Victorian Pre-budget Submission 2026-2027

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About Housing for the Aged Action Group

Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) is a member-based, community organisation specialising in the housing needs of older people. HAAG has over 1,000 members across the country actively working towards achieving housing justice. Established over 40 years ago as a grassroots movement, HAAG has developed a robust service delivery arm in Victoria and has a strong presence in advocacy for older people experiencing housing and homelessness related issues across Victoria and the country. During the 2024-25 financial year, HAAG supported over 2,000 older Victorians.

HAAG welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Victorian Treasury through the Pre-Budget submission process. This submission is based on our experience delivering housing and related support services to older people, research and the lived experiences of older people experiencing housing stress or homelessness in Victoria. This submission particularly draws on the contributions of members of HAAG's advisory groups including: Retirement Accommodation Action Group (RAAG), LGBTQIA+ reference group and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) reference group.

This submission aligns with the Victorian Government's commitments to:

- Preventing homelessness through early intervention
- Gender Responsive Budgeting
- The Big Housing Build and social housing targets
- Supporting older Victorians through the Ageing Well Action Plan

Recommendations

1. **Increase investment in Home at Last to ensure this vital service can both meet existing demand and expand to provide one-to-one support to older people across all of Victoria, at a cost of $1.62m per year in addition to the existing level of funding.**
2. **Increase public and community housing to 10% of all housing stock by 2040. At minimum, 20% of all public and community housing should be ringfenced for older people over 55.**
3. **Expand HAAG's Retirement Housing Assistance Service and secure ongoing funding at a cost of $484 000 per year.[1]**
4. **Increase funding for early intervention and prevention, including peer and community education targeted towards older people, and update online and hard copy information on housing options for older people so that they can plan for their housing future, at the cost of $170,000 per year.**
5. **Investigate housing options for the cohort of older people who are falling through the housing assistance eligibility gap, the 'missing middle' by:**
    a. **Revitalising the Independent Living Units (ILU) Sector.**
    b. **Pilot shared equity housing schemes for older people, with a view to scaling up across the state.**

[1] Current Retirement Housing Assistance Service (RHAS) funding totals $1,008,504, comprising $341,000 from Consumer Affairs Victoria (for the Retirement Housing Assistance and Advocacy Program) and $667,504.81 from the Rental Stress Support Package (for tenancy support). This total represents funding over three years; dividing by three provides an annual amount of approximately $336,168. Both funding streams are set to finish on 30 June 2026, subject to the Funded Services Review outcomes. In addition, a Senior Lawyer has been costed at $120000 + oncosts

Context

Having safe, affordable, accessible and long-term housing is fundamental to healthy ageing and the wellbeing of older people. However, an increasing number of older people are experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or in housing stress. These older Victorians are retiring into insecure and unstable housing, and the number experiencing this is only continuing to grow.

Financial pressures due to skyrocketing housing costs and cost of living increases, along with the significant inadequacy of Age Pension and Jobseeker payment are pushing older people into severe housing stress and poverty. These are in addition to a lack of affordable housing as a result of decades of underinvestment by governments in social and affordable housing, a retirement system that assumes home ownership, and structural gender inequality. And yet, we know that as people age their need for secure, affordable and appropriate housing grows in importance.

Over the last decade there has been a 77% increase in older people renting privately in Victoria, and this number will continue to rise. In Victoria, there are at least 85,000 older people over 55 renting privately in the lowest two income quintiles.[2] Since 2023, the median rent in Victorian dwellings increased by $100 from $420 to $520 in 2025.[3] Income support payments have not kept pace with rental increases, placing the majority of the older renters at risk of severe rental stress, experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Current rental legislation also does not currently provide renters with security of tenure, affordable and safe housing.

It is vital that older people have the secure, affordable housing they need. Housing for the Aged Action Group presents the following proposals to address these needs.

