

**Submission
No 89**

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AMONGST OLDER
PEOPLE AGED OVER 55 IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Redfern Legal Centre

Date Received: 28 June 2022

Inner Sydney Tenants' Advice & Advocacy Service

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Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues,
NSW Parliamentary House,
6 Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Via email: socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

28 June 2022

Dear Chair,

Endorsing NSW Ageing of the Edge Forum submission

Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) is an independent, non-profit, community-based legal organisation with a prominent profile in the Redfern and Waterloo area. RLC has a particular focus on human rights and social justice. Our specialist areas of work are tenancy, consumer law, credit and debt, financial abuse, employment law and police and government accountability. By working collaboratively with key partners, RLC specialist lawyers and advocates provide free legal advice, conduct casework, deliver community legal education and produce publications and submissions. RLC works towards reforming our legal system for the benefit of the community.

In NSW overall there are 44,127 people on the waiting list and 5,801 on the priority list.ⁱⁱ Additional impacts from the pandemic have left more people in urgent need of housing. In December 2021 the housing waitlist was more than 53,000 people, up from 49,000 before the Delta lockdown began, while NSW falls far behind other states such as Victoria and Queensland in social housing construction.

Access to social housing is critical in the inner Sydney area. Renters across NSW make up approx. 33% of occupants, whilst in the City of Sydney this is 71% of all occupants. Public housing makes up approx. 5% of rentals across the state, but make up approx. 33% of rentals in the City of Sydney. Redfern Legal Centre through its Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service sees the impacts of the shortage of social housing every day. The lengthy waiting list means that social housing is simply not a solution for people facing an unexpected crisis that impacts their ability to maintain a tenancy in the private rental market.

We understand that housing and homelessness related issues impact older people disproportionately. We support the submission and the recommendations made by NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum, a coalition of over 100 organisations and individuals advocating for the housing needs of older people in NSW.

We support the calls for NSW Government to –

- Fund a specialist older person's housing information and support service that comprises both an early intervention and crisis response, similar to the HAAG 'Home at Last' model in Victoria.
- Lower the priority age for social housing eligibility from 80 years as a matter of urgency.
- Build 5,000 social and affordable homes per year for 10 years, at least 20% of which should be dedicated to older people.

In addition, we are recommending that NSW government –

- Adopt concrete measures to address ageism, sexism, gender and disability discrimination in government services, finance institutions, including banks, and private rental markets.
- Remove unnecessarily burdensome requirements, such as, completion of 'seeker diaries' to maintain temporary accommodation imposed on older people who are already in challenging housing situations.
- Increase transparency and accountability by increasing availability of data including –
 - Social and priority housing waiting list data broken down by age, gender, disability status and geographic area,
 - The number of social and affordable housing dwellings available in NSW, including age and gender breakdown of allocations,
 - The number of dwellings assigned under State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing for Seniors and People with a Disability) (Seniors SEPP) and Public Housing Seniors Communities (PPOPH), and
 - The number of dwellings built under the commitments in different housing commitments including the *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023*, Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) and Community Housing Innovation Fund (CHIF).
- Provide exemptions to strict documentary evidence for housing applications, including identity documents, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and older women escaping domestic and family violence to ensure equitable access for all older people.
- Adopt the new mandatory minimum accessibility standards contained in the revised National Construction Code for all future constructions in NSW.

We urge the committee to adopt these recommendations highlighted above and welcome the opportunity to engage with the inquiry process where possible.

Your sincerely,

Katherine McKernan
CEO