



# Housing for the Aged Action Group Older Tenant's Voice Since 1988



**March 2015  
Autumn edition**

***Housing - a right  
not a privilege!***





**Hello Members and Friends**

**The year is well under way and the work at HAAG is increasing. The staff are as cheerful and hard working as ever, finding homes and providing information.**

**The insecurity of funding is of concern and most workers are applying for other employment.**

**We must say goodbye to Fionnuala, who left HAAG on 6th March to commence work with Darebin Council.**

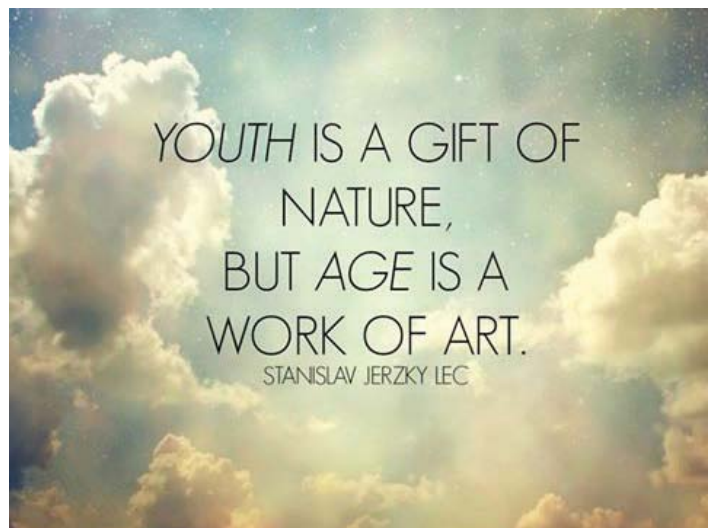
**We wish her all the very best in her new employment and we shall miss her very much.**

**Thanks to all the staff and volunteers for their work in the office and out in the community.**

**Finally, can I ask you to support HAL online and send the Save HAL postcards to the appropriate Ministers. These are available from the HAAG office.**

**Sincerely**

The photo on the front of our newsletter this edition is of Olive Staples.  
Olive is 102 years of age and is a retirement village resident.  
Olive graciously agreed to be on our front cover to highlight that HAAG really does work with older people of all ages.  
It also points to the future of our population whereby we are living independently for longer and services need to be funded to ensure there are resources and support for Older Victorians.  
Thank you Olive!



***HAAG IS ON RADIO 3CR - 'RAISE THE ROOF'***  
***Every 4th Wednesday at 6pm:***  
***Next shows =***  
***25 March 2015***  
***22 April 2015***  
***27 May 2015***

**If you would like to share something with us on our upcoming radio shows please contact the office and have a chat to Shane (our 3CR show co-ordinator) 9654 7389**

## **HOME AT LAST - FIGHTING FOR OUR FUTURE**

As all members will know Housing for the Aged Action Group has been funded since 2012 to operate our Home at Last service that aims to address the massive increase in older people at risk of homelessness. The service has been highly successful but now needs support from the new Labor Government as the funding runs out on 30 June 2015. We have been negotiating with the Department of Human Services to try and get a commitment to ongoing funding and also seeking a meeting with the new Minister for Housing, Martin Foley. However to this stage we have not obtained a breakthrough response from the government.

Over the two and half years we have been running the service we have become known across Victoria as the first contact point for older people in housing difficulty. Focusing mainly on the private rental market, Home at Last helps older people who do not have secure housing tenure, who live with high rents almost equal to the aged pension, homes that are often in poor repair and are unadaptable as people age.

Home at Last aims to help older people before a crisis occurs by encouraging them to act early. In reality this means that anyone in private rental housing is insecure because of the possibility that at any time a person can be given a notice to vacate if a landlord wants to sell their home, or put the rent up substantially where it becomes unaffordable. A fall or sudden illness can also mean a home is inaccessible and a person may be hospitalised and needing to find a new home straight away.

