



## 2022-23 Pre-budget Submission

### About Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG)

HAAG is member-based, community organisation specialising in the housing needs of older people. Established in 1983, the organisation has over 600 members from across Australia, many of whom have a lived experience of homelessness. HAAG's service arm is the Home at Last (HAL) service which provides a one-stop shop of housing information, support, advice and advocacy for Victorians over 50 years of age. This assistance is provided through an intake and referral service assisting over 1,000 people per year. We also provide outreach support to re-house older people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness into long term affordable, age-appropriate housing. This service is unique in Australia, and is funded through the Commonwealth Home Support Program's Assistance with Care and Housing sub-program and the Victorian Government.

Our Ageing on the Edge project, funded through the Wicking Trust, is working towards raising awareness of the increasing numbers of older people at risk of homelessness and supports a national network of older people, mainly older women, with lived experience of homelessness.

### Current context

Homelessness is a significant issue in Australia with over 116,000 people experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Across the country, one seventh of all homelessness is experienced by those over the age of 55 years.<sup>2</sup> Almost 24,000 people who accessed specialist homelessness services (SHS) across the country were older people.<sup>3</sup> These numbers are likely to be higher due to underreporting.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found that the current aged care system is not adequately equipped to support people from a range of backgrounds, including those who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. The Commission made a series of recommendations, such as providing personal advisers for older people in order to link them with housing services as well as developing more affordable and appropriate housing.<sup>4</sup>

Older women are the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Australia and unlikely to seek support from generalist homelessness services.<sup>5</sup> Research found that 61% of older Australians aged 55–64 cited lack of a deposit as a barrier to long term housing aspirations, the most important barrier of all cited. This was also an issue for those aged 65–74 and those 75 years and above.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, accessible at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report, 2021, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/older-clients>

<sup>4</sup> Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Final Report, 2021, accessible at: <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-recommendations.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, Older Women's Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper, 2019, accessible at: [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc\\_ow\\_homelessness2019.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_ow_homelessness2019.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> A. James, et al, Older Australians and the housing aspirations gap, AHURI Final Report No. 317, 2019, accessible at: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/317>

A Productivity Commission report noted that obtaining affordable housing is a challenge for many low-income private renters, with two-thirds of low-income renters paying more than 30% of their income in rent.<sup>7</sup> It further reported that households reliant on government pensions and allowances, particularly those including *older people* or unemployed people, and sole person households are more likely to experience rental stress in the private rental market.<sup>8</sup>

There are over 478,000 low and very low income households across Australians in unaffordable rental housing.<sup>9</sup> Older households disproportionately rely on low-income, and age is strongly associated with reliance on government payments, disability and lower educational attainment.<sup>10</sup> All these factors should be closely considered when developing housing policies aimed at increasing affordability.

The Federal Treasury Retirement Income Review Final Report found that for many who retire involuntarily due to job-related reasons, the adequacy of their living standards before Age Pension eligibility age depends on the level of the JobSeeker Payment. Renters and involuntary retirees experience higher levels of financial stress and poverty than the working-age population.<sup>11</sup>

After the 2017–2018 federal budget and under the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), there is now certainty in relation to future funding for homelessness services. This funding guarantee for community services that support people experiencing homelessness was a welcome development.

Even prior to COVID-19 related housing challenges, cost of housing was a significant issue across all jurisdictions including in rural and remote areas. As highlighted, combination of rising housing costs and lack of government investment in social and affordable housing had increased the significant pressure on low-income households to manage household expenses after paying rent. Given the importance of housing in the current context, it is particularly crucial that the housing solutions for homelessness and increasing affordable housing supply are driven by the Commonwealth government.

Investments through National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) has been encouraging, however, is woefully inadequate to meet the growing demand for social and affordable housing across the country.

A range of housing options is required to cater for a broad spectrum of circumstances, including supports to age in place, an increased supply of social and affordable housing for older people, supported accommodation models for older people with more complex needs and specific residential aged care facilities that can provide intensive supports to those who have previously experienced homelessness.

Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 20% (23,437 persons) of all persons who were experiencing homelessness on Census night in 2016 and experienced much higher rates of overcrowding.<sup>12</sup> Evidence also demonstrates that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, people with disability, people from LGBTIQ+ backgrounds, people in rural and remote areas and other cohorts experiencing disadvantage are at an increased risk of homelessness and need access to long-term, affordable housing. Thus, the solutions to addressing housing should

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<sup>7</sup> Productivity Commission, *Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options*, 2019, accessible at:

<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/renters/private-renters.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Unpacking the housing measures in the 2020-21 Federal Budget*, 2021, accessible at: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/news/Unpacking-the-housing-measures-in-the-2020-21-Federal-Budget>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> The Department of Treasury, *Retirement Income Review Final Report*, 2020, accessible at:

[https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/p2020-100554-00bkey-observations\\_0.pdf](https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/p2020-100554-00bkey-observations_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, 2016, 2018, accessible at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness>

not be a 'one size fits all' approach and include measures to cater for the multifaceted and intersectional housing needs across the country.

## Recommendations

1. Increase the availability of safe, affordable and appropriate housing for older people at risk of and/or experiencing homelessness.

This requires an investment of a minimum 500, 000 social and affordable housing units, to address current and future demand, and should include housing specifically to meet the needs of older women.

2. Invest in service systems to support older people before they reach crisis.
  - a. Ensure that changes to Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) funding through the Care Finder Program maintain a strong focus on assistance with housing for older people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

**Current funding for the ACH program is approximately \$18 million per year. This should be increased to \$180 million per year to meet growing demand and fill the current gaps in the program.**

- b. Establish state-wide housing information and support services for older people based on the proven Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) delivered *Home at Last (HAL)* model which includes community engagement activities to reach diverse communities.

**The cost of establishing HAL-type services in every state is approximately \$2 million per annum per state, a total cost of \$12 million per annum.**

- c. Immediately increase the base rate of income support payments including Commonwealth Rent Assistance and index the payments in line with the wage movements at least twice a year
- d. Increase standard contract lengths for community sector services to at least five and preferably seven years for most contracts; and 10 years for service delivery in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

3. Invest in support for older people with a lived experience to have a voice in aged care

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety made numerous recommendations to ensure that the new Aged Care Act and reforms "put older people first" so that their preferences and needs drive the delivery of care, and that "the system should support the availability and accessibility of aged care for all older people, including people of diverse backgrounds and needs and vulnerable people".<sup>13</sup>

There is currently no mechanism within the aged care reforms for people with a lived experience, or at risk of, homelessness to participate. HAAG currently convenes the National Alliance of Seniors for Housing, a network of older people, mainly women, with representation from across the country, all of whom have a lived experience or are at risk of homelessness. We are well-placed to expand this network and provide support for older people to have their voices heard at the table.

**We are seeking funding of \$100,000 per annum to support older people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to participate in aged care and other reforms processes.**

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<sup>13</sup> Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Final Report, 2021, accessible at: <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-recommendations.pdf>

4. Invest in support for existing Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) providers to transition to the care finder model, through the Primary Health Networks.

As part of efforts to streamline navigation of aged care services, ACH services will transition out of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and into the new care finder program from January 2023. Primary Health Networks (PHNs) will offer contracts to existing ACH providers to become care finder providers between July and December 2022 and the initial contract period will be from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2025. According to the Commonwealth Department of Health,

*“This transition reflects ACH providers’ long-standing expertise in a navigation role for very vulnerable people. Maintaining supports for clients and ensuring the important work under this program continues is a priority for the Department.”<sup>14</sup>*

The ACH program has been in operation for almost thirty years, and HAAG has provided support to ACH workers across the country through organising two National ACH forums and convening the Victorian ACH network since 1996, providing and sharing best practice and peer support.

HAAG is committed to supporting the ACH program and ensuring that the unique skills and expertise of the workforce are not lost during the transition to the new care finder model. Our role in supporting the program would ensure consistency, best practice and improved data analysis. This supports the Royal Commission’s recommendation that “innovation, continuous improvement and contemporary best practice in aged care are to be promoted”.

**We are seeking funding to continue to support ACH providers through this transition, at a cost of approximately \$100,000 per annum until 2025.**

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Health (Cth), Commonwealth Home Support Programme Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) Provider Fact sheet – January 2022, accessible at: [https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/01/assistance-with-care-and-housing\\_1.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/01/assistance-with-care-and-housing_1.pdf)