



# older tenants voice

Housing for the Aged Action Groups Quarterly Newsletter Winter 2021



**HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP**  
**FIGHTING FOR HOUSING JUSTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1983**



## CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME

Hello dear members,

On Thursday May 27th we held HAAG's first hybrid general member's meeting. Hybrid meaning 18 participants face to face in the room for the first time in over a year, and another 18 people, mainly members, on Zoom on the huge TV screen in the room. It was so good to see everyone again and to join with you all in putting together some constructive information.

We formed working parties at tables - and on Zoom - to prepare ideas detailed for the attention of our special guest, Gerard Mansour.

As you may know Gerard is the Commissioner for Senior Victorians and Ambassador for Elder Abuse Prevention. He is well known for being an outstanding advocate for senior Victorians - respected, considered and knowledgeable about the issues facing older persons. He was fulsome in his praise of the work everyone on the day put into the write ups on how HAAG members suggest many steps need to be legislated for wellbeing and best life styles for older people. He intends to take the HAAG member's directives along to meetings with various politicians soon.

Photos from the day are included on the front cover and on page 4. This hybrid general meeting was a first ever for HAAG but there was nothing new about another lockdown, which was set for midnight that day. We are all in it together - just as we are all in together to be willing members of HAAG, a unique organisation that especially exists to assist older people at risk of homelessness - to name just one of the major, terrifying situations faced by many older persons nowadays.

After tremendous interest and contacts from other states you will read in this newsletter how HAAG is going national with the strategies and progress produced by Kobi Maglen, HAAG's National Development Worker.

To assist Kobi we now have a resident of NSW with a very useful law background. Dini Liyanarachchi is a young woman with some very interesting experiences in her career of aiding people whose life and/or livelihood is changeable and often at risk. Well done Kobi and welcome Dini.

New names appear at HAAG for the next few months while Shane McGrath, the stalwart worker of the Retirement Housing Advice service goes on long service leave. Fiona Waters from that service is also on study leave finishing her University Social Work studies. You will now meet Tristan and Maleeha. We also said goodbye to Chris due to a family reasons and we will miss him.

Stay well and warm and safe and sane dear members,

Sincerely,

Phyll



We are currently doing a mix of working from home and face-to-face work. We are an “essential service” however the Ross House building is still closed to the public, and we have adjusted our service according to changing government guidelines. See below for more detail:

### Drop ins

Ross House, our office building, is closed until further notice. We are able to make face-to-face appointments with clients in some circumstances. There is an intercom at the street level sliding glass door – scroll through the menu until you find HAAG and then press the button. A phone in the office will ring, and we can let you in. You will need to check in, use hand sanitizer and wear a mask, unless you have an exemption.

### Home at Last Intake and Referral service

Our intake workers are working remotely from home. We are receiving calls and providing over the phone assessments and referral on 1300 765 765 and [intake@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:intake@oldertenants.org.au)

### Home at Last Outreach service

Our outreach workers are limiting face-to-face contact. They are conducting over the phone assessments as much as possible and limiting home visits. Home visits to people who are sick, self-isolating or in quarantine will not be possible. We have negotiated with DFFH and community housing providers on the process for pre-offer interviews, sign ups and property viewings to avoid face-to-face contact where possible.

### Retirement housing service

Our retirement housing workers are providing over the phone advice and advocacy. Please call 9654 7389 option 2 or email [retirement@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:retirement@oldertenants.org.au) for retirement housing advice and our workers advice line.

### Member advocacy

Working groups and General meetings are taking place via Zoom at the moment. This includes the Cultural Diversity reference group, Retirement housing working group, Committee of Management, National Alliance of Seniors for Housing and LGBTI reference group. We are experimenting with “hybrid” meetings where there is some face-to-face and some online participation. We are hoping to deliver the new peer educator training in this way.





In May we were excited to have our first face-to-face meeting of members since February last year, a long 15 months of only meeting via Zoom. As seems to happen a lot now during “COVID normal”, plans had to change last minute due to a sudden announcement on the day of a new snap lockdown in Victoria, which made some members reluctant to come into the city. Despite this, we had 13 members and 5 staff join us at Ross House, and for the first time, we also had an additional 18 people join via zoom – our first “hybrid” meeting – thirty six people in total!

Thanks to some new equipment including camera, microphone and TV screen, the two groups were able to interact and participate together as part of the one meeting. The “zoomies” were sad to have missed out on the delicious lunch, but they all joined in a lively discussion.

Gerard Mansour, Commissioner for Senior Victorians, joined the meeting via Zoom and asked our members a series of questions, to help him find out what is going on for older people at the moment. He praised HAAG’s ongoing advocacy in raising awareness of the needs of older people, and thanked us for inviting him to the meeting. The Commissioner will be collating all the information from these consultations and then reporting back to the Victorian Government to provide advice on how best to support older Victorians.

The questions on “ageing well” we discussed in small groups were:

- Does COVID -19 still have an impact on the lives of senior Victorians? If so, in what ways?
- To what degree are senior Victorians hesitant to re-connect socially?
- Has there been an impact on the level of isolation and loneliness?
- How could senior Victorians be encouraged re-connect socially and in their community?

