



older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Summer 2024



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP

FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983



CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME



Dear Members and Supporters,

I was honoured to open our Annual General Meeting last month, after another year of growth of our organisation in strength and size. 2024 saw many new members join, our services expand and our advocacy and reach increase. We've even had some hard fought wins in our campaigns.

However we know that our work is never done. We know more older people are experience homelessness and housing insecurity and that the rights of older tenants and retirement housing residents are not fully

protected and respected. So HAAG will continue to fight to change the system, and continue to deliver services to help older people where we can.

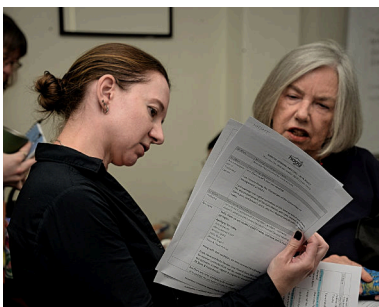
We've summarised all of this in our 2023-2024 Annual Report, which you can see our Executive Officer Fiona York presenting on the front cover.

I'd encourage everyone to peruse the Annual Report to get an overview of the broad scope of HAAG's work. You can **access the report online**, pick up a copy at the office, or if that's not possible, request a copy to be posted out to you.

Wishing everyone a very happy holiday season, stay safe in the heat over summer, be kind and look after each other, and let's resolve to keep fighting for older people's housing justice in 2025,

Pam Young, Chairperson.

WELCOMES



Nadin Pyatsina is our new Executive Assistant, keeping the books in order!



Claudia Burgner and Jane Stanley are our new Policy and Research Officers while Dini is on maternity leave!



Vanessa Heart is a familiar face at HAAG, and a new member of our Committee of Management!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We had great turn out in person and online for our 2024 AGM, with reports from our working group members around the country. As always, our amazing photographer Guruswamy Perumal was there to capture all action.



Veda Bloom addressed the meeting on behalf of the LGBTIQ+ reference group



Fiona speaking to members around the country attending the meeting on Zoom



Jorelle Palanca and Esma Becirevic at the welcome desk



Bill McKenzie spoke for the new Older Renters Working Group. All 6 working groups as well as Housing Older Women Movement from Queensland addressed the meeting.



The team of Housing for the Aged Action Group, now in our forty-first year, still demanding "MORE MONEY FOR PUBLIC HOUSING TODAY!"

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE FORUM

On November 26th HAAG hosted a forum about how people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds navigate the housing system in Victoria. We are inviting new members to join our bilingual educator team as well as our CALD reference group, see the next page!



Group coordinator Ira Aggarwal opening the forum.



Zuleika Fella from the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council speaking about the importance of genuine community engagement.



Long time bilingual educator Hoda Nahal encourages others to promote HAAG to people in their communities.



HAAG outreach worker Nese Duran explains how HAAG's housing support service assists older people.



Thanks to all the participants of the meeting, and a big thanks to Guru for the photos!



Groups discussed how homelessness is perceived in their communities and where people go for information.

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE PROJECT

We are looking for people who would like to join our bilingual educator team! HAAG's bilingual educators are a group of volunteers who speak to people in their communities about their housing issues, homelessness, and how they can access help.

By speaking to older people in their own languages, bilingual educators help inform people about HAAG's services, overcome stigma about asking for help, and build a community where people support each other to get the help they need.

We'll host training sessions in February and March where you can gain the skills you need to speak at community gatherings, seniors clubs, religious and cultural events, and to spread the word among people in your community.

We are also looking for people interested in joining our Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) reference group, which helps us improve how we communicate and provide our services to people from non-English speaking backgrounds or from different cultures.

We pay people for their volunteer participation.

If you would like to become a bilingual community educator or member of our CALD reference group, please fill in the form at oldertenants.org.au/cald-volunteer

If you have any questions or concerns about getting involved, you can call Ira on (03) 9654 7389 or email ira.aggarwal@oldertenants.org.au



All the participants of our November CALD forum, come and join them as a bilingual educator!

A federal election will be called next year, at some time between February and May, so it's time to get ready for action!

We've built up real momentum for change to address older person's homelessness across the country. Our voices are powerful and the housing crisis gripping Australia will be a key election issue.

We really encourage HAAG members and supporters to contact your federal representative and other local candidates to request meetings to talk about the issue of older person's homelessness and what needs to change. Local members are often keen to meet their constituents, especially when there is an upcoming election.

