

INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AMONGST OLDER PEOPLE AGED OVER 55 IN NSW

SUMMARY OF FINAL REPORT

The Parliamentary inquiry into homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in NSW report was released in October 2022.¹

The Committee found that the 'face' of homelessness is changing, reflecting in part the concerning upward trajectory of older people who are experiencing homelessness and that older women, are disproportionately affected by homelessness and face particular challenges in accessing housing and other support services.



The NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum welcomes the outcomes and recommendations of the Standing Committee on Social Issues. We have been recommending that NSW Government:

1. Fund a specialist older persons' housing information and support service that comprises both an early intervention and crisis response, similar to the HAAG Home at Last model in Victoria.
2. Lower the priority age for social housing eligibility from 80 years as a matter of urgency.
3. Build 5,000 social and affordable homes per year for 10 years, at least 20% of which should be dedicated to older people.

The NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum is pleased that the Committee's findings and recommendations are broadly supportive of all recommendations made in our submission to the inquiry², including the three key recommendations highlighted above.

FUNDING A SPECIALIST SERVICE BASED ON HOME AT LAST MODEL

The Committee found that the system of homelessness services is considered complex and difficult for older people to navigate.



It further highlighted that 'Housing-First' and 'Home at Last' models of homelessness service provision are best-placed to assist in addressing the increased prevalence of homelessness among older people. The committee reported that stakeholders were overwhelming supportive of creating a 'one-stop-shop' for older people experiencing housing insecurity or crisis modelled on the Home At Last Service in Victoria.

¹ Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues, Report 61, Homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in NSW, October 2022, accessible at: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2865#tab-reportsandgovernmentresponses>

² Ageing on the Edge NSW Forum, Submission to the homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in NSW, 2022, accessible at:

https://www.older tenants.org.au/sites/default/files/homelessness_among_older_people_aged_over_55_in_nsw_-_ageing_on_the_edge_coalition_copy.pdf

“To alleviate some of these issues, the committee has recommended a multifaceted approach to service delivery, including that the NSW Government consider the establishment of a funded specialist housing information and support service for older people that comprises both an early intervention and crisis response, similar to the 'Home at Last' model in Victoria.”

The Hon Scott Barrett, MLC³

In addition, recently released Productivity Commission stated that ‘Home at Last’ is a promising service to support older people⁴ and Queensland Government recently funded the establishment of a service similar to Home at Last Model.⁵



Recommendation 5

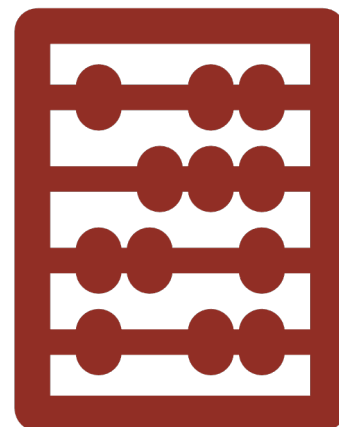
That the NSW Government consider the establishment of a funded specialist housing information and support service for older people that comprises both an early intervention and crisis response, similar to the 'Home at Last' model in Victoria.

LOWERING PRIORITY AGE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Currently in NSW, should an older person meet the eligibility criteria for social housing, they may be able to access the Housing Elderly Persons priority group.

The eligibility criteria for this group are:

1. The client is aged 80 year and over, or
2. The client is confirmed to be an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander and aged 55 years and over.⁶



Committee report highlighted that many inquiry participants advocated that the NSW Government lower the priority age for social housing, most often from 80 to 55 years and to 45 for Aboriginal and Torres Islander older people.

Arguments put forward in support of this proposal included:

- Many people aged between 55–80, particularly women, do not meet criteria for other priority groups and are thus at risk of becoming homeless.

³ Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues, Media Release, 20 October 2022, accessible at:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/other/17902/Media%20release%20-%20Final%20report%20-%20Inquiry%20into%20homelessness%20amongst%20older%20people%20-%2020%20October%202022.pdf>

⁴ Productivity Commission, In need of repair: The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, 2022, accessible at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/housing-homelessness/report/housing-homelessness.pdf>

⁵ Footprints Community QLD, Housing Older Women Support Service (HOWSS), accessible at: <https://footprintscommunity.org.au/homelessness/>

⁶ Department of Communities and Justice, Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement, accessible at:

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/policies/social-housing-eligibility-allocationspolicysupplement/chapters/entitlements>

- Applicants eligible under the Housing Elderly Persons priority group are prioritised for housing after people approved for emergency and temporary accommodation, however, older people are less likely to have accessed these services.
- It takes many years to complete NSW Housing Register application and to receive housing thus waiting until a person is 80 to be eligible for priority housing is often not practical, particularly as the average life expectancy in Australia is approximately 83 years and presumably lower for people experiencing homelessness.
- People aged 55 or over are eligible for priority housing in Victoria.

