

# Housing for the Aged Action Group

annual report

2014-2015



HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.  
[WWW.OLDERTENANTS.ORG.AU](http://WWW.OLDERTENANTS.ORG.AU)

WORKING TOWARDS HOUSING JUSTICE SINCE 1983

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HAAG STAFF AT FUNDING CELEBRATION: Anne Maher, Shanny Gordon, Tegan Leeder, Jeff Fiedler, April Bragg, Kaye Trainor, Gemma White, Maria Cozzi, Paola Posso, Crystal McDonald, Melis Cevik and Taimor. Missing: Lisa Coonan, Ani Lorient, Naomi Gebert, Shane McGrath. PHOTO: GURUSWAMY PERUMAL



# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

2014-2015 was a year marked by two momentous events: The election of a new state government and the Home At Last Service attaining the status of permanent funding as part of the homelessness support system.

Congratulations to our members on the development of our housing policy platform for the state election that was held in November 2014. Our platform clearly set out the problems experienced by our members in a range of housing areas, as well as providing recommendations to government.

The document was developed through a range of member consultations - principally our working groups and HAAG general meetings. We are delighted that our lobbying was successful as many aspects of our policies were adopted by the Labor Party for the election. Now that they are in government we aim to ensure that their policies convert into government action.

When the Minister made the announcement about our funding in May HAAG celebrated long and hard. We had all worked for many years to achieve ongoing funding for our vital service to assist older people at risk of homelessness. We know that this group of vulnerable older people in the private rental market is increasing dramatically and now numbers 85,000 across Victoria. The fact that we have the opportunity to be the cornerstone service to address this need is both humbling and a massive challenge.

The demand on our services has been met with great dedication by our hard working Housing Support staff who are focused on achieving tangible, lasting outcomes for older people. Thank you to our Community Education workers for getting the service so well known in the community over three short years. Our one-stop-shop approach also importantly provides help to existing tenants and residents through our Tenancy Advice and Retirement Housing Services. We are now developing a Communications Strategy as the next stage in our community awareness plan.

Our Data Project worker has also ensured we have maintained effective compliance with our evaluation requirements and future research needs whilst our Administration staff have provided fantastic office support. Our financial management has continued to successfully navigate the challenges of an increasingly complex budget. Most recently we also have successfully developed a special project of assistance to high need older people from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background.

2014-15 has been a year of consolidating our services and putting our policies clearly on the table of the state government's agenda. We look forward to tackling our major challenges over the coming year and encourage all HAAG members to get involved to support our campaigns.

*– Vicki Gutsjahr*

# many thanks

Sincere thanks to our funding bodies for supporting our work:

The Department of Health & Human Services, Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services

Special thanks also to the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and RE Ross trust for their support of our CALD project.

Thank you to our dedicated management committee who have provided endless support through their constant involvement with our day to day work, delegations to departments and politicians.

A special thanks to our amazing working groups who continue to develop targeted campaigns in private rental housing, Independent Living Units and Caravan and Residential Parks and Villages. The dozens of members involved in these groups are 'lived' experts in their fields.

A very special thank you to all of our members who volunteer their time to support HAAG, be it with a mail out, a brochure drop or to lend their professional services- a special mention to Guruswamy Perumal for generously and beautifully photographing all of HAAGs events.

Finally, Thank you to the many supporters of the Save Home at Last Campaign. You all contributed to the successful outcome. We are also sincerely grateful to the Housing Minister Martin Foley for his government's significant investment in our services. Special thanks also to Greens MP Ellen Sandell for speaking in support of HAAG in Parliament.



## *Housing*

Whilst HAAG is not a housing provider we support eligible older people to find appropriate, affordable, secure housing that suits their needs, either through referral to an appropriate agency or through our own Outreach, Information and Advocacy services. We help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities and provide practical assistance.

## *Aged*

Our organisation is led by older people, for older people. We understand the housing needs of our cohort and fight for the realisation of housing benchmarks that ensure a person ages in place with dignity, comfort and peace of mind.

