

# **TRANSCRIPT**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE**

### **Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria**

Melbourne – Wednesday 23 August 2023

#### **MEMBERS**

Trung Luu – Chair

Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

Matthew Bach

Michael Galea

Joe McCracken

Rachel Payne

Aiv Puglielli

Lee Tarlamis

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Melina Bath

John Berger

Moira Deeming

David Ettershank

Renee Heath

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

**WITNESSES**

Ben Rogers, Manager of Policy and Advocacy, Council on the Ageing; and

Fiona York, Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to members of the public with us here today and those watching via live broadcast to our final session of the inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis. Joining us in this last session are representatives of the Housing for the Aged Action Group and also the Council on the Ageing. Could you please just state your full name and your role for the recording.

**Fiona YORK:** My name is Fiona York. I am the Executive Officer of Housing for the Aged Action Group.

**Ben ROGERS:** Hi, my name is Ben Rogers. I am the Manager of Policy and Advocacy at COTA Victoria and SR Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Ben, is it?

**Ben ROGERS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome. Before proceeding I just want to introduce you to our committee. On the screen is Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. On my right is Aiv Puglielli, Member for Northern-Eastern Metropolitan Region; Dr Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria; and Ms Rachel Payne, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Dr Matthew Bach might join us a bit later on Zoom as well, a Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. My name is Trung Luu. I am the Chair.

Just before we continue with the questions, I will quickly read this information to you. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law; you are protected against any actions for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same thing, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered as contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. The transcript will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee website. For the Hansard record, when you are asked questions, please state your name.

And just to the committee: as normal, about 6 minutes; then any extra I will open up to the floor.

Also, Dr Bach just joined us. Dr Bach, we have Fiona York from the Housing for the Aged Action Group and also Ben Rogers from the Council on the Ageing on the panel. Ms Payne, would you like to start?

**Rachel PAYNE:** Sure, thank you, Chair. I guess I would love to start with the 2022 *State of the (Older) Nation* report. I just want to say also thank you for coming today and for presenting for us and your submissions. This report alarmed me as someone who does identify as LGBTIQ, particularly the high levels of renters and who is considered within these cohorts. Do you mind providing just a little bit more detail on that report and a little bit more information as to why we are seeing this identified for those that are most vulnerable in those sectors.

**Ben ROGERS:** So, the older nation report is a report that has been run a number of times over the most recent years by COTA Australia, with support by the federated COTAs, including COTA Victoria. In that regard it is a large survey effort. They partner with another organisation to reach out into the community and to ask those questions, with a roughly equal breakdown from each of the states depending on the proportion of the population. As we try to unpick those issues, and in particular in most of the recent SOTONs, or *State of the (Older) Nations*, we have really looked at housing and how that impacts, and in particular I think it is important to see, especially with that renting component, the breakdown of more marginalised communities. But then also I think it is really important to unpick the other sort of follow-on effects, in particular happiness. It is quite staggering the difference between owning your own home and renting, and particularly the feelings around financial insecurity and feelings like you can adapt your home. It is quite stark, and that is where we really see

the value in that *State of the (Older) Nation* report in sort of unpicking those trends across Victoria to an extent, but also more nationally, and telling that ageing narrative.

**Rachel PAYNE:** Yes, I appreciate that. Why I was reflecting on that is because, as someone in my community, I also have a lot of friends who are older in that cohort and are renting or in share house accommodation. We are sort of all considering what the future is going to look like for all of us moving forward, and maybe more of a communal living arrangement might be an option. I know that that is something that has been flagged internationally in some jurisdictions, that intergenerational opportunity of living. Is this something that has any uptake in Australia or has really been considered or advocated for, and is there a role for government or other not for profits to try and facilitate those sorts of opportunities?

