



older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Autumn 2020



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP

FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983





Dear Members, this welcome message is dedicated to the sad business of farewelling an old friend as they resign from their job of twenty four years. Stay tuned for updates on HAAG's response to Corona Virus on pages 4 to 7.

Jeff Fiedler is leaving Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG). These are not easy words to write, but it is true. We all know that nobody in this world is indispensable, but you all would be forgiven for thinking that Jeff is one person we think is just that and would always be here at HAAG. Always.

It has been twenty four years of top effort from Jeff being a caring agitator and an advocate for older people, those who may be at risk of homelessness - especially older women. I have only been associated with HAAG over the last ten years when I joined a working group headed by Jeff examining various aspects of social housing needs and problems in Melbourne and later to other parts of Victoria. I have always been glad I joined and learned so much from Jeff who is always kind, helpful, and he made me feel I mattered.

Anyone who has participated in any of the HAAG working groups and/or subcommittees will know that Jeff is interested in any ideas HAAG members bring to the meetings. As you know in the last three years with great effort he has taken HAAG nationwide to other states of Australia. So many people in other parts of this country have responded brilliantly. It shows they have long sought and needed the directions and information Jeff has been sharing about how HAAG began and grew as a necessary and unique Australian operation.

In 1988 a few stalwart women formed the first membership of HAAG. They found Jeff and April and began the launching of the real solution to the important needs of older people. To this day it shows how Jeff and all the HAAG workers set the benchmark that older persons need to be accommodated with dignity in an affordable suitable dwelling they could call home. One of the most notable initiatives at HAAG is Home At Last, which began with baby steps under the urging and guidance of April and Jeff and now has several more staff and is one of the busiest operations for housing older people.

Housing is a right not a privilege is the catch cry at HAAG. I have heard some of the past stories of the many hard times; fights with politicians, problems with funding, always so much work for so few staff but still the community spirited centre of achievement. At Jeff's send off, if we are lucky, we will hear some of the stories from HAAG's early days of when he personally thrashed out policy shortfalls with Victorian politicians, or stood toe to toe with abusive landlords.

I can't imagine any of it changed Jeff from the caring person he still is with the goal always clear in his mind. A goal for other people to have the security of a place they can call home.

CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME

Jeff is also an astute and skillful writer of official documents, Letters to the Editor in The Age plus fulsome reports and hefty survey results - all appreciated, Jeff.

Jeff Fiedler will be sorely missed by many people. We wish him all the very best. We hope he will have a good relaxing break and that he may then be involved in projects of a type he feels happy doing, whatever it is. Go well Jeff.

Yours truly



SOME ABRIDGED TRIBUTES FOR JEFF

Thank you Jeff for all your hard work in the housing area. It was a pleasure working with you over the years. Wish you all the best for the future.
Rose Vince, Knox City

Without Jeff there would be no HAAG. His activism and belief in social justice inspired him to start this service for older people in housing stress.

Sue Leigh

Jeff is the finest advocate for the elderly that I have encountered in the past 50 years.

Alan G Field OAM

I recently found HAAG and was at least able to gain some solace that the issue of older persons homelessness was being heard,
David NSW

Thank you for being a wonderful work colleague to our mum in all the years you worked together and for hearing about all our journeys of growing up

The Bragg Kids!

Jeff, you have been an inspiration and delight to work with! Warmest wishes for your future endeavours

Wendy Morris

CORONA VIRUS RISK REDUCTION

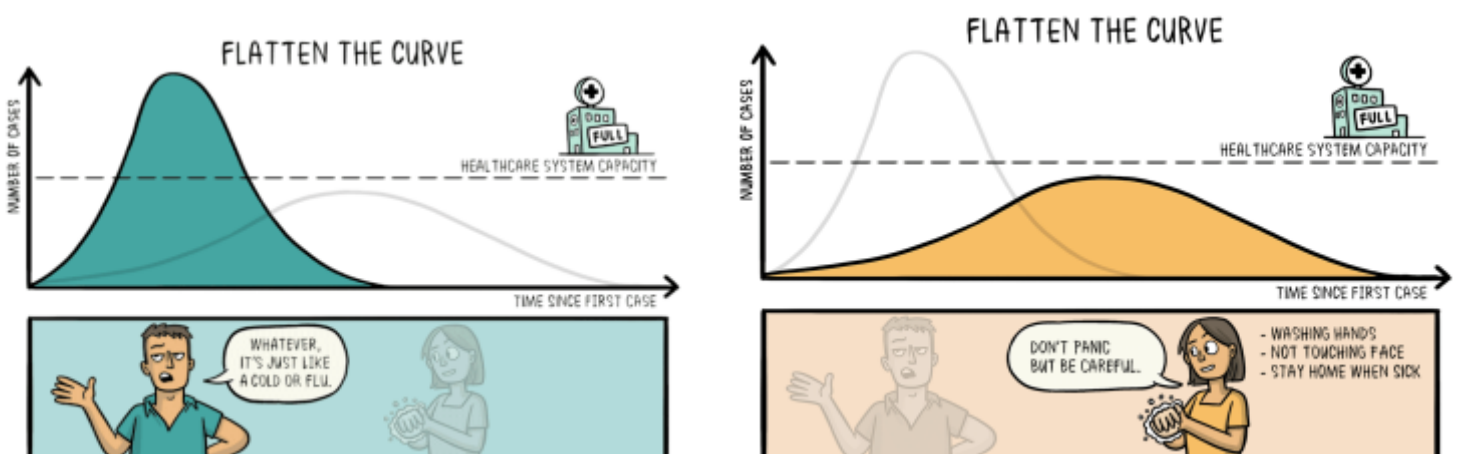
HAAG is taking steps to limit the potential spread of the corona virus. This means that we will be having less face-to-face meetings with our members, volunteers and clients, and there will be less people in the office. We will still be answering the phone and encourage people to stay in touch! Please read more about what we are doing:

- **Please call us, or email, don't visit!** We are closing the office to the public, but we will be still answering the phones. We don't want you risking your health by coming into the city.
- We are postponing face-to-face meetings – this includes general meetings, peer educators, CALD diversity group, RAAG meetings
- We are limiting home visits – we will be doing as many over the phone assessments as possible. If our outreach workers have to visit you, they will be not getting too close. This is not being rude, but it is to protect your health. If you or your family has recently been overseas, we won't be able to visit.
- Please be patient with us – we will be working with less staff in the office, and things may take longer than usual, but we are doing our best.

Please get the seasonal flu vaccine and the pneumonia vaccine – we are heading into our winter flu season, and this may compound the risk of illness from corona virus.

Remember to wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds at least

We know that people are very stressed at the moment – take it easy on yourself, and support each other



Reduce your risk of coronavirus. Wash hands with soap and running water **often** for at least 20 seconds, **especially** before eating and after using the toilet.

When coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue - or cough into your elbow. **Put** the tissue in a bin and **always** wash your hands afterwards.

If you think you may have the coronavirus disease, call the government's Coronavirus hotline on 1800 675 398

قم بتقليل خطر الإصابة بفيروس الكورونا من خلال غسل يديك باستمرار بالماء والصابون لمدة 20 ثانية على الأقل وخصوصاً قبل الأكل وبعد استخدام المراض.
عند السعال والعطس، قم بتغطية فمك وأنفك بمنديل - أو السعال في كوعك. ضع المنديل في النفايات واغسل يديك دائماً بعد ذلك.
إذا كنت تعتقد أنك قد تكون مصاباً بفيروس الكورونا، قم بالاتصال على الخط الساخن التابع للحكومة والمخصص لفيروس الكورونا وذلك على الرقم 1800 675 398

为降低感染新冠病毒的风险。请常用香皂和自来水洗手，每次至少20秒，尤其是在吃饭前和上完洗手间后。

当您咳嗽或打喷嚏时，请用纸巾捂住口鼻，或用手肘遮掩咳嗽。请将使用后的纸巾丢进垃圾桶后，一定要立刻洗手。

如果您觉得自己可能感染了新冠病毒，请拨打政府新冠病毒热线1800 675 398

Koronavirüs riskinizi azaltın. Ellerinizi sık sık, en az 20 saniye boyunca, sabun ve su ile yıkayın. Özellikle yemek yemeden önce ve tuvaleti kullandıktan sonra ellerinizi yıkamayı unutmayın.

Öksürürken ve hapşırırken ağızınızı ve burnunuzu bir mendille örtün veya dirseğinizin içine öksürün. Mendili çöp kutusuna atın ve ardından mutlaka ellerinizi yıkayın.

Sizde koronavirüs olabileceğini düşünüyorsanız, 1800 675 398 numaralı telefondan koronavirus yardım hattını arayın veya

Μειώστε τον κίνδυνο του κορωνοϊού. Πλένετε συχνά τα χέρια σας με σαπούνι και τρεχούμενο νερό για τουλάχιστον 20 δευτερόλεπτα, ειδικά πριν από το φαγητό και μετά από τη χρήση της τουαλέτας.

Όταν βήχετε και φτερνίζετε, καλύψτε το στόμα και τη μύτη σας με ένα χαρτομάντιλο ή βήξτε στον αγκώνα σας. Πετάξτε το χαρτομάντιλο σε κάποιον κάδο και στη συνέχεια πλένετε πάντα τα χέρια σας.

Αν νομίζετε ότι μπορεί να έχετε την ασθένεια του κορωνοϊού, καλέστε την κρατική τηλεφωνική γραμμή άμεσης επικοινωνίας στο 1800 675 398

Riduci il rischio di contrarre il coronavirus. Lava spesso le mani con sapone e acqua corrente per almeno 20 secondi, soprattutto prima di mangiare e dopo aver usato la toilette.

In caso di tosse o starnuti, copri la bocca con un fazzoletto – oppure tossisci nell'incavo del gomito. Getta il fazzoletto in un cestino dei rifiuti, dopo di che, lava le mani con cura.

Se pensi che potresti aver contratto il morbo del coronavirus, chiama il numero di emergenza del governo: 1800 675 398

कोरोनावायरस से होने वाले जोखिम को कम करें। कम से कम 20 सेकंड के लिए, विशेष रूप से खाने से पहले और शौचालय का उपयोग करने के बाद साबुन और बहते पानी से हाथ धोएं।

खांसते और छींकते समय, अपने मुंह और नाक को एक टिश्यू से ढकें - या अपनी कोहनी में खांसी करें। टिश्यू को कूड़ेदान में डालें और फिर अपने हाथों को धोएं।

यदि आपको लगता है कि आपको कोरोनावायरस बीमारी का संक्रमण है, तो सरकार के कोरोनावायरस हॉटलाइन 1800 675 398

Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) is calling for a moratorium on evictions as part of Victoria's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"No Victorian should lose their home during this pandemic, or because of it," said the group's Chair, Phyll Williams. "Older people are the fastest-growing segment of the private rental market, and the most vulnerable to the coronavirus. The government must ensure that renters aren't put on the street, where they will be completely unable to take any social-distancing or self-isolation measures."

"Even for young and able-bodied people, an eviction unavoidably involves a large amount of social contact. The usual systems and processes like attending open-house inspections or queuing outside support services are now unacceptably risky," said HAAG Executive Officer Fiona York.

A moratorium on evictions would mean

- Cancelling or adjourning all Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) applications for possession
- Suspending all current possession orders or warrants of possession

"One risk is that people who are self-isolating won't be able to attend hearings, and may be unfairly evicted as a result," said Ms York. "Even worse, a contagious person might attend a crowded courthouse to contest an eviction, which often means literally hours in a packed waiting room, potentially infecting many more vulnerable people."

We are calling for the Department of Health and Human Services – Victoria's biggest landlord – and all Community housing providers to lead by example and not evict older people into homelessness.

"It would be absolutely unconscionable for organisations that are supposed to help our most vulnerable citizens to evict people into homelessness during this state of emergency," said Ms York.

According to VCAT's 2018/19 annual report, the Tribunal heard 14,443 possession applications over the financial year. This would have represented just a fraction of the tenants who received eviction notices in the same period – that is, only those who contested the notices, or failed to move out.

Another concern is for casual and contract workers losing hours as businesses close or restrict operations, who may fall into arrears and face eviction. A moratorium on evictions could also require assistance or suspension of mortgage repayments for private landlords.

If you are facing eviction during this period of pandemic please get in touch with us on [96547389](tel:96547389)

For more information about the virus, latest updates and what to do you can check the government websites:

Victorian Department of Health and Human Services: dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

Australian Government: health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources

Call us if you have any concerns - **1300 765 178** or **03 9654 7389**

Staying connected

We want you to stay connected! We know that social isolation is a problem and people get lonely at the best of times. With people self-isolating, this is going to get worse.



One of our workers or volunteers may give you a call to check in and have a chat.

Listen to our radio show and podcasts, check our facebook **and give us a call if you need anything.**

Sunlight and fresh air as disinfectant – in the last flu epidemic, medics found that a combination of fresh air and sunshine seemed to have prevented infections. So try to get some sunshine if you can, while keeping clear of crowds.

Inquiry into homelessness in Australia

April



29

Another inquiry into homelessness is being held and submissions are due on the 29th of April.

Through this inquiry the federal government are “hoping to understand how we can better support those who face it, and help some of the most vulnerable in our community.”

Making a submission is a great way to make the government hear from the people who’s lives are affected by homelessness and demand that they take action.

You can make a submission online at

www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/HomelessnessinAustralia

or contact the HAAG office for help to lodge your submission.

In late December a catastrophic fire hit East Gippsland, in the eastern part of Victoria. This rural area has an older population, many of whom live in remote areas without access to doctors, public transport and other services. There are long distances to drive for medical services, and lots of areas have no mobile phone reception. The older population are very self-reliant and resilient, and are



The aftermath of the fire in Goongerah, East Gippsland

used to looking after themselves. In summertime, there is an influx of tourists who visit the many national parks and coastal areas in the region.

When the fire was threatening the area, an evacuation order was made over the entire region. For many older people there was no choice but to stay where they were. Others drove to evacuation centres that were hastily set up in the nearby town centres.

Val Marshall is the only Assistance with Care and Housing worker in the Gippsland region, which stretches from Melbourne all the way to the NSW border. The area she covers is around Bairnsdale - a town nearly 300 km east of Melbourne with a population of over 10,000 people. Her program is only funded for three days a week. She mainly works with people who are homeless or at risk, over the age of 65, or younger if they are prematurely aged or first nation people.

Helping them to find housing is a bit of a challenge. The private rental market in Bairnsdale is very expensive and there isn't much public housing.

"The rental prices in Bairnsdale are quite high and if you're on benefits then you're really struggling," says Val when we interviewed her in February.

"My main issue is trying to house people now, and because there's no public housing stock – well, no empty public housing stock in this area, the turnover is so slow. In the elderly person's public housing stock we are actually waiting for someone to pass before it is offered to someone else, and that has been confirmed by the local housing office, which is incredibly sad. My latest breakthrough that I've had in the last couple of months is a retirement village that went to a rental model, but my program and a couple of other programs have already filled that up."

Val lives on the northern edge of the town, and wasn't working on 30-31 December when the fire hit because she too was evacuated. "It was quite surreal. I didn't see the fire balls, but I saw the massive plumes of smoke. I visited the relief centre on my day off and it was quite devastating, people were quite raw with emotion. It's very upsetting to lose property and have to leave so quickly."

"At the evacuation centres, amazing things were going on but also there were understandably frustrated people. Tents were eventually allocated, before that people were sleeping in their cars. The Sikh community was absolutely amazing cooking vegetarian meals every night and people with spare veggies were dropping them off to make into meals"

Val had a client who was living in his car and had to evacuate from near Orbost. He managed to save his car, but lost all his other belongings. Because his car is not considered a primary place of residence, he is not eligible for the grants that are available. He has now been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which is exacerbated by the smoke. It was very smoky for many weeks across the whole region, from the large fires to the north and the east, but also from the NSW and Canberra fires.

"There might be ongoing health issues that may not surface for a while. I did wear a mask on the very smoky days but they were not always available to people. "

The message Val has for our government is:

"We need more public housing stock, please please please. It's an urgent priority"

"It makes me sad because its saying to people who are on benefits that they have little value, that people are not important. Somehow we have to raise the profile and make it more vote-grabbing."

Listen to the full interview with Val Marshal on our podcast at www.3cr.org.au/haag





The national Ageing on the Edge Older Persons Homelessness Prevention Project is soon to release its report on the housing crisis facing a growing number of older people in Queensland.

Produced in consultation with key agencies such as Council on the Ageing Queensland and Queensland Shelter, the report highlights the rapidly growing problems facing many older people in Queensland. The report also identifies solutions to address the vital housing and service responses needed to help older people in Queensland who are struggling in poverty, hardship and at constant risk of homelessness.

This research has found that there are many older renters struggling to the extent that they are doing without the daily essentials of life such as food, heating, medications and aged care services to ensure they keep a roof over their head. As one older woman interviewed said 'It's the fear of what if (I lose my housing)?' Some of the key points from the report are:

- There was a 43% increase in homelessness for people aged 65 and over in Queensland between 2011-2016, the biggest jump in homelessness of any age group
- Trends in homelessness for older women is even worse with a 56% increase
- Almost 22,000 Queenslanders aged 65 and over are in housing stress paying more than 30% of their income in rent in housing that is insecure, unaffordable and not adaptable as they age
- This represents a massive 43% increase between 2011-2016
- 11,700, 36% of the total, are in extreme housing stress paying more than 50% of their income in rent and doing without essentials such as food, medications, heating and cooling
- 42% of those in extreme housing stress are aged 75 or over and particularly vulnerable

We strongly encourage the Queensland and Federal governments to implement the key recommendations from this report.



Jennifer Darwin and Silvio in front of HAAGs banner



Dennis George congratulates Jeff on his many years of work



Jeff with Paola Posso and her daughter Sophie



Sue Marino and Kris Spark with Jeff



Treasurer and long time friend Peter Sibly presents Jeff with flowers



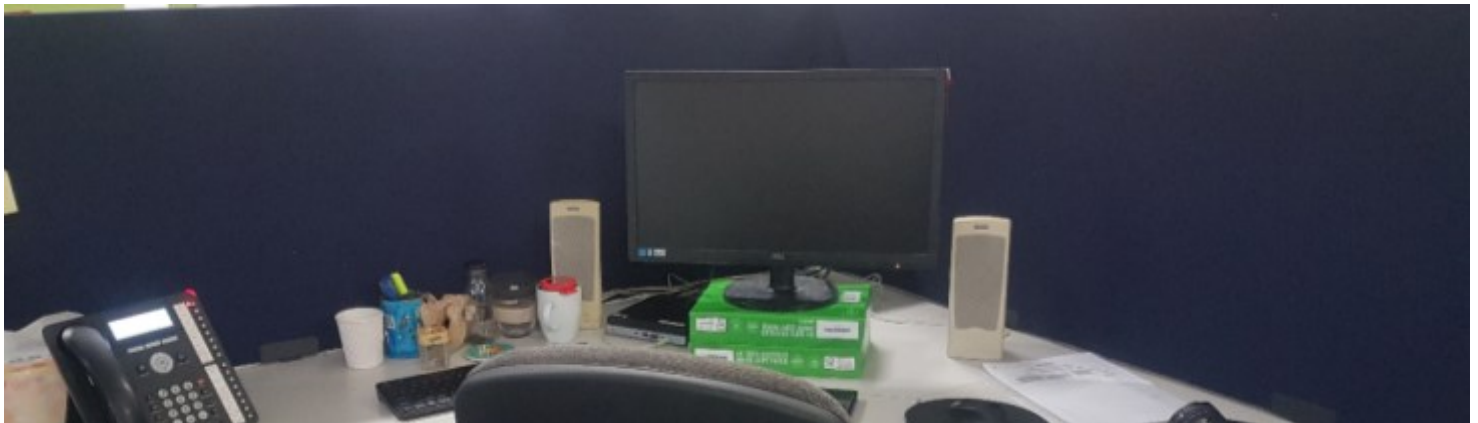
The team of members and staff at Jeff's Farewell meeting



Welcome back Claire Hurren - Claire worked with us as a Social Work Student and is now returning to complete her study into renters experiences in Public and Community Housing



Welcome Chelsea Barker to the team— Social Work Student turned Independent Living Unit researcher, helping us update our information about ILUs around Victoria



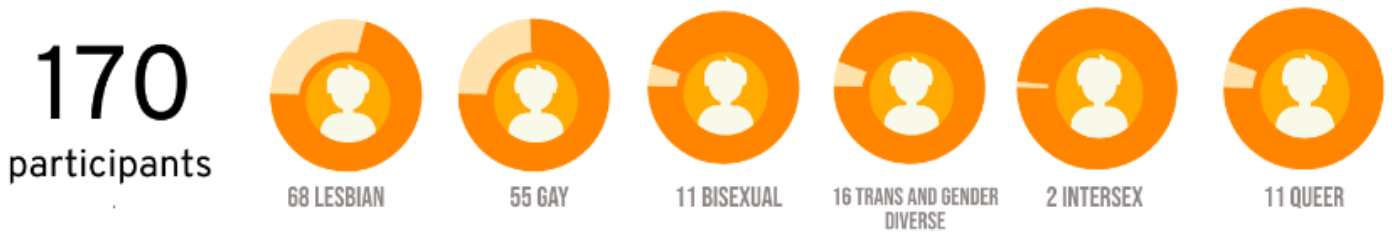
Jeff's desk is sadly empty after 24 years of his service at HAAG.

Now we are really excited to welcome Kobi Maglen to the team as the National Development worker. Kobi was Director of Strategy and Advocacy at Social Ventures Australia and worked really closely with Jeff over the last year on planning the Seniors Housing Gateway. She is passionate about the issue of older people's homelessness, especially for older women. We are lucky to have such a skilled and experienced person who has an intimate knowledge of our national project accept the position and be able to hit the ground running almost immediately.



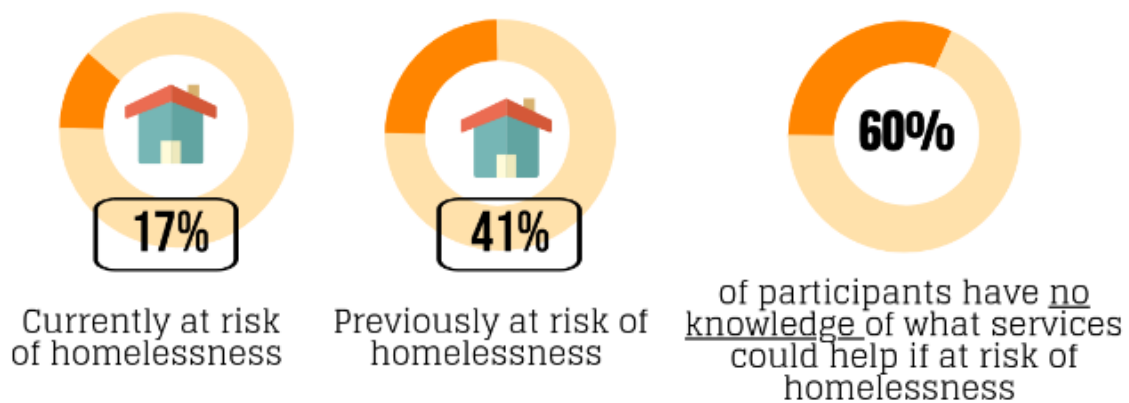
HAAG is currently working on a project that aims to ensure older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people have access to secure, affordable and appropriate housing that can be enjoyed for the rest of their life. This means raising awareness amongst older LGBTI communities about the risk factors for homelessness and facilitating early referral before a housing crisis, including planning for retirement and affordable and secure housing options for LGBTI older people.

As part of this project we have begun to survey older LGBTI people to assess the current housing circumstances for older LGBTI people, their knowledge of what options are available and what their future needs may be in relation to safe and affordable housing.



The survey shows that over 17% of older LGBTI people stated that they are currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In addition to this, 41% have indicated they have previously been at risk of homelessness. However, we believe that often LGBTI older people do not recognise they are at risk of homelessness and are unaware of support services available. For instance, our research found that over 33% of LGBTI older people living in rental properties are unable to afford their rent and of those who own their home with a mortgage, over 50% are concerned about their housing in the future. So we predict a much higher percentage of older LGBTI people are currently at risk of homelessness.

As there is limited research on the housing circumstances of LGBTI older people, we hope that our project will not only capture the current trends but improve sector and policy responses surrounding older LGBTI people and Housing. This will ensure the needs of older LGBTI people at risk of homelessness are appropriately addressed in a culturally safe way.



ANOTHER 'HOME AT LAST'

Hi my name is Jo. In 2012 I had an open heart surgery. When I recovered I got a job as a bus driver. But I couldn't concentrate so I had to quit.



I was unemployed for a while and became very depressed and went into anxiety and was mentally disturbed. My marriage wasn't working and its was really tense in the house

I was renting my eldest son's house and he kicked me out. From Sydney I ended up in Melbourne. As an unemployed father I became a burden to my family. Nowhere to live.

Lived with my parents for a while, things were not good. I got in touch with the Vinnies. They provided me temporary shelter.

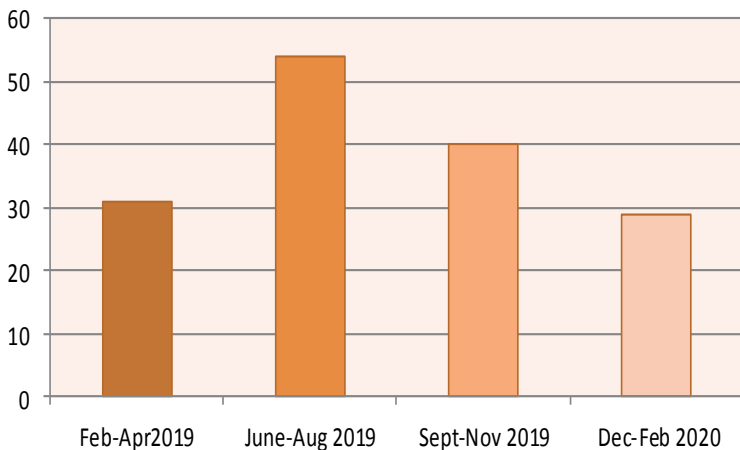
I had fallen very low in my life. I was on the verge of committing suicide. I contacted Peter Wilkinson and Rodney of Humes Mens Shed Sunbury. They got counsellors to talk me out of it. Help also came from my brother and sisters. I was very lonely and lost with no sense of direction. I became a Zombie.



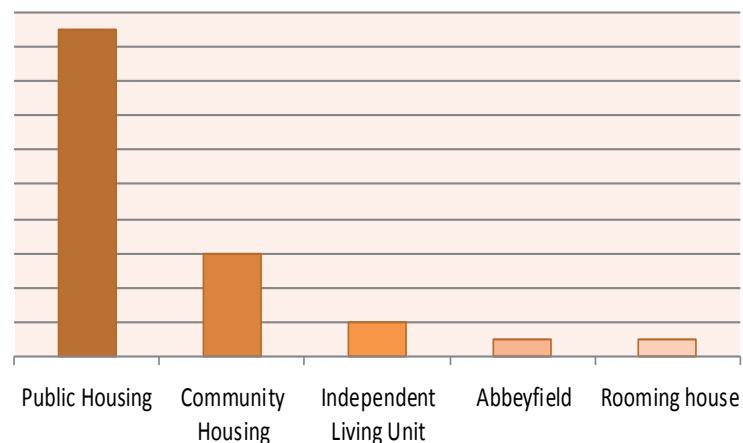
Centrelink is helping me financially and an Angel was sent to me from God in the form of NESE from HAAG. Now a permanent shelter has been provided and she has done a lot for me to get back on my feet. I sleep in peace now and thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

HOME AT LAST SUMMERTIME DATA 1st November 2019 - 31st January 2020

People housed in 3 month periods



Housing Options for People Housed





"I'm just trying to explain why renting doesn't help us..."

Love Is Strange (Ira Sachs, 2014)

Love Is Strange is about an elderly couple who, after 40 years together, are forced to live separately—couch-surfing with family and friends—when a combination of life events suddenly leaves them homeless. We watch the protagonists navigate broken real estate and social housing systems (told they may be able to get help from the 'Department for the Ageing', Ben (John Lithgow) sarcastically replies, "They have a whole department just for us – isn't that encouraging?") as their increasingly strained relationship sustains them.

There are plenty of great romantic movies but few where the characters have already spent decades together, and it's a delight to see the depth and weight of a lifelong love depicted so gracefully. Lithgow and Alfred Molina as George both give career-best performances; their words and gestures constantly suggest a history and affection that makes us care about their separation. The movie is gently good-humoured even in its sadness, and it shares this cranky generosity with its protagonists.

Ben and George are, of course, relatively privileged—down-on-their-luck, sure, but still middle class white men with family to support them. They're spared the worst forms of homelessness. But this doesn't make their lives easy, and the film's focus on the ways good intentions can give way to little tensions and indignities is unsparing. I can't think of another movie that conveys this aspect of family life so well—loving someone, wanting to help them, but feeling your frustrations slowly rising for reasons that are nobody's fault.

I strongly recommend this movie to HAAG members, just make sure you have plenty of tissues handy. It shows us the real pain of older people's homelessness beyond stereotypical images and assumptions.

Love Is Strange is currently available to watch for free on SBS On Demand - visit oldertenants.org.au/loveisstrange. If you're enjoying HAAG's movie review column, please drop us a line and let us know what you think of the movies we've discussed, or what you'd like us to cover in future.

. - Shane Mcgrath ★★★★★

Housing for the Aged Action Group

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Fighting for Housing Justice for older people since 1983

HAAG offers FREE confidential advice, housing and support to over-55's



Anne and Kokila at the Annual General Meeting.

Photos in this newsletter thanks to Guruswamy Perumal

- Housing Options Information
- Outreach Housing Support
- Retirement Housing Advice & Support
- Research & Policy Development