



# 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**





Fifteen year old Phyll Williams

Hello Dear Members

If you were one of the many faces who joined in the Zoom General Meeting on May 21st a big thank you to you all. It was an adventure and I can tell you I was a little nervous never having chaired a meeting via computer before but glad to say we covered some interesting topics. The next General Meeting held for the HAAG members isn't due for some months yet so we may hope to be catching up face to face at that one.

I hope you are all managing well in isolation during these difficult times. I have been making many jars of kumquat marmalade and lots of pots of soup. I took to sorting old photos of my parents, my siblings and me, my children and their children, my various pet dogs, dwellings I've lived in and places I enjoyed when travelling around Australia in a Kombi van. I was not pleased to see some of the hairdos I've had in the past!

I feel sorry for other folk who may not have been so pleased or settled to be forced indoors. Equally I am furious to hear there are some older tenants who have been forced to face eviction during this serious Covid-19 time. There are managers and/or owners of rental premises who have issued eviction notices to older people who can't possibly instantly find somewhere else to live that they can afford.

What is this country coming to that the older citizens of the land are overlooked, ignored, forgotten and considered disposable without compassion? We are to be thankful that we belong to HAAG and know the workers there are still doing all they can to support any older person at risk of homelessness. The workers are doing their best, as always, without being in the office and I know they would prefer you give a call to them if any of you feel you need any help at all, with housing or just with needing to hear a friendly voice.

It is good to remember we are all in this together but I am still reeling at the thought of the Prime Minister giving \$688 million dollars for renovations of kitchens and/or bathrooms and not giving anywhere near that amount for much needed social housing in Australia. Shame Mr Morrison Shame.

Sincerely

Phyll Williams,

PS. I've just heard the wonderful news from our Early Intervention worker Gemma White of her pregnancy. We wish her and her family all the best!

## CORONAVIRUS RISK REDUCTION

HAAG is taking steps to limit the potential spread of the coronavirus - and so far, all of our staff, members and clients have stayed safe from the virus. However, we can't be complacent about the risk, especially with further outbreaks around Melbourne.

- **Please call us, or email.** Our office is closed to the public, but all our staff are still working and answering the phones.
- We are moving face-to-face meetings online – this includes general meetings, peer educators, CALD diversity group, RAAG meetings
- We are limiting home visits and doing as many over the phone assessments as possible. If our outreach workers have to visit you, they are practicing social distancing. This is not being rude, but it is to protect your health. If you or your family has recently been overseas, have been asked to quarantine, awaiting test results, or have symptoms we won't be able to visit.
- Please be patient - some things may take longer than usual, but we are doing our best.

## RETIREMENT HOUSING CORONAVIRUS ADVICE

The Retirement Housing Advice Team have been hearing about how COVID19 is impacting people in different forms of retirement housing.

A concerning trend in calls from residents, their families, and their support workers across Victoria is that when the COVID19 stay at home restrictions were announced, many retirement housing managers and owners began to enforce their own lockdown rules that were more severe than those created by the State and Federal governments. The Retirement Housing Advice Team received reports that some retirement housing residents were being told they were not permitted to leave their units to go to their usual doctors or to the supermarket. Other residents found that their in-home support workers that usually assist them with cooking, cleaning, and personal care were being told they were not allowed to enter the retirement village or residential park as per usual. If you or someone you know is in this position you can contact Chris, Shane and Fiona W on [9654 7389](tel:96547389), option 2 OR [retirement@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:retirement@oldertenants.org.au) for information and advice.

RAAG, the Retirement Accommodation Action Group, had its first online meeting on the 26th of June (pictured on front cover). The format worked well to connect the members from across Victoria working towards retirement housing reform to benefit and support older Australians living in retirement accommodation. The July 24th meeting will focus on planning socially distanced actions for the second half of the year. If you are interested in being involved please get in touch with Fiona W on [Fiona.Waters@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:Fiona.Waters@oldertenants.org.au) or on [9654 7389](tel:96547389), option 2.

# CORONAVIRUS SURVEY RESULTS

In late April and early May HAAG conducted a survey of older renters, seeking to better understand their rapidly changing experiences in the face of coronavirus. We heard from 84 people, aged between 50 and 85 years old, mainly in Victoria. An additional 18 people came to HAAG's housing support service with coronavirus related issues, and 9 people identified coronavirus related issues through our aged care service navigator welfare checks.

Paying rent and bills has become more difficult for older people during the pandemic. 13% of people said it has gotten harder to pay the rent, and a further 24% said it was likely to get harder for them.

It affected people's sense of security - 35% said they felt less secure. 18% say it gotten harder for them to get repairs done, and a further 12% were concerned it was likely to get harder if they needed repairs.