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[2] 4 W. Stone et al, Ageing in a Housing Crisis: Older people's housing insecurity & homelessness in Australia (Commissioned by Housing for the Aged Action Group), 2023, accessible at: https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/decades_of_decline_2011-21_victoria.pdf

[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics: Latest insights into the rental market, 2025, accessible at: https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/latest-insights-rental-market

Recommendation 1: Expanding Home at Last service to support older people into a secure, affordable home

HAAG's **Home at Last** service provides vital support to older Victorians experiencing housing crisis, particularly in the private rental market. This is particularly challenging for older people who are on low-incomes or relying on government income support payments as their main source of income. This crisis is exacerbated by the lack of supply of public, community and affordable housing targeted to older people.

The HAAG **Home at Last** service model demonstrates that better housing outcomes can be achieved for older people experiencing financial disadvantage. **Home at Last** provides accessible, equitable and appropriate support and housing information for older people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Services include:

- tailored housing information
- assistance with housing applications
- support during the move, and establishing a new home
- referrals into aged care and other relevant supports.

A key component of the service is its focus on early intervention. This occurs through engagement with communities directly and through peer educators who can reach people at risk of homelessness before they get to a crisis point.

The financial value of **Home at Last** is well established. An Ernst & Young Cost Benefit Analysis (see Table 1 below) found it has a benefit cost ratio of 2.3.[4] For every dollar spent on **Home at Last** at least **$2.30 in societal value** is generated through improved wellbeing benefits accruing to individuals and avoided costs to government. This value is enhanced by the many non-financial benefits that also accrue (but are not included in the financial analysis), including: increased community connections to respective groups (CALD and LGBTIQA+), reduced reliance on multiple community services and increased reliance on government services, clients receiving the services they need as a result of improved referrals to other social services, and increased contribution of clients to their community via volunteering.[5] HAAG's **Home at Last** service has been recognised as an exemplar program in Federal and state housing policy analysis.

[4] Ernst and Young, Home at Last Economic Appraisal, November 2019, accessible at: https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/home_at_last_economic_appraisal_-_final_report_-_november_2021.pdf

[5] Ibid

Table 1: Cost Benefit Analysis

Home at Last service – Cost Benefit Analysis Results

$2.4m	$350k	$2.1m	$1.4m	BCR 2.3
By connecting older people with safe, stable, long term housing the Home at Last Service delivers $2.4 million in **economic value** each year.	Of which almost $350,000 is from **improved wellbeing outcomes** such as improved feelings of safety and security and improved personal finances.	A further $2.1 million is in the form of **avoided societal costs** including: premature entry to aged care, crisis housing and health system costs.	Comparing benefits to the HAL service costs of $1.1 million each year leads to a **net-economic benefit** of $1.4 million.	The Service has a **benefit cost ratio** of 2.3. This means that every dollar spent on the Home at last housing information and support service generates at least $2.30 in societal value.

Source: EY analysis of the HAAG data and the HAL Service, based on documented data and assumptions

Despite the success of **Home at Last**, funding has not increased to meet demand, nor is it sufficient to provide services across the state. HAAG proposes the following investments to address these issues.

- **Meet demand**

Demand for Home at Last is growing dramatically. In the seven years from 2019 to 2025 there has been an almost **40% increase** in clients in the **Home at Last** service, from 1,282 clients in 2019-20 to 2,147 in 2024-25. 60% of these clients are women. There has been a significant increase in the number of older renters calling the service due to tenancy issues such as receiving unaffordable rent increases and eviction notices. Despite this increase HAAG has received no increase in funding to meet this demand. As the rental crisis worsens, demand for **Home at Last** will continue to increase.

A **40% increase** in funding for the **Home at Last** is required to meet the current increase in demand, for an investment of **$658,300 per year** *in addition to the current level of funding.*

- **Provide Home at Last across Victoria**

Home at Last's current funding level only allows us to successfully provide the outreach and one-to-one support that provides positive and life changing outcomes in the northern and western metropolitan areas.

