

# Housing for the Aged Action Group Inc.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

Out of an expressed need for public housing for older people living in the Westernport region, Housing for the Aged Action Group had its beginning. At the initiative of a group of older private tenants, the Westernport Regional Housing Council and concerned individuals, our group began meeting on 21st July 1983.

Initially, the group concentrated on the following:

- the chronic shortage of elderly person units in the region
- the Ministry of Housing's one bedroom policy which was seen to be unfair and impractical for many older couples housing needs.

In 1984 the group published its first booklet entitled 'When the Buck Stops', which was based on research commissioned by the group. The booklet included housing profiles of people in housing difficulties and drew public attention to the desperate shortage of public housing.

Following numerous attempts to secure funding the group eventually received a small grant of \$5000 from Community Services Victoria to employ a one-day a week worker to extend the functions of the group. Then in 1988, after increased participation from tenants, we successfully applied for funds from the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and employed a worker for 12 hours per week. A Constitution was formed and we became incorporated in 1988. During that year we published our second booklet entitled 'The Buck Ain't Stopped' which was based on further research commissioned by the Westernport Regional Housing Council.

In 1991 we secured funding to provide a state-wide tenancy service for older renters with a worker employed for 32 hours per week. Since 1998 the position has been full-time.

During 1995 we extended our services by securing funding from the Federal Department of Health's Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) scheme to assist frail older tenants in housing difficulty. Short term funding from the Stegley Foundation, Sidney Myer Fund, and The Lance Reichstein Foundation was also provided to establish a Housing Options Service, an indispensable link between other funded services at HAAG. This has continued to be provided by our organisation on a voluntary basis.

In 1996 HAAG launched a publication called 'Community Housing and Older People' that was the culmination of six months research into the preferred community housing options of older people, funded by the Department of Human Services.

In 1997, in conjunction with the City of Moreland, the Public Tenants Union and the Brunswick Progress Association, HAAG organised the 'Housing People' photographic exhibition of inner Melbourne slum housing during the Great Depression.

In 1998/99, for International Year of Older Persons, HAAG organised the 'Having Our Say' Forum at the Melbourne Town Hall, and released a report about the housing concerns of older tenants.

In 2001 HAAG secured funding for a full time position from the Office of Housing to provide a public tenants advice service under the Public Housing Advisory Program (PHAP). HAAG also held a Health, Aged Care and Housing Forum to help workers in these fields to better integrate their services.

In 2002 HAAG organised another successful statewide forum called Having Our Say 2002 which is part of a strategy to develop a Rural and Regional Older Tenants Network.

In 2003 100 tenants attended our AGM to endorse HAAG's Older Tenants Housing Charter and accept a report called Older Australian's Experience Living in Insecure Tenancies. HAAG also produced a report called 'Older Tenants Experience Living in Insecure Tenancies' that documented the wider impacts of the threat of homelessness and relocation on older people.

In 2004, in conjunction with the Victorian Public Tenants Association, HAAG held a forum called Back to the Future at ACMI, Federation Square. Attended by 200 people, talks and films depicted the fear that affordable housing is heading back to the days before the Housing Commission where older people had to rely on private landlords for their housing.

In 2005, HAAG held two significant forums: A Housing is a Health Issue regional forum in Benalla, and a Caravan and Residential Park Residents Statewide Forum, with a report launch by the Minister for Consumer Affairs in 2006.

In 2007 HAAG presented a major submission to Consumer Affairs' Residential Accommodation Strategy that aims, amongst other plans, to provide improved security of tenure for older people living in residential parks.

In 2008 HAAG held two major forums: Ageing In Place? on the struggles faced by older people in the private rental market, held at the Melbourne Town Hall; and Caravan Parks or Villages? on the changing landscape of caravan and residential parks held at ACMI in Federation Square, Melbourne.

In 2009 HAAG conducted a major statewide consultation with older people living in caravan and residential parks that was compiled into a report to advise the State Government on the need for law reform to support this form of accommodation as an emerging form of retirement housing. This culminated in the passing of the new Part 4a of the Residential Tenancies Act in 2010 that specifically addressed the needs of this group.

In 2010 HAAG introduced two major enhancements to our services: 1. HAAG restructured its housing and homelessness services to better address the increasing vulnerability of many of the 40,000 older Victorians living in the insecure private rental market. The Older Persons Housing Options Information and Referral Service provides a vital service access point between vulnerable older renters at risk of homelessness, the community links where they may present with their problem, and housing services that provide appropriate responses tailored to their needs. 2. HAAG obtained additional funding from Consumer Affairs to establish a Retirement Housing Information and Support Service that assists vulnerable older people living in low income retirement housing.

In 2011 HAAG held a national forum called Ageing on the Edge—Older People at Risk of Homelessness. The event was attended by over 200 delegates and its aim was to highlight the latest research and to hear from the community sectors' perspective on housing and homelessness problems faced by low income older people in Australia. An outcome of the day was a commitment by the sector to form a coalition of organisations to work towards developing an older persons housing strategy.

Overall, HAAG provides housing services, holds regular general meetings, an annual statewide forum, visits older people in country regions of Victoria, organises exhibitions, conducts research, runs campaigns, forms working groups on particular issues and lobbies the State and Commonwealth Government on critical housing issues for older people. For more information please contact us on 96547389 or 1800637389 (free for country callers).