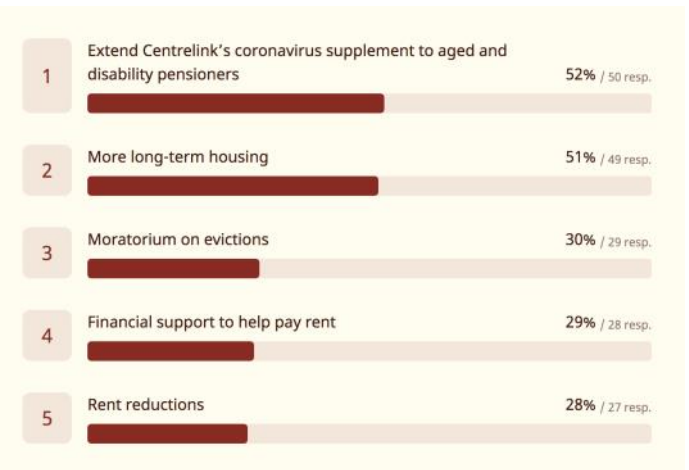
We heard from older people living in rental stress experiencing the impact of coronavirus in a number of different ways. Individually they present a distressing picture of what limited access to secure housing looks like. Collectively they represent a powerful argument for policy intervention.

My situation has remained the same, but I don't know what my longer term housing stability will be as I live in private rental and spend two thirds of my pension on rent. Not sure how long the landlord will keep the property I live in.

I've been housesitting in order to keep a roof over my head but with the cancellation of travel all those opportunities evaporated overnight.

Older renters were overall not impressed with the government giving them 2.4 stars out of 5 for their handling of older people's housing needs during the pandemic.

The survey results also guided HAAG's focus in our campaigning, with these 5 issues being identified as most important for older renters.



You can read the full survey results and the policy note that we developed from the responses at [www.olderrenters.org.au/sites/default/files/covid19-policy-note.pdf](http://www.olderrenters.org.au/sites/default/files/covid19-policy-note.pdf)

I have been on a periodic tenancy for 18 months and could be given notice at any time. I have been looking at other rentals but it's hard to find anything affordable that is not rundown, in need of painting, repairs etc. Also now with the virus there are less places advertised as it seems people are not moving.

I had no work for 4 weeks. I had no money for rent, food and bills. I felt cut off at home with very little support from anyone. It is not only the elderly who live alone but many younger people. They also felt cut off. I felt very sad and friendless.





HAAG is shocked at reports of a “hard lockdown” being enforced by police on public housing tenants in Flemington and North Melbourne as this newsletter is going to print. Residents in nine public housing towers in Flemington and North Melbourne were suddenly told to stay in their homes with police on every floor enforcing the lockdown.

This response was inappropriate and stigmatized low income, mostly migrant Victorians, many of whom have English as a second language. We note that residents in privately owned apartments in the lockdown postcodes have not been subject to the same level of policing.

The community response to prevent a potential outbreak of COVID-19 in these estates must be health-based, and not law and order based. We are concerned about the presence of police on the estates, and although they claim to be there to support a health and not an enforcement response, the history of over-policing and racial profiling cannot be ignored.

HAAG has approximately 50 current and former clients and members currently living under these “hard lockdown” (detention) restrictions, and many more in public and community housing in the surrounding lockdown suburbs. Our housing support team is contacting our clients and members to check in with them, and to assess their support needs.

The picture that is emerging is one of fear and confusion. Many are unaware of what is going

on – residents don’t know that rent has been waived, they have seen no support staff, they don’t know if they are to be tested for COVID-19, and many were unaware of the 1800 helpline number. Those that had tried to call it reported trouble getting through and long wait times. There were concerns about a lack of culturally appropriate food, medicine, and access to information. They are unsure if they can still use the communal laundry, and are concerned about the lack of personal protective equipment and sanitization. The term “detention” has caused fear and confusion.

Residents have been concerned about overcrowding, maintenance and cleaning of communal areas in the public housing estates for some time. We are calling on Government to provide free personal protective equipment and sanitizer for all public and community housing tenants, both in hard lockdown and elsewhere in the lockdown postcodes as a matter of priority. We renew our call for urgent investment into more public housing.

We are also concerned about the lack of culturally appropriate and in-language communication to residents about health and safety. Our clients are confused and fearful, and report that information is being shouted over public address systems with very little in-language and translated written material.

Residents in large public housing estates are vulnerable to a COVID-19 outbreak due to many systemic issues that need to be addressed – low paid casual workers without access to sick leave, living in overcrowded and poorly maintained housing, not receiving public health messages from a trusted source in a language they understand.

We are calling on the Government to urgently address the cleaning and maintenance issues in all public housing estates, particularly the older person’s high rise, and consult with the social and community sector workers to better plan and respond to a potential COVID-19 outbreak.

## NO EVICTIONS IN A PANDEMIC!

The other biggest disappointment in Victoria's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, has been the bungling of the so-called 'eviction moratorium'. In a pandemic where social distancing and self-isolation have been essential to controlling the spread of a deadly virus, it's a no-brainer to say that tenants shouldn't be put out on the street. You can't socially distance in the queue for a homelessness service, or when you have to juggle house inspections and removalists and visits to real estate agents offices. When Daniel Andrews announced an eviction moratorium, he could have easily banned evictions altogether – or perhaps, banned them outside exceptional circumstances, like a tenant endangering others.

Instead, the Andrews Government hung a sign that said 'Eviction Moratorium' over what was really just a different way of evicting people. Landlords can no longer serve notices to vacate—but they can apply to VCAT for termination orders. Is there much of a difference, especially when we know most tenants never attend VCAT hearings?

