



older
tenants
voice



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP
DECEMBER 2017 | SUMMER EDITION

SEASONS GREETINGS!



Merry Christmas to all our valued members and friends.
Thank you for your support over 2017.
We hope everyone has a lovely festive season with family and friends.

Our office will be closed from 1pm Friday 22nd December 2017
and re-open on Tuesday 2nd January 2018

For Crisis Support during this period, please call:
Opening Doors- 1800 825 955 – 24 hours
For Family Violence Response please call:
Safe Steps - 1800 015 188 – 24 hours

HANDS OFF PUBLIC HOUSING

The 'Hands off Public Housing' campaign is a campaign run by a coalition of organisations including Friends of Public Housing, Fair Go For Pensioners, and the Unitarian Church. HAAG are involved in this campaign and has begun attending regular meetings with this group.

We have mailed out to all members an information pack with our concerns about the public housing re-development program as well as some tips on how to contact your local MP about the issue. Please contact us if you haven't received anything.

We have been very proud to see HAAG members making submissions to the Inquiry into the Public Housing Re-Development Program which closed in early November. The hearings will begin in December and anyone who made a submission will be given the opportunity to speak. You can also attend the hearings if you are interested. More information can be found here:

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lsc/inquiries/article/3846> or you can call HAAG for more details.

HAAG also made a submission to the Inquiry which can be found here:

<https://www.older tenants.org.au/publications/submission-inquiry-public-housing-renewal-program>

We hope that any work done on the re-development sites is halted until the inquiry is over.

If you live at one of the estates affected you can call your local Community Legal Centre for advice (we recommend you do this before signing anything). The affected sites are the low-rise estates at;

- Northcote
- Brunswick West
- Heidelberg West
- North Melbourne
- Clifton Hill, Flemington
- Prahran
- Preston

Feel free to call HAAG and speak to
Fiona, April, Gemma or Crystal for
further information 03 9654 7389



CHAIRPERSONS WELCOME

The new Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) Committee of Management (COM) has been elected, inducted and already really busy with COM and subcommittee meetings.

You will read further into this newsletter of some of the marvelous achievements of the workers at HAAG and the amazing number of older people who have been housed this year in secure and affordable dwellings. In these times of housing stress and crisis it is incredible to be able to find solutions for so many older people. I cannot congratulate the workers of HAAG enough.

HAAG is growing to be a well versed service provider as well as a community based organisation. We have just received federal government funding to expand into the Barwon region, due to April's excellent efforts. Gemma and Fiona completed a year of outstanding work with the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) clients resulting in, for one example, information brochures in 13 new languages. The Communication team of HAAG - Crystal, Gemma and Reuben- have continued to do what they do best, which is cultivate and communicate the many stories from clients, members and staff to the state, this nation and even the rest of the world via social media. HAAG reportage covers everything that is connected with aged persons and housing and I congratulate the team for their continual superb output.

On December 29th at the National Housing Conference in Sydney Jeff Fiedler launched the National Ageing on the Edge Forum, along with Dr Deb Faulkner of South Australia's University. The forum was a well attended success with an audience of



140 people. WELL DONE JEFF!

I know this initiative has been a goal of Jeff's for many years and now it's happened. This unique organisation has now become a national identity, said to be soon copied in all other states. The national media outlets interviewed Jeff about the issue of older persons at risk of homelessness, raising awareness of the issue on a national scale.

A few new arrivals to welcome; Christopher Kadira will be joining the Retirement Housing Advice Service, Emily Connelly will join Housing Support on Intake sharing the role with Paola Posso who returns to us after a year or so away. Also joining the team is a very handsome little chap, baby Asher- Congratulations Naomi on the birth of your first baby!

Finally, please consider joining our working groups to help HAAG and our affiliate organisations campaign for justice in all forms of housing for older people.

Do have a Happy Christmas and a Festive New Year everyone. My wish for 2018 is for clarity from those in charge about Public Housing, and Retirement Housing (inc. residential caravan living) and finally seeing fair rulings about them all.

-Phyll Williams - Chairperson of HAAG

MORE NEW FACES TO INTRODUCE

In November we welcomed Paola Posso back to her Intake position in the housing support team. She will be sharing this role with new worker Emily Connelly, who introduces herself below. Welcome ladies!