Over the time Home at Last has been running you have got to know all of our staff in our Community Education Team, Intake Workers, Outreach Workers and of course our Tenancy Worker and Retirement Housing Worker. We have been very lucky with the people we have had working in such a dedicated way to achieve the outstanding results in helping thousands of older people across the state. Due to the uncertainty of our funding unfortunately staff have had to consider seeking other jobs and we fully support their need to ensure they maintain employment. However it is a great shame to lose experienced and dedicated workers when we know that the community needs such vital support. So we need to keep lobbying until we can convince the government that Home at Last needs to be funded as a vital service now and forever!!

Some facts about the state of the housing crisis for older people, and why Home at Last is an important service to respond to the problem:

- \*Homelessness for older people is increasing at a greater rate than any other age group in society.

- \*Australia has an ageing population with decreasing numbers in secure home ownership.

- \*330,000 older people across Australia (85,000 in Victoria) are living in private rental housing that is insecure, unaffordable and not adaptable as they age. There has been a 44% increase in this number just in the last 5 years!

- \*No core funding is provided Australia-wide for specialist homelessness services for older people out of a total budget of \$500 million!

Home at Last is a unique homelessness service because it focuses on rapidly re-housing older people from unsuitable housing into long term affordable housing.

Almost 800 older people have been assisted to live in suitable homes in just the first 2 and a half years of operation. 70% of clients have been housed within 3 months!

Home at Last saves the government budget by assisting older people at risk of homelessness before a disaster occurs. This saves money in crisis housing, hospitalisation and premature entry into residential care.

Older people who are well housed can live happy, healthy lives and make an enormous contribution to society.

What can you do to help:

- \* Contact your local Member of Parliament
- \* Sign up to our supporters page on the HAAG website - [www.older tenants.org.au](http://www.older tenants.org.au)
- \* Come along to our film launch and demonstration
- \* Contact the HAAG office for more information and to join the campaign on:  
(03) 9654 7389

More details as shown on pages 5 & 6.

# SAVE HOME AT LAST



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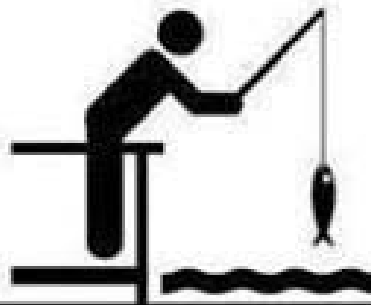
IF YOU  
GIVE SOME-  
ONE A FISH,



THEY EAT  
FOR A DAY.

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IF YOU  
TEACH SOME-  
ONE TO FISH,



THEY CAN FEED THEM-  
SELVES UNTIL THE  
WATER IS CONTAMINATED  
OR THE SHORELINE IS  
SEIZED FOR DEVELOPMENT.

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IF YOU TEACH  
SOMEONE TO  
THINK CRITICALLY  
AND BE POLITICALLY  
CONSCIOUS,