Candidates are interested in local concerns and with the right information, encouragement and clear recommendations, you can be a champion for older people and their housing issues.

We know that approaching politicians can be nerve-wracking and seem difficult, so we've prepared a toolkit to help, which you can read at oldertenants.org.au/toolkit

Also, you can get in touch with Claudia or Jane on (03) 9654 7389 or jane.stanley@oldertenants.org.au if you'd like any help, support or encouragement to take action!



HAAG member Frances meeting with Leichardt candidate Elida Faith of a cup of coffee during the 2022 Federal Election campaign.

“Tell your politicians you'll change your vote if they don't change their policies. Share your story, it is powerful”

Senator Larrisa Waters

“I found my MP willing to listen, very aware of the issues and keen to talk about social housing”

Kris Spark, HAAG member

“I had a positive meeting with my local MP. She was interested in housing, was approachable, well briefed and very supportive”

Maeve Browne-Cooper, HAAG member

“Email, write, phone, visit, tell your story, talk to MPs, be prepared to vote on it”

The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP; 2021

The Retirement Villages Act Amendments Bill was finally released after a five-year consultation period. The bill is a “mixed bag” that includes important improvements for residents but leaves some major areas of concern inadequately addressed.

For many years we have been calling for an end to ambiguous and confusing contracts, which have made it difficult for people to compare villages or understand their real costs, and so we welcome the introduction of standardised contracts to address the complexity and variety of contracts in retirement villages.

We also welcome the introduction of a mandatory Code of Conduct for retirement village operators, which sends a strong message to the industry.

We have seen shocking mistreatment of our clients in retirement villages by unscrupulous operators, caused by a lack of adequate consumer protections and regulation. The mandatory Code of Conduct has the potential to provide stronger consumer protection and a better experience for residents.

Stronger regulation of retirement village fees is welcome, but we are also concerned it will allow some of the industry’s worst practices to continue. The bill doesn’t go far enough in regulating exit fees that can incentivise villages to ‘churn’ or evict residents for increased profits, and trap unhappy residents in villages that no longer suit them.

The Bill also doesn’t do enough to protect security of tenure in retirement villages, allowing residents – who may have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars or more for

their homes – to be evicted if they have committed ‘many’ minor contract breaches.

The worst village operators we see use eviction threats to harass residents to manipulate exit payments and extract windfall profits. This practice should be stamped out, but we are concerned that the Bill will allow it to continue.

We, alongside our partners and residents of retirement villages, have also been calling for an Ombudsman to resolve disputes. The introduction of a new alternative dispute resolution service within the Department of Government Services is a step in the right direction. It must provide a free and easily accessible service for residents, as well as the ability to make binding decisions on operators. We look forward to working with the Government to develop this new service.



HAAG continued to feature in the news with coverage focussing on the new Bill

Renegotiating rent rises in retirement housing

Joseph lives in a small retirement village in a regional area. Although some residents have paid ingoings up to \$85,000, the village largely caters to people on pensions with little or no savings. Many, including Joseph, didn't pay any upfront fee and simply rent their units month to month. Joseph also has significant accessibility needs, and would find it almost impossible to rent a suitable property suitable in the private market.

In September, the village wrote to residents saying their monthly fees would increase by \$30 a fortnight – not as severe as some rent increases we've seen, but fairly high considering the small, plain units and the limited incomes of the residents. And because this was a retirement village and not a residential tenancy, Centrelink workers refused to adjust Joseph and other residents' Centrepay arrangements to cover the increase – they said they would only do so for formal Notices of Rent Increase (which are not used in retirement villages).

One of our Tenancy and Retirement Team (TART) workers contacted the village to ask that the increase be reduced to \$20 a fortnight, and raise the problem with Centrelink. At first the village refused to budge, claiming their rents were well below market rates. But retirement village fees aren't just set by the market, like private rents – because they cater to people on fixed incomes, retirement village fees can generally only increase by CPI. Eventually the village relented – not only for our client, but for all the village residents. They reissued the rent increase notices, giving everyone an extra month at the old amount, and reduced the increase from \$30 a fortnight to \$16. It's not a huge difference, just \$1 per day, but we still think that's a win for renters on pensions.