I recently completed her Masters of Social Work at the University of Melbourne. I came to this through having a passion for social justice and feminist activism as developed through my undergraduate studies in Sociology and Gender Studies. I decided that I wanted to put theory into practice and Social Work felt like the best fit. I have also done volunteer and community work at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Women's Empowerment Program, SlutWalk Melbourne and Girls On Film Festival. I have completed student placements at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Crisis Centre where I further developed my interests. I strongly believe that everyone has a right to safe, secure and affordable housing and am excited to have the opportunity to work towards this at Housing for the Aged Action Group in the Home at Last Intake team.

We will also be welcoming to HAAG, Chris Kadira. At the time of printing this newsletter Chris had not commenced work but on 13/12/17 Chris will be joining Shane and Jess in our Retirement Housing Advice Service. Watch out for next edition for Chris's full introduction.

WELCOME BABY ASHER!

HAAG Intake worker Naomi and her husband Evan welcomed thier first child to the world on 24th November. A baby boy, Asher Gainsford. We are very excited to have another little boy on the HAAG-babes team and wish the happy little family all the best during their time at home together, and in all the years of joy to come.



MORE FUNDING FOR VITAL SERVICE

On October 23rd HAAG welcomed some of the new regional ACH workers. Along with five other organisations HAAG has received increased funding to provide much needed ACH support to people living in regional Victoria. HAAG held an orientation day for our new colleagues and we welcome them to the program and the Victorian ACH workers network.



PHOTO: New ACH workers during the orientation session at HAAG on 23rd October 2017. L TO R: Kyle Maloney, Gayle Reeve, Peter Cougleton, Rose Marsh, Liz Hutton, Vicki New

UPDATE ON SERVICE REVIEW

In July this year, the Department of Health and Human Services engaged two consultants to undertake a service review of HAAG and our Home at Last service, and a report was released in August. In September, our Committee of Management responded to the report, however, the Department has stuck to the action plan that was recommended by the consultants.

This action plan is something that we are now working on with the Department. The Committee of Management is expected to take on a greater governance role over the organisation, and is meeting with DHHS every month to discuss progress. There is a high level “governance group” within DHHS who are overseeing the process, and DHHS local engagement officers are meeting with our co-managers once a fortnight to report on progress against the action plan. These fortnightly meetings have been positive.

The main areas in the action plan are around strengthening governance, financial controls and written documentation of policy and procedure, working towards accreditation. The biggest concern for staff and Committee is the DHHS-proposed organisational restructure. The Committee is keen to work with staff and managers through this time of change, and is working on keeping lines of communication open with participation from everyone at HAAG.

Both workers and Committee are under a lot of pressure during this service review. With the growth of the service, change is inevitable, however, most of the work we do on a day-to-day level won't change – we will still be working towards housing justice for older people and maintaining the HAAG values of inclusiveness, commitment, respect, integrity, solidarity and equity. We truly appreciate the support that members have been giving us, and we will keep you updated as things progress.

CALD PROJECT

HAAG's latest project targeting information to people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds is now well underway with bi-lingual workers trained and ready to deliver information about Home at Last to their communities. The aims of this year's project are to:

- Provide information about Home at Last to isolated people from CALD backgrounds
- Link isolated people into seniors groups
- Link isolated people into Home at Last and Seniors Rights Victoria
- Assist people who have been helped by Home at Last to become HAAG members
- Assist people from CALD backgrounds to become HAAG members

The following language groups are involved in the project;

- Indian- Hindi Speaking
- Indian- Punjabi Speaking
- Urdu Speaking
- Serbian
- Bosnian
- Croatian
- Arabic Speaking/ Assyrian Chaldean
- Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese speaking)
- Dari Speaking

The following talks have been delivered:

AUDIENCE / PARTICIPANTS

Serbian Pension Club Fitzroy/ 70
Preston Multiethnic Slavic Seniors Group/ 12
Croatian and Serbian Pensioners Group/ 13
Afghani Women's' Group Dandenong/ 40
Werribee New Balkan Seniors Group/ 9
Assyrian Womens' Senior Group/ 20



WELCOME TO OUR NEW COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT



Phyll Williams is a retired university lecturer who has been a member for 7 years. Living in an Independent Living Unit (ILU), Phyll brings her lived experience of older persons housing needs to HAAG. Phyll is looking forward to providing stability and consistency to the organisation.



Elias Tsigaras has worked in the community sector for 25 years overseeing services to migrants and refugees across metro Melbourne. He is committed to ensuring that migrants and refugees have a voice. As the deputy director of the MiCare Elias brings management and governance skills and experience to the Committee.



Peter Sibly has worked the majority of his life in the not for profit sector and is the General Manager of the United Housing Co-operative in Yarraville which manages 102 long term social housing properties. Peter brings management, finance and governance experience to the Committee.



Royal Abbott is a retired journalist of 30 years. For the last two years he has been involved with Banyule Community Health as a volunteer and a committee worker, where he has undergone a rapid immersion course in governance and accreditation. Royal has been a volunteer at HAAG since 2017.



Ena Ahern is a passionate community volunteer who has a Masters of Social Work from Melbourne University. Ena worked with HAAG as the Assistance with Care and Housing Intake worker until 2012. She brings experience and knowledge of social work standards to the Management Committee and is committed to supporting HAAG staff.



Vicki Gutsjahr has a long history of participating in community movements and serving on committees. She began her career as a teacher before teaching English as a second language and migrant education classes. In 2015-16 Vicki served as HAAG's Chair.



Sue Leigh is a retired community worker and has previously served on the HAAG Committee of Management. She has a strong commitment to social justice and strongly supports the aim of HAAG to campaign for the right of older people to safe, secure and affordable housing.



Sue Marino is the daughter of one of the founding members of HAAG, Molly Hadfield OAM. Sue has recently retired after 35 years as the Business Manager at the North Fitzroy Primary School.



Maree Norris has been a member of HAAG since 1999 and has served on the Committee of Management a number of times. She looks forward to returning to the management committee.



ChenSu Ooi has worked in the community sector for ten years. Su is committed to social justice and working with people who are disadvantaged, especially ethnic seniors. Su now works at Ernst & Young as a consultant in the Economics, Regulation and Policy group and is keen to lend her professional skills to HAAG's governance.



Victor Sekulov is a Finance Manager with over thirty years experience obtained both in the corporate private and the public sectors. A friend advised him of HAAG and he was amazed at the great work and support provided to our older community.



Kris Spark's involvement with Housing for the Aged Action Group began 17 years ago when she started work in COTA Victoria's information service, Seniors Information Victoria. She is committed to consultation with members and transparency of Committee of Management's decisions and actions.

HAAG'S 2017 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We held our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 23 November, where a new Committee of Management was elected for the coming year. Independent returning officer David Martin ran the election, where all nominees were elected unopposed. Phyll Williams, Chairperson and Peter Sibly, Treasurer, summarised the years events and financial information and each of the new Committee members had the opportunity to introduce themselves to the membership.

Outgoing members of the Committee of Management were thanked and given tokens of appreciation by the Chair – big thanks to Richard, Terrence, Mary and Kathy for their work on the Committee during a time of great upheaval for the organisation. Your contribution is most appreciated by everyone here at HAAG.

Following the election, Melanie Joosten gave an interesting talk on experiences of ageing that she had found from interviewing a large number of older people, including HAAG members. Melanie is an award winning writer, who has recently had one of her books turned into a film, and published a book called "A Long Time Coming" which features a chapter on HAAG. Her talk was thought provoking and well-received. Thanks to Melanie for coming to our AGM to talk about your work!



MORNING TEA WITH YOUR MP -THE ONGOING CAMPAIGN FOR RETIREMENT HOUSING REFORM

On 30 November, 130 residents of retirement housing gathered at Parliament House for a morning tea with their MP to hear about what the government is going to do to fix retirement housing. Despite the extremely hot weather, it was standing room only at Parliament House where a big crowd listened to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Marlene Kairouz, the Shadow Minister Heidi Victoria MP and the Greens spokesperson and Member for Melbourne Ellen Sandell. Although they acknowledged that dispute resolution was a big issue, neither of the major parties made a firm commitment to an ombudsman, but both promised to work with residents to look at options. The Greens undertook to introduce a private members bill for a Retirement Housing ombudsman and reform of the Retirement Villages Act if neither major party acted on these two issues within 12 months.

A panel discussion then took place, facilitated by Gerard Brody, CEO of Consumer Action Law Centre. On the panel was HAAG co-manager Fiona York, who spoke about residential parks and villages; Lawrie Robertson from Retirement Villages Victoria; John Lander, whose story was featured on Four Corners; and Barbara Romeril, who spoke about her aunt's experience in trying to sell her retirement unit.

After the speakers, the large group gathered on the steps of Parliament House in front of a banner calling for safe and affordable retirement housing.

The Retirement Housing Matters election platform was launched on the day, and given to every minister in attendance, along with three fact sheets about our three key issues – exit fees, dispute resolution, and training for managers of retirement housing. This election platform was developed by HAAG and our partners at Consumer Action Law

Centre, COTA Victoria, and Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria. With 12 months until the next state election, we have also launched an advocacy kit for families and residents to help them speak to politicians about the issues for people in retirement housing. These are available online or by calling the office.

HAAG would like to thank our colleagues at Consumer Action Law Centre and Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria who worked so hard on the day to make the event happen!

RETIREMENT HOUSING CASE STUDY

Mr and Mrs Jenner* are a couple in their mid 70s who moved from a rural area to Melbourne four years ago to access specialised medical treatment, and wanted to move back closer to family. Since June 2016 they have been trying to sell their moveable unit so they can finally move. The couple asked the park owner sell their unit. For over 12 months they had their villa open for numerous inspections from potential buyers, yet despite 50 other new units selling during this time, they still had no buyer. They dropped their asking price significantly in a desperate attempt to sell.

Eventually the Jenners began to realise that these buyers did not know that their unit was for sale, and that it was being used as a display home to encourage people to buy other units owned by the operator. The owner preferred to sell new units because there was more money in it for them. The Jenners tried hiring a local real estate agent, but the park management obstructed the agent's efforts – for example, not allowing For Sale signs or open-for-inspections (breaching their obligations under the Act) – and so the agent was reluctant to list their unit.

The couple came to HAAG exhausted and financially and emotionally distressed. They had already gone to two private lawyers, who told them there were no legal options for them. HAAG retirement housing worker Jess McCrickard wrote to the operator on their behalf. The park owner wrote back strongly denying they were doing anything wrong, but within two weeks the couple received a property offer – the first one in the 18 months since the property was listed for sale. The offer is subject to the standard cooling off period, and the couple are anxious that it goes through. They are too frightened to exercise any other rights they may have in case it puts the sale at risk.

This illustrates the power imbalance between operators of residential parks, and the residents who own their villas, but rent the land they are on. HAAG has requested that Consumer Affairs Victoria take a stronger regulatory approach to rogue operators like this who blatantly disregard the law because they know they can get away with it. *Not their real names

NO MORE FAKE DEBTS FOR PUBLIC TENANTS

HAAG's tenancy program once assisted Kay Kaylison, a public tenant who'd transferred from one apartment to another – only to be hit with a bill for \$13,000 in repairs. Did she do \$13,000 in damage? Absolutely not. In fact, her apartment had been damaged by a fire in a neighbour's apartment. But she was caught up in a huge, systemic problem – the Department's chronic mismanagement of its maintenance claims against tenants.

Essentially, when a public tenant moved out (often after a very long tenancy), the Department sent in a maintenance crew who would completely renovate – paint, replace carpets and cabinets, etc. The Department, without checking if tenants had actually caused any damage or if this was just routine maintenance would then send the bills, perhaps adjusted for depreciation, to the tenant. Often this was for upwards of \$10,000. They would offer to let the tenant pay the debt off at small fortnightly amount – \$10, say – or, if they didn't acknowledge the debt, the Department would take them to VCAT for the full amount. Many tenants who received these letters were probably scared enough to agree to pay \$10 a fortnight for many years to cover debts they didn't really owe. Others only found out years later that they'd already been ordered to pay off huge amounts.

For years, tenant advocates have tried to convince the Department to change this unfair system. We've always been told it's too hard, not possible, or put off with vague promises.

But this October, Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass published a report confirming what HAAG and others had long said about this. The Ombudsman slammed DHHS debt collection policies as unfair, unreasonable, and inept, and said the Department was failing in its role as a social landlord. "The effect on the lives of already disadvantaged people caught up in the department's egregiously unfair processes cannot be overstated," Ms Glass said.

With HAAG's help, Kay Kaylison challenged the Department and had the claim against her reduced to under \$3000. But nobody should have to go through that process.

Thankfully, the Department has agreed to implement all the recommendations in the Ombudsman's report, and changes are already underway to improve transparency and fairness. We expect big improvements for our members and clients now and into the future.



Photo Credit: Guruswami Perumal

AGEING ON THE EDGE- NATIONAL PROJECT

The recent National Housing Conference in Sydney provided the opportunity for the Ageing on the Edge Project to launch its NSW report on the 29th November called 'The Older I Get The Scarier It Becomes'. Held as part of a wider forum, the day included presentations from academics, Council on the Ageing NSW and older people speaking about their own housing experience.