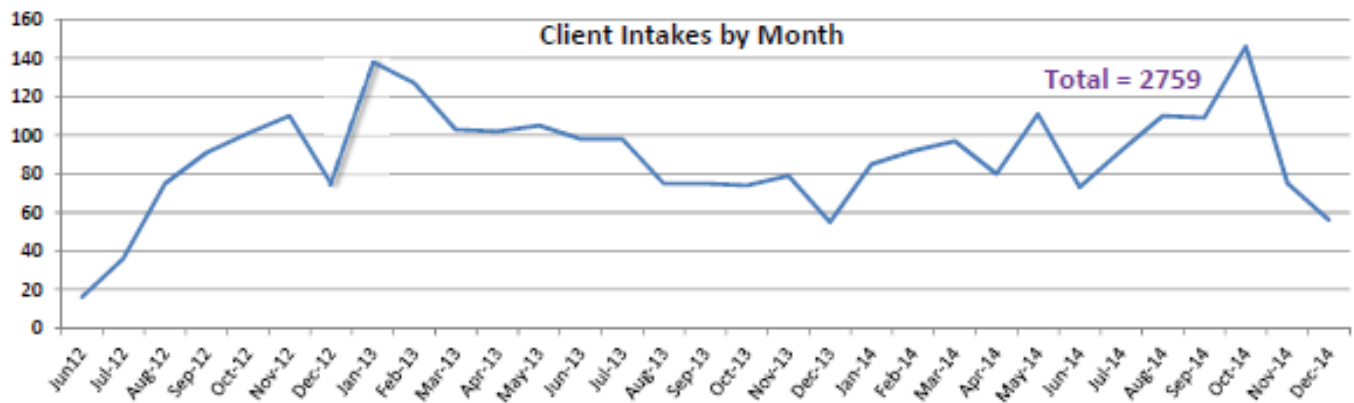


THEN WHATEVER THE  
CHALLENGE, THEY CAN  
ORGANIZE WITH THEIR  
PEERS AND STAND UP  
FOR THEIR INTERESTS.

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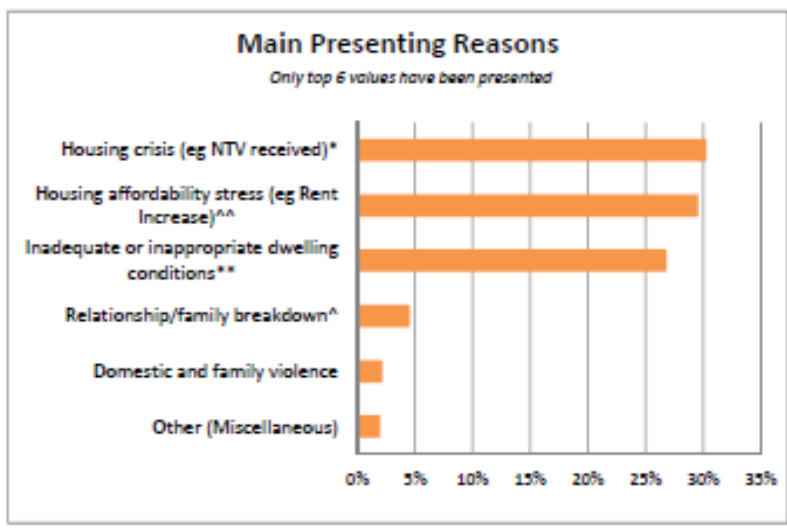
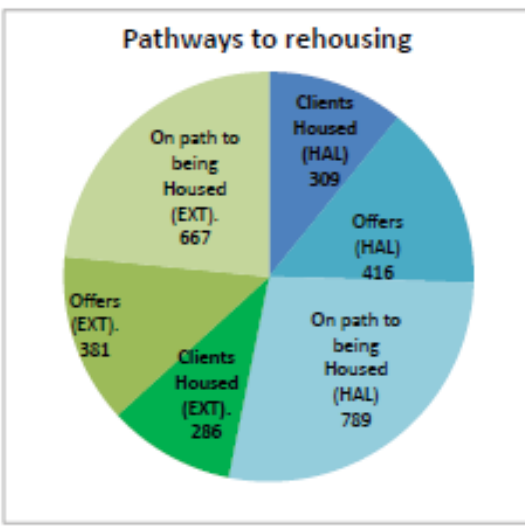
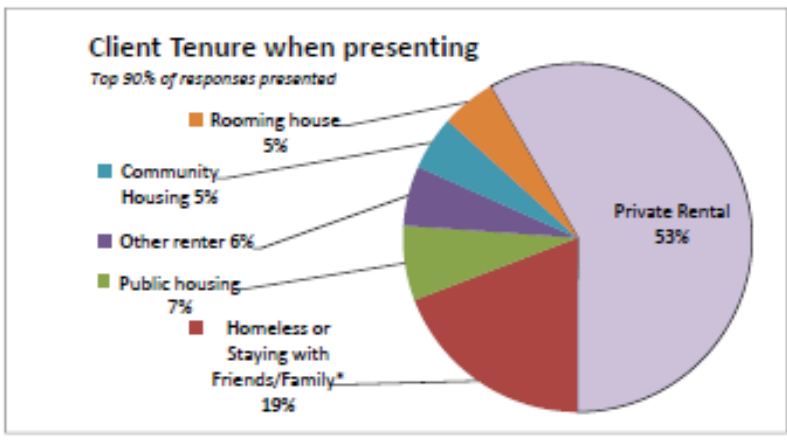
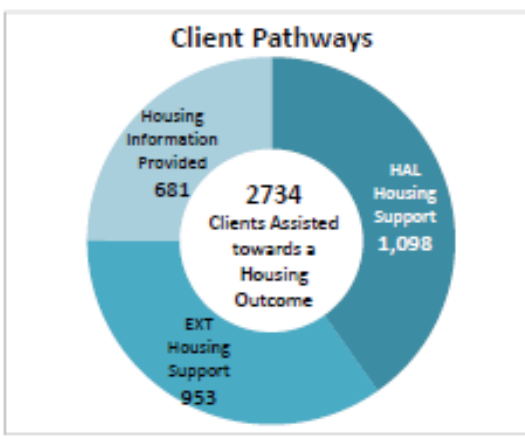
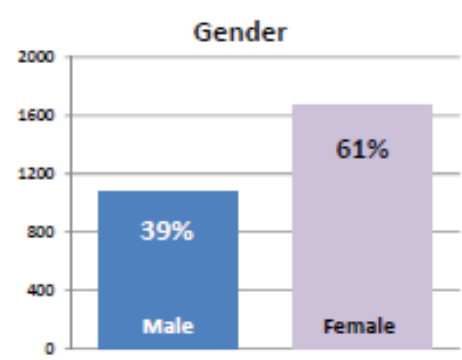
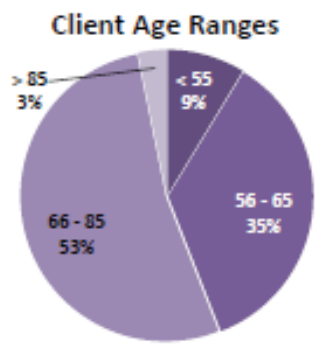
# Home At Last - Older Persons Housing Support service