The new protection this system was supposed to offer was that VCAT would have to decide if an eviction was 'reasonable and proportionate'. But this was just buck-passing—the State Government would refuse to decide who should be evicted in a pandemic and make the Tribunal do it instead. And eviction is the Tribunal's bread and butter, the majority of its daily caseload—they were hardly going to decide their main function was unreasonable and disproportionate overall. Sure enough, when VCAT published their first decision under these new laws, the Deputy President ruled that it was not the Parliament's intention to protect tenants by making eviction a last resort, and made a termination order so the landlord's mother could move in.

With the pandemic continuing (and rising case numbers at time of writing), a real eviction moratorium remains a matter of urgency. Being evicted is always a terrible outcome for individual tenants, but under the threat of Covid-19 it's more than that—it's a major public health issue. The Victorian Government must ensure that nobody is evicted into a pandemic.



Housing and public health are intertwined and inseparable. Melbourne's coronavirus hotspot areas are all in areas with high levels of housing stress. Photo by Марьян Блан



Kobi Maglen was introduced in our Autumn newsletter as our new National Development Worker. Kobi is leading our work on the Ageing on the Edge Homelessness Prevention Project

The Ageing on the Edge Homelessness Prevention Project, funded by Wicking Trust, aims to: gather evidence and build awareness about the growing problem of housing insecurity for older people in Australia; and, build effective service responses, including early intervention and prevention strategies.

Our advocacy aims to build effective service responses to the increasing numbers of older people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, leverage the Ageing on the Edge research. We've just returned our focus to Victoria to publish the report "No place to call home: Older People at Risk of Homelessness in Victoria."

Kobi has been busy meeting project stakeholders from across Australia via zoom online conferencing. There are active networks of people and organisations advocating for the housing needs of low income/asset older people across Australia. For example, in Queensland, the Housing Older Women (HOW) movement, convened by Queensland Shelter, is meeting fortnightly. One of the goals of the HOW Movement is to establish an information and housing support service in Queensland based on the HAAG Home at Last model. In New South Wales and Western Australia, informal coalitions have formed under the banner of Ageing on the Edge to seek government funding for information and housing support services in each state. In South Australia, HAAG has been exploring opportunities to address the needs of low income/assets older people via a government tender for the South Australian Homelessness Prevention Fund.

Via our advocacy efforts and awareness of older people experiences of housing stress and homelessness being compounded by Covid-19, we have had good levels of engagement with Federal and State Ministers and their advisers over this period. These opportunities have enabled us to advocate for the immediate, short, medium and longer terms needs of low income/asset older people in relation to their housing.

As well connecting with stakeholders across Australia, Kobi has been working internally at HAAG to explore our ambitions and potential role in relation to information and housing support services in other states and territories. She has spoken to HAAG Committee of Management members, staff and interstate stakeholders to hear people's perspectives. A proposed model for scaling the Home at Last service will be submitted for approval by the HAAG COM in July.





On the 2nd of July our Executive Officer Fiona York presented evidence to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. She drew out some key points from HAAG's latest report "No Place to Call Home: Older people at risk of Homelessness in Victoria" written by Dr Debbie Faulkner and Kobi Maglen, our national project worker. It analyses Census and Specialist Homelessness Service data to identify homelessness trends for older people in Victoria.

## **There are Increasing numbers of older people at risk of homelessness**

- Older people are the fastest growing group facing homelessness – increasing at a faster rate than any other group.
- Over the last ten years, while youth homelessness has been decreasing, rates of homelessness amongst people over 55 have been increasing.
- This is not just due to the ageing population
- This is particularly an issue for older women

Older women have had the biggest percentage increase in the last five years – we know this is the tip of iceberg because

most older women have not previously interacted with the service system, they adopt a range of coping mechanisms, like as cutting down on food and electricity or medication, and going to a homelessness service is the last resort

## **More older people are in private rental & therefore housing stress**

- The stereotype peddled in the media and in the popular imagination is that older people – boomers – own their own homes and sucked up all the cheap housing at the expense of younger people
- In fact, fewer older people own their own homes than ever before – to be specific, 182,550 older Victorians were renting in 2016. And more and more people are retiring with mortgages.
- There were over 28,000 households headed by someone over 65 in housing stress. that is, paying more than a third of their income in rent, Of these, one third are over the age of 75 years old.
- This is not a problem just confined to metropolitan Melbourne – over 10,000 of households in housing stress were in regional Victoria
- There are very few rentals which are affordable on the Aged pension, and even less so on Newstart, even with the recent COVID-19 boosts

To sum it up - if you are a single person, aged over 55, on a fixed or low income, and living in private rental – then you are at risk of homelessness





The National Alliance of Seniors for Housing is a working group of HAAG and is funded by the Wicking Trust for the Ageing on the Edge Older Persons Homelessness Prevention Project



Through the Ageing on the Edge project, HAAG started working with older people from across the country to achieve housing justice. NASH has been an important working party of the Ageing on the Edge project and HAAG's national advocacy work. We want to make sure that the network is strengthened for the long term.

To ensure the continuation and sustainability of NASH as a national voice for seniors past 2020 we have been working on making NASH a direct working party of HAAG. Presenting the NASH newsletter with The Older Tenants Voice is part of our sustainability strategy for the network, in addition to bringing together in one regular publication our national voices, advocacy and actions.