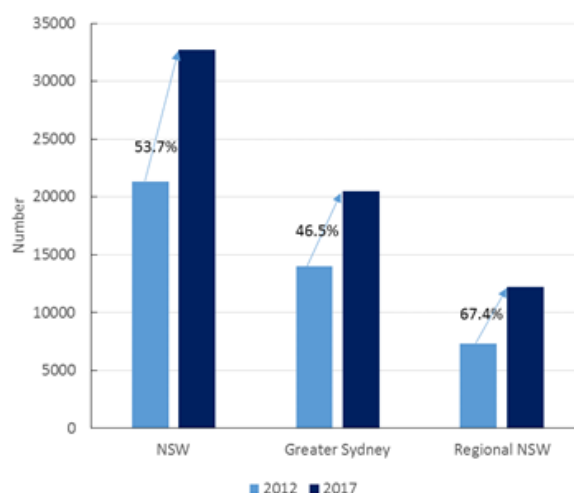
What we have found in NSW

NSW has experienced the greatest increases in house prices and rents (Yates 2017). As a consequence housing affordability in NSW and Sydney are at their lowest levels for a number of years (National Shelter, Community Sector Banking and SGS Economic Planning 2017).

This situation is reflected in the numbers and growing proportion of older people at risk in the private rental market and the increase in older people seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services. This report has identified in NSW from Department of Social Services data:

- From 2012 to 2017 there has been an increase from 21,000 to 33,000 in people aged 65 and over paying unaffordable rents (53.7 per cent increase).
- 9,314 older people were in severe housing stress paying more than 50 per cent of their household income in rent.
- In 2017 single women households account for 45.5 per cent of these households (single males 30.5 per cent and couples 24.0 per cent).
- 12,000 of these low income households were aged 75 years and over.
- 3000 people aged 75 and over were paying 50% of their income in rent.

Change between 2012-2017 in low income people in NSW aged 65 years and over paying more than 30 per cent of income in rent (Source: DSS unpublished data).





'The Older I Get The Scarier It Becomes' report also found there is an almost complete lack of support for older people in NSW when at risk of becoming homeless. Information on affordable housing options is hard to find, there is no central Home at Last type service to offer support and referrals to agencies that can help, there are 300 homelessness services in NSW but not one for older people and the Assistance with Care and Housing Program, whilst expanding across NSW, is still very poorly funded. Therefore the report makes recommendations across these areas to try and get help to address this rapidly growing problem. Of course we also believe most of all that governments need to invest strongly in public housing.

Thank you to our Ageing on the Edge Project partner Dr Debbie Faulkner from the University of Adelaide who has done an incredible job researching the latest data on older people in housing stress in Australia; the NSW Federation of Housing Associations, Homelessness NSW and the Ageing on the Edge Reference Group for their support over the past year in developing our campaign in NSW; Reuben Endean, HAAG's Digital Communications Worker, who has helped us spread the word far and wide about the need for action; and to Sahndra Nelson for working with us to respond to and involve more than 130 older people from across Australia seeking to join our national campaign for older persons housing justice.

A copy of summary report of 'The Older I Get the Scarier It Becomes' is available from HAAG's office and the 150 page version available on our website at:

<https://www.older tenants.org.au/publications/the-older-i-get-the-scarier-it-becomes>

Please call Jeff Fiedler, HAAG's National Development Worker on 9654 7389, or write to him at jeff.fiedler@oldertenant.org.au if you would like more information.

Photo Credit: Guruswami Perumal

CASE WORK SUMMARIES

RETIREMENT HOUSING ADVICE SUMMARY

Greatest Success

Getting a leak fixed! One of our clients has been living with a leak in her unit since May - dealing both with the flooding whenever it rains and with the bullying and harrassment of a recalcitrant village manager. After we helped her make a VCAT application, the leak has finally been repaired - with only the outstanding matter of appropriate compensation for her losses.

Greatest Challenge

Shane and Jessica have really felt the absence of legendary HAAG retirement worker Shanny Gordon since her departure in September. Whilst they await the commencement of the new retirement worker, Chris, they have been working very hard to keep on top of the work load in what is for both of them a relatively new field.