Service Summary: 01 JUNE 2012 - 31 DEC 2014



**43,750**  
People informed about Housing Options for older people via Community Education activities

**70%** of clients rehoused within 3 months



**If we've ever needed your Support....**

**...THIS is the time!**

Home At Last faces CLOSURE ON 31ST MARCH. This means our 300 current clients will be sent to other services and NO FUTURE CLIENTS will be accepted. We need support as we rally Government to fund this service so that we can continue the work that has helped thousands!

## **What can you do?**

### **Come along to the HAAG DVD LAUNCH**

**When: Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April 11am**  
**Where: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Ross House  
247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne**

Housing for the Aged Action Group's 2nd film by Bentwheel productions will tell the story of 6 clients who were assisted by Home at Last into lasting Homes...at last.

### **Come along to the DEMONSTRATION In front of Ministers Office**

**When: Thursday 23rd April 12am**  
**Where: 50 Lonsdale st Melbourne**

Wear red, bring your Placards and bring a blanket as a symbol of Homelessness. Map location on reverse. Call office if you need assistance getting there.

### **Make a call to TALK BACK RADIO**

See reverse for pointers

### **Sign our online SUPPORTERS PAGE**

[www.older tenants.org.au/savehal](http://www.older tenants.org.au/savehal)



1st Floor, Ross House  
247-251 Flinders Lane  
Melbourne  
Ph: 1300 765 178

PLEASE CALL THE  
OFFICE IF YOU HAVE  
ANY QUESTIONS





#### TALK BACK RADIO NUMBERS:

3AW: 9690 0693

ABC 774: 1300 222 774

#### The situation on Older renters:

- 44% Increase in older private renters between 2006-2011
- 80% of renters over 65 rely on Aged Pension as main source of income (that's \$842 a fortnight)
- These people pay an average of 75% of that income on rent.
- There are no Homelessness agencies funded by the Department of Human Services to target the needs of older people.

#### Some facts about the Home At Last service:

- The Home at last program has assisted approximately 15% of all Specialist Homelessness Services Clients in Victoria (over 55).
- HAL has provided information to 45,000 older people looking for housing options.
- 616 older people have been housed in long term affordable housing or by referral to other specialist agency. A further 1613 clients on a pathway to being housed.
- 70% of all HAL support clients have been placed in affordable, long-term housing within 3 months.