Additionally, we have taken the opportunity to update the terms of reference for NASH, to reflect its closer links to HAAG. Email or ring Leonie

[leonie.bessant@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:leonie.bessant@oldertenants.org.au) if you would like a copy.

The NASH organizing committee met weekly over April via online video conferencing, with the dual purpose of familiarizing members with the technology, and to give each other support in what has potentially been a very isolating and stressful period. The committee are now back to regular monthly meetings which will continue to be held online, which is unanimously felt to be far preferable to our previous phone conference format.

In this issue we have collected short reflections of the pandemic in; "Stories in the time of Covid-19". We also have a letter from a member in response to our The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) story in the previous edition of NASH News.. We love feedback and your stories so keep them coming in!

# *Electrical dramas and fun and games in a granny flat rental during Covid crisis*

by Wendy Morris



I rent a granny flat without a lease agreement. This is because it is affordable and in the area I wish to live.

A dangerous electrical power surge occurred in my granny flat during the first week of the covid lockdown. It was accompanied by the lights and TV flashing on and off and a large “whip crack” sound near my fridge. The event took out all my white goods except those with surge protectors that came with the appliances. Both my landlord and I had no idea of the laws around Residual Current Devices (RCDs), of which there were none to the granny flat. The cable to the granny flat was underground so my landlord explored with a pick and shovel to see if he could find the problem; eventually having to get a rock crusher to get to the cable from the back of the property to the roadside.

Eventually it was discovered that a large tree had partially fallen during the lifting and stretching the cable up and close to ground level. The electrician discovered a “dodgy job” that had been done years ago on the cabling with numerous suspicious looking junction boxes years ago. Any one of us could have been killed if we had walked over the area when it was wet.

Meanwhile for over a week I had an extension cord from the main house to my granny flat to “keep the lights on” (and charge my mobile); no stove, fridge, TV or heater while the landlord found an electrician to solve the issue. Friends came to the rescue and I stored my food in their fridge, cooked on their stove....keeping social distancing of course!

I had to go shopping for a new fridge, microwave and cooking appliances during the covid lockdown.....a daunting task! I have no insurance as the place has no security windows or dead locks on the door, however my landlord’s insurance will cover some items.

The episode sure was traumatic and the covid lockdown really added to the fun and games...!



## Vulnerability

by Marie

I have never really felt vulnerable and always been able to vocalise my feelings until recently.

I had been in a major Sydney Hospital for surgery after an accident with a hedge trimmer and had a nerve in my finger and whilst being anxious I never once felt that I did not have a say in treatment. I returned home on medication that had a bad reaction so 3 days later I was admitted to the local Hospital and there my whole world started to fall apart and I started to feel unsafe. The doctors in the ER were not listening to what I was telling them and suddenly I was surrounded by doctors in COVID clothing. I tried to explain that I had not been out for 7 weeks but they would not listen and literally held me still while they took a COVID Test & I was then sent to a ward with no explanation as to why they were keeping me there (I have a serious auto immune disease so being in a hospital is a stressful situation).

I was put into a ward and as you can see by the picture it was bleak, freezing cold and I was alone, one nurse came in fully covered and gave me a blanket and I spent a very difficult night. In the morning a nurse arrived to find me crying and shaking with the cold and explained to me that I was in a COVID Ward and had no choice but to wait for results before they could place me somewhere else. Doctors & nurses were standing outside the ward discussing me but did not come into the ward. The male nurse on duty complained to his supervisor that I was unhappy about my treatment and in the end I had to show them my charter of rights for seniors to make them take notice. I had one hand in a plaster cast and the other arm had a canula so the food was delivered, sealed and so I could not eat until the nurse organised someone to help me. One of the young trainee nurses told me that they were on placement from uni and did not know that this was a COVID ward either. At 1.30am the next morning the nurse came to tell me that I was “negative” and that they would move me to a ward with other patients. I was not the only elderly patient that had been trapped in that ward, I know they have to be careful but I can tell you that having my rights taken from me for those few days will stay with me forever! As I left that local hospital I have vowed never to return there as I dread to think what some vulnerable people are going through.





## *Fear for the Family*

For us the main impact of the Corona virus pandemic has been fear for our family. My son's father passed away from cancer recently and my son made the decision to come from Melbourne to spend time with him before he died. This was very stressful for him and also for us because he was not able to observe quarantine – the anxiety that came with that, along with the pain and loss my son had to endure was hard for everyone. This made me think about the pain that so many people in the world are going through, with so much loss and suffering it's hard not to be overwhelmed.

Both our sons lost their jobs overnight and living in the city they have very high rents. Government measures to protect renters have not been clearly articulated leaving tenants to 'come to an agreement with their landlord'. This could work in an ideal world, but where there are big power imbalances such as exist between tenants and landlords under Australia's very weak tenancy law – it has meant that many people will accumulate large debts to their landlords. I think that the pandemic has highlighted the depth of inequality that exists in Australia and many other countries and I hope that some change will come about because of it.

## *Icing on the cake*

I'm sitting here today with a freshly brewed coffee and gluten free cake with lemon icing. Mum often made lemon icing.

I've been crying 😞 a lot today-I don't know why. I'm full of gratitude being healthy and well. That's not the reason. Actually, I've cried a lot during this time as I'm a spacious loving person being outdoors and mobile.

