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Harder to find good housing

Rental market tightens



JEFF FEIDLER

by SIMON GARNER

THE impact of a tightening housing rental market is dramatically affecting many older people in Victoria.

One is 92-year-old Joyce Rollinson who has rented a unit in a residential development at Safety Beach for the past eight years.

Joyce was shocked to receive a notice early in June informing her she had 60 days to vacate the unit.

"I was told my unit was to be refurbished and sold," she said.

"There are 24 empty units here and when I asked which one I would be moving into, I was told they all would be refurbished and sold privately.

"I tried all over Victoria to find somewhere else but all places have waiting lists and they won't extend my 60 days notice.

"Naturally all the other tenants here are now very worried, wondering who'll be next to be told to go."

Joyce has a son in Western Australia and has decided to move there.

"He is having to assist me with the cost of moving and my air fare," she said.

"Many don't have this help available to them."

Jeff Feidler from the Housing for the Aged Action Group said a steady decline in government spending on public housing over the past 30 years had forced more older people into private rental.

"The problem with private rental is that it is often expensive, not secure, and not adaptable for people's changing needs as they get older," he said.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that between the census years of 2006 and 2011 the number of older people living in private rental housing increased by 44 per cent from around 52,000 to 75,000.

During the same period, the percentage of people aged 55 and over owning their home outright fell from 63.8 to 60.5, and the percentage of those with mortgages rose from 14.5 to 17.7 per cent.

Mr Feidler said the number of public independent living units available for rent in Victoria had fallen from around 9000 to 6200 over recent years.

"Back in the 1950s and '60s the Commonwealth government funded the construction of public rental housing for the elderly and other vulnerable people," he said.

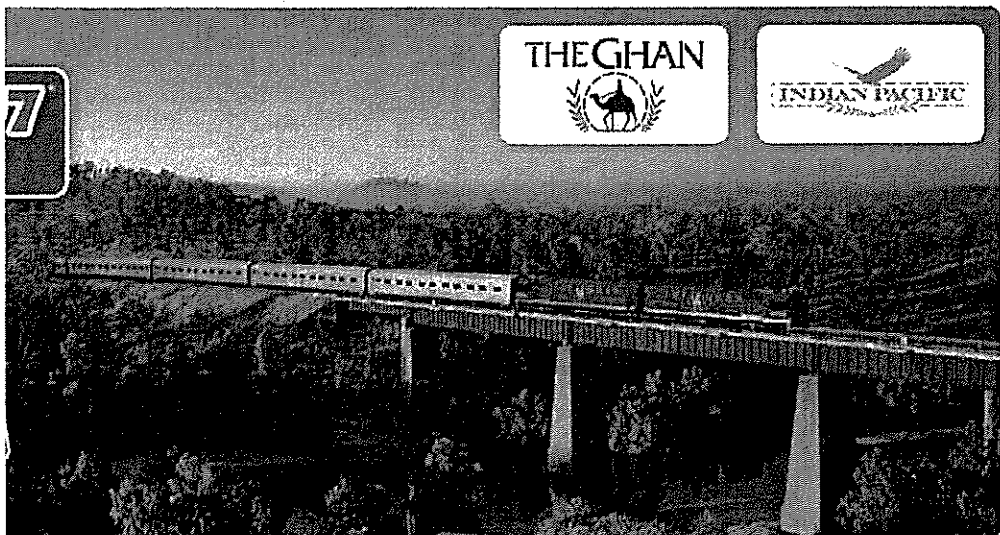
"But the government didn't provide funds for their upkeep, and many providers didn't plan for the future by allocating funds for refurbishment and repair.

"Places therefore get rundown to the point where they need millions spent to restore them to an acceptable standard."

Mr Feidler said there were options for older people facing eviction or other housing issues.

Information from the Housing for the Aged Action Group, phone 1300-765-178 for the cost of a local call.

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