## *Action*

We encourage our members to be actively involved in HAAG by way of working groups, volunteering, forums, media opportunities and joining our Committee of Management. We campaign for social justice in the area of Housing and Older peoples rights and run various events throughout the year promoting the issues and seeking solutions.

## *Group*

We began 30 years ago as a grassroots group of 4 older women who wanted to see better Housing conditions and security for people as they age. Today we have grown to a Not For Profit organisation of 15 staff with over 300 members but our community group heritage still runs strong in our veins. HAAGs workers and management are a dedicated working family, driven by the knowledge of members and the experience of clients, continuing to tackle housing justice issues.

## **OUR MISSION**

HAAG STRIVES TO ENSURE THAT ALL OLDER PEOPLE HAVE  
SECURE, SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING.



Members Carmel McMennemin, Gladys Maher at HAAG Funding Celebration.  
Photo: Guruswamy Perumal



# Full funding for Home At Last

The Home at Last service reached an important milestone in its operation in 2014-15. For the past three years Home at Last has built a highly effective service that has assisted hundreds of older people to move from insecure rental accommodation and access long term affordable housing. With the key aim to address homelessness by introducing early intervention and prevention strategies Home at Last has shown that it is possible to provide affordable housing solutions for older people within a reasonable period of time. However, the service reached a critical stage of its funding during this year as the pilot project funding was concluding.

During the year the state government finalised the evaluation of the service with the assistance of independent auditing agency KPMG. The feedback from the evaluation was extremely positive and Home at Last had met and, in most cases, exceeded, its project targets. However there was a sense from the government that there were other factors determining our future beyond its undoubted success.

Therefore we began publicly campaigning for the future of the service, whilst at the same time negotiating with the government for Home at Last to become a permanent part of the homelessness service landscape.

There were a number of obstacles in the way, with first the state election in November 2014 and then the uncertainty of knowing if the new Andrews Government was going to support Home at Last with a longer term funding package.

We were ultimately relieved that the campaign was successful and delighted that Home at Last has been funded as an ongoing service within the homelessness services sector. HAAG members should be very proud of what we have achieved. Sincere thanks also to the Victorian government and the Housing Minister Martin Foley for believing in Home at Last.

And of course the demand for the service continues with the number of older people seeking our help increasing significantly. The service has proved its worth by achieving its aims to intervene early, before people face eviction, and then find real outcomes in terms of long term public and social housing. Our evidence shows that older people then can go on to lead active, healthy lives knowing they have a secure home for the future.

Thank you to everyone for ensuring that Home at Last can now build services for all older Victorians well into the future.



Maria at Fair Pay Rally



Community Ed. Forum in Bendigo



Clients new Public Housing home



General meeting: Future Planning



Member Alma Dri-Paterson and Jenny Smith (CEO, Council to Homeless Persons)



Shanny spruiking @ Seniors fest. to the hon. David Davis



The hon. Robin Scott with Bilingual workers Lina Hassan Leila Alloush and Mesko Ayouz ,



