



# older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2019



**HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP**

**FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983**





Ho Ho Ho and all the best for a sunny December and holiday season to you all. We wish you a wonderful celebration for the season whichever way you traditionally observe it.

HAAG workers are again at the end of another busy and productive year of housing older people and caring for their welfare. You will read all the statistics in the latest Annual Report on the many clients they have managed to assist this year.

Sometimes even a trip to VCAT is necessary to right the wrong that's been done for too long to seniors by ruthless and

unjust real estate managers or landlords. Shane, Chris and Fiona Walters of the HAAG Retirement Housing team are no strangers to the ins and out of VCAT and seeking justice for the clients of HAAG.

The reworked Act that governs rental accommodation comes into action in 2020, and the Act that covers Retirement Villages is under review. HAAG workers have been contributing to these reviews. It takes a long time for governments to end the unkindness and discrimination endured by several renters of private dwellings but at last it seems to be happening. There are still some parts of the Acts that need sharpening up - as with most government documents - but all in all it's a bit of a boost to the Christmas spirit.

This last week HAAG members have attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM) for the 2018-2019 year. Due to the day of the worst weather ever seen in Melbourne, plus the stoppage of trams and trains, I have to congratulate the many people who made it to the meeting. You are a stalwart bunch of citizens and you make me proud. Your acceptance of the new Constitution launched on the day, and your helpful comments on some wordage was appreciated. It only awaits approval by the registrar and we are set.

There were some chaotic moments on the day, especially when our guest speaker was unable to appear but fortunately a replacement speaker stepped up. Margareta Windisch spoke of her PHD interesting work on older women affected by climate change in Moreland.

We said farewell and will miss two of our most admired and helpful Committee of Management (COM) members, Maree Norris and Guruswamy Perumal (pictured with myself and Fiona York on the cover) who is also our photographer for all our events. We welcome a new member to the COM in Pauline Carmeri from Val's LGBTI Ageing & Aged Care.

Finally, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has shocked many of the Australian population and we hope it will result in tremendous changes in aged care in the near future. The task of HAAG is particularly geared to preventative measures for ageing seniors, which didn't feature as strongly in the final documentation, which is a pity.

Your truly, Phyll Williams



# **HAAG VOLUNTEERS CHRISTMAS/ END OF YEAR LUNCH**



*Come and share a delicious lunch to  
celebrate the end of 2019*

**11 am Tuesday 10 December 2019**

**Hayden Raysmith Room**

**Level 4, Ross House**

**247 Flinders Lane**

**CALL 96547389 to RSVP or email  
HAAG@oldertenants.org.au**





HAAG is saddened by the recent death of our dear member and friend Frances Swann.

Frances was a member of HAAG since 2003 and was well known and loved by many HAAG members and HAAG staff. In 2015 Frances was inducted as a life member of our organisation, only the third person in HAAG's 36 year history to be bestowed that honour.

For many years, particularly through the 2000's, Frances was an almost daily contributor as a volunteer who would come into the office for our collective activities such as preparing our newsletters, mail outs and a range of office duties. During the many years that outreach worker Jenny Stewart worked at HAAG, Frances was Jenny's right hand-person who was available to help Jenny with her daily work assisting older people who need help to find affordable and safe housing. At times Jenny could be quite a hard task-master but Frances would reply to Jenny with a wry smile, a mild joke at Jenny's expense, and then get on with the task at hand. She was always focused on helping people who were at risk of homelessness.

There was also one particular period of HAAG's history in the early 2000's when the organisation's funding was cut and the future of the organisation was very uncertain and we will always be grateful for the volunteer hours Frances contributed to make sure that HAAG could keep afloat through those lean times.

Frances represented the traditional caring values that have been the foundation of HAAG, formed by those people whose life experience stretched far back to the days of The Great Depression in the 1930's when most of the population was poor and our society was less



focused on individual consumerism and more on helping each other.