Considering the rapidly growing demand for services, HAAG proposes the government urgently increase investment in **Home at Last's** capacity to enable it to meet demand across the full metropolitan and regional areas. HAAG proposes employing six additional workers to provide outreach support and early intervention.[6] In addition to staff, this would also require vehicles, IT, Human Resources, office rent and other costs that would be approximately $213,000 per year. The total cost would be approximately **$954,300 per year** *in addition to the current level of funding*.

With the high proportion of women seeking support, expanding **Home at Last** would contribute to meeting the Victorian Government's commitment to Gender Responsive Budgeting, and addressing gender inequality.

[6] Costed at $118,104 per annum per staff member ($118,104 x 6 staff members - $708,624)

Recommendation 2: Increase public and community housing to 10% of all housing stock by 2040

Increasing the number of public, community and affordable homes is essential to address the housing crisis facing Victoria. Victoria has the lowest rates of social housing in the country. In 2024, the proportion of social housing households in Victoria was 3% (a decline from 3.5% from 2014) compared to 4.1% nationally.[7] Given the scale of the issue, Victorian government should urgently increase public and community housing stock to bring the housing level to the national average.

The 2021 Census recorded that there were about 85,000 older people in the lowest two income quintiles in the private rental market in Victoria.[8] Anglicare Victoria found that renters in Victoria are paying over $100 more per week for the same property compared to 2020 and half (48 per cent) of low-income rental households are in housing stress.[9] These older renters are now likely to be in significant rental stress, at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Measures to increase the supply of general or affordable housing to address the current housing shortages across the country will not increase supply for the most vulnerable older people, unless it is dedicated public or community housing. While Victorian and Federal programs designed to increase social housing, such as the Big Housing Build, are providing important increases in homes, these are not enough to meet the needs of low- and middle-income Victorians. With growing demand and the unprecedented housing crisis, we are calling on the government to invest more in public and community housing.

HAAG supports calls from the sector for increasing public and community housing to 10% of all housing stock by 2040.

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[7] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Housing assistance in Australia, 2025, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/contents/households-and-waiting-lists

[8] Housing for the Aged Action Group, Ageing in a Housing Crisis: Older people’s housing insecurity & homelessness in Australia, 2023, supplementary information Decades of Housing Decline: 2011 & 2021 Census Analysis Victoria accessible at: https://www.oldertenants.org.au/publications/decades-of-housing-decline-2011-2021-census-analysis-victoria

[9] Anglicare Victoria: Rental Affordability 2025 Snapshot, Accessible at: https://cdn.anglicarevic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Anglicare-Victoria-2025-Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-report.pdf

Recommendation 3: Expand HAAG's Retirement Housing Assistance Service and secure ongoing funding at a cost of $484 000 per year.[10]

HAAG has delivered the **Retirement Housing Assistance Service (RHAS)** since 2017. This service supports financially disadvantaged Victorians who live in retirement housing and who are 55 years and older, including residents of retirement and rental villages (both for profit and not-for-profit) and permanent residents of caravan parks and residential parks. Prior to this, since 2011, we supported residents of retirement housing via the Tenancy Advocacy and Advice Program, as well as supporting older people in private rental.

The **Retirement Housing Assistance Service** is comprised of the following two components:

- The workers advice line – to provide information, advice and case work support on retirement housing for community workers.
- Retirement housing casework service – for older Victorians living in retirement housing who are financially disadvantaged who have a matter with a level of detriment that warrants assistance. This includes face to face casework and over the phone support.

In the 2024-25 financial year, the **Retirement Housing Assistance Service** assisted:

- 449 clients, 64% women and 36% men
- 196 clients aged between 70-79 years old, 98 clients aged between 80-89 years old, and 16 between 90-99 years old.
- All clients were on an income support payment
- 58% living in for-profit retirement villages, 14% in not-for-profit retirement villages, and 10% in residential parks

In 2024, we received Rental Support Services Program funding, to provide information, advice and advocacy for older Victorians living in private rental and rooming houses. The need for this service was demonstrated through our **Home at Last** service data, where around 40% of older people contacting the service are doing so due to a tenancy issue, such as a notice to vacate or rent increase.