Super Fionnuala



Client Terez Shaman and interpreter



Kim Phelp with client Betty Carroll



Melis, Shane and Naomi



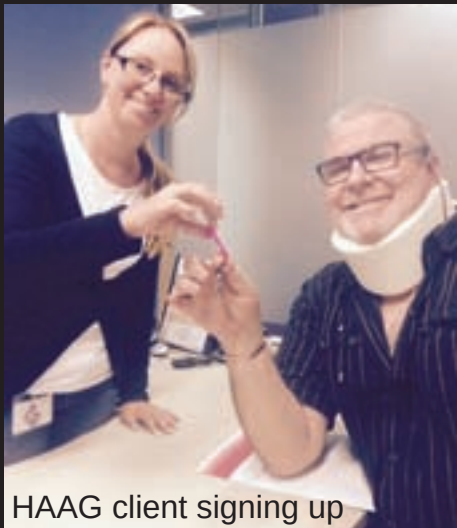




Clients fridge, replaced by HAAG



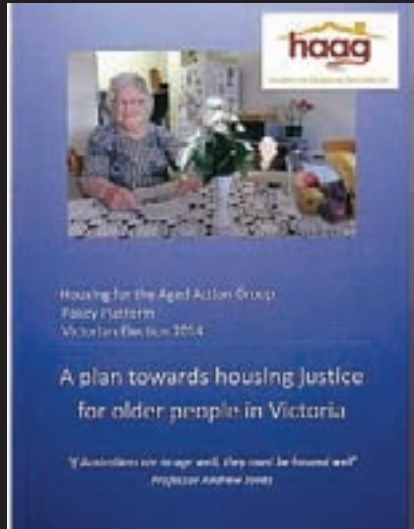
Members Jenny Stewart, Sue Healy, Sue Leigh at HAAG Film Launch



HAAG client signing up



Members Daisy & Helen in CAV story on Channel 10 and 7



Members Denise Muir and Gladys Maher with April and Jeff at HAAG AGM 2014



Lisa



Ani



Happily Housed Margaret Simmons



CALD Project worker Gemma presenting at project launch



AGM - NOV 2014 Committee of Management

## HAAG COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

<b>Vicki Gutsjahr</b> <i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Gordon Beard</b> <i>Vice Chair</i>	<b>Maree Norris</b> <i>Treasurer</i>	<b>Sue Leigh</b> <i>Secretary</i>
<b>Bob Brooks</b>	<b>Daisy Ellery</b>	<b>Joan Lansbury</b>	<b>Kris Spark</b>
<b>Meredith Munro</b>	<b>Phyll Williams</b>	<b>Sally Stabback</b>	<b>Sivarasa Nallarattnam</b>
<b>Alicia Strobbe</b> <i>Person of Expertise</i>	<b>*Pauline Williams</b>	<b>*Dalene Salisbury</b>	<b>*Eunice Walters</b>

\*Thank you to the Members who served on the Committee until the 2014 AGM

\*Carmel McMennemin

## HAAG STAFF

<b>April Bragg</b> <i>Manager</i> <i>Housing Support</i>	<b>Maria Cozzi</b> <i>Team Leader</i> <i>Housing Support</i>	<b>Melis Cevik</b> <i>Housing Support</i> <i>Worker</i>	<b>Anne Maher</b> <i>Housing Support</i> <i>Worker</i>
<b>Paola Posso</b> <i>Housing Support</i> <i>Worker</i>	<b>Tegan Leeder</b> <i>Housing Support</i> <i>Worker</i>	<b>Naomi Gebert</b> <i>Housing Support</i> <i>Worker</i>	<b>Jeff Fiedler</b> <i>Manager</i> <i>Education and Advice</i>
<b>Shanny Gordon</b> <i>Retirement Housing</i> <i>Information Worker</i>	<b>Shane McGrath</b> <i>Tenancy Advice Worker</i>	<b>Gemma White</b> <i>Community Education</i> <i>and Project Worker</i>	<b>Fionualla Spillane</b> <i>Community Education Worker</i> <i>until March 2015</i>
<b>Crystal McDonald</b> <i>Data, Communications</i> <i>and Reporting Worker</i>	<b>Ani Loriente</b> <i>Finance Worker</i>	<b>Kaye Trainor</b> <i>Administrator</i>	<b>Lisa Coonan</b> <i>Administrator</i>
<b>Hilda Quiroga</b> <i>Project Worker</i> Nov 2014 - Feb 2015	<b>Caroline Westerdahl</b> <i>Student</i> Sep 2014 - Dec 2015	<b>Neşe Duran</b> <i>Student</i> Sep 2014 - Dec 2015	<b>Naomi Orr</b> <i>Student</i> Jun 2015 - Jul 2015



# Campaigns and Policy Work

Through 2014-15 HAAG has continued our staunch focus on older peoples housing issues: This covers those struggling in the private rental market, and those living in residential parks and villages, independent living units and rental villages. By assisting our members to organise into working groups and holding general meetings, we develop our strategies for each year.

