



## Victoria's 2026–30 Climate Change Strategy

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

Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) is a member-based, community organisation specialising in the housing needs of older people. HAAG has over 900 members across Australia actively working towards achieving housing justice. Established over 40 years ago as a grassroots movement, HAAG has developed a robust service delivery arm in Victoria and has a strong presence in advocacy for older people experiencing housing and homelessness related issues across Australia. During the 2023-24 financial year, HAAG supported over 1,800 older Victorians.

HAAG welcomes the opportunity to provide input into [Victoria's 2026-30 Climate Change Strategy](#). We commend the Strategy for drawing a strong link between a warming climate and more frequent and intense climate hazards, such as heatwaves, bushfires, droughts and extreme rainfall, and commend the commitment to adapt to climate change, particularly in relation to the built environment, and [support for vulnerable community members](#).

HAAG acknowledges the work already underway to install energy efficient appliances in public housing, and air conditioning units in some public housing.

### Our recommendations are as follows:

- Ensure that Victorian Climate Change Strategy has a specific focus on supporting older Victorians, particularly those who are financially disadvantaged, in recognition of the disproportionate impact of climate change on older people.
- Support the construction of more public, community and affordable housing in regional areas to provide greater choice and recovery support to disaster-impacted people in rural and regional Victoria.
- Strengthen minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties.
- Improve the ability of public housing to withstand extreme heat events, with a priority on 55+ public housing stock, by:
  - Investing in upgrades such as insulation, draught proofing, screen doors, overhead fans and other measures that do not require significantly more costly energy consumption by tenants.

- Ensuring any air conditioning installed in public housing is appropriate and fit for purpose.
- Continue to electrify public housing properties and transition from gas.
- Develop clear obligations on community housing providers to ensure that homes meet the same climate resilience standards as public housing, including support for older renters to modify their homes appropriately.
- Prioritise low socioeconomic areas containing heat islands (for example the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne) for investment in green belts and tree cover.
- That the Victorian Climate Change Strategy acknowledge the links between climate change and housing, and support calls for a significant increase in the number of public, community and affordable housing.
- That retention and renovation of existing public and community housing stock be prioritised over demolition to achieve reduced carbon emissions and better outcomes for older tenants.

## Climate change and older people

Climate change can have disproportionate impacts on the most vulnerable communities. Older people are at greater risk from storms, floods, heat waves, and other extreme events in part because they tend to be less mobile than younger adults and so find it more difficult to avoid hazardous situations.<sup>1</sup> Older people are also more likely to suffer from health conditions that limit the body's ability to respond to stressors such as heat and air pollution.

A recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report found that age increased hospitalisations and deaths as a result of weather-related injuries. The highest numbers and proportions of cases hospitalised with extreme weather-related injuries were aged 65 years or older, accounting for over 35% of hospitalisations.<sup>2</sup> Extreme weather-related injury deaths were predominantly among people aged 45 years and over, with 77% of deaths being of those over 45

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<sup>1</sup> K. R. Smith, et al, Human health: impacts, adaptation, and co-benefits. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 709- 754 [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WGIIAR5-Chap11\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WGIIAR5-Chap11_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Let's talk about the weather: injuries related to extreme weather, 2023, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/extreme-weather-injuries/contents/about>

years. Over half, 52%, of deaths were people over 65 years. This demonstrates the significantly disproportionate impact of extreme weather events on older people.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that Victorian Climate Change Strategy has a specific focus on supporting older Victorians, particularly those who are financially disadvantaged, in recognition of the disproportionate impact of climate change on older people.

## Climate change and housing

### Natural disasters

HAAG delivers a housing support service in regional Victoria, which was impacted by floods in 2022. A considerable number of older people who were in flood impacted properties were living transient lives or experiencing homelessness for some time after the flood event. Providing these individuals with urgent access to public housing should be a key priority for all levels of government as well as ensuring those in flood risk areas are relocated to safer properties.

#### Case Study

*Gordon\*, who is almost 70-years-old, had previously lived in public housing, but was relocated after the site was marked for redevelopment. The property that he relocated to became unsuitable for his needs and he was forced to find a rental property. He experienced homelessness after his private rental in a regional area of in Victoria was impacted by the October 2022 floods. Since then, he has stayed temporarily with family and friends. Despite actively searching for private rentals and approaching multiple real estate agents, he has been unable to find any properties that were affordable on the Age Pension, reporting high level of competition for properties at the 'lower' end of the private market. He believes he did not receive compensation or housing support after the floods as he is not a homeowner. He was assisted to find housing through HAAG's regional housing support program.*

**Recommendation:** Support the construction of more public, community and affordable housing in regional areas to provide greater choice and recovery support to disaster-impacted people in rural and regional Victoria.

## Heatwaves

Older people are disproportionately affected by heatwaves and are recognised as a vulnerable group in heat wave responses. Older people who are homeless or in insecure and unaffordable housing are particularly impacted.

### 1. Older tenants in private rental

There are increasing numbers of older people living in private rental, many of them in poor quality housing stock. The number of private renters in Victoria increased 79% in the ten years between 2011-2021, and that was prior to the unusually large increase in the cost of renting.

A recent survey by Sweltering Cities<sup>3</sup> found that:

- 86.8% of older renters feel unwell on hot days or during heat waves
- 34.8% of older renters don't have an air conditioner at home, and 78% of older renters with an air conditioner don't turn it on due to concerns about cost
- 72.5% of older renters over 65 think that cost of living will make it harder for them during heatwaves

Responses by local government to combat heatwaves, such as using public facilities with air conditioning, often require transport that is unavailable or inaccessible for older people on low incomes or with mobility issues. This means that they are forced to stay at home in unsafe housing.