I live in an Independent Living Unit. Last week I'd been emptying a storage unit and my car had been going back and forth over a day parking in a 'short term' area (permitted) A man of shouted at me from 50+ metres away. Accusingly commenting about my car being parked 'most of the day'. Ha! I don't usually communicate with the residents-it's safer that way.

However, on this occasion I did-without looking up responded 'tell someone who cares.' He then called me an F-ing B! To which I responded, 'Get a Life.' No more said as he disappeared. The 'Manager' said she didn't know who I was talking about (and hasn't bothered to investigate.) Confirmed to me how pathetic and powerless she is. 'What's new?' I could write a book about my experiences here.

Gee I'm feeling much better now 'putting pen to paper.' I still laugh through my tears though. I'm thinking 😞😞 of you all especially at this time and keep well and safe.



## *Keeping the Lights on*

Letter to the editor - David Curtain

Thanks for keeping the lights on in the current crisis. The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) story has helped me feel that I am not alone (NASH March edition).

I similarly sought to see whether I was being charged the correct market rent for an NRAS lease, and contacted various organisations, including NSW Tenants advice services & the Department of Social Services (DSS), who did not want to know. I was eventually successful in having the community housing provider conduct a review of the market rent, after 2 ½ years in the lease, where I was refunded a large sum. But I certainly earned the refund, for all the stress, phone calls and research of NRAS schemes I was required to do.

Affordable Housing funding seems a murky world, where many different rules apply. What was frustrating was not having a body to go to that had all the info in one place. I would have expected NSW Family and Community Services (FACS), NSW Fair Trading or the Community Housing Industry of Australia (CHIA) to offer some clear guidance in that regard. Some of the NSW Tenants rights services are quite active in supporting tenants. However, the government funded local one could only say whether it was affordable or not, rather than providing any guidelines/legislation. Even the NSW Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) had difficulty determining whether they heard NRAS matters, despite it being listed on their website as doing so.

I resolved the issue by researching more responsible and informed community housing providers websites, that seemed to have more of a social conscience. I found the NSW FACS Sales & Rent Reports which community housing providers use to set their market rents and found that mine had been incorrectly set when establishing the lease. I'd encourage all social, Affordable & community housing tenants not to accept the bullying of departments. Armed with the facts, you can be successful.

NASH have been collecting stories from older renters around the country since February 2019. You can see the previous editions of their newsletter at [oldertenants.org.au/nash](http://oldertenants.org.au/nash)

Their regular 'letter to the editor' column has also been a regular fixture, so if you'd like to write in to the editor, send an email to [leonie.bessant@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:leonie.bessant@oldertenants.org.au) or write to us at HAAG, 247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000



HAAG is soon to release to the public a report on the housing experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) older people in Victoria.

Despite comprising a considerable portion of both the Ageing and LGBTI populations, there is only a handful of research worldwide regarding housing and LGBTI older people. Our report, which is based on surveys and interviews with 228 LGBTI older people, is one of the first to identify the current housing circumstances and concerns of older LGBTI people.

This research has found that almost 16% of LGBTI older people identified that they are currently at risk of homelessness. In addition to this figure, over 40% indicated that they had previously been at risk of homelessness.

However, many LGBTI older people do not recognise they are at risk or, by definition, experiencing homelessness, and are unaware of support services available. For instance, many older LGBTI renters are struggling to the extent that they are without the basic essentials such as food, heating, and medications to ensure they keep a roof over their head. As one older transgender person interviewed said 'I can only just afford to pay rent, but struggle to buy food when faced with other bills to pay'



Our report found some of the circumstances that place LGBTI older people at risk of homelessness include:

- Lower numbers own their own homes outright, and significant numbers are in private rental, even at retirement age.
- High numbers living in “informal” housing arrangements such as share housing, living with ex-partners or renting from friends
- Significant numbers of older LGBTI people live with disabilities and are in caring roles
- LGBTI elders are 7 times more likely to live alone than the general older population

Despite the high level of risk, LGBTI older people often do not recognise they are at risk or, by definition, experiencing homelessness and 60% of LGBTI older people do not know where to go for help and information about their housing options.

Increased commitment is urgently required to address and prevent housing insecurity and homelessness among older LGBTI people. As such, we hope that the findings can be used to better inform research, policy and best practice and improve sector and policy responses surrounding older LGBTI people and housing.

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



### **Just before the Victorian COVID-19 stage 3 lockdown came into effect on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020....**

On midnight, Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Stage Three restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19, started in Victoria. Victorians were given a clear and simple message: "Stay home to Protect Yourself and the Victorian Health Care System". For homeless people, this order to stay home, was almost impossible to adhere to. Most homeless people already have poor health with underlying conditions; they have very little or no money, and lack access to health services, so they were already in a high-risk group.

Ali, one of our clients was referred to Housing for the Aged Action Group, Home at Last program, by the Ascot Vale Housing Office, for an urgent assessment for Homeless with Support in late December 2019. Following an urgent assessment, he was approved in January 2020, before the outbreak of COVID-19.

Ali has serious health issues. He came to Australia as a refugee in May 2015 from Somalia. Ali was a civil war survivor and endured a disability due to being shot in his leg which left him with a severe walking disability, He ambulates with a walking stick therefore needs a ground floor property or one with lift access.