There were mixed responses from our members – some expressed reluctance to catch public transport, a fear of large gatherings and travel, and concern about the vaccine rollout and complacency with safety precautions. Others said they had modified the way they socialize – smaller family gatherings, checking in on neighbours, using the phone to connect with friends and family. There were positive comments about becoming used to technology, learning new skills and the importance of volunteering.

After a short break, we continued our discussion over lunch. Part of our strategic plan is to “elevate the voices of older people at HAAG” – through our services, advocacy, campaigning. We have been talking to staff and committee and now we are hearing from our members, asking questions similar to the ones in our member survey last year. The questions we discussed in small groups were:

- What are the ways you engage with HAAG and what’s working well for you? What’s not working well, and why?
- What sorts of issues would you like to hear more about, or to get involved with?
- Do you suggestions of new ways HAAG could engage with members?

This discussion was useful for us to make sure that we are connecting well with our members, and people had some great ideas. They mentioned that they enjoyed the working group meetings, the flexibility of meeting via Zoom, the social media like Facebook and Twitter, and the newsletter. Some people don’t read the newsletter online, and enjoy reading a hard copy because it is so colourful and interesting! They mentioned the need for more training for members on using technology and on political advocacy.

We will make sure that these discussions are reflected in our Participation strategy, which is currently being put together by our new worker Lois Knight. This document will reflect all the ways that older people participate in HAAG, from clients receiving a service for us, through to members of the organization and our Committee of Management.

We finished up the meeting with singing happy birthday to our members Pam Young and Jenny Martin, whose birthday was on the day of the meeting, and also to our retirement housing worker Fiona Waters whose birthday is in June. We look forward to see you at the next GM in August

The Victorian Government is developing a 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy to “establish the 10-year vision for social and affordable housing in Victoria”

They developed a discussion paper to seek input on the 10-Year Strategy and wanted to hear from public and community housing residents, the broader community, housing providers, developers, local government, community service providers and investors.

HAAG decided to provide a detailed submission into this discussion paper, which was open for public consultation from February to April 2021. To inform this submission, we held specific consultations with groups of older people to discuss the Ten Year Affordable Housing Strategy discussion paper. These groups were:

- Cultural Diversity Reference Group – a working group of HAAG which meets monthly and whose membership includes bilingual community leaders from our target communities.
- Retirement Accommodation Action Group (RAAG) – a working group of HAAG which meets monthly and whose membership includes residents of retirement housing, such as, ILUs, residential parks and caravan parks.
- The “Missing Middle” – a consultation with older women who are over the asset limit for social housing but who do not have enough savings for any other housing type and are at risk of homelessness.
- LGBTI older people – two consultations, one online and one face to face, for older LGBTI people to tell us about their housing circumstances. This group forms part of our LGBTI housing project.

We also drew on our previous submissions, notably [HAAG’s Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness](#), research and policy briefs.

We made 23 recommendations in our submission, under the headings of pathways, communities, growth and partnerships. Our number one recommendation was to: **Specifically recognise older people’s right to housing and their unique housing needs. Older people and women in particular are the fastest growing cohort of homeless people and urgently require targeted responses across the spectrum of housing policy, services and investment.**

Our submission has some great information from our members, including quotes from our consultations, that really informed what we said to government. It has now become our “go-to” document for lots of other areas of our work.

To read the full submission go to: [oldertenants.org.au/10-year-strategy](https://oldertenants.org.au/10-year-strategy)

Our Cultural Diversity Reference group made an additional submission, focused on the needs of older CALD people. That submission can be read here: [oldertenants.org.au/cald-10-year-strategy](https://oldertenants.org.au/cald-10-year-strategy)

# Our twenty three recommendations towards safe, affordable and secure housing

## Pathways

- Support early intervention via community engagement to reach older people before they hit a housing crisis.
- Expand HAAG's Home at Last service across Victoria, including additional funding to ensure older peoples unique housing needs are catered for and to support Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other vulnerable communities.
- Fund HAAG's retirement housing service to be a central information hub to collate and distribute information about ILU vacancies and eligibility criteria and provide navigation support.
- Support collaboration and referral pathways between the aged care, housing and homeless, family and domestic violence and health care sectors to develop early identification and service integration for older people at risk of homelessness.
- Simplify housing application processes, using plain English and recognising the technological barriers for older people and people from CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other vulnerable communities.
- Provide low/income asset older people with access to housing that is "affordable" according to their means.
- Restore and adequately resource the dedicated Complaints and Appeals Office in order that public tenants can have problems swiftly dealt with when they are beyond the resolution powers of the local housing office.

## Communities

- Increase social and affordable housing options for older people particularly in areas that allow maintenance of social and cultural networks, access to transport, health and other services, employment for those who have not retired, and green space.
- Fund data collection and research to identify the population size and demographics of the "missing middle"; how many Victorians over 55 at risk of homelessness are ineligible for social housing because of savings or assets above the asset limit
- Elevate the voices of public and community housing tenants by funding local or estate-based tenant groups to support community programs and tenant advocacy, without having their funding jeopardised by strong advocacy.