Rent increases are a huge problem for many older tenants across different types of housing, and sadly there is often nothing we can do about it (except try and help someone access public or community housing). But in some cases, there are legal options to challenge an increase, or ways to negotiate a more reasonable amount. If you've received a rent increase you can't afford, give us a call and we'll see if there's anything we can do.



Sally Saunders, one of our TART workers who work to solve tenants issues like Joseph's, across both retirement and private rental housing types.

The TART team is recruiting a new worker, and the position is listed at oldertenants.org.au/vacancies



The Victorian Department of Health produced these posters informing about some key ways to survive heatwaves, which can be downloaded in many community languages at health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/extreme-heat-community-resources

On our **latest episode of Raise the Roof radio show** and podcast, Shane and Fiona talked to Bill McKenzie, public housing resident and HAAG member, talking about his citizen science work at Layfield Court, one of the older persons high rises in Melbourne, and about the issues of heatwaves in high rises, Homes Victoria's communications about the demolitions, and the roll out of the air conditioning program.

With summer here, it's a timely reminder that heat waves can kill older people in poor quality housing.

To learn more about what's causing heatwaves, how to identify them, what the risks are, and what you can do to protect yourself and vulnerable people read swelteringcities.org/heatwave-information.

SUMMERTIME OPENING HOURS



Intake worker Claire Hurren on the HAAG reception desk. Members are always welcome to drop in at HAAG's office!

The office will be closed from 3pm Tuesday the 24th of Dec and will reopen on Wednesday 2nd January. You can call on 1300 765 178 and leave a message and we will call you back.

For anyone who is experiencing immediate homelessness and requiring emergency accommodation, please call 1800 825 955.

If you are experiencing family violence, including elder abuse, please call Safe Steps: 1800 015 188

For this end of year newsletter we're including a special section of HAAG themed puzzles to give your brain a workout while enjoying the holiday season.

Sudoku

Solve this special sudoku to receive a special code which can be redeemed by calling HAAG.

	1			2		9		
	4		7		5			
			3	4	9			
	5	9				6	3	
7		6				1		4
	3	4				8	7	
3			9	5	7			
			1		8		2	7
				3				

Cryptic Crossword

A HAAG themed cryptic crossword! Solve it here or find it online at oldertenants.org.au/crossword where you can also reveal the answers. If you've never solved a cryptic crossword before, here is a brief guide s.wsj.net/blogs/html/wsjcrypticguide.pdf. Remember, a definition of the answer is always at the start or the end of the clue (or sometimes both), and the rest is wordplay!

Down

- 1) Earrings erupt badly need to get fixed quickly (6,7)
- 2) Makes decisions about Victorian renters rights during an improv catastrophe (1,1,1,1)
- 4) Rumours of weight loss food in the neighbourhood (5)
- 5) We get better with it, a great example for beginners (3)
- 6) Victors obediently took edict to foundations of democratic right (4)

Trivia Quiz

In what year was HAAG founded on the Mornington Peninsula?

What is the name of Australia's current Federal Housing and Homelessness Minister?

What is the current rate of Jobseeker Allowance for a single person per day?

What is the country with the highest per capita social (public and community) housing in the OECD?

Which is the state of Australia with lowest per capita social (public and community) housing?

HAAG staff are members of which trade union?

When we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land at our meetings in Ross House, who do we acknowledge?

Answers page 6

- 9) Teeth grinding can be heard by older people around the country (1,1,1,1)
- 10) So backwards, be quiet inside waking up office building (4,5)
- 12) Fallen diners lost in city street (8,4)
- 14) Wrong tones written in case files (5)
- 15) Arrive finally at housing support service (4,2,4)
- 16) Broadway musicals aren't such a big part of your budget (5)
- 21) Cost for royal removed from not having to pay (3)

PUZZLES

23) I follow Santa's sound to the place I live (4)

25) Pie was a bit sour (4)

26) Never ever allow team leaders to clean (4)

Across

3) Innovator selected to shuffle through these pages(5,7,5)

7) Email reply to weary gent with shirt, then never go to work again (10)

8) Let's go boys, tomorrow is quite awesome beginnings for the rainbow community (1,1,1,1,1,1,1)

11) After mad vocal part could see why we are campaigning (8)

13) Learner driver entered private area accommodating the solution to homelessness (6,7)

17) Watered garden contained radioactive element, but have a roof over your head (6)

18) Porters got confused messages (7)

19) Loser rat dreamed of becoming real estate agents (8)

