

Standing Committee on Social Issues

16 August 2022

Re: Question on notice – Parliamentary Inquiry into homelessness amongst older people, aged over 55, in NSW

Dear Committee,

We appreciate the opportunity to provide further information to assist the Committee in our response to the questions we took on notice at the Parliamentary Hearing on the 18th of July 2022.

We consulted with Housing for the Aged Action Group and Community Housing Industry Association NSW, who supported us in providing these responses.

1. What evidence is there that the Home at Last model works, and how would it be implemented in NSW?

- The Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) Home at Last service started as a pilot project in Victoria in 2012 and was funded via the Department of Human Services Homelessness Innovation Action Projects (IAPs). IAPs were initiatives established to trial new methods of service delivery in the homelessness sector.
- The IAPs were evaluated by KPMG in 2015.¹ The Home at Last pilot demonstrated positive housing outcomes for older people and the benefits of a preventative response to homelessness for this cohort.
- The KPMG IAP evaluation prompted the provision of recurrent funding by the Victorian Department of Human Services (now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)) for the Home at Last service, which has been operating as a state-wide information and housing support service since.
- The service is co-funded by the DFFH, Consumer Affairs Victoria, and the Assistance with Care and Housing sub-program of the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP).
- Annually, the service assists approximately 1,000-1,200 older people, with around 150 being supported to access permanent housing.
- Home at Last provides specialised housing services to people who are 50 years or older (45 years or older for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients) who:
 - Have low income/assets or are experiencing financial disadvantage,
 - Are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness (including older people currently in an unaffordable private rental)
- Core elements of the Service include:

¹ The KPMG evaluation is not publicly available.

- *Community education* – targeted community education sessions run for both the general community and specific communities.
 - *Intake assessment and warm referrals* – one-on-one appointments to discuss the unique circumstances of each client and applicable housing options.
 - *Housing options information and navigation* – information provided on all forms of available housing, including retirement housing, and assistance in navigating the system of housing options.
 - *Housing support, relocation and linkages* – one-on-one support through the application process, attending offer interviews, brokerage services, and support during and post relocation – including assistance to physically move and set up a new home and information on other relevant social services and assistance programs.
 - *Tenancy advice* – advice provided on a client’s current tenancy situation and options.
 - *Professional education and network development* – professional education sessions provided to service providers that interact with older people to inform them on the issues facing older people at risk of homelessness.
- Home at Last was evaluated by Ernst and Young in 2021, which found that the service has a benefit cost ratio of 2.3. This means that every dollar spent on the Home at last housing information and support service generates at least \$2.30 in societal value.²
 - Currently, the NSW services are crisis oriented and the housing services are stretched beyond capacity. There is insufficient support for older people to plan for housing safety or assistance with housing applications, and insufficient services which have the infrastructure to support older women.
 - Many older women are not coming forward to access services, especially those who are experiencing homelessness for the first time.
 - A key component of the service is prevention and early intervention to reach older people before they experience a housing crisis to stop them from entering into a cycle of homelessness.
 - The service builds strong relationships with local services to ensure there are multiple referral pathways to the service and this could include domestic and family violence services, housing services, GPs, community services working with specific cohorts such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, multicultural communities, LGBTIQ+ communities and others.
 - The Queensland Government recently committed to establish a specialist housing support service based on the HAAG Home at Last model.³
 - The Queensland Government called for tenders from the local community sector to deliver the service and is funding HAAG to provide backbone support in the design and establishment of the service to meet the needs of older women in Queensland.
 - The approach taken by the Queensland Government provides a template for establishing the service in NSW. The Queensland Government has committed \$5.4 million over 4 years for a state-wide service inclusive of a central hub in Brisbane and regional spokes in two regional centres.

2. What specifically could be done to streamline development proposals for Community Housing Providers (CHPs)?

Recent NSW Government initiatives, such as the Council Accelerated Planning Program and measures announced as part of the 2022 State Budget, could help improve assessment times if they prioritise affordable housing developments. However, it is unclear whether and how these initiatives will target affordable housing and how long they will last.

² Home at Last Economic Appraisal by Ernst & Young, accessible at: https://www.older tenants.org.au/sites/default/files/home_at_last_economic_appraisal_-_final_report_-_november_2021.pdf

³ Queensland Government, New housing support hub and advisory group to help older Queensland women access housing, accessible at: <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/94495>

Further planning system reforms are needed to reduce barriers to approval in the approval of developments that deliver affordable housing. DVNSW recommends:

- Introducing a streamlined approvals pathway for low-impact community housing development by registered CHPs. While a range of mechanisms may be used to deliver this outcome, a dedicated complying development pathway for affordable housing development of up to 60 dwellings would be an effective approach. This is consistent with the scale of development able to be self-assessed by the Land and Housing Corporation and Aboriginal Housing Office under the Housing SEPP.
- A fast-track approvals process should also be introduced for meanwhile use housing projects, to reduce red-tape and maximise the time available to use vacant buildings for housing. This process should utilise the exempt and complying development approval pathways, supported by a set of clear development standards and safeguards to ensure accommodation provided is safe and secure.

For larger, more complex developments and those requiring development applications, please refer to the Community Housing Industry Association's response.

Sincerely,

Elise Philips, Interim CEO

Domestic Violence NSW