Frances is almost the last of HAAG's members to hold that historical knowledge and heritage and we now have a challenge to maintain the values that Frances's legacy represents to us. Also importantly, Frances represents a long line of strong women activists at HAAG such as Molly Hadfield, Edith Morgan, Margaret O'Callaghan, Ann Sgro, Sue Healy, Amy Duncan, Carmel McMennemin and our current Chairperson Phyll Williams. We will do our best to honour Frances's memory by ensuring that her values continue to inspire the new generations of older people and staff who come to support the work of HAAG.

As much as we will remember Frances for her work at HAAG, it was Frances's beautiful personal nature for which we will perhaps remember her mostly. When Frances came into the office the first thing she offered everyone was a kiss and a hug. Frances would make sure we'd drop whatever work we were doing, have a good cup of tea, and just enjoy the moment of being together and having a good chat. She would then regale us with her latest stories of people she had met or events she had attended. Such simple but heartfelt personal interactions with Frances were so important to us as it was a constant reminder that HAAG not only provides services to help older people but that we must always be a place where older people feel immediately welcome and 'belong'.

Frances was also a fiercely independent person and we always thought this was her secret to living a long life. Even well into her eighties when relying on her 'walker' to help her get around, she would get on the light rail near her home in St.Kilda, travel all the way into Bourke Street and then walk to our office in Flinders Lane.

On the rare occasion when she couldn't get around on her own, such as her visits to the Eye and Ear Hospital for some difficult eye procedures, we really enjoyed the opportunity to be able to take Frances to and from the hospital to ensure she was looked after comfortably. Frances was the kind of person that you always wanted to give back to, as she always gave us so much.

We will miss you greatly Frances, rest in peace.



Frances telling the Minister for Housing a thing or two



Kris Spark presents the Treasurers Report



Fiona York presents the Annual Report



Members voting to adopt a new constitution



Returning Officer Brenda Penaluna confirming the election of the new committee and Chairperson Phyll Williams



Guest speaker Margarita Windisch speaking about the effects of heat waves and climate change on older renters



### HAAG's new constitution – what does it mean?

At our AGM, members voted on a motion to change the “Rules of the Association”, that is, the Constitution, or guiding document on how the organization is run. Over the last year, we have been working on updating some of the outdated parts of the constitution and we have been getting advice on “best practice” from Justice Connect and pro bono legal firm DLA Piper. We wanted to make sure that our constitution complies with the law, and we made adjustments to the “model rules” to suit our organization. You can read our new constitution at [oldertenants.org.au/constitution](http://oldertenants.org.au/constitution)

The biggest change to the Constitution is the composition of the Committee of Management. In the past, the Committee has had 12 people elected once a year. The new Committee will have 9 people who are elected for a three year term, and three people are up for election every year, similar to the Senate. This means we will have new people join us, as well as passing on knowledge from the existing Committee members.

The Committee must now also have a minimum of 50% aged 50+ years and include renters. This is to ensure representation on the Committee from older people, especially older renters.

Another change is how membership is renewed. Before, members had to send in a new membership form every year. Now we will contact you once a year to see if your details are up to date and ask if you want to remain a member. If so, you don't need to do anything. If you want to resign, or we don't hear from you for three months, then you will no longer be a member.

We got rid of the old category “newsletter members” and changed “organizational members” to “Friends of the Association” – so there is no confusion about who is and isn't entitled to vote. If this is you and your organization used to be a member of HAAG, then you will now be a “friend of HAAG” instead.

Committee Advisors are people who can provide advice to the Committee but do not have voting rights. If you have skills or knowledge that you think would be useful for our Committee (for example, cultural knowledge, legal, accounting, business management, media, human resources) the Committee is keen to hear from you.