**Fiona YORK:** Do you want me to jump in there? Do you mind?

**Ben ROGERS:** Yes, of course.

**Fiona YORK:** I was just going to add something about the LGBTI cohort in particular around that issue of older people's housing. We conducted a survey a couple of years ago, just prior to COVID, that interviewed and surveyed online and did some follow-up small groups with about 227, I think it was, older LGBTI folk. What we found in that was that there were really high numbers of older people who were not in home ownership, who were in private rental and who were living, like you say, in unconventional housing situations like sharing with friends or perhaps living in the back room of an ex's house – things like this. What we also found, which was really upsetting, I guess, was that lots of people in that cohort did not know where to go for help at all, did not consider themselves to be at risk and had no idea what services were available. In talking about their aspirations for housing, which is what you also alluded to, there was that idea of wanting to live in communities where – maybe not exclusively LGBTI communities – they have allies and they felt safe. There are some examples of that overseas, but there are very few examples of that in Australia, and where they do exist, it is often for higher income people. So people that are in private rentals who are paying high amounts of rent and who do not have any assets find it very difficult to find safe housing, and this is particularly problematic for older LGBTI folk, who may be discriminated against in the private rental market, who may not feel safe in the housing options that do exist and who do want to remain, as most older people do, in places that they are familiar with. They do not necessarily want to be pushed out into cheaper options where they may not have the same social supports and the same connections with the community. So that is certainly what our data was showing, and since then we have formed a group of older LGBTI elders who meet once a month and discuss these issues. That comes through consistently around both the barriers to accessing the services and the barriers to accessing housing and the aspirations for those people as well.

**Rachel PAYNE:** And I think even one step further would be aged care and the limitations there, particularly if you are within the LGBTI cohort.

**Fiona YORK:** Yes.

**Rachel PAYNE:** Excellent. I think I might move it over to the rest of my panel here. Thank you so much.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Aiv, do you want to start questioning?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes, for sure. Thank you both for coming in. Just looking in summary over both submissions that you put through, there has been the pressure that renters are facing from increasing rents, and we hear that across the board for all backgrounds within the renting community. We have also heard in the hearings how rent increases have been used as a means of evicting tenants in some instances. Because there is no cap in place on how much it can increase, it is put up by an amount that a person has no hope of paying and they basically have to self-evict. I will go to both of you. In a scenario where we were to change the landscape wherein there is a limit or a control on how much at one time rent can increase, would that at least in the short term go to the pressure currently that people you work with are facing out there in the community? I will start with Ben.

**Ben ROGERS:** Definitely in terms of the short term, absolutely. One of the things we have really seen, particularly with the cohort we represent, is that quite a lot are on static incomes. They are on the aged pension. Particularly at this rate – they have not had super their whole lives – that is really what they are relying on. That does tend to go with inflation, but it does not necessarily cover that much. Particularly if you are seeing big

increases in your rent, your pension is getting stretched further and further, and that means you will eventually have to self-evict. So I think we definitely see that as an option in the short term to support a particular cohort that we represent.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** And in the instance where there is someone who is facing that risk of eviction or self-eviction by means of rent increase, would that obviously quite directly help them in that scenario?

**Ben ROGERS:** I mean, in that scenario, yes, absolutely. I cannot talk to exactly the stories that we hear on our helpline – I am happy to provide that on notice as well – but particularly in that scenario we would see that as a real support and benefit.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. That would be great on notice as well, if you can. I will go to Fiona now.

**Fiona YORK:** I think the fundamental issue is that to not be in housing stress, you should not be paying more than 30 per cent of your income on rent.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes.

**Fiona YORK:** And if you are on a fixed income like the aged pension, JobSeeker or disability support, even if rents were to be capped now, most people on those incomes are not able to afford the rent as it is.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes.

**Fiona YORK:** So I think we do need to look at rent control in some way – like you say, perhaps some sort of predictability about those rent increases. But there is not going to be a market solution for the 85,000 people in Victoria right now who are 55-plus, who are in the lowest income quintiles and who are not going to be able to afford the rent – no matter how it is capped – at the moment. So where there is no market solution for those people, the government has a responsibility to be able to provide housing for those people. And those figures are based on data from 2019–20, which is before the rent increases, so there are 160,000 people in Victoria at the moment at 55-plus who are renting. The whole of Australia's pension system and support systems is based on the assumption that people own their own homes. So the rates themselves presume that you are not paying more than 30 per cent on household costs, but the reality is that you are. If you take away that housing cost, then you can afford to live, potentially, on these fixed incomes. But at the moment with the rents, even if they were to be capped right now, you are not going to be able to afford it. We need to have rent control for the future, but for right now we need to have a massive increase in public and community housing to fulfil that non-market solution for those people.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Absolutely. To follow on from that is this idea of immediacy and immediate access to housing and bringing in homes in a way that they are accessible and are able to be used by people that are under this pressure in the immediate term – not other houses coming through the pipeline. My understanding is that in your submission you also go to short-stay accommodation and the impact that that is having on the rental market. Again we see a scenario where there is a house that might be sitting empty but which is used for short-stay accommodation in a nice touristy part of town. Could you go into a bit more detail about your concerns around short-stay accommodation?