On arrival, Ali had lived with his son and family in South Australia. He recently came to Melbourne as living with his son was not the best option for him due to

over-crowding in the son's house and growing extended family tensions. Since moving to Melbourne, he had been couch-surfing with friends. However, due to the current public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, his friends were no longer willing to offer him to couch surf in their houses. Ali therefore had nowhere to live. We had approached every social and community housing provider but because Ali was on a Job Seeker payment, no housing provider would consider him.

We approached Moonee Valley Council as they have nomination rights for some properties in Monee Ponds. We strongly advocated for Ali to be nominated for one of their vacant properties as soon as possible due to the seriousness of COVID-19 and its' possible health risks to Ali. Moonee Valley Council immediately acted on our request and nominated Ali for a bed sit property in Monee Ponds. Unfortunately, Ascot Vale housing service declined this nomination as Ali was not 55 years old yet.

On Sunday 29 March, I formally wrote to Area Manager of Ascot Vale Housing Service for their decision to be re-considered the application, upon humanitarian grounds. In my letter, I successfully argued that Ali was not 55 years old yet, but he would turn 55 on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June this year, which was only couple of months away. I informed them that Ali desperately needed an appropriate living environment and support resources to achieve his potential and re-engage again with life. I informed

them how Ali's housing situation was causing him severe anxiety and stress, particularly the worry of not being able to get any affordable and secure housing, during this health pandemic as he feared of becoming ill with the COVID-19.

I informed them that I was prepared to act both as a personal and professional referee for Ali, with the intent of assuring them that he would turn out to be one of their best tenants. I urged them to reconsider their decision and offer Ali one of their available Moonee Ponds bedsits, as soon as they could; as we had very little time left before the full lock down would occur in Melbourne (and elsewhere in Victoria).

On Monday 30th March, we received a phone call from Ascot Vale Housing Service informing us that they did reconsider their decision and decided to offer Ali a public housing property. We completed all the paperwork on the same day before the lock down restrictions began.

Ali had no furniture and little personal belongings. HAL supported Ali with some brokerage and referral to services to assist with furnishing his new home. Ali was the last client I worked with on a face-to-face basis due to COVID-19 pandemic. I have been continuing to assist Ali with his needs over the phone. Ali is a practising Muslim. Every time we talk on the phone, he finishes with a little pray from the Quran, wishing us the best. He said:

"I am very thankful sister that I was

housed before the Ramadan began on 23 April, and at the end of Ramadan with Eid-ak-Fitr celebration, I may not have many people visiting me due to the pandemic, but I will have safe, secure and affordable housing".

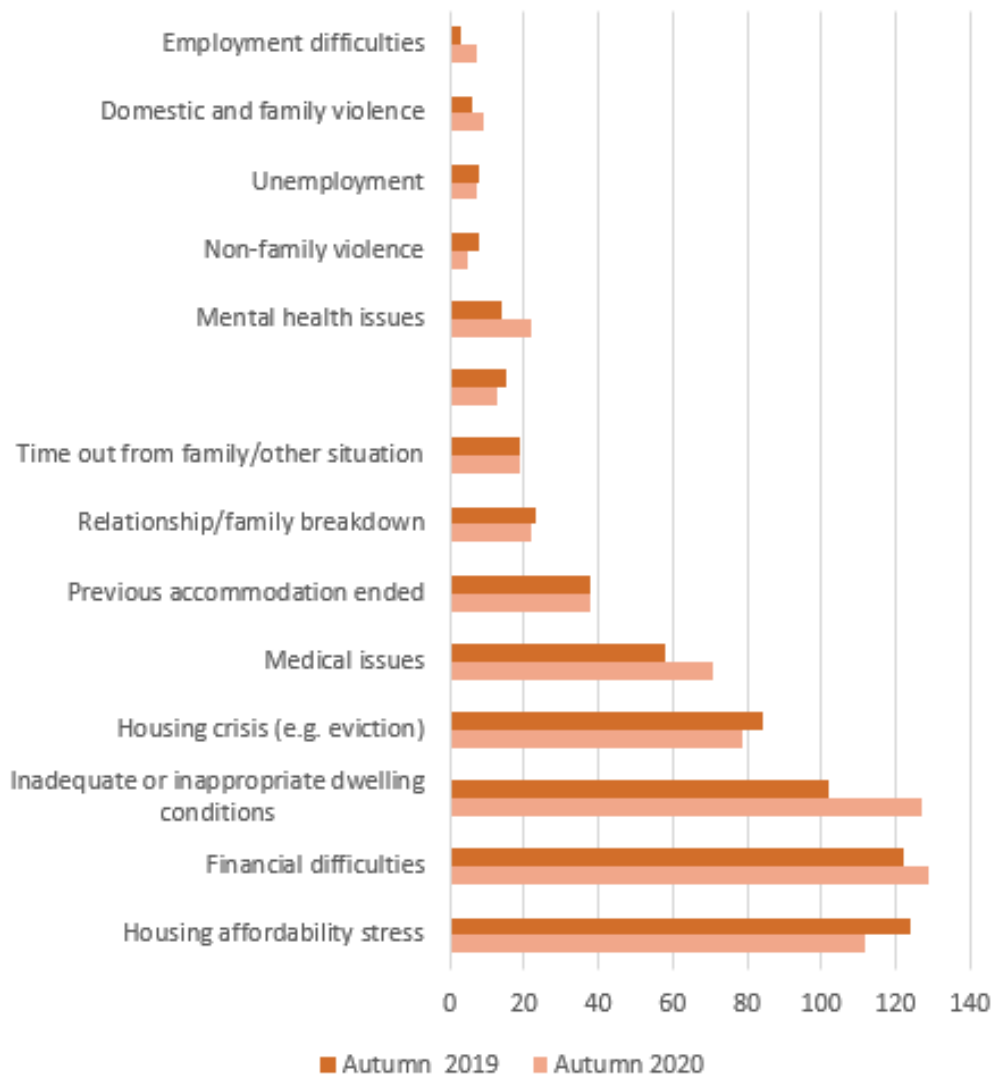
We will remain in contact with Ali throughout this public health pandemic and after it is over we shall link him up with available support services. Hopefully this will not be for too much longer.