## Growth

- Build more social and affordable housing that meets the needs of older people, including investment in the not-for-profit ILU sector.
- Invest in ILU housing that includes a balance of small private residences and communal space.
- Ensure that all public land currently used for public housing is retained for renewal and expansion of public housing.
- Implement mandatory Inclusionary Zoning across Victoria.
- Reform of residential tenancy laws to include rent control measures and security of tenure.
- Regulate community housing providers management standards so that tenancy selection, rent setting, modifications and transfers align with public housing management standards.
- Develop models of shared equity housing for older people.
- Ensure all new and existing public, social and affordable housing complies with universal design principles, ensuring access for older people and in recognition that they are also likely to live with a disability. Housing should also meet climate change 7-star rating environmental standards.
- Extend the scope of the Royal Commission into Family Violence Recommendation 20 so that the Victorian Government reports annually on the extent of unmet housing demand among people affected by elder abuse, and proposed actions for meeting the continuing housing demand from older people affected by elder abuse.
- Rural and regional allocations of Big Housing Build investment and any future investment in housing must include criteria which prioritises housing in areas of the greatest need, noting that some regions and cohorts of high need have missed out.

## Partnerships

- Improve consultation and engagement with older people at risk of homelessness by working through existing groups like HAAG where participants are already connected and empowered to participate.
- Ensure smaller, specialised community housing providers are provided opportunities to build new social and affordable housing via the Big Housing Build and do not miss out to the larger providers.



An independent 'Review of Social Housing Regulation' was announced in November 2020. This is part of the Victorian Government's \$5.3 billion 'Big Housing Build'.

According to the government website, the review will:

- examine regulatory oversight
- consider how the system can support high-quality resident and community outcomes in public, community, and affordable housing
- ensure strong resident outcomes over the long term
- examine the case for common regulation for all social housing (public and community)
- examine the case for Victoria's participation in the national regulatory scheme

HAAG has been calling for a review of the regulation governing community and public housing. One of the recommendations from our report "Public vs Community Housing: Comparing the Rights and Experiences of older renters in Victoria" is:

Ensure community housing providers are subject to the same benchmarks for tenancy management as public housing, including clear and transparent policies that apply to tenancy selection, rent setting, financial hardship, maintenance, and modifications, with evictions as last resort, and that these benchmarks and policies be publicly available.

This is now one of the things being examined in the review. Overseeing the process is a panel chaired by Professor David Hayward and supported by Dr Heather Holst and Dr David Cousins AM. The panel will report to the Assistant Treasurer and the Minister for Housing in March 2022.

A background and scoping paper has been released and is open for public submissions, due on July 9th. You can find a copy of this paper and make a submission via the Engage Victoria website: [vic.gov.au/review-social-housing-regulation](https://vic.gov.au/review-social-housing-regulation)

The review panel is accepting written submissions, and is also planning to hold roundtable discussions and site visits. HAAG will be making a written submission to this first discussion paper, and welcomes any ideas from members, particularly community and public housing tenants. We will be drawing on the research we conducted last year which you can read on our website: [oldertenants.org.au/public-and-community-housing](https://oldertenants.org.au/public-and-community-housing)

There was news on the housing front in the Victorian State Budget. There is a commitment of \$5.3 billion, Victoria's "Big Housing Build" for social and affordable housing. This includes a promise of 12,000 new homes over four years - 9,300 social housing homes and 2,900 new affordable and low-cost homes. None of this includes new public housing – that is, housing owned and managed by the government.

The Big Housing Build also includes replacing old public housing units – it remains unclear how much will be replaced with public housing and how much will be handed over to the community housing sector.

A quarter of the budget is for affordable and social housing in some areas of regional Victoria and all new homes must meet the 7 star energy efficiency rating. There's a boost to shared equity through the newly formed HomesVic and the Victorian Home Buyers Fund, reducing the size of the deposit needed allowing people to buy earlier than they would otherwise. There is no specific measures for older people, who may still face barriers due to lending laws.

There is significant spending on services that prevent homelessness, focusing on supporting people into the private rental market, people leaving care and vulnerable people with complex needs. Also, spending on early intervention for rough sleepers, rehousing people in hotels after the pandemic and the building of a new Aboriginal refuge in regional Victoria.

Although we welcome the investment into housing by the government, compared with other states, Victoria has low investment in social and affordable housing so we need to catch-up. It's disappointing to see that the focus is moving away from investment in public housing – there needs to be "growth in both" public and community housing.

The 2020 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into homelessness found that older women are a fast-growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness, however the unique housing needs of older people are barely acknowledged in the discussion paper for the 10 Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing or the Big Housing Build. HAAG is concerned that older people experiencing or at risk of homelessness are not identified as a group requiring specialist support, pathways and housing outcomes. HAAG provided strong feedback on the discussion paper to the Strategy and we appreciate the efforts of our reference group members and their brilliant contributions to our general submission and the CALD group submission. We hope to see the policy shift and respond to the housing need of older people in the final draft.