Whilst HAAG has created awareness for many years about the problems of the private rental sector, there has been the emergence of a much larger group of older people, the majority of whom are women, who have reached retirement without having secure and affordable housing. Our partnerships with academics and researchers such as Dr Maree Petersen from the University of Queensland and Dr Wendy Stone from Swinburne University have enabled us to combine 'big picture' statistics with the experiences of older people seen through our services. For example we now know that there are 85,000 older people in Victoria living in the expensive, insecure and poorly designed private rental market (334,000 nationally). HAAG produced the film 'Feels like home' to highlight the human face of these problems. This raised media attention on the issues and led to media opportunities for some of the film 'stars' –Joan, Neville, Margherita, Betty and Bruno.

The campaigns of our Caravan and Residential Parks and Villages and Independent Living Units Working Groups continue to progress a range of reforms and were responsible for the current state government adopting many of HAAG's policies as their election platform agenda. Since elected we have been working with the government, through processes such as the review of the Residential Tenancies Act, to see through these reforms.

Another highlight was the development of HAAG's policies into a campaign document that was distributed to all Victorian members of parliament before the state election in November 2014 "A plan towards Housing Justice for older people in Victoria".

In terms of Campaigns, the Save Home at Last Campaign was a big one! Concerned that our funding was due to expire and no future commitments had been made, HAAG members and service users rallied around to fight for it to continue. This involved postcards to the Ministers Office (500!), visits to local MPs, getting support from a wide range of community agencies who also sent messages to the Minister and media coverage in newspapers. We even had a feature story on the ABC TV news one Sunday night.

This campaign was a great example of the success of our members in mobilising into action and we have grand plans for converting that energy into our campaigns for an older persons housing strategy and more public housing.

# Housing Support

The Home at Last Information & Referral service is a client's first point of contact via phone or drop in and the point at which a full assessment of housing and support needs is undertaken. We provide our clients with information and resources and encourage clients to make their own decisions regarding their housing needs. Where a person requires intensive support to find alternate housing a referral is made into their local service which is either our own Home at Last Outreach or a referral to an external support service.

The Home at Last Outreach service is the entry-way to a range of services including housing options that otherwise might not be available to our clients. Outreach workers create and maintain a rapport – often a beautiful relationship - with our clients. The service is based on an empowerment model because we believe the situation clients find themselves in is a structural issue caused by insufficient housing stock and other related factors, not necessarily a clients own issues.

Due to the uncertainty of ongoing funding during 2014-15 the intake service saw many peaks and troughs in terms of client numbers. There were months that we weren't accepting any new clients and put in place a service transition out plan. Although this impacted on the service we still provided assistance to a record number of people. Most people were living in private rental they could no longer afford, or had already fallen out of private rental into homelessness. We are very proud of the re-housing outcomes we achieved this year for our clients, and have enjoyed hearing from clients the transformative impact this has had on their life

Margaret in her 70's moved from interstate so she would have more family support as she aged. Shortly after arriving in Melbourne her accommodation arrangement fell through and she had trouble accessing anything else. Margaret is deaf and communicates in Auslan so found it difficult to find housing information and assistance. Margaret was finally put in touch with Home at Last by a community organisation and after a couple of months of intensive outreach support Margaret moved into a social housing apartment that is nearby to both services and her family. Now her tenancy is safe from the tribulations of private rental and she pays only 30% of her income to rent.





## Community Education

Bendigo, Geelong, Frankston, Mornington Peninsula are all areas that gave a warm welcome to the Home at Last community education team in 2014. During this period 420 people attended information sessions about Housing Options and Home at Last and 6667 received information through mail outs, information stands, small meetings etc. Some of the events organised during this busy period were:

- Information sessions in Frankston, Mornington Peninsula, Rosebud, Hastings in conjunction with Consumer Affairs Victoria
- 2 information sessions in Geelong for Seniors Week
- Information sessions for Chinese, Egyptian and Indigenous groups
- Bendigo 'Switched on Seniors' event (featured above), where a number of services came together to provide information to older Bendigo residents over a casual morning tea.

