as removal of the 120 day notice to vacate without reason, rent control, resident participation in decision-making, need for management training, the right to sell your own home or choose your own agent and many other claims.

By 2007 Consumer Affairs Victoria began to take the concerns of residents seriously due to the overwhelming weight of evidence that the numbers of permanent residents, and new village developments, were significantly on the rise in Victoria. The state government acknowledged that an increasing number of retirees were investing their savings in new homes in these villages, but did not necessarily have the protection of that asset or the resident's right to enjoy their retirement years in peace in their chosen community. In other words, developers were trying to attract retirees to buy homes that cost more than \$100,000, but not always offering long term tenure guarantees.

After ongoing negotiations with the state government and the involvement of all stakeholders, on September 1, 2011 new legislation was proclaimed that has improved residents rights in a number of areas. However, as with rental villages, the fundamental problem faced by residents still remains: a lack of security of tenure. The new legislation ensures that 5 year minimum term leases must be offered to residents, but only in any new park development started after September 1 and therefore does not protect existing residents. In any case, 5 year lease terms still do not provide enough protection to cover a person's retirement years and therefore they are still vulnerable to a park owner deciding to sell or change the use of the land.

Recommendation

The state government must actively regulate the new housing markets emerging for older people and ensure that security of tenure and other protections are provided. Further, the state government must introduce a Retirement Housing Act that would provide legislative coverage for all older persons' cluster-type housing.

2. How can approaches to ageing be most effectively integrated in Victoria?

Housing for the Aged Action Group believes that improvements to ageing approaches are not only a matter of enhanced services to older people. Better integration of existing government departments and non-government agencies who provide housing and aged services could also achieve significant improvements to the lives of older people.

The key to this integration is that housing must be seen by government as a key foundation of an older person's ability to age-in-place. As Westmore and Mallett state "The foundation for ageing in place is secure, permanent housing, around which other support needs are built. Without this foundation, vulnerable older people living in private rental had limited and sometimes no opportunity to age in place"¹⁷ The need for such integration is becoming more pronounced as governments shift resources away from residential care to community care. However, very little is being done to acknowledge that older people on low incomes need a decent home to receive community care. Otherwise community care expenditure is futile if it is provided in an environment that is unhealthy and potentially dangerous and leads to an outcome of premature entry into residential care, defeating the fundamental purpose of the program. Generally, Aged care services that provide assistance such as Home and Community Care (HACC) and Community Aged Care Packages (CACPs) have little knowledge of housing services that may be available to assist an older client. Similarly, government and non-government housing services are not aware of the aged care needs of older people and how to recommend access to such services when needed.

Bringing together these service systems to co-ordinate assistance, particularly to vulnerable older people on low incomes, could provide a vital link to provide help to many older people who are often disconnected from mainstream service assistance. For example, for many older people, particularly those who have lost contact with family and friends through either death or estrangement, their most important contact is their home care worker provided through either HACC services or a CACPs package. The home care worker is in a critical position to identify if their client has a housing problem but currently is not given the information that could enable them to help their client if they have a housing problem. This could be in a very basic form such as the provision of written information that could be passed on to their elderly client, or more centrally within their organisation, a kit of information about appropriate housing resources that can assist. This joined-up approach could then lead to a visit from a specialist older persons housing worker who could help with problems such as repairs, rent arrears, disputes with landlords, or more significantly, applications for public and social housing to provide a long term solution to their housing problem.

¹⁷ P.36 Westmore, T. & Mallett, S. (2011) *Ageing in what place? The experience of housing crisis and homelessness for older Victorians*. Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne.

Recommendation

The Victorian Government must recognise that housing is a key foundation of an older person's ability to age-in-place and improve the integration of housing and aged care services.

3. What does “participation” mean for senior Victorians and in what ways are opportunities for participation enabled?

Participation for senior Victorians often requires ensuring that older people have secure housing tenure as a foundation to be able to participate meaningfully in society. Many older people renting in the private market who are at risk of homelessness are so consumed by a sense of survival that they are unable to consider being able to engage in political, social or recreational activities. However, in HAAG's experience, once a low income older person obtains affordable housing that provides security of tenure in a home that is well maintained and is adapted for their needs as they age, they are able to consider involvement in activities that enrich their lives. This also provides great benefits for society as they join the ranks of many other older people who are the greatest voluntary contributors to our communities.

HAAG has received testimonies from a number of older people who have told heartfelt stories about their battles with homelessness and how they had been desperately single-minded about their need to obtain affordable housing when under threat of eviction. Once HAAG has been able to assist them out of their private rental or homelessness trap and into either public, social housing or independent living units they report a life-changing sense of relief and joy that such a 'miracle' has occurred in their lives and that they are able to enjoy the daily benefits of life that most Victorian citizens take for granted. HAAG recommend viewing our latest short film called "Ageing on the Edge" that evocatively shows the struggles of older people facing homelessness and then the enormously positive impact that good housing has on their lives when their housing dilemma is resolved.

'Ageing on the Edge' is attached to this submission and can also be viewed at <http://www.oldertenants.org.au>.

Recommendation

The Victorian Government must ensure that older people on low incomes have the right to access services and affordable housing to enable them to full participants in Victorian society.

4. What are examples of “age friendly” environments that facilitate access, mobility and independence of seniors?

Housing for the Aged Action Group believes that much more can be done to ensure that accessible, adaptable and age-friendly housing is acknowledged as a right. These principles must begin with good housing design and extends to the living environment in a person’s community. Research from AHURI has shown that the localised environment in which a person lives becomes much more important as a person ages. It is clear that older people spend more time in their own home and utilise it for a range of functions.¹⁸ Older people also narrow their community outreach focus as they become frail in health and spend a great deal of time communicating with a smaller radius of contacts. For these reasons it is essential that houses are built with universal design principles and that local environments are built to be aged and disability friendly to aid older persons’ mobility so that they can maintain connections with their communities and reduce isolation.

Further HAAG believes it is essential that a much wider range of accommodation types be developed to suit an ageing society, including forms of housing that allow older people to receive residential care levels of support while still living independently.

A positive model of age-friendly housing that should be adopted and promoted is the Apartments for Life Project based in Bondi Junction, Sydney. Apartments for Life is an independent living concept currently being developed by the Benevolent Society in Sydney where the design and service support structures enable 95% of the residents to be able to stay living in their own home all their lives, no matter what level of care is required. The Apartments for Life Project is based on the Humanitas housing model.

As the Benevolent Society states:

The Humanitas Foundation in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, has attracted international renown because of its achievements in developing the innovative Apartments for Life model of housing and care for older people. Under the leadership of Dr Hans Becker, Chair of the Humanitas Foundation, the first Apartments for Life complex opened in the mid 1990s. Today there are more than fifteen Apartments for Life complexes in Rotterdam with several thousand older people as residents.

As its name suggests, a key feature of the Apartments for Life model is that it offers older people a chance to remain in their own home – in this case an apartment – throughout older age and to avoid having to move home when their health declines and they require increasing levels of care and support. Apartments for Life challenges the oft-held assumption of the inevitability of a move to a nursing home in later old age. However Humanitas’ Apartments for Life is about more than just enabling older people to live in the one place until

¹⁸ Dwelling, land and neighbourhood use by older home owners. Judd et al, AHURI March 2010

the end of life. It is about supporting older people's control over their own lives and their continued activity and participation in community life.¹⁹

In addition to Humanitas housing and the Apartments for Life project, Housing NSW has adopted the concept and built a number of public housing developments along similar lines. HAAG understands that there are no projects like Apartments for Life in Victoria at present and therefore it is vital that the state government explore and promote this positive model of independent living and aged care. As a starting point HAAG believes that there are significant opportunities for the Office of Housing to follow the lead of Housing NSW and roll-out similar projects in Victoria.

Recommendation

The Victorian Government must develop creative models of independent living that can incorporate a range of aged care services, also known as service integrated housing, such as the Apartments for Life Project in Bondi Junction in Sydney.

¹⁹ Apartments for Life in Australia. Lessons for Australia from Humanitas in the Netherlands The Benevolent Society 2009