HAAG Staff Rebecca Walton, Anne Maher, and Darwin Cheng



Kathy Barnes and outgoing committee member Maree Norris

## OUR NEW COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT



**Chairperson**  
**Phyll Williams**



**Vice-Chairperson**  
**Maryanne Wright**



**Secretary**  
**Pamela Young**



**Treasurer**  
**Peter Sibly**



**Kris Spark**



**Sue Marino**



**Vicki Gutsjahr**



**Pauline Crameri**



**Maeve Cooper-Brown**

Introducing  
our newly  
elected  
Committee  
for 2020

Our  
Committee  
wants to  
hear from  
you if you  
are  
interested  
in sharing  
your skills  
by joining  
us a  
Committee  
Advisor



Our strategic plan was endorsed by our new Committee of Management at their meeting in November. For over a year we have been consulting with members, workers, and the Committee to develop the plan, supported by consultants Think Impact. We reviewed our achievements against the previous strategic plan, and looked at the context for our organization – increasing demand, more and more people coming to us in crisis, fewer housing options, as well as more opportunities for connecting with aged care, national advocacy and regional expansion.

### VISION

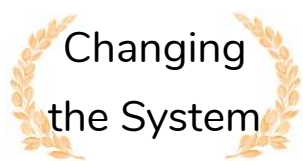
A society where older people have safe, secure and affordable housing

### MISSION

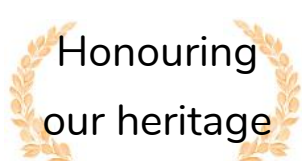
We engage and work with older people through community activism, services and advocacy to achieve social change and housing justice



Changing  
Lives



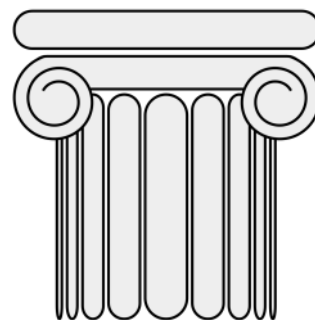
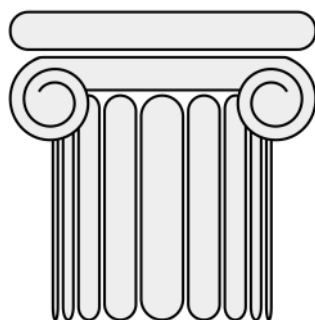
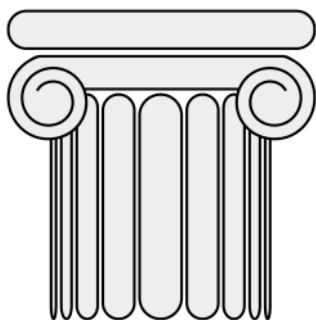
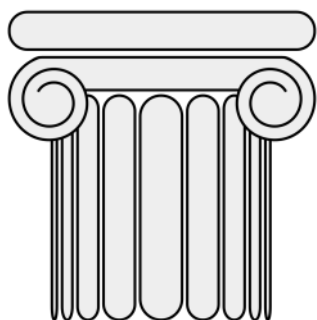
Changing  
the System



Honouring  
our heritage



Organisational  
Strength



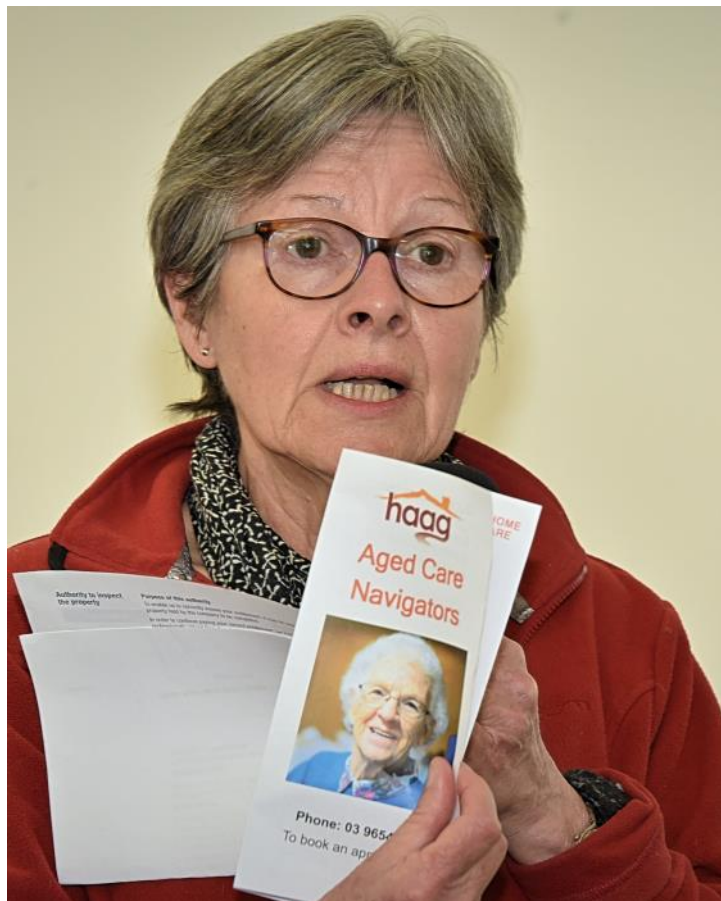
### Our four new strategies:

- Service Delivery – changing people’s lives: enable older people to make positive life changes through high quality service delivery
- Advocacy and Campaigns – changing the system: seek opportunities to strive for systemic change
- Honouring our heritage: elevate the voices of older people in all our work
- Organisational Strength – build on strong foundations: continue to consolidate and strengthen HAAG through organisational development

If you would like a copy of our strategic plan, please contact our office or look online at [oldertenants.org.au/strategic-plan](http://oldertenants.org.au/strategic-plan)

Thanks to Rebecca from Think Impact, our student on placement Mariel Pinto Zuniga and everyone who took the time to give their ideas on our future work.

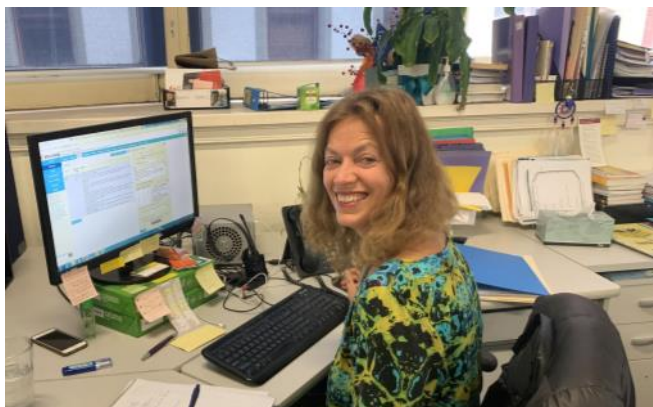
Bon  
Voyage  
Emily  
Connoly -  
best of  
luck  
working as  
a social  
worker in  
the UK



Susan McQueen volunteers on our Aged Care Service Navigator Project and is now also working in our Housing intake team



Nam Nguyen is a social work working with the intake team



Welcome Dimitra Lagoudaki to the Housing services intake team!



Welcome on board Claire Hurren - Social Work Student studying renters experiences in Public and Community Housing



The Victorian Government is currently reviewing the Retirement Villages Act and has published a 60-page Issues Paper about the review. If you live in a retirement village, this is a great time to let the government know what needs to change in your industry. You can see a copy of the Issues Paper, as well as summaries of the main issues, at [engage.vic.gov.au/retirementvillagesact](https://engage.vic.gov.au/retirementvillagesact)

### What are the key issues?

The Issues Paper covers a wide range of issues in retirement villages, but we think financial models and Deferred Management Fees (DMFs) are especially important. Exit fees and DMFs are often charged when residents leave retirement villages, and can eat up a huge part of the value of the unit. Many HAAG members think that rules about exit fees should ensure residents aren't ripped off, and that DMFs are set in a way that's fair and transparent.

### Dispute Resolution

HAAG believes that existing forms of dispute resolution, VCAT, can be too complex, time-consuming and expensive. We believe the government should introduce a retirement housing ombudsman to provide free, accessible, and binding dispute resolution.

### Other Issues

The Review also covers many other issues, including:

- What rights should retirement village residents have?
- How can we make the transition to aged care work better?
- Should contracts be simpler and clearer?
- What training should be required for retirement village managers?