In addition to the Big Housing Build, we welcome the Victorian Government's announcement of a new specialist service for LGBTIQ people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. This responds to what HAAG has been calling for - the need to cater specifically for this extremely vulnerable group and their increased likelihood of experiencing discrimination, violence and homelessness. We are hoping for positive news for this service, and to have an opportunity to ensure the needs of older people are not forgotten.

**When it come to accessing Aged Care services, there are too many questions**

- Where to start?
- What does it all mean?
- What’s the difference between a RAS, ACAT , MAC, HCP, CHSP, NDIS, HACC-PYP
- What support can I get to remain at home?



**Are you feeling confused too?**

Aged care can be complex and overwhelming. In fact, navigating the aged care system is easily one of the most confusing aspect of finding the right support as you age. Knowing what to expect, what services are available and understanding the terminology before you even contact My Aged Care will make all the difference in getting the process right, from the beginning.

**That’s where we come in...**

Our experienced workers and bi-lingual volunteers can support you, your family member or friend with:

- Understanding what’s available
- Walking you through the steps involved and preparing you for what to expect at each stage
- Finding and navigating to solutions that best meet your needs
- Registering with My Aged Care - the starting point for accessing all aged care services.
- Liaising with other service providers to ensure services meet your needs

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 navigator service, call or email [anez.barnes@oldertenants.org.au](mailto:anez.barnes@oldertenants.org.au)

We are very pleased to advise that Dini Liyanarachchi has been appointed Ageing on the Edge Advocacy Lead. Dini is located in Sydney at the Uniting NSW/ACT office when not working at home. Having started work on 3 May, Dini visited Melbourne to meet with the HAAG team. We thrilled to have her on board.

Dini and Kobi also visited Brisbane in May to meet with QShelter and the Housing Older Women (HOW) movement. Discussions between QShelter, the HOW movement and the Queensland government have been positive, and we are lending support based on HAAG’s experience in delivering services and advocating for older people’s housing needs.

Dini presented at the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) in early June. Council members responded positively to the presentation. Kathryn Greiner, MACA Chair, attended the NSW Ageing on the Edge members forum as guest presenter and provided some helpful insights into how to influence governments on the housing needs of older people.

Some of you may recall that last year HAAG hosted an event during Homelessness Week, At Risk: Older women facing homelessness in Australia. At the event, we launched research that identifies an estimated 405,000 women aged 45 and over to be at risk of homelessness in Australia. We are planning a follow-up online event in partnership with the University of Melbourne in July or September: 2021 At Risk #2 Older women facing homelessness in Australia: from awareness to action

The online event will be in two parts:

1. breakout sessions on topics of interest to the 550 people who registered for the event last year including influencing for change, local-scale solutions and the intersection between housing and family and domestic violence.
2. political panel.

Further details will be provided once we confirm our panel members and the timing of the event. We hope you will join us.

The National Alliance of Seniors for Housing (NASH) coordination group has been meeting regularly. The coordination group is trialling an online platform that HAAG has developed to connect people across the country to share stories and housing solutions. We are hoping the platform will offer better functionality than Facebook in grouping and sorting discussion topics. We hope to test the platform more widely before a formal launch.



Dini and Kobi (left) with the HOW movement in Brisbane



Based on research by the Federation of Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) and HAAG, we agreed on the Shepparton/Hume and Goulburn Valley as the target region for our pilot project. Fiona, Christine and Kobi visited Shepparton in late April and we have since had several online meetings. We are hoping to work collaboratively with local stakeholders. So far, we have met with Beyond Housing, the Salvation Army, Rumbalara, GV Health, the Shepparton City

Council, the Lighthouse Project, Wintringham and others. We are also in the process of recruiting two new workers for the project who will hopefully be located locally: a Regional Community Engagement worker and a Regional Housing Support worker. We will be in touch separately with HAAG members located in the region and hope to convene a local members' meeting in the coming months.







Peer educators Jenny and Vanessa

Gemma and Rebecca have been preparing to deliver training to 8 volunteers at HAAG on peer and community education. Training will commence on Friday 25th June and run for 6 weeks until Friday 30th July. Along with teaching the skills required for these volunteer roles, the training will have a media, advocacy and campaigns focus. This will help us to convey HAAG's key messages to media and key decision-makers, such as the need for more public housing and specific service support for older people. Media training will be provided by the Economic Media Centre.

Once trained, peer and community educators will work together to deliver community education. These community education sessions will help raise the profile

of older people's experiences of homelessness, the risk factors and how older people can access support before reaching a crisis point. These volunteer roles therefore actively help HAAG in achieving our vision of a society where older people have access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

We're excited to commence this training and are grateful to the volunteers willing to undertake these roles!

HAAG’s LGBTI community reference group (pictured below meeting on Zoom) is finally up and running thanks to a grant provided by City of Melbourne. The group brings together representatives from the LGBTI community with lived expertise and experience to identify and address barriers and issues relating to accessing housing and homelessness services and maintaining secure and affordable housing in order to improve the ability for older LGBTI people to navigate the housing/homelessness system.

At its core, this group offers an opportunity for people from the same community to connect over housing issues that are unique to their lived experience. As one group member pointed out “we want to ensure that the voices of older LGBTI people are heard in the housing space”.