**Case study:** Jean, 75 years old, living in private rental paying two-thirds of her aged pension on rent.

*“When it’s a cooler night I leave the window a little open. The window is up high so it’s safer. I don’t have security door or flyscreens, and the door is on the footpath, so I can’t leave them open when it’s cooler. At 8am I shut the window, put the blinds down and keep it dark, to keep the apartment cooler. When it’s very hot I have an air-conditioner but I only put on for 30-40 minutes because it costs too much”.*

We support calls from the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) to reinstate the Victorian Healthy Homes program to provide funding to assist low-income households to install insulation, draught sealing and efficient electric appliances, to reduce climate pollution generated by poor quality housing, while protecting

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<sup>3</sup> <https://swelteringcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-Summer-Survey-report-v1.3.pdf>

residents from the damaging health effects of excessive heat and cold.<sup>4</sup>

**Recommendations:** Strengthen minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties

## **2. Older tenants in public housing**

There are 12 older persons public housing high rises and a number of low rise older persons public housing in Melbourne. In addition, there are large numbers of older tenants living in general public housing stock. Issues with heat retention in some of these buildings has been recognised by Victorian Government, and to address this, many over 55's public housing tenants have been provided with portable air conditioning units. Our members advise us that tenants are either declining the offer of air conditioning due to fears of cost, don't understand how to use air conditioning effectively (for example, due to confusing settings) and the units themselves are not keeping the apartments cool.

**Recommendation:** Improve the ability of public housing to withstand extreme heat events, with a priority on 55+ public housing stock, by:

- Investing in upgrades such as insulation, draught proofing, screen doors, overhead fans and other measures that do not require significantly more costly energy consumption by tenants.
- Ensuring any air conditioning installed in public housing is appropriate and fit for purpose.
- Continue to electrify public housing properties and transition from gas.

## **3. Older tenants in community housing**

Community housing (that is, housing owned or managed by registered community housing providers) is a growing sector, and is increasingly responsible for providing housing for low-income Victorians. Our Home at Last service houses approximately 150 older people a year in public and community housing, with around half of those in community housing. This means we are uniquely placed to observe the difference between these two types of housing, in terms of tenancy selection and management, rent setting, complaints, repairs etc. One thing we have observed is that community housing tenants often find it difficult to receive modifications such as air conditioning, even on medical grounds, due to a lack of funding.

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<sup>4</sup> VCOSS Pre-Budget Submission 2025 pp 83 <https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/VCOSS-2025BudgetSub-new-1.pdf>

**Recommendation:** Develop clear obligations on community housing providers to ensure that homes meet the same climate resilience standards as public housing, including support for older renters to modify their homes appropriately.

### **Older people on low incomes**

Lower socioeconomic suburbs of Melbourne are often hotter due to the built environment and lack of tree canopy cover. Although there is no affordable housing for anyone on Government benefits<sup>5</sup>, people on low incomes tend to live in hotter suburbs due to slightly lower housing costs. These are also often the areas with less public transport. These intersecting factors of location, poor infrastructure, poverty and age compounds vulnerability to heatwaves.

**Recommendation:** Prioritise low socioeconomic areas subject to extreme heat (for example the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne) for investment in green belts and tree cover.

## **4. Older people experiencing homelessness, including rough sleeping, living in temporary accommodation**

Older people experiencing primary homelessness or living in precarious and emergency accommodation are extremely vulnerable to the effects of heat waves, fires (including smoke inhalation), severe storms and floods. For example, studies show that the risk of heat-related illnesses may be higher for people experiencing homelessness due to the lack of access to water and cool places, and that there are higher numbers of people experiencing homelessness presenting to emergency departments on hot days.<sup>6</sup> In order to survive the effects of climate change, we urgently need significant increases in safe and affordable housing.

**Recommendation:** that the Victorian Climate Change Strategy acknowledge the links between climate change and housing, and support calls for a significant increase in the number of public, community and affordable housing.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-Regional-Reports.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Climate-Change-and-Homelessness-Research-Project-Report.pdf>

## Reducing emissions

To meet Victoria's ambitious net-zero target by 2050, it will be essential that construction practices change. The Victorian Government has announced plans to redevelop the 44 public housing high rises in Melbourne. According to architect firm OFFICE feasibility study on the Flemington Estate, it is possible to refurbish and retain the public housing towers, by retrofitting the existing building to make them more energy efficient and liveable, and creating a global warming saving of 55% by not demolishing the buildings.<sup>7</sup> The Comprehensive Energy Efficiency Retrofits to Existing Victorian Houses (2019)<sup>8</sup> identified that existing housing stock represents the largest potential energy saving and greenhouse gas abatement in the Australian residential sector.

**Recommendation:** that retention and renovation of existing public and community housing stock be prioritised over demolition to achieve reduced carbon emissions and better outcomes for older tenants.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://office.org.au/api/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Retain-Repair-Reinvest-Flemington-Estate\\_OFFICE\\_Full-Report.pdf](https://office.org.au/api/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Retain-Repair-Reinvest-Flemington-Estate_OFFICE_Full-Report.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://assets.sustainability.vic.gov.au/susvic/Report-Energy-Comprehensive-Energy-Efficiency-Retrofits-to-Existing-Victorian-Houses-PDF.pdf>