The committee believes that the requirement for clients to be 80 years old, or 55 years old for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to access the priority list should be investigated and if, appropriate, reconsidered.



Recommendation 21

That the NSW Government investigate the costs and implications of lowering the age limit for access to the Housing Elderly Persons priority group from 80 years to 55 years, and from 55 years to 45 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

INCREASING SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK



During the inquiry, there was significant concern expressed about the increasing impost of rent on older people and the impact that has on placing them at risk of homelessness and that the risk of poverty is three times higher for older tenants rather than homeowners.

The report states that there was consensus amongst stakeholders that the NSW Government needs to fund, or help fund, more social and affordable housing, particularly community housing. The evidence also demonstrated that providing women-only spaces is critical for supporting feelings of increased safety. Moreover, stakeholders said that providing communal living spaces helps facilitate engagement and increased feelings of wellbeing.

Stakeholders argued that this 'extreme' shortfall in supply is manifested in the large number of applicants to the NSW Housing Register, particularly the approximately 15,000 applicants who are older people. Moreover, inquiry participants noted that applicants can wait up to ten years to receive social housing, depending on individual circumstances, such as desired location, number of people to be housed, and accessibility features.



Recommendation 23

That the NSW Government consider funding the construction of new social or community housing that is specifically allocated to older women and is appropriate to their health, safety and accessibility needs.

While it is encouraging that the Committee is calling for more social and affordable housing, it was disheartening that the recommendation is not specific and quantifiable.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum made additional recommendations in the final submission reflecting a detailed discussion on various policy and procedural challenges older people experience. These recommendations were also reflected in the final report of the committee.

Recommendation 19 That the NSW Government consider increased investment in the maintenance and retrofitting of social housing stock to ensure dwellings meet the needs of tenants, including older people

Recommendation 20 That the NSW Government work towards ensuring that all new social housing is fully accessible and addresses the needs of older people, including those with mobility issues or physical disabilities.

Recommendation 33 That the NSW Government review the need for the 'seeker diary' requirement for accessing temporary accommodation.

Recommendation 37 That the NSW Government consider additional funding and support to place-based homelessness and supporting services that target older people who are experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 27 That the NSW Government consider designing protocols to waive documentary evidence requirements in social housing applications for applicants who have a demonstrated difficulty in accessing or providing such documents.

Recommendation 28 That the NSW Government consider additional funding for homelessness and other social services that support culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including funding the employment of bilingual workers.

Recommendation 40 That the NSW Government examine opportunities to streamline application processes for housing and support services, including reviewing documentation requirements and providing easy-to-read supporting materials, and ensuring the need for applicants to repeatedly retell their story is minimised.

Recommendation 22 That the NSW Department of Communities and Justice make publicly available more data, specifically surrounding:

- social and priority housing waiting list data by age, gender, disability status and geographic area
- number of social and affordable housing dwellings available in New South Wales, including a breakdown of allocations by age and gender
- number of dwellings built under housing commitments in the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023, Social and Affordable Housing Fund, and Community Housing Innovation Fund.

Considering the gravity of these issues and the disproportionate impact they have on older people, particularly older women, we are calling on the NSW Government to take immediate action to implement these recommendations.

MORE RESOURCES

- Election toolkit⁷
- Our [video on older women and homelessness](#) in NSW⁸
- Our [Home at Last: Solutions to End Homelessness of Older People in NSW \(2021\)](#) report⁹
- The [Cost Benefit Analysis of the Home at Last model](#) completed by Ernst and Young¹⁰

⁷ NSW ageing on the Edge Forum, (link)

⁸ NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCiNii1BCE>

⁹ NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum, Home at Last: Solutions to End Homelessness of Older People in NSW, 2021, https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/home_at_last_report_web.pdf

¹⁰ Ernst and Young, Home at Last: Economic Appraisal, 2021, https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/home_at_last_economic_appraisal_-_final_report_-_november_2021.pdf

ABOUT THE NSW AGEING ON THE EDGE FORUM

The NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum is a coalition of over 140 organisations and supporters. The members of the Forum are advocates for change, including older people with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, peak advocacy bodies and private sector organisations, working together to address housing and homelessness related issues of older people.

The NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum's Coordination Group:

