



older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2020



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP

FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983





Hello dear members

I wish you all the best of health during these trying times. The reality is we can't change what is happening except to always follow the restrictions on social distancing, hand washing, face masking, staying at home - and being patient - at all times hoping for the best soon.

We're senior people and as such we are used to handling hard times and making the best of any situation. I do recall a very senior tribal Auntie in western North Queensland area once telling me 'We do waitin well Phyllie'. She always called me that and she was right about 'waitin' and being so patient. She had a lifetime experience at it. HAAG workers go on doing what they do best for older people seeking secure housing or even at risk of homelessness. These days they are working from home a lot and keeping up on Zoom and the phones. I can't imagine how resilient they need to be daily to keep calm and carry on, as the saying goes. Be proud people.

There's been some notable activities at HAAG during the pandemic. The early hard lockdown at the public housing towers where at least 50 HAAG clients live proved so frightening. Seeing uniformed authority figures on the front lawn and being confined indoors can only have raised bad memories from a past unsafe homeland for so many clients. Our HAAG workers were there to assist in any way possible and our advocacy for better and more up to date public housing to be built has never been more important.

Another important milestone was the event for *At Risk: Older women facing homelessness*. This marvelous Zoom event in August was organised by Kobi Maglen, our National Development Worker. Over 350 people joined from around the country. The speakers were respected academic and high profile women who provided a complete picture of the 405,000 older Australian women from all ranks, private and professional, now at risk of never having a place to call home. A recording of the event is available on the HAAG website.

In August we also held the winter member's General Meeting, which would normally be the well attended 'soup and stories' day. Instead the meeting was held on Zoom, but we posted packages of soup prior to the day as a reminder for everyone to come along. HAAG workers are ready to assist anyone who wants to learn and participate in Zoom meetings. Few people were available to share stories this year, which meant we felt sad at not catching up with a large number of our 480 members.

The next member's meeting is the AGM in November. We need as many members as possible for that to ensure members continue to direct the future of HAAG. Please ensure your membership details are currently up to date for voting. You are all important to HAAG and we hope to keep you fully informed as always through our updates in this newsletter..

Stay safe and well, Phyll Williams, Chairperson.

On August 26th 2020 my friend Pauline Williamson died. She was a long term member of Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) from 2009. In her younger years Pauline served in the Women's Royal Australian Navy (WRANS) for 6 years. On leaving the Wrans Pauline lived for some time in Queensland where she worked at teaching refugees English language skills. She moved back to Melbourne when the northern climate interfered with her health.

Pauline was assisted by HAAG housing workers, Ena and April, to find somewhere to call her home at last in Victoria, which they did. As a result she also immediately joined the HAAG membership in 2009 as a concerned advocate - so much so that she eventually became the Chairperson of the Committee of Management (CoM) in 2014. We worked together on several HAAG subcommittees as well. She continued with HAAG responsibilities until her housing arrangements became very risky due to a threatening neighbour, and she returned to Queensland again where she worked daily in an insurance office and in her own time with refugees learning English.

When Pauline returned to Victoria in later years she began working with the first year pupils in her local primary school to help with their reading skills. Nothing pleased her more than the little notes and drawing gifts given to her often from the children over the next few years.

She had renewed her HAAG membership when she returned to Victoria and we met up again for our frequent coffee, chats and laughter dates until finally the lockdown put an end to that. She always enjoyed finding knowledge and maintained her interest in learning by continuing to study various academic subjects right to the end.

Pauline was a private person - independent, with a droll sense of humour and a sharp mind. As a keen walker even in her older age she still stepped out as straight backed as her navy training taught her.

I will miss her.

Phyll Williams





As some may know, HAAG has a fantastic finance sub-committee, led by all-round good guy Peter Sibly and very ably supported by Committee members Kris Spark and Sue Marino. They meet monthly to discuss the financial state of the organization and ensure good governance and oversight.

Recently during one of these meetings, Peter mentioned that his 99 year old dad had a fall in his nursing home in Wonthaggi. They got to talking, and it turns out they all had a connection to the town.

As a newly graduated young teacher, Kris Spark – or Miss Spark as she was known back then – had her first teaching job at Wonthaggi High School. Initially she stayed in South Dudley, in a hotel converted to flats, and Peter said was where his dad used to drink when it was a licensed pub. She later moved in with some other young (male) people, causing quite the scandal for the principal at the school, who warned her that as a young single woman, people would talk! Peter was a student at the school at the time, in his second last year – he doesn't remember Miss Spark, but he does remember the conservative principal.

Sue Marino's best man at her wedding was also from Wonthaggi, and Kris and Peter both knew him. Sue has fond memories of going to a ball at the tiny community hall in nearby Archie's Creek one long weekend in 1971. Peter's parents were probably there, as they loved ballroom dancing and lived on a farm nearby. Sue doesn't remember much of the night, but she had a great time and her first daughter was born nine months later.

Although all three were in the same town at the same time in the early 70's, none of them knew of this strange coincidence until just a couple of months ago.

Peter's dad Vinnie passed away a couple of weeks ago and the funeral was in Wonthaggi, where he was well loved. Our condolences to Peter and his family.



The young surfer Peter Sibly in the 70s.
Above Left to right are Peter, Kris and Sue

Renting During COVID

Rent reductions, eviction bans, and how to have security of tenure in a pandemic

This is a quick round-up of important information about the Victorian government's emergency Covid-19 rental laws. This is general info only – if you need advice about your specific situation, please give us a call!

Measures extended

The emergency rental laws – including the so-called eviction moratorium and support for rent reductions – were originally supposed to last until the end of this month. With Victoria still in stage four lockdown, those laws have now been extended through to next March. This is both good and bad – there are some important extra protections for renters there, but it also means the previous rental reforms have been delayed again.

Eviction ban

The emergency laws include restrictions and changes to rules about eviction – but that doesn't mean people can't be evicted! The protections are specific and narrow. If you get a notice to vacate, notice of a VCAT application, or your agent tells you they're considering evicting you, you should get advice immediately about whether you're protected and how we can help.

Rent reductions

There is an ongoing scheme to help tenants who need to negotiate a rent reduction because they have lost income due to the pandemic. Unfortunately, this is little help to many older people in private rental, who have often been facing severe rental stress since before Covid. Even if you are eligible,

you may find that the amount of paperwork and documentation your agent requires to even consider thinking about reducing your rent is just too much to manage. Or you may find that you just can't get an answer. We think that's intentional – designed to discourage you. Don't give up; contact HAAG for help if you can no longer afford your rent and we'll look at all your options.

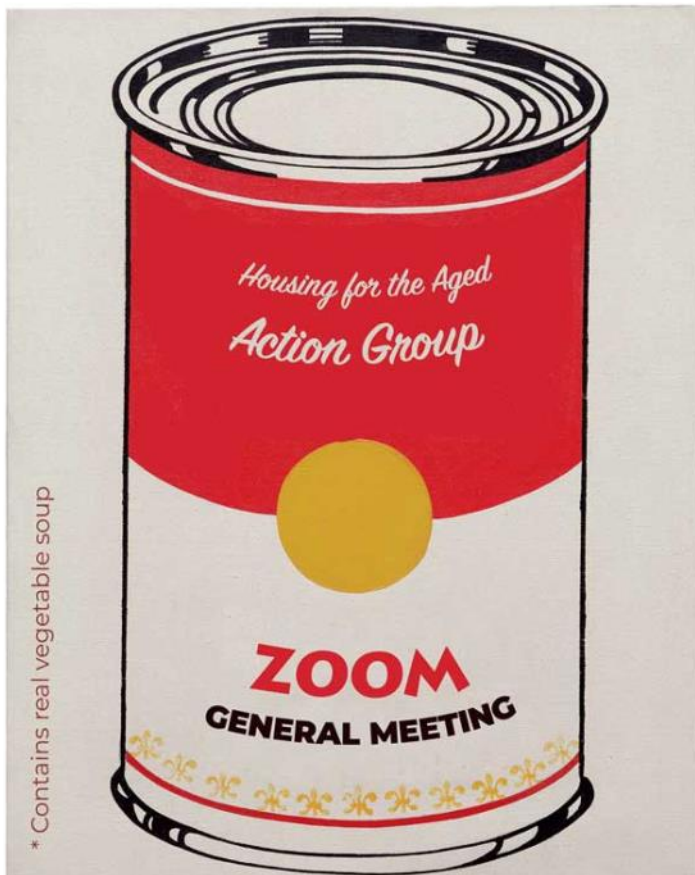
Real estate agents

Pardon our language, but what the hell is wrong with them? Last week, Gil Kane from the Real Estate Institute came out to urge agents and landlords to refuse to negotiate rent reductions. Ignoring basic health and safety concerns, a hopeless lack of professionalism and indifference to legal and professional obligations, refusal to talk fairly or negotiate in good faith, lying, trying to wring every last cent out of struggling tenants – it's good to know in these wild and unpredictable times, we can count on real estate agents to act exactly like always.

If you have a question about your rights as a tenant during Covid-19, please give us a call.



Photo by Seshadri Sakar on Unsplash



On 20 August we held our second General Meeting for members via Zoom. This time we had made an extra effort to assist people with navigating the online meeting, by making it easier to log in and providing clearer instructions on how to join. We responded to feedback from our May General meeting that people would like more time for member discussion, so this time we tried breaking into smaller groups (called “breakout rooms” in Zoom).

Usually our winter General Meeting is one where the workers make soup and bring it along to share with our members, but we couldn’t do that this time, so instead we sent packets of instant soup to members who receive our information by mail.

We had about 15 members join us via the internet and via phone for the meeting, and it was great to see their faces and hear their voices. In the small groups we discussed two questions:

What are your strategies for dealing with the lockdown?

What are you finding the most difficult?

People are clearly missing the opportunity to catch up face to face at Ross House, and are missing the outdoor activities and social interactions. Although everyone is managing to keep busy and using various strategies to stay connected, like chatting on the phone to friends and family, there are still feelings of isolation. Meeting online does give people who have trouble leaving the house, or who live far from the city, the opportunity to participate.

We would love to hear from more members about how they would like to connect with us, so we have a survey in this newsletter to ask some questions about what would make it easier and more interesting.

Thanks to everyone who participated in the General meeting and we look forward to seeing you at the next one!



The online event, At Risk: Older Women facing Homelessness in Australia, launched two reports detailing the burning issue of 405,000 older women at risk homelessness and the challenges many of them face living in the private rental sector.

565 people registered for and over 350 people joined the event from around the country. There was a clear a desire for action, connection, innovation and policy reform.

Kobi Maglen and Mary-Anne Wright from HAAG were joined by the Age Discrimination Commissioner Dr Kay Patterson, the President and Board Chair of YWCA Helen Conway and Dr Emma Power from the University of Western Sydney on the panel. A lively discussion was facilitated by Suzie Riddell, the CEO of Social Ventures Australia.

“Older single women are often seen as invisible, silent and well behaved - time to change that folks”

“I feel like a spark has just been fanned into flame in me!”

The full video from the event, along with the ‘At Risk’ Report, is available online at

oldertenants.org.au/ageing-edge-national-action-project

HAAG will be following up on the ideas that came out of the event. Watch this space.



The ninth edition of NASH News casts its focus on older women renters experiences of violence. It is essential to the wellbeing of older women to feeling safe in their housing, particularly given that many women have experienced sexual assault, family violence or domestic violence . Family and domestic violence remains a significant factor in homelessness for Australian women. Additionally, 18 per cent of women over 15 years have experienced sexual violence at the hands of someone other than a partner (Australian Government, 2019).

Many older women are still feeling the consequences of fleeing their homes because of violence and abuse long before assistance for victims of family violence existed.

66 per cent of single women renters over 55 years previously owned a home, compared to 27 per cent of the general rental population (National Shelter, 2018), suggesting that family breakdown and violence may be a contributing factor to not owning a home later in life. Women make up 62% of all main tenancies in social housing (AIHW, 2018).

With some state differences, women escaping family violence may receive priority on social housing waiting lists. Other vulnerable groups eligible for priority housing may include male prisoners returning to the community. Obviously, it is vital for these men to have housing support which “reduces recidivism, thereby bringing direct benefits to clients, increases community safety, and reduces criminal justice system costs” (Willis, 2018). However, mixing vulnerable older women in housing complexes with men who may have violent histories, or who currently exhibit anti-social behaviours, can be a frightening and triggering experience. Social housing for women could be a solution to this problem.

Here are the stories of two women who do not feel safe in their social housing because of fellow male tenants, and their dealings with housing authorities and police. Although the women live thousands of kilometres apart their stories are remarkably similar.

AIHW (2018) Housing assistance in Australia 2018. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2018/contents/social-housing-tenants>

Australian Government (2019). Domestic and sexual violence. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Family. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>

National Shelter (2018). *Disrupted: The consumer experience of renting in Australia*. National Shelter, The National Association of Tenant Organisations (NATO) and Choice.

Angelia*

Angelia (*not her real name) was enormously relieved and pleased when at the beginning of the year she finally got the keys to her social housing unit after four years of being on the priority housing waiting list. The unit had everything she needed to help her manage her multiple sclerosis (MS); it was a ground floor, it had bathroom facilities she did not need to step up into, air-conditioning which is crucial for someone with MS, and as a bonus it was a small block of ten units in a really nice inner suburb close to her social networks.

In the first week she was surprised to discover her porch being cleaned by a male neighbour who we will call Barry*, one of several men in the block. Angelia initially thought he was just over enthusiastic and welcoming her, but he stood too close to her and inappropriately spoke in an over-familiar manner when she asked him what he was doing so this immediately set off her inner alarm. It was not a public space; it was her own private area. He had a 'proprietary' air that extended to herself which was alarming. She politely told him thanks, but she would clean it herself.

Later that week he put his bin under her lounge window which was nowhere near a common area. To do this he would have had to get the bin over her garden bed. The act was clearly territorial and aggressive. Catching sight of him she asked him to move it, pretending she had a male friend in her unit as this act had made her feel her instincts to be wary of him were on the money. Upon inquiring about him with other neighbours Angelia was told he had been relocated to their block from another Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) property because of anti-social behaviour, assault of other tenants, drunkenness, and other tenancy breaches. Barry had a long history of incarceration for violent offences and had not long been released from jail before causing havoc at his previous residence. He is also on anti-psychotics for a serious mental health issue.

Another male resident in the block is also an ex prisoner, Joe*, who Angela describes as a quiet and polite man who busies himself looking after his garden. After the bin episode Joe became the object of Barry's ire, apparently jealously and paranoily blaming Joe for the deterioration of his relationships with a female resident Vera* who had been Barry's friend and was the one privy to his history. This came to a head about two months after Angelia moved in when Barry physically assaulted Joe and threatened both Vera and Joe with a knife, which to Angelia's horror she was informed he carries at all times. Joe and Vera, both of whom use walking frames, went to the local police station but the police would not make a report. Another resident, Kay, a very capable retired hospital administrator (who has also been subject to Barry's verbal abuse when she politely asked him to move his car from her allocated car parking spot) went to

assist in making the report but also failed to get it officially recorded.

Angelia and a group of residents including Joe and Vera reported Barry's behaviour in writing to the DHHS, but they refused to issue him with a tenancy breach, claiming this was because there is no police report. However, Angelia found out DHHS can indeed issue a tenancy breach if an incident is witnessed. Other residents who co-signed the letter to DHHS testified they had observed the assault and knife threat.

Since then due to the Corona virus lockdown things have gone quiet with Barry but the DHHS claims this is due to their single phone call to him. Given Barry's history with the DHHS and at his recent behaviour, residents feel ongoing peace is unlikely, and realistically expect more trouble from Barry again once lockdown is eased.

Angelia was subjected to violence at the hands of a former partner and from the moment she realised she was in close proximity to a violent male she has been on alert. Much of her belongings remain unpacked, she finds it impossible to convince herself her unit is her home because it doesn't feel like a sanctuary. Her boxes stacked up in the corner of her living room are constant reminder of her unease.

Angelia, Vera and Kay do not enjoy the full amenity of their units because they avoid spending time in their small gardens so they're not seen or accosted by Barry. They also always check if Barry is outside before leaving their units along the block's paths. Kay now parks her car in the street instead of the units' car park as Barry has decided to use her spot to park his second car. Angelia also completely avoids the units' paths by using a side public lane which has access to the rear of her unit.

"I don't want to live two doors up from a drunken, psychotic gambler with a violent history who carries a knife. What are DHHS waiting for, for him to stab someone? I can safely negotiate my way around a difficult female resident, but you can't do that with a male who's clearly not in control of himself. His history and recent acts of violence towards other residents is extremely stressful for me. Fear and wariness are survival emotions triggered in the face of threat, which is why I hate living here now, I'm constantly on edge. It's a frightening fact that I left a violent marriage only to find myself in my latter years living so close to another violent dangerous man. It's disgusting that social housing forces women to compromise personal security for housing security. Forcing women into a physically and emotionally threatening association is as unjust and as dangerous to women as would be forcing them to stay in a bad marriage. Corona virus lockdown will be lifted however Vera, Kay and I will continue to live in a form of lockdown due to a violent abusive male resident".

Angelia is pursuing more legal avenues to get the DHHS to act and wants to move even though the flat is so ideal in every other way.





*Ellie**

I am a 76-year-old lone female living in Queensland with few family members. I am a former registered nurse. After retiring as a nurse, I added two degrees to my portfolio, and taught in China and Korea.

My marriage ended in 2010 when I discovered my husband had used all our assets for gambling and drinking and left us financially ruined. I left him with little other than my suitcase and computer. I did house sitting for several years before renting in Beachmere, then more house sitting. Health issues forced me to stop that lifestyle and I rented in Deception Bay, paying \$330 a week from my pension.

I had applied for public housing three times over a five-year period. The first time, I was refused as the Housing Department Queensland believed I had \$130,000, which I did not. I applied again, but the Department has no record of it. I applied again in 2019 and again my documents were lost, and I was told that I had never even attended a Department of Housing office! I had a witness though, and the documents mysteriously reappeared. Suddenly in March 2020, I was offered a unit in a bayside area, and given just a couple of days to accept. I moved in on March 20th.

I was familiar with the property as I had helped a desperate friend who was about to be homeless 18 years earlier after being bashed and robbed get into housing there. My unit is around 30 years old. Maintenance of the property has always been of poor standard, there is no onsite manager, and little communication with the department. Requests for maintenance have apparently been ignored, and many of the residents have stories about bullying and bad behaviour by the staff at the department.

Here there are some men with violent backgrounds, and I am on 'high alert' at times. Two have ongoing violence issues and have been seen and heard to be trashing items in their

units or having fights with visiting males. One man has a history of sexual abuse for which he has been imprisoned. He tends to 'favour' some women, who reject his attention. Since I have been here, he slipped into one lady's bedroom when she was asleep. She had forgotten to lock her door and awoke to see him standing over her. She said it was a waste of time reporting it. It had happened before and been reported but no action resulted. We are always on guard when he is around. It is thought that at least one other male has a criminal history. My female neighbours tell me there are occasional violent episodes at the property. I often wonder how the Department of Housing can house such males in units next to vulnerable women!

The man next door to me is foul mouthed and violent and I have been told the police have been called several times before I arrived. I contacted the Housing Department about his behaviour, as I witnessed him physically and verbally abusing a young disabled girl, and they sent me to the police, but the police refused to act. Another man recently appeared with an axe and demolished a tree in the garden which had been nurtured by his male neighbour. There is an icy relationship between them, and I worry why a man in such housing needs an axe!

The men rarely interact or speak with the females and generally isolate themselves in their units 24 hours a day. Some people remain in their units all day and night. One woman was found to have been dead for six weeks and no one noticed.

The units are too small for us and have no wardrobes or similar. Women's only accommodation should be provided, not just for the different space needs but so we can be free of fear in our own units. Some would prefer female only accommodation as a few have had sexual abuse incidents in the workplace and in their marriages and can get very distressed in certain circumstances. We do not always feel safe here.

Get in touch with NASH by email at leonie.bessant@oldertenants.org.au, write to us at HAAG, 247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000, and find the previous editions of our newsletter at oldertenants.org.au/nash



MEMBER SURVEY—WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

During the coronavirus pandemic HAAG has to stop having meetings in person, and instead have meetings online. Its really important for us to continue to be a member led organisation. So we want to hear from you about how we can make it easier and more interesting for you to attend online meetings.

Please take the time to complete the survey online at

oldertenants.org.au/membersurvey

Or fill these pages out and send them to us at

Housing for the Aged Action Group

247—251 Flinders Lane

Melbourne 3000

What's your name?

(leave it blank if you prefer to be anonymous)

 Have you ever been to a HAAG meeting at Ross House?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Maybe once or twice
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ All the time

 Have you ever been to other groups community meetings?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Maybe once or twice
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ All the time

💖 What are your favourite things about community meetings?

- ☐ Decision Making
- ☐ News and Updates
- ☐ Catching up with people
- ☐ Delicious Food
- ☐ Guest Speakers
- ☐ Being involved in community groups
- ☐ Prizes

📱 Have you ever used these technologies to talk with people when you can't meet them in person

- ☐ Letters
- ☐ Telephone calls
- ☐ Mobile phone calls
- ☐ Skype
- ☐ Zoom
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Facetime
- ☐ Facebook Messenger
- ☐ Other

💻 Have you ever been to a meetings online using one of these technologies

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Maybe once or twice
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ All the time

🏠 What are some of the things that make it harder for you to attend meetings online?


- ☐ Don't have a good computer or smart phone
- ☐ Money to connect to internet
- ☐ Busy
- ☐ Boring or not interested
- ☐ No food
- ☐ Not enough chance to socialise
- ☐ Too hard to learn all the different new technologies
- ☐ Other

👋 Would one-on-one training in how to use Zoom make it more likely for you to attend meetings?


- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Other

👤 Are there any other topics or things you'd like to do more of in our general meetings?

👤 Do you have any suggestions how we could make it easier and more satisfying to attend online meetings?

 What other ways have you connected or heard from Housing for the Aged Action Group?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Word of mouth
- ☐ Phone call
- ☐ Email newsletter
- ☐ Printed newsletter
- ☐ Website
- ☐ Other

 Would you like to hear more from Housing For the Aged Action Group?

- ☐ Absolutely not please stop pestering me
- ☐ Its enough thanks for keeping me up to date
- ☐ I would like to hear from you more often

 Have your membership details changed?

If so, please fill out the details below

 What's your best email address?

 What's your new address?

 Whats your phone number?

Are you passionate about retirement housing reform?

**JOIN US
AT
RAAG!**



Retirement Accommodation Action Group or RAAG is a group of retirement housing residents that lobby, advocate and promote the right to live in retirement accommodation that is safe, affordable and fair .

Areas of action include: stopping excessive fees, lobbying for a Retirement Housing Ombudsman, increasing training for operators, simplifying contracts, increasing safety and

security of parks and villages.

Membership open to residents of caravan parks, residential parks, retirement villages and ILUs.

Contact us for more information

retirement@oldertenants.org.au

03 9654 7389, Option 2.

Choosing, living in, and leaving retirement housing can be difficult. Are you concerned about a term in your contract, a fee that seems unfair or excessive, or the way management are treating you? Do you have a question about your rights or responsibilities as a resident?

Whether your living in a retirement village, caravan park, or any other kind of Retirement housing, our information, advice and advocacy can help you navigate your way through the maze. If you are a worker who has a client in retirement housing and you need advice, this service can also help you.

Call 03 9654 7389

(interpreters available) or email retirement@oldertenants.org.au for free and confidential advice.

**CALL US
AT
HAAG!**

**Need
help with
Retirement
Housing?**

HELLO'S & GOODBYE'S

Welcome to Nikoletta Stamatopoulos, we don't have a photo but we introduce her properly on the next page!

Welcome James Bell, intrepid hiker and newest member of our intake team. James is telecommuting to work from his home in Central Victoria!



Welcome Anez Barnes, who has started with HAAG as a social work placement student from RMIT. Anez is working on a client feedback survey, so if you're a recent client of HAAG you may hear from her on the phone!

We were very sad to farewell our intake worker Sotiria Nika, who left HAAG to be with her family in Greece. Its hard to 'get together' and farewell a team member while we can't meet in person, so we made her this 'group photo' of the team to wish her all the best.



Thanks to COTA Australia and the Australian Government Department of Health we are extending and expanding our Aged Care Navigator Trial into the financial year 2020-2021. We have received additional funds to pay for a 4 day/ week worker on the Aged Care Navigator Trial.

We welcomed Nikoletta Stamatopoulos who will be coordinating the position. Nikoletta comes to HAAG with a background in Aged Care and is Greek speaking. We are always happy to add to HAAG's Multicultural/ Multilingual workforce.

The purpose of Aged Care Navigator trial is to assist people who are vulnerable to access My Aged Care. HAAG is what is called an 'Information Hub' and we focus on assisting people who have experienced housing stress or homelessness. You can find more about the trial here:

<https://www.cota.org.au/information/aged-care-navigators/>

Our trial, which has been running since March 2019, uses bi-lingual volunteers as the first point of contact between clients and the aged care system. Our volunteers (most of whom have been with HAAG for a number of years or have professional or aged care backgrounds) are linked to older people who speak their language. They can explain the Aged Care System and how it works, and work with the person to link in with My Aged Care.

In non-COVID times the volunteers conducted home visits, but the service is now done over the phone. We also follow up with welfare checks to make sure the person has received the care they requested/need.

Last financial year, HAAG's Aged Care Navigator program assisted 122 people to access aged care (Home Care and Commonwealth Home Support Program). Most people who used the service were from

Non-English Speaking background and have at some point had a housing crisis. They are unlikely to have known about Aged Care and the services they now receive if it wasn't for our bi-lingual volunteers. Our bi-lingual volunteers have been educating people in their community about what aged care is and how to access it and we thoroughly appreciate their work.

Our volunteers work in the following languages:

- Arabic
- Mandarin
- Cantonese
- Serbian
- Croatian
- Bosnian
- Assyrian

And we have volunteers who are English speaking and experienced at using interpreters.

If you or anyone you know would like more information about the Aged Care System, how to get Aged Care or want help to get it please call us on 9654 7389. As members, if you have any ideas you want to share about how to get information into the community about our service please feel free to call or email Rebecca.walton@oldertenants.org.au.



October



9



Out of the Closet, Out of Options:

Older LGBTI
People at Risk of
Homelessness

HAAG and the Australian Association of Gerontologists are excited to invite you to the launch of their reports on LGBTI older people and homelessness and housing for World Homelessness Day.

Please join them with the Victorian Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ communities Ro Allen who will officially launch the reports. They will be joined by a panel of speakers, facilitated by Joe Ball, CEO of Switchboard Victoria

This event is an opportunity for the LGBTI community, and service providers to gain insight into the current housing and homelessness situation of older LGBTI people in Victoria and Australia more broadly

Please join the event online:

11am – Friday October 9th, 2020

Please RSVP at oldertenants.org.au/lgbti-event

HAAG Annual General Meeting 2020

HAAG's first ever online Annual General Meeting is coming up on Thursday the 19th of November at 11am—Save the date!

That means its time to make sure your membership details are up to date! If you've changed your home address or email, please fill in the survey in the centre of this newsletter, email

joanne.maguire@oldertenants.org.au, go to

oldertenants.org.au/update

Or give us a call on 9654 7389

November



19

In the months since our last newsletter, we have been busy meeting with Federal and State politicians to talk about the issues around housing and older people. Some of these meetings arose from the release of our COVID-19 policy papers, and some resulted from our At Risk: Older Women and Homelessness event.

Josh Burns MP

In July, our Chairperson Phyll Williams and Fiona York met with the Federal Member for McNamara Josh Burns MP, who is a member for Labor for Housing and interested in the issue of older women's homelessness. He said "the meeting was an inspiration" and afterwards, he wrote an article in the New Daily featuring one of our members Vanessa Heart's story. You can read the article here:

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2020/08/02/homelessness-australia-older-women/>

In September, we arranged for Josh Burns and his advisor to meet (via Zoom) with two of our members and former clients – Vanessa and Jenny – who live in public housing. They had a great discussion about the circumstances that led them to become homeless, and how public housing has changed their lives. Having the personal stories to put a face to the statistics is great for politicians to see, and we hope to do more of this in future.

Jason Clare MP

In August, national project worker Kobi Maglen and Fiona York met with Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness Jason Clare MP. We presented the findings of the At Risk report and were joined by Dr Emma Power, who presented the findings from her research into older women and homelessness.

Melissa Horne MP

In August, Chairperson Phyll Williams and Fiona York met with the new Consumer Affairs Victoria Minister Melissa Horne to introduce ourselves and our retirement housing service, flag the declining ILU sector, and raise some of the COVID-related issues for older renters. We undertook to provide more details about our case work to the Minister.

Luke Howarth MP

In August, national project worker Kobi Maglen and Fiona York met with Federal Member for Petrie and Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services Luke Howarth.

Peter Kahill MP

In September, Fiona York joined members of the Save Public Housing Collective Libby Porter, David Kelly and Kerrie Byrne in meeting with Peter Kahill, Federal Member for Wills. Peter grew up in public housing and is a strong advocate for increased public housing investment.



The Assistant Minister for Homelessness, Luke Howarth, being briefed by Kobi Maglen on our *At Risk* report describing why older women are more likely to be homeless.



Universal design means that older people can age in place, regardless of where they live. The ageing in place concept encourages older people to stay in their own homes, in order to promote health, well-being and independence. This concept underpins Australia's Aged Care system which preferences in-home care over residential aged care. This approach comes at a lower cost than its alternative and is favoured by most older people.

Retirement Housing

The vast majority of housing in Victoria is not designed to allow people to age-in-place. This includes housing designed and marketed as "Retirement housing" such as Residential Parks and Villages, Independent Living Units and some older stock of public Housing. While this housing may be suitable for an older person when they first move into a property, it is unlikely to support independent living as they age.

Private Rental

Private rental properties are unlikely to have accessible features which allow people to age in place. Features such as ramps and rails are often seen by

landlords as 'detracting' from the value of the home and restricting re-saleability.

Although in Victoria, the Residential Tenancies Act (VIC) has been reformed to allow some disability modifications, written consent from the landlord will still be required for modifications that are 'not minor'. Many tenants also feel unable to ask their landlord for permission to make modifications following an aged care or NDIS assessment due to fear of a rent-rise. Most other state jurisdictions have no such provisions, and there is a lack of consistency across the country regarding tenancy laws and home modifications.

'Affordable' private rental properties are notorious for their lack of accessible features, in fact, they are often not meeting safety minimum standards at all. This makes private rental a poor option for pensioners who wish to age in place on a limited income. If Universal Design Standards are legislated in new-builds, this is likely to have a trickle-down impact on the private rental market, as owners will no longer see these features as undesirable.

Data from HAAG's Home at Last Service re: Accessibility (2019-20FY)

- 26.5% of the people who access our Home at Last Service to avoid becoming homeless do so because their housing is inappropriate or inadequate
- 19% or 1 in 5 Home at Last clients

requested accessibility features in their home when applying for Public and Community Housing.

Of those requesting accessibility in their Public and Community housing application:

- 50% required no stairs or a ground floor property
- 20% required a fully accessible property, including wheelchair access

Recommendations

We support report the Andrew Dalton and Rob Carter Report for the Melbourne Disability Institute and the Summer Foundation (2020), which finds the benefits of legislating minimum standards of universal design to Australian Society outweigh the costs, and recommends the regulation of LHD Gold level (Option 2) for all new housing.

At a minimum, all new housing should have:

- An accessible path of travel from the street or parking area to the entry level of a dwelling
- Doors, corridors and living spaces that allow ease of access for most people on the entry level
- A bathroom, shower and toilet that can be used by most people with reinforced wall areas for grab-rails at a later date

In addition, we recommend:

- Education and training for the housing industry on minimum access features
- Retrospectively modify existing public and social housing stock to universal design standards



175

New clients

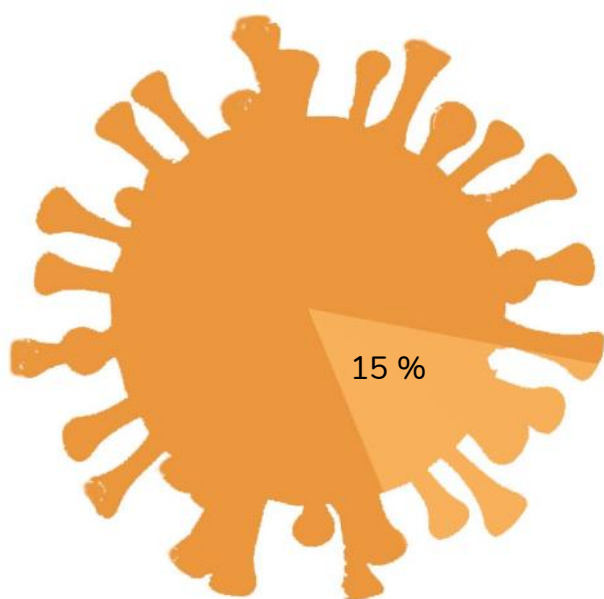
75

Housing Applications

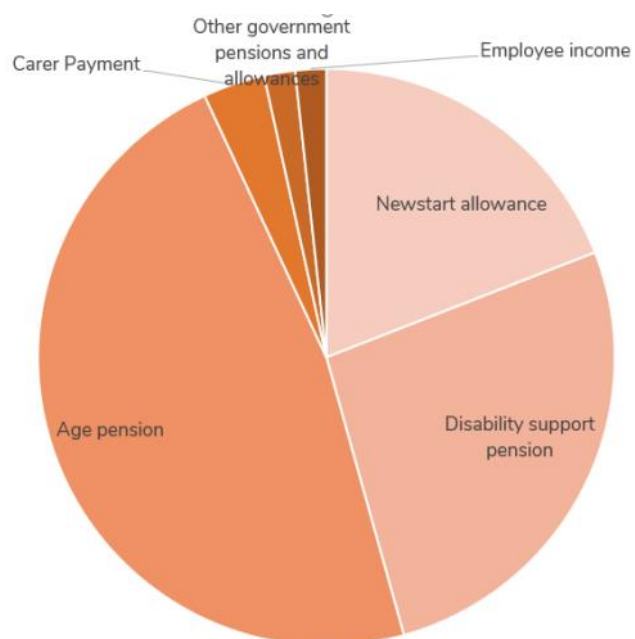
38

People Housed

**Clients seeking assistance
due to impacts of COVID-19**



Income source of clients



**Warm Safe Home
for older Victorians**

Are you struggling to pay your bills?

