

Older Tenants' Voice

Summer

2008/09

HOUSING -
A RIGHT,
NOT A
PRIVILEGE

HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

Dear members & friends,

On behalf of the management committee and staff of Housing for the Aged Action Group I'd like to wish you a Merry Christmas and an enjoyable summer season.

2008 has been a hectic year for HAAG and we have produced this brief newsletter to provide you with a review of the main housing issues facing older people this year and the actions we have taken to tackle the problems that have arisen. While this year has also been a struggle to survive for us, both financially and from a service point of view, we have had some terrific breakthroughs towards the end of 2008. In particular I wanted to let you know that early in December the **Myer Foundation** announced that they are providing us with a \$100,000 grant. This Commemorative Grant to celebrate 75 years of the **Sidney Myer Fund** and 50 years of The Myer Foundation has been provided to 37 Australian non-profit organisations in recognition of their work. This grant will enable us to run a 12 month project that will mainly aim to provide a better service to you, our members, as well as provide more information to the broader Victorian community about older persons housing issues and provide more assistance to older people in need. This will include more regular newsletters, suburban and country forums, general meetings, getting out to health and aged care services that assist older people so

that we can provide them with housing information, and also improve our Housing Options Service. So we look forward to communicating much more with you in 2009 than we have been able to over the last couple of years.

Also, in 2008 we celebrated our 25th year of housing activism on behalf of older people. At our Annual General Meeting in October we ran a slide show depicting our history and our members action over that time. Long time member **Carmel McMennin** then cut our special birthday cake.

I look forward to catching up with you during 2009! *Doreen Rushby, Chairperson*



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PHONE: 96547389 OR 1800637389 (COUNTRY
CALLS). ALSO SEE OUR WEBSITE AT
WWW.OLDERTENANTS.ORG.AU

2008—The major issues and our responses

PRIVATE RENTING JUST GOT HARDER

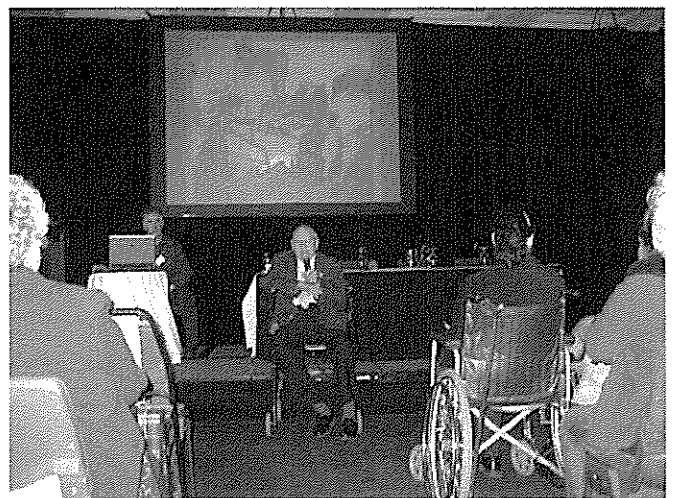
Over the past year older people on low incomes living in the private rental sector found the going really hard. Before the situation got harder this year single renters over 65 years of age were already paying on average more than 50% of their income in rent. However, private rents have increased by 13.7% in the last year and in Victoria we are experiencing our lowest vacancy rates on record (below 1%). This means even higher rents with aged pensioners forced to accept properties in the worst condition. One older tenant called us recently to say her rent is going up an extra \$300 a month. How can an aged pensioner survive with that kind of increase imposed by greedy landlords?

Ageing In Place is a fantastic philosophy where older people are encouraged to live a lifetime in their own home, connected to their community. One of the main factors in achieving this aim is that older people, particularly those who are frail in health, need housing that provides them with guaranteed security of tenure, affordability, and good quality housing that is adaptable as they age.

Unfortunately the reality is that there are a significant number of older people who are forced to live in private rental housing that provides none of these attributes. In fact many older people have been driven into a state of poverty and ill health due to the stresses they are forced to endure. With a 28% reduction in expenditure on public

housing over the last decade older people are being told they must wait up to 20 years to get decent housing. Unless we act now the situation will become steadily worse as the numbers of older low income rental households are expected to increase from 195,000 in 2001 to 419,000 by 2026

HAAG tried to highlight the plight of older private renters by holding a forum at the Melbourne Town Hall in June 2008 called **Ageing In Place? The Impact of the housing crisis on older people in the private rental market**. Over 100 people attended on the day and a range of older tenants told their story of hardship and struggle, just managing day to day. Their story was later highlighted in stories printed in **The Age** and **The Australian**. We also met with the new Commonwealth **Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek** and **Dr. Jeff Harmer** the **Secretary of FAHCSIA**, the Commonwealth Department responsible for housing. Dr. Harmer agreed with us that a special funding program is needed to address the special plight of older people in private rental housing. We now await the government response.