HAAG was first funded to provide tenancy advice to older renters at risk of homelessness in 1991, and our Specialist Tenancy Housing Support and policy advocacy service provided tenancy advice alongside housing support, as part of our suite of services during the early establishment of the Home at Last service between 2012-2016.

These programs give us specialist expertise and infrastructure to provide a service that connects tenancy advice, advocacy, and housing support, and we have a demonstrated ability to deliver a quality and cost-effective service that is suitable for older people.

The combination of our **Retirement Housing Assistance Service** and Rental Stress Support Program (RSSP)-funded services allows us to offer a one-stop-shop approach to older people's housing advice

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[10] Current Retirement Housing Assistance Service (RHAS) funding totals $1,008,504, comprising $341,000 from Consumer Affairs Victoria (for the Retirement Housing Assistance and Advocacy Program) and $667,504.81 from the Rental Stress Support Package (for tenancy support). This total represents funding over three years; dividing by three provides an annual amount of approximately $336,168. Both funding streams are set to finish on 30 June 2026, subject to the Funded Services Review outcomes. In addition, a Senior Lawyer has been costed at $120000 + oncosts

and advocacy. However, the separate funding streams increase the administrative burden on workers and the organisation. Consolidating these programs by recognising that private rental is now a common form of retirement housing and expanding the **RHAS** eligibility to include private residential rental agreements would be the most efficient way to leverage our expertise, experience and infrastructure to benefit the most disadvantaged older Victorians.

Across a range of housing types, older people face a range of unique challenges in understanding and enforcing their rights. These challenges can be technological, legal and practical in nature. HAAG is a specialist service uniquely placed to address these challenges.

We propose that the best way for us to do so is by expanding HAAG's **Retirement Housing Assistance Service** to:

a) incorporate assistance for private rental, an increasingly common form of housing for financially disadvantaged older people.
b) incorporate legal assistance, through recruiting a lawyer or lawyers to the team

The ability to expand the Retirement Housing Assistance service to include legal advice would complement our existing support and advocacy service for residents, as per the recommendations made in the Life in Residential Parks report[11]. It would also increase the knowledge and capacity of the legal sector in relation to retirement housing issues, which has been recognised as a gap[12].

[11] Consumer Policy Research Centre Life in Residential Parks, 2025 https://cprc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Residential-Parks_Key-insights-comprehensive-recommendations.pdf
[12] Ibid.

Recommendation 4: Fund early intervention and community education

People over 55 at risk of or experiencing homelessness are often unaware of, or unable to access safe, secure and appropriate housing options. For many older people, particularly older women who are experiencing homelessness for the first time in later life, the service systems are complex and difficult to navigate. Stigma and shame are also barriers to older people knowing when and where to seek help.[13]

HAAG'S peer and community education specifically targets older people experiencing housing stress, or challenges navigating the aged care system. By providing information about forms of homelessness, the risk factors for homelessness and the pathways to support through HAAG's **Home at Last** and **Care Finder** programs, HAAG aims to prevent older people from experiencing homelessness or reaching a crisis point. Community education also raises awareness of homelessness as a public health issue, highlighting the systemic causes, and the specific experiences of older people. Peer educators particularly target older people who may experience additional risk factors for homelessness and barriers to accessing services, such as those from CALD backgrounds or older people who identify as LGBTIQA+. To achieve this, HAAG actively recruits older volunteers from diverse backgrounds who can connect and advocate within their communities, due to their nuanced understanding and position in these communities.

Early intervention and community education has consistently been a key referral source to HAAG's **Home at Last** service. Prior to the pandemic, this was the main or the second main source of referrals to the service. Given the scale of the housing crisis and the lack of support and awareness about service systems among this cohort, it is critical that the early intervention component of the service is significantly expanded. However, this work is currently funded as a part-time role from a philanthropic grant and a small amount from a separate stream of Federal Government's **Care Finder** funding.