### How to make a submission

You make a submission by writing down your opinion and concerns in your own words. You don't need any special training or skills to express your views! Public submissions about the Issues Paper are due by December 6th and can be posted to Retirement Villages Act Review, Consumer Affairs Victoria, GPO Box 123, Melbourne VIC 3001, lodged online at or emailed to [rvreview@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:rvreview@justice.vic.gov.au).

## HEATWAVES

### AND OUR RIGHT TO BE COOL

#### female research participants wanted!

Are you female, aged 70 plus and live alone in the City of Moreland?

I would love to interview you for my PhD research study on how older women who live alone are managing heatwaves in urban environments.

The study on 'heatwaves, social vulnerability and public cool spaces' aims to contribute to current knowledge on the topic and gain important insights on what it is like for you living in this area during a heatwave, how you cope and what could make it easier for you.



If you wish to participate in this study please contact Margaret Windisch at [margareta.windisch@monash.edu](mailto:margareta.windisch@monash.edu) or on 0438 869 790

If you live in rental housing, this is a great time to tell the government about your needs as an older tenant.

The Victorian Government is collecting feedback on the Residential Tenancies Regulations, and has published a draft set of regulations.

You can see a copy at [engage.vic.gov.au/rentingregulations](https://engage.vic.gov.au/rentingregulations) (Warning: the Regulatory Impact Statement is about 200 pages long!)

The Regulations cover a wide range of issues, but we think there is one that is particularly important for HAAG members:

### Minimum standards for rental properties

The Regulations will list minimum standards for rental properties, including things like a working stove and toilet, locking doors and windows, and a council bin. It will also require landlords to provide a heater in the main living space, but there is no requirement that they install insulation, and nothing about cooling. We are worried that without insulation, compulsory heaters will do nothing to reduce utility bills for tenants – while landlords who have to install heaters may pass on the cost by increasing the rent.

HAAG will make a formal submission, but the government also needs to hear from average renters. Do you want or need a heater? Do you want or need insulation? What about cooling? How might changes to your rent and/or power bill effect you?

### Other Issues

The Review also covers many other issues, including:

- What modifications should older renters be able to make without asking the landlord? What should the landlord not be able to unreasonably refuse?
- What should agents have to tell tenants when they apply for a property?
- What should agents be banned from asking tenants when they apply?
- What safety-related activities (if any) should tenants be responsible for and what should landlords be responsible for – i.e., changing smoke alarm batteries?

### How to make a submission

You make a submission by writing down your opinion and concerns in your own words. You don't need any special training or skills to express your views! Public submissions about the Regulations are due by December 18th and can be lodged online at [engage.vic.gov.au/rentingregulations](https://engage.vic.gov.au/rentingregulations) or emailed to [rvreview@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:rvreview@justice.vic.gov.au).

### Don't want to write a submission, but want to have your say?

If you don't want to write a submission but would still like your perspective included, please speak to Shane, Fiona or Chris from HAAG's Retirement team by calling 9654 7389. We would love to know what you think we should include in our submissions to the review.