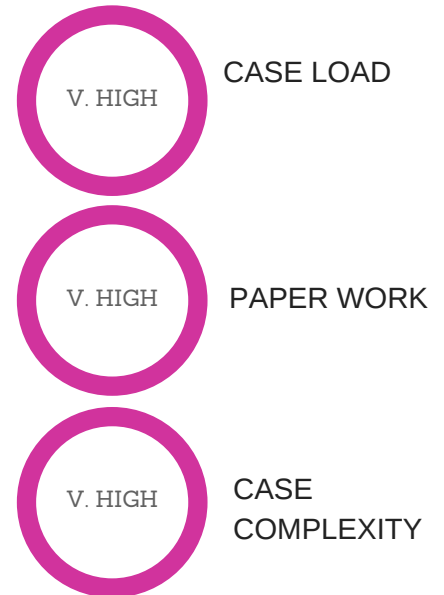


PHOTO: Outreach worker Melis popped in to see Terrence with a box of chocolates. This was a thanks from HAAG for Terrence's time on our Committee of Management (COM). Terrence was actually a client of ours in 2016. After experiencing housing crisis- and coming out the other end of it- Terrence wanted to do something to help others in his situation. Becoming a member of HAAG and then joining the COM; sharing his experience to help develop our service and policies, was a selfless move for which we are very thankful.

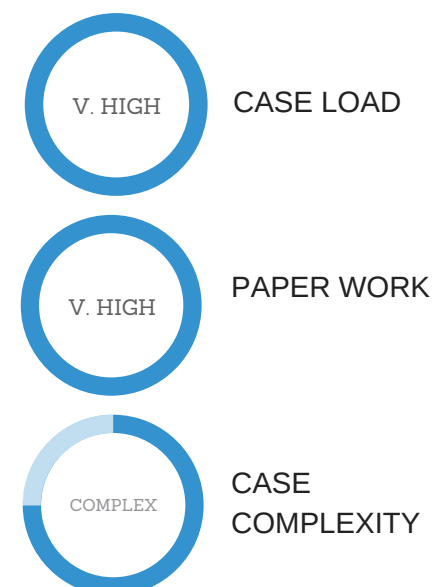
HOUSING SUPPORT SUMMARY

Greatest Success

Last quarter, September-November, extremely positive in terms of offers and housing outcomes, 47 offers of housing received and we housed 38 people into new long term tenancies.

Greatest Challenge

Keeping up with the volume of people needing assistance, waiting list enacted for majority of period. Keeping abreast of new administrative systems such as the Victorian Housing Register, Data Exchange collection requirements (CHSP program) and My Aged Care.



HAAG Communications

This quarter's media has focused a lot on the great work of Jeff and the National Ageing on the edge project. Jeff's gained some fantastic publicity on national media including a spot on ABC's Lateline which covered the NSW report on older people at risk of homelessness. All of this has brought unprecedented attention to the issue of housing insecurity in later life and already politicians are taking notice- well done Jeff and Reuben!

A lot of new people are commenting on and sharing our social media posts so we are happy to have reached a wider audience and made new friends.

In November we helped design the logo for the national project and assisted with the promotional material for the forum in Sydney. We have also been assisting the Hands Off Public Housing Campaign in promoting their activities and actions.

Crystal has been looking into media and publicity training for relevant staff and members and has begun planning for 2018 communications in an attempt to have HAAG as ahead-of-the-game as possible.



PHOTO: David Maguire ABC News/ Jeff on Lateline

HAAG SERVICE DATA 01 SEPT- 30 NOV '17

Total new Clients	262
Needing Housing support	217 (83%)
Needing Information Only	45 (17%)

Main reason for seeking assistance (top 3)

Housing Crisis eg: NTV	100 (38%)
Inappropriate/Inad. Housing	79 (31%)
Housing Affordability Stress	36 (14%)

Client Demographics

Average Age	67
Predominate Gender	Female(62%)
CALD clients	47%

Referrals to Housing Support/Information

HAAG Services	85
External Services	134

HAAG Housing Outcomes

Clients Housed	39
Offers made	54
Average time to Rehouse	< 1 Month

Retirement Info Service data^

Retirement Info Clients	65
Average Age	75
Predominate Gender	Female
Residents at Info. sessions	12

Secondary Consultations*

Total	15
Total hours spent on SC	2.5
Consult. requested by other agency	20%

*Cannot be counted as clients due to eligibility etc.

^Retirement Info data 01Oct - 08Dec 2017



@HAAGHomeAtLast



@HousingfortheAgedActionGroup



www.older tenants.org.au

Housing for the Aged Action Group Inc.

1st Floor, 247-251 Flinders Lane,
Melbourne 3000.

ADMIN: 9654 7389

Home At Last: 1300 765 178

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Research and Policy Development