A financial counsellor may be able to help you

To connect with a financial counsellor in your local
area visit warmsafehome.org.au or call

1800 007 007

**Would you like someone to call
you to check on your wellbeing?**

**Call the Older Person's COVID-19
Support Line: 1800 171 866**



HAAG volunteers and staff have been distributing masks which were provided by DHHS to vulnerable clients. The mandatory mask wearing in Victoria has been important in keeping the number of coronavirus cases under control. In general, our clients state that mask wearing is important in managing the pandemic. However, some clients reveal that they find it difficult speaking and hearing others while wearing masks,

compounded by the social distancing rule of 1.5 metres.

Our secretary and radio presenter Pam Young has also been helping out to keep people safe during the pandemic by sewing masks and distributing them to whoever needs them. If you would like Pam to deliver you one of her hand sewn masks, please give her a call on [0409160669](tel:0409160669).



While our HAAG team have been busy working from home our pets have also been hard at work, so we thought we'd put them in the spotlight. On the front cover is James' dog 'Molly'.



During the pandemic our Raise the Roof radio show team have been working overtime from home to keep our radio show on the air.

Tune in to HAAGs radio show Raise the Roof airs at 5:30pm every second Wednesday 3CR Community Radio 855AM, or catch up on all the latest episodes at oldertenants.org.au/podcasts.

Here are some of the highlights from the past three months.

Renters and Housing Union

Shane and Fiona interviewed Eriene Solidis Noyce from the newly formed Renters and Housing Union. RAHU are organising collectively to fight for the right to safe and secure housing through self-advocacy, education, and frontline eviction defence. Join RAHU at rahu.org.au



Unmasking the Past - the 1919 flu pandemic and housing

Fiona and Shane delved into the past with retired historian Dr Anthea Hyslop, currently in lockdown in the outskirts of Melbourne, Victoria who is noticing some startling parallels with the 1919 flu pandemic known as the "Spanish flu". As one of the few experts on this part of our history, Anthea tells us about what happened a hundred years ago, the similarities and differences with what we are living through right now, and how the flu pandemic caused us to look at the link between housing and health.

Public Housing tenants speak out

We talked to three HAAG members and public housing tenants, Jenny and Vanessa who are living in one storey units in the West, and Royal who lives in an older persons high rise in the southern region. They were not part of the hard lockdown, and have had very different experiences of the COVID-19 responses. As with many public housing communities, they are looking out for each other - but finding the social isolation a struggle.



Public Housing tenants speak out

We talked to three of our Housing Support Workers, Darwin, Paola and Nese, about the impact of the hard lockdown on public housing tenants in North Melbourne. The hard lockdown was implemented without warning on 9 public housing towers, including 2 older person's housing blocks. Our workers relay what they found when contacting their clients .

Last night I watched an episode of *The Golden Girls* with my partner, who'd never seen it before. When I was a kid, I loved this show and watched it religiously, endlessly entranced by, especially, Dorothy Zbornak's sharp, sarcastic wit – I don't remember the exact context, but I still remember her snapping down the phone, "No, I will not have a nice day!" That is the energy I still strive to bring to work every day.



Now – after seven years at HAAG – I see more clearly the ways Dorothy, Blanche, Rose and Sofia are creating their own housing option in a world that doesn't always have another place for them. The care, support and mutual aid they show for each other is often as moving as it is funny. Dorothy might joke about sending Ma back to the comically awful retirement village Shady Pines, but really it's their shared life together that lets them all keep living independently.

Within the safe bounds of a television sitcom, friendship is the real security of tenure. There must be a special episode about homelessness in there somewhere (specific episodes often tackling, and then resolving, important contemporary social issues), but the Girls never really need to think about public housing or eviction laws. Of course, the show is more fun that way – I don't need or want to see how badly Rose misunderstands her rights, or an episode where Blanche gets into trouble when it turns out the gentleman she thinks she's flirting with has actually signed her up to a predatory retirement village contract.

But it's nice to let my thoughts drift between the idealised fantasy of the show and the realities of contemporary Australia, where older women are one of the fastest growing groups of homeless people. Sharehousing has often been a preferred form of tenure for many marginalised groups – students, LGBTI people, refugees, etc – but has generally not suited older people. Partly this is because sharing is a less desirable lifestyle for some older people, but it's also because Australian housing laws have not properly served or protected shared housing arrangements. If tenancy laws provided the security for housemates to age in place and the flexibility to leave as they needed to, maybe we'd see real-life *Golden Girls* situations working out as well as they do in the show.

Please let us know what you think about this – would you like more and better options for shared housing, or is independence more important? What would you need to feel safe and comfortable sharing a home with friends? And who's your favourite *Golden Girl*, and why is it Dorothy Zbornak? ★★★★★ - Shane McGrath—*Golden Girls* is available for streaming on Stan

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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



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

The late Pauline Williamson asks a question at a HAAG meeting with the minister