The outlook from Jey's new apartment in South Melbourne

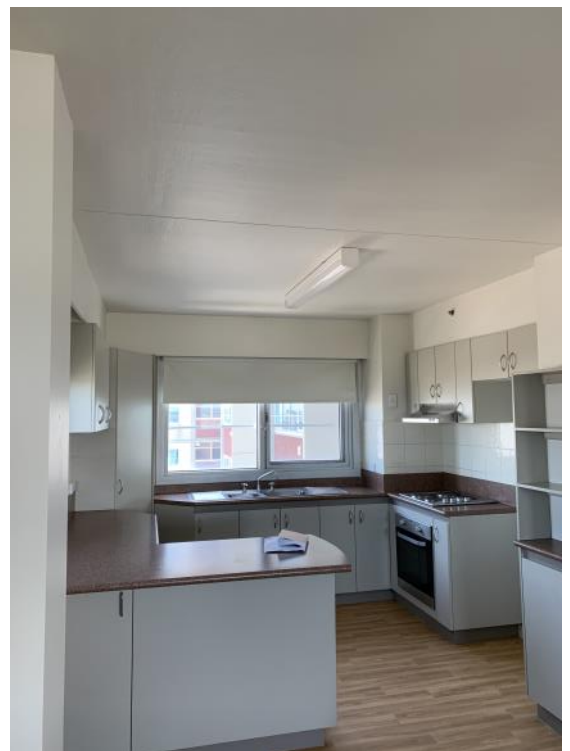
Jey is a 57 year old woman from China. She dropped in to our service in May 2019. During the intake assessment, we communicated through a mandarin interpreter via the VITS services. At the time of the drop-in she was couch-surfing at a friend's house, who had then asked her to leave as she could not keep assisting her any further. Jey was left to the unknown, and had a few weeks to pack up and leave the place. On New Start Allowance, there was no way for Jey to secure a private rental property. Meanwhile, Jay was undergoing chemotherapy at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, as she had been diagnosed with cancer in the throat. Due to her health issue, she couldn't breathe properly as cancer had affected her breathing and the pains were constant and severe.

Home at Last wanted to make sure that Jey could find a safe, affordable and secure home to live, to be able to focus on her cancer treatment and restoring her health, instead of grappling with homelessness.

A priority support application was lodged, requesting a one bedroom unit or apartment, in the Inner Metro Areas, so Jey could be close to Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Her "Homeless with Support Application" was approved in July 2019. In October 2019, Jey received a housing offer from the South Melbourne Office of Housing for a beautiful high rise, 1 bedroom apartment with lift access. The view from Jays apartment is pictured above. She accepted the offer with gratitude. She reported that "I cannot describe how happy I am and how much your service has assisted me, thank you!".

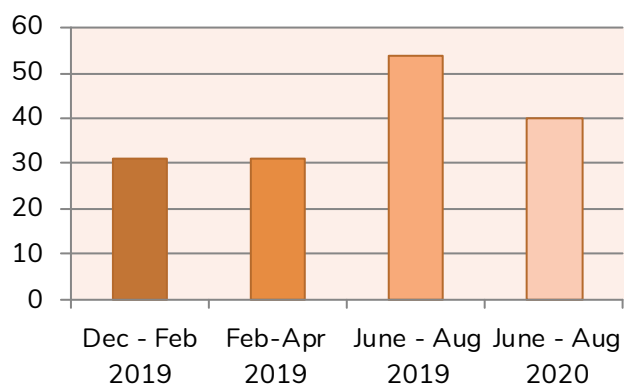
Home at Last provided white goods, two week rent in advance and referral to St Vincent's Welfare assistance for furniture and general support while settling in at her own home safely.

We wish you all the best Jey and hope you get well soon!