## **Housing reform looks brighter in 2015**

After the new Andrews Labor Government came to power in November 2014 much of the focus of our work has been to analyse the new government's policies that they took to the election.

We are very glad to say that many policies the government has promoted are in line with many aspects of HAAG's views, as promoted in our Policy document distributed before and during the election aimed towards housing justice for older people. The success in having the government adopt many of HAAG's policies is in large part due to our working groups that have lobbied intensively for the past few years.

The key areas of the Labor policies that we will be focusing on are, as stated in their platform document:

- Implement improved protection for older renters
- Improve protection of people living in residential villages (that is where the resident owns the demountable building but rents the land) through new standalone legislation.
- Review and strengthen the Residential Tenancy Act and Residential Tenancies Regulations to ensure effective consumer protection and improved housing standards
- Ensure that a review of the Residential Tenancy Act and Residential Tenancies Regulations examines reforms to specifically:
  - Mandate a standard tenure of leases to be offered in the market environment under normal circumstances
  - Encourage greater length and security of tenure
  - Ensure access to transparent and independent mechanisms for reviewing rental increases
    - Strengthen maintenance regimes for rental properties
    - Reform minimum standards for rental properties to improve water and energy efficiency standards.

As many of these key areas require legislative change the main work to implement the policies will be done by Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV). As members will know HAAG has been funded by CAV for many years and we currently have two staff employed with CAV resources: Shane McGrath as our Tenancy Advice Worker and Shanny Gordon, as our Retirement Housing Worker. We have already had some preliminary discussions with CAV and they have been very encouraging with plans put in place for ongoing discussions.

You can join our Caravans and Residential Parks and Villages (CARPAV) working group if you live in a park or the Independent Living Units (iLUs) working group if you live in an ILU or not-for-profit retirement village.

We will also be starting a new working group soon on broader housing policies about more public housing/the perils of private rental housing etc.

So if you would like to be part of these exciting developments, where we have the opportunity to be a part of real change, then please contact our office on 03 9654 7389.





**Left: Xmas Committee lunch 2014**

**Below: HAAGies at Xmas Committee lunch**



**Left: ILU working group Xmas meeting**

**Below: HAL campaign committee**



**Below left: April being interviewed by Channel 10 at the Equal Pay rally**

**Below right: HAAGies at the Equal Pay rally**



## FAREWELL FIONNUALA

Fionnuala Spillane was a community education worker for HAAG since the inception of Home at Last up until the 6th of March 2015. Not that I need to remind anyone of that.

If you don't know Fionnuala, you probably haven't been in our office over the last 2 or so years, because Fionnuala took the time to get to know all of our members and volunteers, and build relationships with just about everyone she came in contact with.

I remember when we first started working together, Fionnuala would explain to me the importance of 'taking the time to build relationships'. I remember at that time taking that advice with a grain of salt and busying myself with other "more important" administrative tasks. But the longer I worked with Fionnuala the more I realised just how right she was.

When I would go to speak to a service they would say "You must be Fionnuala's colleague", or when a client would call that has been at an info-session they would say "Is Fionnuala there? I need help with housing". Fionnuala was memorable because she took the time to get to know people and went the extra mile in making sure they got the help they needed.

It has been a great learning experience working with Fionnuala and we shared a lot of funny, hard and brilliant moments together (she'll remember a time that was all three, when we spoke with pride at Greg Hunt's promotional event- fresh back in the country and not realising who we were inadvertently backing).

I'll leave you with my favourite Fionnuala quote, which sums up her attitude as a community education worker, and makes great advice for all of us:  
"We don't get paid to be shy!"

Best of luck in your new role Fionnuala! They're lucky to have you.





