



Statement on plans to redevelop seven Older Person's Public Housing Towers

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Melbourne, January: Government must expand older persons' public housing and support older residents, says Housing for the Aged Action Group.

The Victorian Government has announced the redevelopment of another seven public housing towers across inner Melbourne, all of which are Older Person's High Rises and home to residents who are over 55 years old. Relocation of residents will begin in July this year. The estates affected are in Kensington, North Melbourne, Prahran, St Kilda and South Melbourne. There are 13 older persons high rises in total, with this announcement affecting over half of them.

Many residents have lived in these sites for decades, with some in their 80's and 90's, and many with chronic health and age-related conditions. The impact of relocations on people in this age group cannot be underestimated. We have assisted many hundreds of people to move into these towers and have seen the life changing value of having safe and secure housing. We know that this announcement will be a big shock to that security, and we are concerned about how some people will survive the relocation process.

We are deeply concerned that the redevelopment signals an end to dedicated older person's public housing in Victoria. This model of housing is the envy of other states, and alongside the 55+ priority category on the Victorian Housing Register (waitlist), is part of an essential recognition of the specific needs of older people, something Victoria should be proud of, and must retain.

Dedicated older persons' public housing is an appropriate housing option for older people on low incomes, due to its affordability, security of tenure, access to supports and sense of safety and community, enabling people to age in place with dignity. The older persons' high rises are well-located, with close proximity to services, transport and open spaces. Having dedicated older persons' housing, rather than general housing stock, is a desirable option for residents who report feelings of safety and security, and the ability to be access supports in the home.

Measures to increase the supply of general or "affordable" housing to address the current housing shortages will not increase supply for the most vulnerable older people, unless it is public or community housing. Our understanding of the development plans is that there will be three times

as many apartments built, but only a minimum 10% increase in social housing, and none of that public housing.

“We are genuinely concerned that public housing is disappearing in Melbourne under this redevelopment program. We have not seen any commitment to growing and expanding public housing, or retaining the older persons’ public housing model,” said Executive Officer Fiona York.

“Every day we hear from older people who are unable to survive in the private rental market, living in significant rental stress and at risk of or experiencing homelessness. We urgently need more, not less, dedicated older persons public housing, not just for the 12,000 older people on the waitlist, but all those tens of thousands of people struggling in the private rental market,”

“We have many older people who would love to live in well-designed, accessible and energy-efficient housing on these sites. However, if it is yet more unaffordable market housing it will simply not be available to them. This is why we must have “growth in both” public and community housing, and no loss of public housing on these sites,” she continued.

HAAG has previously called for more support for older residents, and are pleased to see that Homes Victoria intends to work with the Older Persons High Rise program to support residents through the relocation process. Residents require independent advice and advocacy to understand their rights, as well as timely, accessible and transparent information. Community services with trusted relationships and expertise in working with older people require adequate funding to support people through this disruptive and upsetting time.

Housing for the Aged Action Group is calling on the Victorian Government to

1. Invest in and grow public housing stock. There should be no reduction of public housing on the renewal sites as a result of the redevelopment.
2. Retain and grow dedicated older persons’ public and community housing, recognising the specific needs of older people.
3. Fund independent relocation support to older residents, to assist them to understand their rights, and access support services as required.
4. Ensure the rights of residents are retained in any new tenancy, including rent setting, home modifications, bills, repairs and maintenance, and complaints.
5. Prioritise maintaining older people’s connections to family, community and essential health and care services.

About Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG):

Housing for the Aged Action Group is one of the only Australian organisations specialised in the housing needs of older people. Coming from grass-roots beginnings over 40 years ago, HAAG today is over 1,000 members strong. It is committed to finding long term solutions to the housing crisis facing older people in Australia.

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