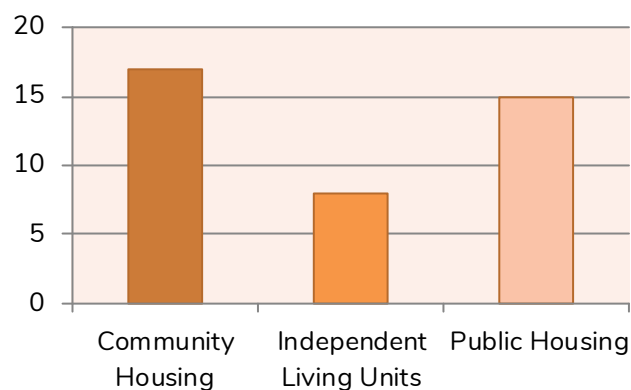


The kitchen and living area in Jey's new home

## People Housed in 3 month periods

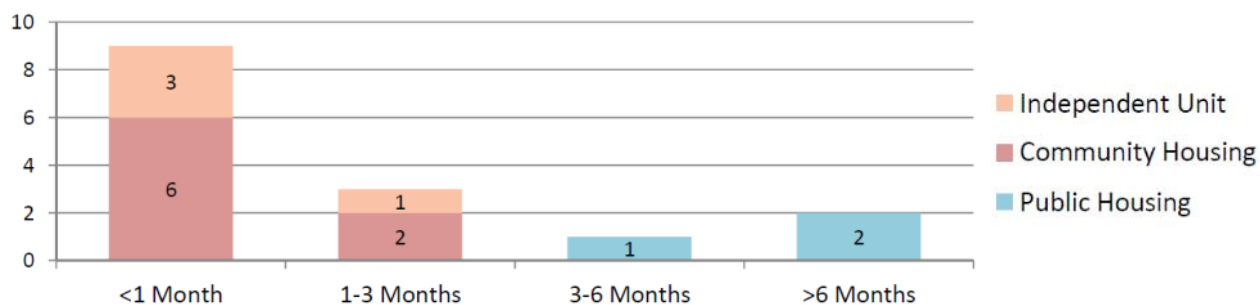


## Types of Housing

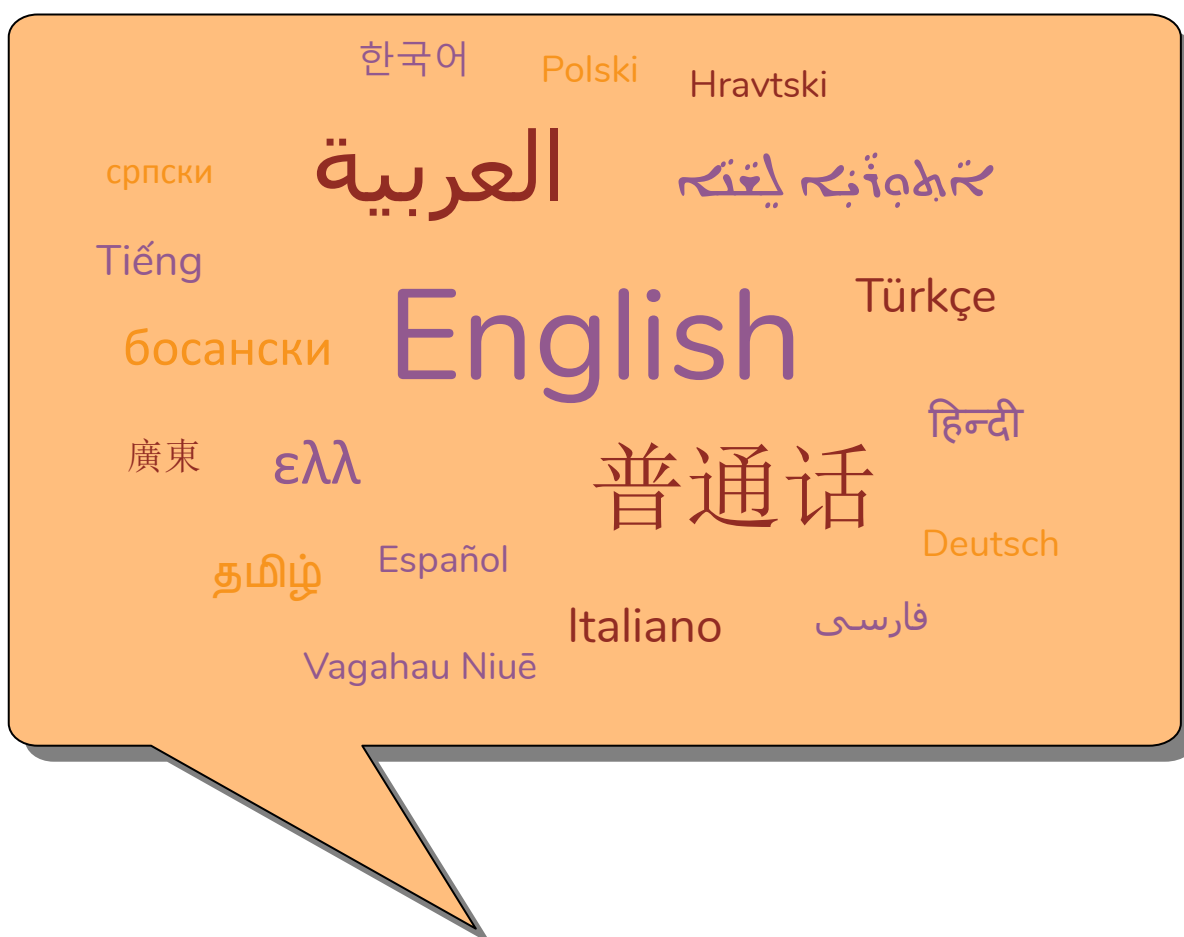


### Time taken from contacting HAAG to being housed

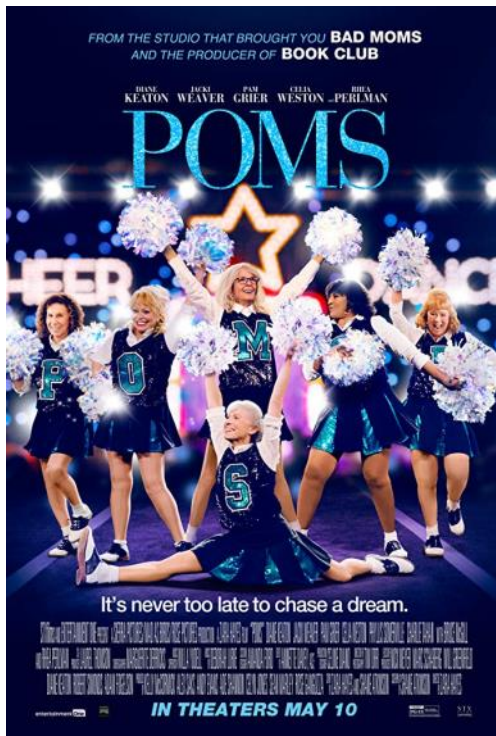
(people housed in October only)



## Languages spoken at home







"The entry form says there's an 18 and over category, and we're over 18!"

Poms (Zara Hayes, 2019) starts with Martha (Diane Keaton) moving from her home of 46 years into a retirement village, fending off insensitive garage sale shoppers and her own anxieties about the transition. Cynical, urbane Martha, in her jeans and khaki, is immediately uncomfortable with the bright, flowing colours and pastels and the relentless optimism that surrounds her. But she has a secret that ultimately helps her to emerge from her grouchy and self-imposed isolation - her dreams of being a cheerleader ended, as a teen, when she had to care for her cancer-stricken mother. Now Martha, desperate not to let anyone

know she's been diagnosed with cancer herself, decides it's time to cheer again.

At first, the cheerleading club is largely a joke designed to annoy her snooty neighbours. But as the club grows, it becomes a source of increasing emotional and social strength for the women who are training together, as they learn to defy the paternalistic younger people who think they know best.