Expanding the current service would include an additional staff member, training and payments for Peer Educators with lived experience and other organisational costs at a cost of **$160,000 per year**. In addition, we would use this funding to update our '**Finding a Home' housing options booklet**, providing plain language information on housing options for people who do not own their own homes. This would be distributed through our existing networks, for example, local libraries and neighbourhood houses, aiming to reduce the demand on our service from people contacting intake for this information. We estimate the cost to update, print and distribute to be **$10,000.**

[13] D. Faulkner and J Fielder, The older I get the scarier it becomes: Older people at risk of homelessness in NSW, 2017, accessible at: https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/older-i-get-scarier-it-becomes-291117.pdf

Recommendation 5: Fund housing options for older renters who aren't eligible for social housing - the 'missing middle'

Australia's retirement system is predicated on people owning their own home. However, this is no longer the case for an increasing number of people entering retirement. HAAG's research *Not Poor Enough, Not Rich Enough*[14] exposes the rising number of people continuing to rent privately into retirement. They may have a small amount of assets, precluding them from social housing eligibility, yet cannot afford to buy their own home or fund a place in a retirement village – this group is referred to as the 'missing middle'.

This leaves them with radically fewer options and most housing and homelessness services are not able to assist them. While this problem affects many older Victorians, it disproportionately affects women because of the gendered gap in retirement savings.[15]

Without a dedicated response, this group will continue to deplete their savings until they become eligible for social housing, and risking homelessness. Intervening early would benefit individuals, their families, the community, and reduce government expenditure on crisis accommodation.

Policy solutions to support this group are outlined below and should include shared equity schemes and low-cost retirement housing options, such as Independent Living Units (ILUs) with no or low entry fees.

Recommendation 5a: Revitalise Independent Living Units sector

Independent Living Units (ILUs) are generally not-for-profit retirement villages - communal rental housing provided by community organisations for older people with limited incomes and assets. From 1954 until 1986 the sector was subsidised under the Aged Persons' Homes Act (APHA) and during that period around 9,000 units were built in Victoria.[16] ILUs offer a high level of security of tenure, affordable rent, and require either low, means-tested, or no ongoing contributions. For some older people who are part of the missing middle, ILUs can be the only option that meets the long-term needs.

As the ILU sector has not been adequately funded since the mid-1980s the stock is in serious decline. Early findings from HAAG's research suggests that around 50% of Victoria's ILUs are no longer in service. HAAG understands that many ILUs have closed or been sold off, often shifting to the provision of residential aged care as a more financially viable business model. Many of the ILUs that still exist are generally older and in need of major repairs and maintenance.

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[14] https://www.oldertenants.org.au/publications/not-poor-enough-not-rich-enough-older-people-falling-through-the-housing-assistance

[15] Housing for the Aged Action Group: The 'missing middle': Older people falling through the cracks in the housing and homelessness system, briefing note, 2021 https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/missing_middle_briefing_note_feb2021.pdf

[16] Housing for the Aged Action Group, Establishing a 10-Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing Discussion Paper, 2021, accessible at: https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/haag_submission_to_10_year_housing_strategy_final.pdf

Recommendation 5b: Scale up shared equity models for older people

Shared equity housing models have the potential to enable older people with some assets to purchase a home, or remain in a home with a mortgage, providing them with the stability and security they need. Shared equity models enable the division of the value of a dwelling between more than one legal entity. However, existing models tend to have eligibility criteria that prevent older people from accessing them. For example, limiting eligibility to first home owners can preclude older people who have separated and sold a family home, and are now renting privately. Requirements to have a commercial loan can be difficult for people over 50 years, who can find banks unwilling to lend to them.

Studies have shown that shared equity schemes have potential to address rising housing precarity and prevent homelessness among people over 55.[17] There is the opportunity for the Victorian Government to establish a shared equity scheme to provide the proof of concept and a model that could be replicated and broadened throughout Victoria. Such a pilot, conducted by the government in partnership with a community housing provider, would demonstrate feasibility and give loan providers a stronger basis on which to base their credit risk assessment.

[17] See for example Patricia Pascuzzo (2021), Housing Finance Products for Older Women in Queensland, Consultation Paper, Prepared for Q Shelter by Inclusive Economics.