As there are currently no programs, services or projects for LGBTI older people in regards to housing stress and homelessness in Australia, the group’s immediate focus is to co-develop and deliver LGBTI appropriate community education material throughout Victoria.

Following a similar format to projects HAAG has completed with CALD communities.

These sessions and resources will:

- Inform LGBTI older people of their housing options and paths to access a safe, affordable and long-term home.
- Highlight the warning signs that may lead to homelessness and give practical tips on how to recognise these signs, well before a crisis
- Prevent older LGBTI people from becoming homeless following an unexpected life event e.g. relationship breakdown.
- Link LGBTI older people into HAAG for support.
- Ensure early referrals of LGBTI older people at risk of homelessness, so they can avoid a crisis.





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. 1 in 5 Home at Last clients request accessibility features in their home, when applying for Public and Community Housing:

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

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 and promotes health, well-being and independence.

HAAG has been advocating for universal housing design principles to be included in building standards for many years. Last year we made a submission to the Australian Construction Code's regulatory impact statement. We joined the Building Better Homes coalition, along with a large number of organisations, to lobby the building ministers across the country to include minimum accessibility standards in the National Construction Code.

On 30 April, we were excited to learn that the building ministers listened, and made the landmark decision to improve housing accessibility for decades to come. From

September 2022, new homes in Australia will include seven accessible design features in the Livable Housing Design Guidelines (LHDG) Silver standard:

- A safe continuous and step free path of travel from the street entrance and / or parking area to a dwelling entrance that is level.
- At least one, level (step-free) entrance into the dwelling.
- Internal doors and corridors that facilitate comfortable and unimpeded movement between spaces.
- A toilet on the ground (or entry) level that provides easy access.
- A bathroom that contains a hobless shower recess.
- Reinforced walls around the toilet, shower and bath to support the safe installation of grab rails at a later date.
- Stairways designed to reduce the likelihood of injury and also enable future adaptation.

This is a great outcome, and the result of years of grass roots campaigning by advocacy organisations. We will continue to work towards a Gold standard in the National Construction Code and the retrofitting of existing public and community housing to meet universal housing design standards.



HAAG is a registered Charity with the charitable purpose of advancing social and public welfare. This status as a charity allows us to receive tax deductible donations and grants from philanthropists. Many of our innovative projects would not be possible without this.

Under the existing rules that govern charities, we are prohibited from committing serious (indictable) offences. There is new legislation being proposed by the Australian Government Treasury that will change the regulation requirements. The proposed changes will expand the reasons a charity can be deregistered, by including summary offences like trespass, vandalism, or obstructing a road. Not only could we face deregistration for committing these offences, but we would also need to take reasonable steps to ensure our resources don't promote or support unlawful conduct.

The proposed changes cover not only our organization, but all of our staff, volunteers and Committee, including our email lists, our website and any private social media accounts.

This could mean that we could be deregistered for promoting or attending a lawful protest rally, even as individuals, even if no convictions or arrests take place.

The proposed changes are part of the Morrison Government's crackdown on "activist organisations masquerading as charities", even though the head of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission says that very few charities break the law in an activist context.

The Charity sector has come out strongly against the proposed changes, which may be tabled in Parliament very soon. HAAG has signed on to an Open Letter to the PM and we suggest contacting your local Federal MP to express your concerns.

### What you can say:

Start by telling the story of the incredibly important work we do, and the impact this proposed regulation will have.

- These regulations should not proceed in any form. These regulations cannot be improved by amendment.
- These regulations will place an enormous administrative burden on already stretched charities in the midst of a pandemic. We may need to get legal advice on a huge number of summary offences across each State, Territory and federally.
- These regulations undermine our ability to advocate on our issues
- These regulations unfairly target charities and impose regulations that would be unthinkable for businesses.
- Charities should not be deregistered for committing any offence - unless that offence demonstrates the charity's purpose is unlawful. Otherwise, the laws are disproportionate and out of step with the Act.



Sadly Chris Kadiri has left the Retirement Housing team after 3 years

Welcome on board Dini Liyanarachchi - our first ever interstate worker, joining the National Project from Sydney!!



Tristan Dang is stepping in to the gap left by Chris as one of our new Retirement Housing Advice workers



And Maleeha Saeed, LLB, BA, Grad Dip, is a commercial lawyer and is stepping up to fill in for Shane who's on long service leave, and Fiona Waters who's finishing her social work studies.



## Another case solved:

Our retirement housing team are like the Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson of social work, always tracking down the many issues to get to the best solution.

Sue presented to our service with various different problems. She had a medical issue which was causing her to be in financial distress. Her car had recently been stolen and burnt and was also fighting with her insurance company to pay her out the cost of her car. She was also behind on her rental payments as she had to rent various bits of equipment such as medical devices and scooters to get around.

There were three issues she needed our support in, she wanted us to assist with getting the drainage issue resolved as this was impeding her scooter mobility/ causing tiles to be wet, the hedge be removed as it was derelict and messy, and she needed more time to pay her rent.

An Advocate from HAAG got involved and looked at the contract. In the contract terms

it was clear that the resident would need to pay to have these issues resolved as the issues were on her property and not common areas. There were also no provisions that necessitated that the housing provider should be lenient with accepting rent payments.