Let me just say here, I love cheerleading movies. Bring It On is one of the greatest films of the 21st century. But I'm A Cheerleader - classic! Poms hits all the beats I want from a movie like this. Hilariously awkward auditions and rehearsals, passionate friendships, mean teenage rivals, and overcoming adversity through choreography and pleated skirts.

There are obviously far too few Hollywood roles for older actresses, so it's great to see the Poms cast shine here. Keaton, Jacki Weaver, Pam Grier and the other club members all do a fantastic job conveying both the joy and stress their characters face when they challenge other people's expectations about what older women can do.

Conveniently, there are no managers in this movie - and most retirement village managers we've met would be far too depressing to include in a movie about terminal cancer. I watched this right after writing a lengthy submission on the lack of effective dispute resolution mechanisms for retirement village residents, and was left wishing a gang of rebellious cheerleaders could tackle all the problems we see in retirement villages. Maybe this can be HAAG's next working group? Recommend this movie if you'd enjoy a light comedy with a serious emotional heart and a triumphant cheer routine at the end. - Shane Mcgrath ★★★★★

## Housing for the Aged Action Group

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ADMIN: 9654 7389

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SURFACE

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AUSTRALIA

[www.olderrenters.org.au](http://www.olderrenters.org.au) 1300 765 178 [haag@olderrenters.org.au](mailto:haag@olderrenters.org.au)



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