Murray Burles speaks at the forum

CARAVAN PARKS AND VILLAGES

Since 2005 HAAG has been working with caravan and residential park residents across Victoria to improve their housing conditions. We have convened a working group of residents that now numbers up to 60 people from across the state. HAAG and the working group have met with the **Minister, Tony Robinson**, and a number of Consumer Affairs representatives with the aim of achieving legislative reform. Our main aim is to ensure that residents are provided with security of tenure as many parks have closed, forcing residents to relocate at major personal and financial cost. Other problems include the need for rent control, resident participation, abolition of deferred management fees and improvements to park manager's behaviour. Another way we tried to achieve our aims was to highlight the issues by putting on a forum at Federation Square on October 16 2008 called **Caravans or Villages?** Over 100 people attended on the day.

The event, organised in conjunction with the **Mornington Peninsula Shire** and the **Municipal Association of Victoria**, was opened by the **Minister for Consumer Affairs, Tony Robinson** and featured talks by representatives from five local councils who spoke about the loss of caravan parks but also the huge impact of the new residential villages that are emerging as a more affordable form of retirement village. Four state government department representatives also responded with information about how they plan to protect residents with the changing landscape.

So in 2009 we will be pushing hard for legislative change with the hope that a new Residential Parks and Villages Act may be created during the year.

We also recently completed a report on the changing landscape of caravan parks and villages in 3 local government areas of Victoria. If you would like a copy please give us a call at the office.

KEEPING AN EYE ON NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS FOR OLDER PEOPLE

HAAG believes that, as well as a lack of affordable housing supply for older people, there also needs to be a wider range of housing types to suit older people as they age. This is more important as our ageing population means a significant increase in people living into their 80's and 90's, but needing more support to live independently. We have been lobbying governments to provide a better range of accommodation but at present it is mainly being provided by the private sec-

tor. So a lot of our work involves scrutinising what is out there. In the recent past we have actively lobbied for improvement to the conditions of tenants living in Village Life housing where meals are provided in a semi-independent arrangement. Older people also need more housing with 2 bedrooms, housing that is better designed for access and adaptability as we age, and in good locations near services, family and friends.

During 2009 we will be writing a report on the new developments in older persons housing and will make it available to our members as soon as it is completed.

IT'S BEEN A BIG YEAR AT HAAG

In 2008 we have experienced many ups and downs in housing, and the same goes for our organisation.

While the year has been a struggle financially we are grateful to **Consumer Affairs Victoria** and the **Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing** for their ongoing funding. We also received fantastic support from philanthropic trusts who helped us to provide important support to vulnerable older tenants. For example we assist people in crisis with removal costs when they move house. Other funding received this year has assisted us with other needs such as renewing our old computer equipment and conducting community education forums in country areas.

So we are sincerely grateful to the following Trusts, Councils and individuals for supporting us during the year: The **Lord Mayor's Fund**, the **Helen MacPherson-Smith Trust**, **William Angliss Charitable Fund**, the **Mornington Peninsula Shire** (the Caravan Parks forum) and as mentioned on page 1, the **Myer Foundation**. Two very special donations were received from 99 year old member **Evie Wallace** (\$2000) and the estate of **Wilfred Wilson** (\$400). **Evie's** grant will be used for a special project on disability bathroom design. **Wilf** had been a management committee member for many years and was well known for speaking the truth to bureaucrats and Ministers when needed.

Our management committee has been brilliant in continuing to steer the ship through troubled waters. So thanks to **Doreen Rushby**, **Dalene Salisbury**, **Molly**

Hadfield, **Bob Brooks**, **Helen Ohlhoff**, **Bob Purves**, **Max Penaluna**, **Amy Duncan**, **Maree Bellett**, **Pat Black**, **Sarah Lawrence**, **Joan Maxwell**, **Sivarasa Nallaratham**, **Pat Hooper**, **Arthur Larsen** and **Wyn Stenton**.

Our most active members have been the **Caravan and Residential Park Residents Working Group**. Now with 60 members representing residents from across Victoria, they continued to meet monthly. We hope to also extend our working groups in 2009, with an emphasis on lobbying for the most vulnerable group: private rental tenants.

The year was also noteworthy for the retirement of long standing outreach worker **Jenny Stewart**. Jenny dedicated 12 years to HAAG and contributed enormously to the development of the organisation over that time.

Thanks to **Kaye** for her fantastic job coordinating the administration of the office. **Bill** has kept a steady hand on the management of our sometimes fragile finances. A special thanks to **April** for her amazing job housing dozens of frail and vulnerable older clients who were in dire straits with their housing. We also have recently welcomed **Ena** to the fold who will be managing our Housing Options and Outreach Service while April conducts the Myer Foundation community education project in 2009. **Maree** has done an amazing job producing HAAG's website that is receiving a huge number of 'hits' each month. Have a look at www.oldertenants.org.au. Finally, thanks to all our magnificent members for your support during the year and we look forward to your active involvement in 2009.

Cheers and best wishes for Christmas , **Jeff**.