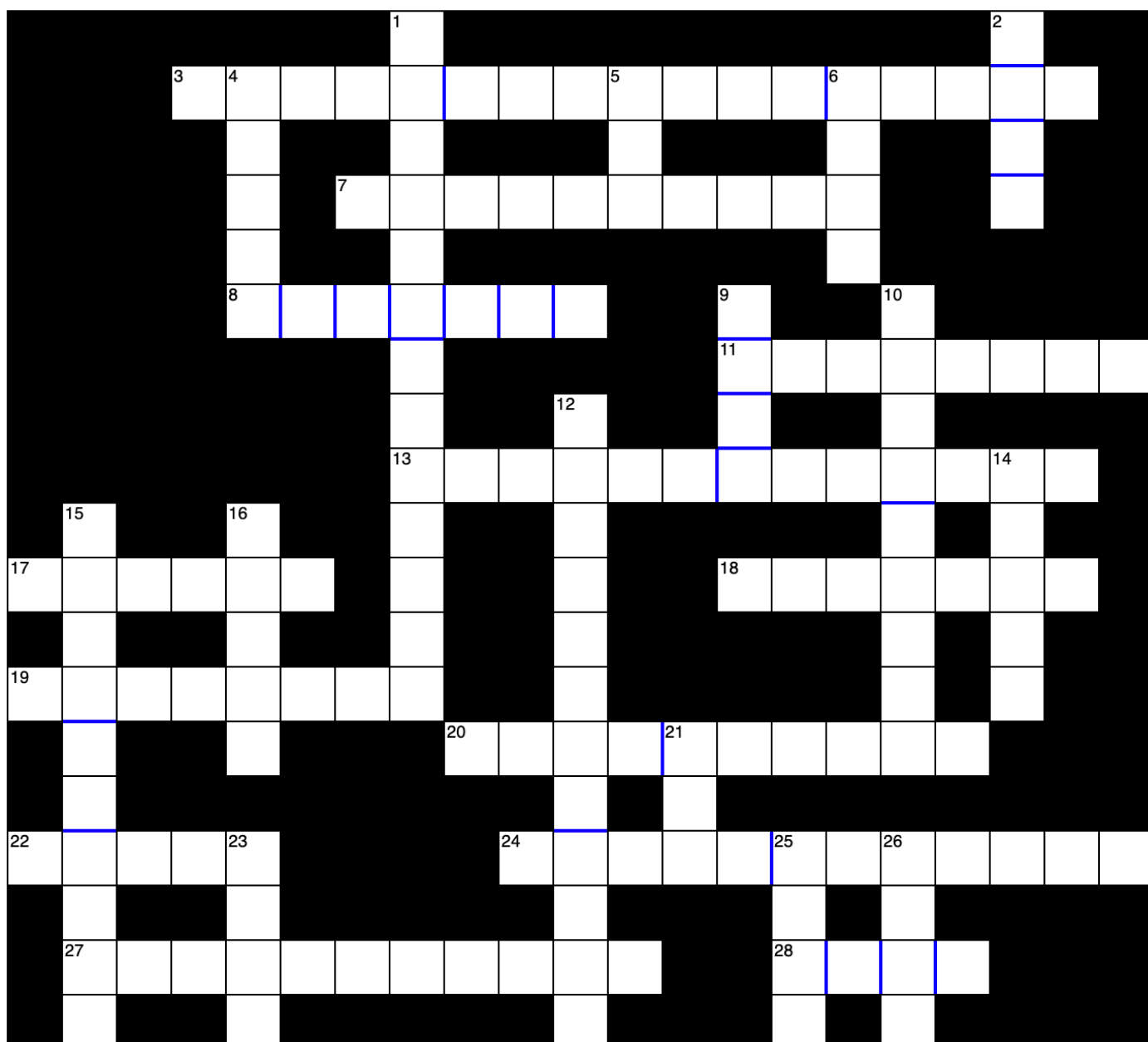
20) Headless terror discovers queen getting assistance accessing aged care (4,6)

22) Having lots of cash to put down the toilet (5)

24) Wiser person found two handfuls of bugs in website (5,7)

27) Wrestlers tap out of undersea adventures (11)

28) Melodic hindu music distracted housing action group (1,1,1,1)



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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



Member at our CALD forum and lunch.
Photos by Guruswamy Perumal

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