**HAAG (Housing for the Aged Action Group) launches Innovative project to prevent homelessness in older CALD communities.**

**Housing for the Aged Action Group in partnership with the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria has launched the Preventing Homelessness in Older Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities Project. The 12 month project is funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation.**

**Jeff Fiedler, Manager of Education and Housing Advice at HAAG said, "People from CALD backgrounds often face additional challenges. They may find it difficult to access information about housing rights and options in their own language. Making sure that culturally diverse communities have access to independent information, advice and advocacy is crucial to ensuring the most vulnerable older people are assisted."**

**While 34% of HAAG clients are from a CALD background, some cultural groups with high proportions of older renters are under utilising our service. HAAG has identified the need to directly reach out to older people from CALD backgrounds. The project will ensure that older people from CALD backgrounds have access to housing services thus reducing housing crisis and homelessness.**

**Eddie Micallef, Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria stated, "Insecure housing and risk of homelessness is an issue that has been examined by the Council. A joint approach by ECCV and HAAG will enable ethnic and multicultural communities to better engage with housing services to receive information in their language and with consideration of cultural values."**

**The project will target people over the age of 55 from CALD communities across Victoria.**

**Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) suggest that there are currently 19,934 people from non-English speaking backgrounds who are over 55 and renting in Victoria. HAAG focuses on older renters, as private rental housing is highly insecure and unaffordable for older people on aged pensions. In addition, rental housing can be unsuitable for older people with age related disabilities, as necessary modifications are often rejected by landlords.**

**For further information contact Gemma White, Project Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group, 9654 7389.**

## **Lance's story**

**After losing his job, Lance found himself struggling to pay the rent and bills on the newstart allowance and he found himself living in unsuitable and unsafe housing in a rooming house in Brunswick.**

**Lance shared the rooming house with four other men and another three men lived in the bungalow out the back. Lance had to share the bathroom, kitchen and lounge and with no heating and cooling it was very uncomfortable in summer and winter.**

**The house was over 100 years old and was constantly infested with mice and rats. The rent for the room was \$185 per week and it cost \$3.00 to use the washing machine. The landlord used to bang on Lance's bedroom door screaming at him "when am I going to get the rent".**

**When one of the tenants passed away in the bathroom, the local fire brigade were called and had to break down the bathroom door. The landlord immediately put the rent up \$50 per week due to the damage to the bathroom door.**

**Lance felt very unsafe and there were often fights and issues with alcohol and drugs. Then, the landlord sold the rooming house to a developer and all seven tenants were evicted. Lance moved into another rooming house for a short time.**



**Fortunately a Centrelink social worker referred Lance to Home at Last and I was the outreach worker allocated to assist Lance with housing.**

**I assisted Lance to fill out an application for public housing and advocated on his behalf with the Department of Human Services.**

**Lance received a public housing property offer and has recently moved into a unit in Fitzroy North.**



**The unit is surrounded by trees and close to a bike track.**

**instead of the sound of street traffic, noisy planes and car fumes Lance enjoys the sound of birds and bicycle bells!**

**I assisted Lance to move in and purchased a bed and fridge and organised some furniture.**

**Lance reports that he “loves it” and Lance’s doctor is very happy. His blood pressure is back to normal and he is walking everywhere; with public transport and shops close by.**

**Written by Anne Maher,  
Outreach Worker,  
Home At Last**



**Photo on left page:  
Previous home (Rooming House)  
Photos on this page:  
New home = public housing.  
Another happy Victorian!**

**A fall down some stairs and a subsequent broken leg - meant that I needed ambulance transport to casualty and discharge home with lots of very welcome (free) services - (shopping and home care, but could also include showering assistance) from PAC (post acute care).**

**I am 62. Suddenly without an income and on crutches I wondered how I would contact Centrelink. It often meant a wait of an hour and a half on their phone number and I couldn't negotiate their online service.**

**A home visit from my GP and an initial medical certificate (its best on a Centrelink Certificate which all Dr's have) gave me the information I needed and a friend drove me to the local office. My broken leg turned out to be a particularly bad break and considerable pain meant I needed to return to bed a lot.**

**To my dismay, I found, that due to not currently being in employment or studying, I was automatically put on "Newstart with Incapacity" rather than sickness benefits. This meant being placed under rigorous reporting requirements at a time when I was very unwell.**

**Fortnightly reporting to Centrelink and often twice weekly text messages from them, meant I was constantly thinking about what I needed to do to comply with their requests.**

**My Dr was on holidays and I consulted another Dr, showing him the initial certificate and he wrote another for a further month as I was still in a CAM Boot and was needing frequent painkillers.**