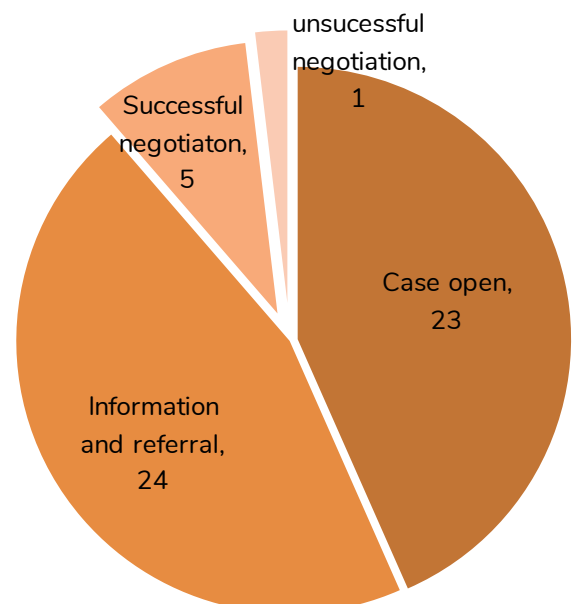
From a negotiation standpoint, HAAG was at a disadvantage as there was no reason for the housing provider to be generous. The advocate petitioned the housing provider to do better in our client's current situation, we highlighted the safety concerns and reminded the housing provider of their core values.

This led to the housing provider committing to repairing the front yard and the drainage issue. The housing provider eventually came back to us and agreed to provide the resident with a payment arrangement whereby the resident was to pay their rent in two instalments monthly.

Our client is very happy with the support we have been able to provide and this is the best outcome we could have hoped to achieve.

## Retirement Housing Advice Service Data, Jan - March 2021

This chart represents the many cases that the team have been dealing with. Many require ongoing, longer term supports. Often, we are only able to provide information, or referral to other organisations. For the most part, when it comes to negotiations, most are successful as in the case of Sue, however with weak regulations, we are occasionally unable to negotiate a successful solution.



EMMA, 53 years old, moved to Victoria after being assaulted in Townsville, a city on the north-eastern coast of Queensland. She was sharing accommodation but after the assault she decided to move to the Barwon Region where she is originally from.

The assault impacted her life, and Emma developed fears to find new accommodation. She believed at that time, that moving back to Barwon could help her to recover from all this emotional impact from the incident she experienced.

Once she was in Barwon, Emma sought support and dropped into the Office of Housing in Geelong. A worker from Geelong Office of Housing advised her to contact the Home at Last program from Housing for the Aged Action Group for long term housing support and Salvos for temporary accommodation.

Salvos supported Emma and provided her with motel accommodation for almost 3 weeks. Emma started a race trying to find accommodation. She made a list of real estate agencies in the area and started to contact them directly one by one, but, the options for her were minimal. Emma is on Disability Support Pension and she gets no more than \$1,100 every fortnight, she needs to pay for medicines and other extra expenses. The cost of properties for one bedroom was at \$350 a week or more expensive and the competition to get access to lower cost properties (not more than three) was very high. She was never successful with her applications for a private rental property.

Sharing accommodation was not an option for her anymore due to the traumatic experi-

ence she had in Queensland and her only hope was social housing.

Emma contacted the Home at Last program, and she was referred to the Barwon Outreach worker. The worker visited Emma at the motel and an application for social housing was completed using the Victorian Housing Register. Emma was approved for priority housing - Homeless with Support Category.

When the application was approved Emma was sleeping in the car. Unfortunately, Salvos could not provide her with more motel accommodation due to lack of funding, and there was no transitional housing available. Emma was feeling scared, frustrated, and her level of anxiety was very high as she did not know what else to do.

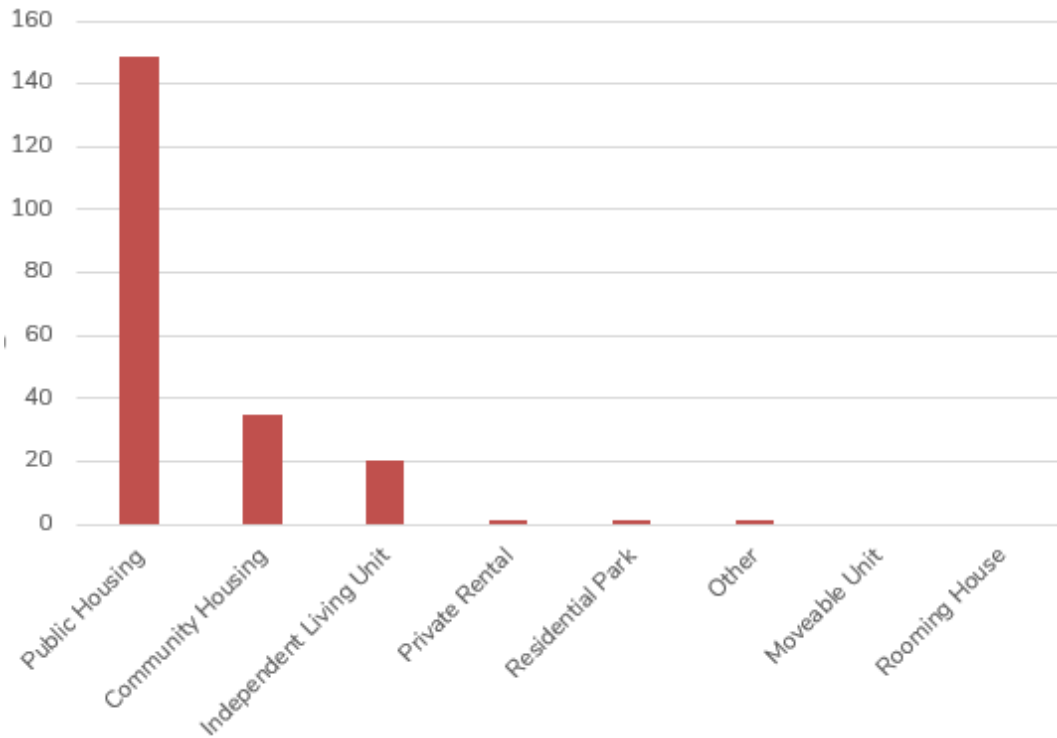
The Outreach worker from HAL advocated on her behalf with the Office of Housing and a property became available for her. It was also an advantage that Emma was very flexible in terms of areas and she was willing to accept any property as she was in need.

The outreach worker and Emma inspected the property and she accepted the offer. Emma was assisted by the outreach worker with the sign up and settlement process. Home at Last provided her with whitegoods and a bed. Her words at that moment were:

“OH MY GOD IT IS LIKE A DREAM. It is still unbelievable to me that I have a FOREVER HOME with brand new whitegoods and a bed. I cannot thank you enough”.

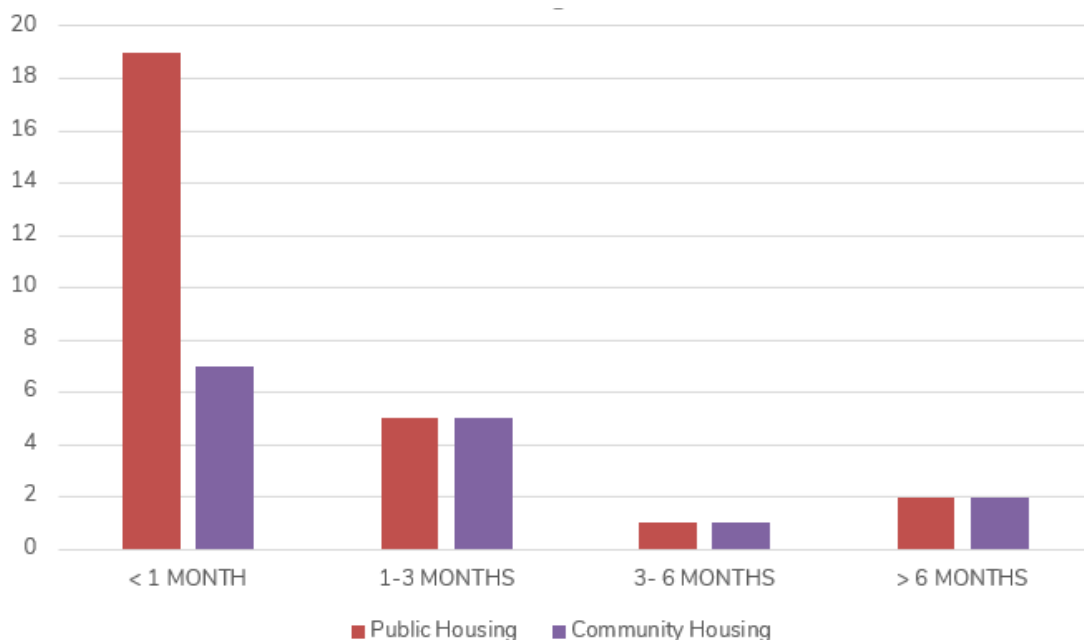
## Types of housing that clients move in to

The majority of people HAAG supports to get housing move in to Public Housing



## Waiting times by housing type

HAAG is more often able to get quick housing outcomes for people in Public Housing than in Community Housing



Its June, the time of year when we ask you for money to fund our wonderful community radio station 3CR!

Not only is 3CR the ONLY media platform which gives older tenants a regular voice on our radio show and podcast Raise the Roof, its also a unique and beloved place to hear:

- Culturally diverse, and especially refugee voices
- Voices of people with disabilities
- Aboriginal activists
- Environmental radicals
- Squatters and homeless people
- Incarcerated people
- Old timey music
- All about protests

3CR is a hotbed of radical activism, not just a radio station but a whole community of people who give a voice to radical ideas like 'older people should have safe affordable housing'.