Ali in his new home

Given the major changes taking place due to coronavirus - social distancing, loss of employment, and new government supports, we took a look at our data from this time last year to see what's changed.

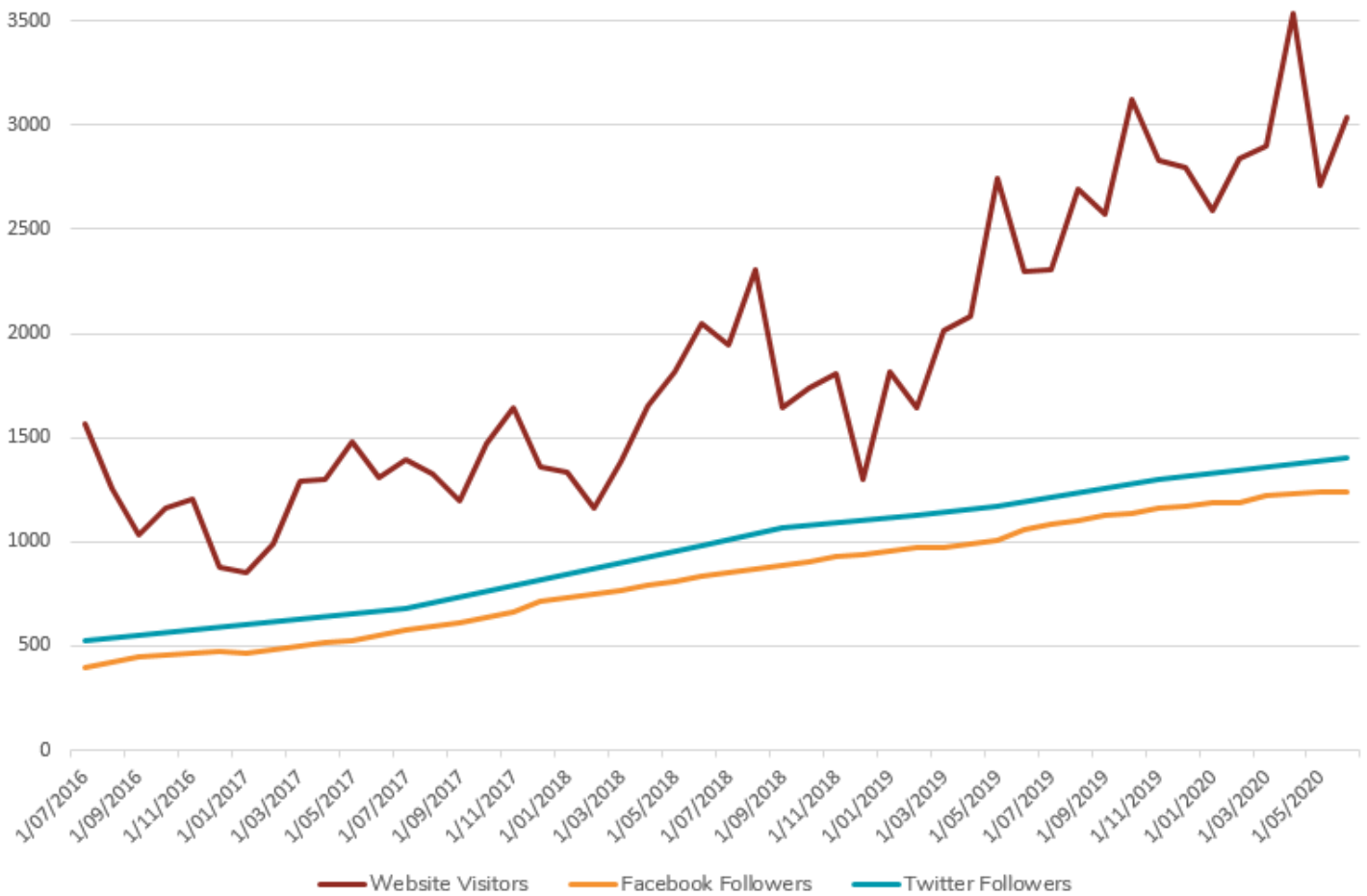
Incredibly, while nobody is 'coming through the doors', our Home at Last service is still seeing the same numbers of people over the phone. And perhaps surprisingly, they are still coming to us with the same issues. Despite the dangers of being evicted during a pandemic, there has been no grace period given to older renters by landlords, and none of the factors that force older people into homelessness have significantly decreased.



Our service continues to work as usual. While we haven't seen a flood of homeless people, the slow and steadily growing trend of older people's homeless has not abated. We are concerned that the governments temporary increase to Newstart Allowance - a saving grace for many renters during the pandemic - could be ended in September, potentially proceeding a flood of older renters forced into homelessness.

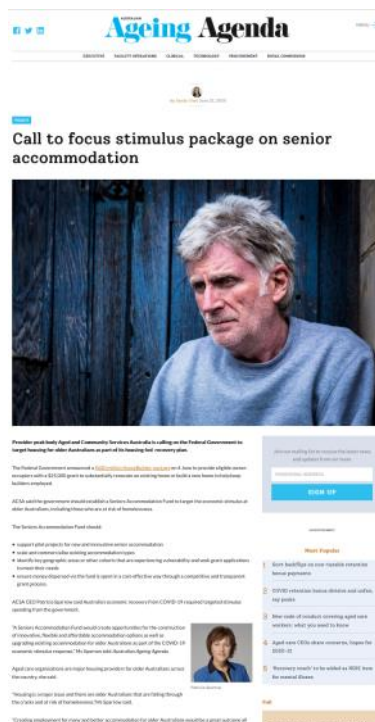


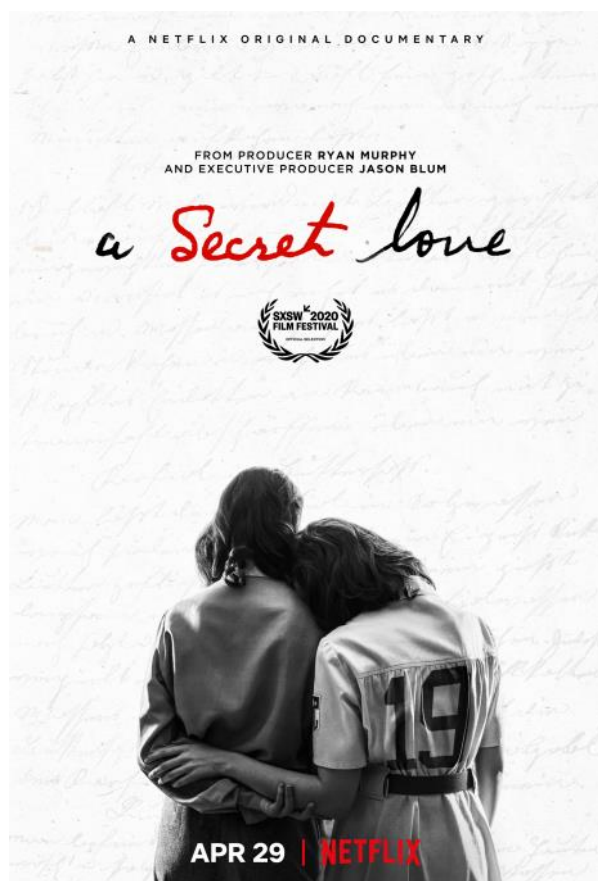
Our online presence continues to grow slowly and steadily over the years. Our website is providing more and more information to people and our social media is spreading the word about our services and campaigns for safe and affordable housing.



We could really use some help to 'breakthrough' and put older peoples housing firmly in the mainstream agenda - if you're on social media join in the conversations happening on our pages, and share the stories with your friends and networks - and let them know they can become a member of HAAG as well!

Also a big thanks to everyone who donated to our radio show Raise the Roof on 3CR 855AM





“I don’t care where we go. As long as we’re together we’ll be happy.”

A Secret Love, Chris Bolan, 2020

Pat Henschel and Terry Donahue met at a hockey rink in Saskathewan, Canada, in 1947. Terry was on a break at the time from playing in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, the wartime alternative to men’s sports that inspired the Geena Davis and Madonna movie, *A League Of Their Own*. *A Secret Love* tells the story of Pat and Terry’s 70-year relationship, told from the point of a momentous change in their present; their declining health means they need a new home, and they struggle to find a place where they can live together happily, comfortably and affordably as out lesbians.

The movie, and Pat and Terry themselves, are endlessly charming: I could watch them flirt and bicker all day. “Everybody loves Terry,” Pat says at one point; “they all put up with me because of Terry.” But I have no doubt viewers will fall in love with both of them.

At times, it’s frustrating that the movie focuses more on their family than the couple themselves—though understandable, as the movie was directed by their great-nephew. Even the title focuses more on the family’s perspective than the incredible love at the heart of the movie.

But whenever we do focus on Pat and Terry, the movie is deeply moving. It is painful to watch them struggle to find something they can afford that will meet their needs. There’s an excruciating scene where a well-meaning, shiny-haired retirement village manager blithely dismisses their concerns about potential homophobia. But these difficult scenes highlight the power and intensity of their lifelong love.

If you don’t mind a good cry, this is a wonderful and moving story that highlights the housing difficulties older LGBTI people face.

A Secret Love is currently streaming on Netflix.

. - Shane Mcgrath ★★★★★

## Housing for the Aged Action Group

Level 1, Ross House 247-251 Flinders Lane,

Melbourne 3000

ADMIN: 9654 7389

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



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