**Suddenly, I received a further text from Centrelink saying I would need to attend their office in 2 days time or my benefit would be stopped. Despite entering his office with a large CAM boot on my leg - he told me I would need to look for work as my certificate had expired. I produced a new certificate and he said gruffly that the Dr had not put all parts of my medical history on it - and that due to it being my 3rd certificate I would need to attend a review with an assessment officer in 7 days time.**

**I told him I was confused, as the Dr had signed that I was not fit for work. He said that Dr's are only interested in the illness and not the person, so they have bricklayers who can't work but who can do paperwork.**

**The assessor was much more pleasant but did say that she was assessing my capacity to work. I told her also that I was confused because my Dr had verified that I could not work - and told her what her workmate had said. She appeared very embarrassed and said the reason for the assessment was to allocate the most appropriate job provider.**

**I received a letter from Centrelink the following day saying that I did not need to look for work until my medical certificate had expired.  
All monitoring, reporting requirements and texts ceased.**

**Could I suggest to other members - that if they find themselves in this situation, take someone with you to any meeting - and do emphasize what your Doctor had said on the certificate. And talk to Social Security Rights Victoria - if you need assistance. They are open from 9.30 - 12.30 Monday to Friday on (03) 9581 0355 or 1800 094 164.  
Your local member is also good to keep in mind.**

**But most of all - take care as you recover from your injury.**

**Written by a HAAG member.**

## **PENINSULA RESIDENTIAL PARKS & VILLAGES FORUM - 19/2/2015**

**Mornington Peninsula Shire officers and residents of residential parks and villages on the Peninsula participated in a forum on 19 February 2015.**

**Everyone I spoke to agreed it was a very successful event and the 30 plus residents in attendance were very appreciative of the opportunity to express their concerns to Council officers and to hear updated information from Shanny Gordon of HAAG.**

**It was very valuable to get all Council Officers who share some responsibility for Caravan Parks and Residential Villages in one room and to hear directly from residents.**

**A coordinated response to such a complex issue is very important for Council and for the estimated 1000 permanent residents living permanently in parks across the Peninsula. The value of community consultation is very important for a whole host of reasons.**

**In an attempt to follow up on the good work I have attempted to summarise and simplify actions arising out of the meeting:**

- Emergency & Social Planning response – Develop a strategy for emergency response, improved emergency vehicle access, risk assessment, contingency planning and future planning for residents facing increasing mobility issues in view of the fact many residents are over the age of 70.**
- Advocacy around regulation reform for Parks with the new State Government and within our local planning scheme.**
- Response to Individual requests for information – Individual officers and residents to follow up on a couple of matters**

**A request has been put out for suggestions or changes to these actions to further develop a formal plan.**

**This work has come out of a meeting HAAG attended with the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure (DPTLI) about the regulations associated with caravan and residential parks, and the role of Local Government.**

**The regulations are heading into a review period and this collaborative work with Mornington Peninsula Shire officers, Peninsula residents and HAAG will hopefully inform any review processes that do occur under the current State Governemtn agenda.**

**Thanks you to all who participated in this worthwhile forum!**

**Peter Sibly  
Social Planner  
(Housing Justice & Advocacy)  
Mornington Peninsula Shire**



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

1st Floor, 247-251 Flinders Lane,  
Melbourne 3000.

ADMIN: 9654 7389

Home At Last: 1300 765 178

SURFACE

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA

Print Post Approved  
100002438

**Housing for the Aged Action Group offers  
Free and Confidential Advice to older people renting their home.**



**1st floor Ross  
House  
247-251 Flinders  
Lane,  
Melbourne, 3000**

**Admin: 9654 7389  
Intake: 1300 765 178  
(cost of a local call)**

**Email: [haag@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:haag@oldertenants.org.au)**

**There are four main aspects  
to our service:**

**Housing options**

**Private renters assistance and tenancy advice  
Outreach care and housing support  
Retirement housing advice and support**

**Interested tenants and residents are encouraged to join  
Housing for the Aged Action Group  
Pensioners No Charge**



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

**We are on the Web:  
[www.oldertenants.org.au](http://www.oldertenants.org.au)**