So please listen in to our fortnightly show on 855am

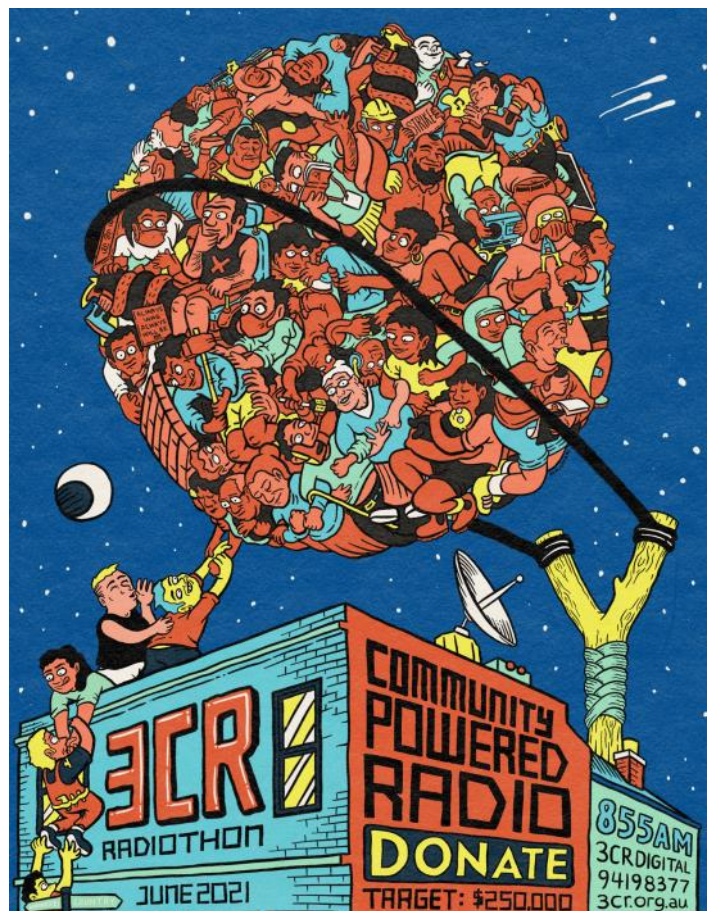
Tune in to our podcast at

[3CR.org.au/haag](https://3CR.org.au/haag)

Search Housing for the Aged Action Group wherever you get your podcasts,

And donate to keep the show alive at

[3CR.org.au/donate](https://3CR.org.au/donate)



## Letters to the Editor

The message I want to get across – my mantra for the last 25 years that I've been with HAAG – Greedy Grasping Landlords

Its still going on in the older womens community – there is the way the media portray older women. There is always the feeling that that they are not quite with it!

Older women like myself get confused with

the ever increasing complexity of the systems, that I feel will eventually bring us to our knees.

I remain yours faithfully,

A long term HAAG member.

Our regular movie reviewer Shane has had the unenviable task of finding movies to recommend on the subject of older people, housing, or homelessness. Its a tragically overlooked topic, and so he's had to make some questionable choices - reviewing a cheerleading movie, a sitcom, a kids cartoon, and even a horror movie. But as soon as Shane had gone on long service leave, a movie hit the big screens that takes the topic head on.

Nomadland is a movie that challenges many Hollywood traditions. There are no big name actors, in fact most of the actors are non professional, real life 'nomads'. It doesn't glamourise their stories, with superheroes, plot-twists, or period costumes. And most of all, it focusses its attention on a single, older woman, who is homeless and on the road after her husband dies and their mining town is shut down. It is so incredibly rare to see a movie focussed on an everyday older woman, that you might think its because such an 'unglamorous' topic just doesn't sell movie tickets, and like in our society, older women are best left politely overlooked. But Nomadland has exploded that myth, becoming a box-office hit and going on to win the Oscars for Best Picture, Best Actress, and Best Director.

Fern (Frances McDormand) lives in her van. She's not your average 'grey nomad' as she's very reluctant to leave the town where she's from. But she's not unlike many of this generation who are on the road without a place to go home to. Also, like so many older women, she doesn't see herself as homeless, or needing the support of friends, stating "I'm not homeless, I'm just houseless, its not the same thing right?"

She does meet a community of people who love their life 'on the road'. She meets and connects with other older people who have left their homes and are in the American desert connecting with nature. She connects with younger itinerants, who are closer to the American tradition of Jack Kerouac's 'On the Road'. But this movie doesn't show this lifestyle as a romantic ideal, for older people having to deal with gruelling seasonal factory work, cold, sickness, and poverty and grief.

Its not in any way an idealised portrait of modern America. But it stops just short of making a political point about the society that has pushed its elders to the fringes like this, has mined towns until there is nothing left, and left the natural landscape degraded. At her sister's family barbecue June is angry at her real estate mogul in-laws, but stops short of making it clear that her lifestyle is not a 'choice' but a response to poverty. Instead, the American seasons and movement of nature becomes a metaphor for their nomadic, insecure life of seasonal work on the road.

Its really wonderful to see older people's lives presented on the big screen in such an honest way, and Frances McDormand certainly deserves the Oscar for her performance. It leaves me feeling that older people, and especially HAAG members, have so many movie-worthy stories to tell.

★★★★★ - Reuben





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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



HAAG staff got together to play minigolf during a rare break from COVID restrictions. Congratulations Nese on winning the competition!

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