## Preventing Homelessness in Older Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities Project

Preventing Homelessness in Older CALD Communities' is a 12 month project which began in January 2015 to respond to the needs of Australia's growing multicultural population. Around one third of Australia's over 50 population is born overseas, and a quarter of all older renters are from CALD backgrounds. The project aims to deliver information to selected groups in a culturally appropriate manner.

Communities with the highest number and proportion of older renters are targeted in this project. These Communities are; Chinese, Arabic Speaking, Bosnia and Herzegovinan, Croatian, Serbian and South Asian.

The key stages of the project are;

1. Develop brochures and community education packages through consultation with community reference groups
2. Provide training to bi-lingual workers to deliver information sessions to their communities
3. Bi-lingual workers deliver information sessions in their communities

The project has already increased the percentage of CALD clients using Home at Last services from a stable 34% to 54% of all clients. Through this project many people who would have never known about Home at Last are now able to get housing help.

# Tenancy and Retirement Information Service

HAAG's Tenancy and Retirement workers continue to deal with an incredible range of people and problems – from battling evictions to recovering bonds, organising repairs, and seeking compensation. We are constantly reminded just how malicious and venal landlords, estate agents, park and village owners can be.

Evictions remain among the most serious matters we see – tenants come to us at their most vulnerable and anxious, and are often dealing with complex financial and medical issues on top of their notices to vacate.

HAAG continues to punch above its weight and our advocates have great success in preventing evictions – or at least delaying them until our clients can be rehoused.

Some notable successes from the past year include:

- Recovering \$5,500 for a 90-year-old woman who had unknowingly overpaid her rent by a small amount each month over a six year tenancy;
- Convincing the Tribunal not to evict an elderly couple with severe mental health problems who received a no-reason notice to vacate after asking their landlord to fix a broken window;
- Supporting a group of residents through a stressful, lengthy relocation process to units operated by a not-for-profit community housing association;
- Assisting a retirement village resident of 102 years of age to ensure she was not being discriminated against by other residents because of her age;
- Assisting a residential village resident with issues of ground movement that are affecting her unit.





## HAAG SERVICE DATA

Total new Clients	1142
Needing Housing support	848 (74%)
Needing Information Only	294 (26%)

### Main reason for seeking assistance (top 3)

Inappropriate/Inad. Housing	342 (30%)
Housing Crisis eg: NTV	304 (27%)
Housing Affordability Stress	245 (21%)

### Client Demographics

Average Age	67
Predominant Gender	Female (61%)

### Referrals to Housing Support/Information

HAAG Services	443
External Services	433

### HAAG Housing Outcomes

Clients Housed	146
Offers made	216
Average time to Rehouse	1-3 months

## Tenancy and Retirement Service Data<sup>^</sup>

Tenancy Clients	103
Top issue (19%)	Rent Arrears
VCAT representations	36

Retirement Info Clients	240
Average Age	70-79
Predominant Gender	Female
Residents at Info. sessions	800

### HAAG/ECCV Project- Target group data

New clients	78
Clients Housed	12
Referrals to/from Ethno-specific agencies	66

*All indicators have dramatically exceeded quota*

### Secondary Consultations\* (SC)

Total	354
Total hours spent on SC	50.5 hrs
Consult. requested by other agency	41%

\*Cannot be counted as clients due to eligibility etc.

<sup>^</sup>Some figures are estimates only

## Financial Report 2014-15

### Funding and Grants Received

Department of Health and Human Services <i>Home at Last</i>	\$1,073,709.00
Consumer Affairs Victoria <i>Specialist Tenancy and Consumer Service</i>	\$294,540.30
Department of Social Services <i>Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged</i>	\$190,928.99
Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation <i>Preventing Homelessness in CALD Communities</i>	\$130,000.00
RE Ross Trust <i>Preventing Homelessness in CALD Communities</i>	\$10,000.00
City of Greater Geelong <i>Housing Options and Avoiding Scams</i>	\$405.00

This year Housing for the Aged Action Group has been able to successfully engage in many new projects while also assisting a record number of vulnerable older people at risk of homelessness. This has been possible thanks to the various grants received and sound financial management.

# *Housing for older people a right - not a privilege*



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