**Fiona YORK:** Yes. I think there are a few concerns there. One is that people are being pushed out of the communities where they live because the rental availability is not there. The other thing that we have been told is that landlords, if there was to be a rent cap, would simply pull their properties out of the rental market and put them into the short-stay market, to therefore make more money on them. I think we need to have regulation around rentals and regulation around short-stay accommodation as well to make sure that that does not happen.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Absolutely.

**Fiona YORK:** But we are certainly hearing a lot from our members and from our clients around the number of empty houses and what to do about those things. I think there are a range of things that we could look at there around empty housing and regulation of short-stay accommodation, particularly in tourist areas. Down on the Mornington Peninsula we hear that there is a massive rental crisis, and yet the houses are being leased to short-term renters because they are more lucrative for the owner.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Definitely. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Michael, would you like to continue?

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, both, for joining us. My question, I guess, in a way touches on what you were just talking about. I would like to ask you particularly about ageing in place. We did hear yesterday from one witness who had to move away from her GP and other support services, just out of sheer financial necessity, and that was in the inner city. And even in the outer regional and suburban areas, I know places like the Dandenongs and Gippsland have a lot of issues where people are forced to leave their town and sometimes their entire region just in order to get a property, let alone an affordable one. In terms of the availability of housing that is available and the mixture that is available that is actually appropriate for older people, is there a real shortfall in what we have, especially in these outer metropolitan and regional areas?

**Fiona YORK:** Would you like to talk about aging in place?

**Ben ROGERS:** Yes. It is really important, especially in terms of ageing in place, that we support older people to grow old in their communities. It is the stated aim of the Victorian government and of the Commonwealth government. There are different names for it, but we all know that older people need to grow old in their communities for it to be a sustainable system. In terms of the quality of housing, I cannot give you numbers, but what I can say, what we do hear from people, is particularly there are issues around adapting their homes. For instance, in the SOTON 2022 report 15 per cent of people said they would really struggle to adapt their homes to support them to live in place. I will also flag that COTA Victoria, with another hat, leads a national campaign called Assistive Technology for All, which is a campaign group based around changing access to and support for assisted technologies, particularly for independent living. But a component of that looks into particular home modifications. We recently made a report to the Commonwealth government, as part of their aged care reforms, around the need to make sure that home modifications in particular are enabled to happen, because without them places become unsuitable and therefore you need to move. I think what has really come through in this hearing today and yesterday is particularly how not every situation fits every person. Everyone is so individual, and I think one of the great things about our cohorts is that there is such variety and diversity. But people need houses that can adapt to their needs, because you could find two 77-year-olds who could have completely different needs and completely different ways of living. A one-bedroom house might work for one of them, but the other one with the exact same medical needs may actually need a two-bedroom house for different reasons, to be able to accommodate how they are living. I think for us that is the real key: that particularly where houses are being built it is not clear that they are being built with the future in mind, which means they need to be adapted, and that is something that I know has been a long-term concern. I know COTA Australia back in 2009 was amongst a collaboration that brought about – what was it called? Living Houses Australia, or something along those lines, particularly looking around those universal building guidelines and particularly how you can look at homes so that in the future they can be adapted to suit people's needs.

**Michael GALEA:** And would you agree with that, Fiona?

**Fiona YORK:** Yes, I think we need to have universal housing designs in the building code, and Victoria has recently implemented that for new builds, but we do have the problem of the older stock, which you have mentioned as well. In terms of the types of housing that are available for older people, I think there has been a general decline in those options over the last 30 years or so. There used to be types of housing which were well located and connected to communities, independent-living units and low-cost retirement housing that were basically dotted throughout all of the suburbs and a lot of the small towns as well, and that was often a very attractive option for older people, particularly those on low incomes or with low amounts of assets, where they could age in place, they could be around the community and they could be renters for life or they could actually purchase their homes as well. But that type of housing stock has been in decline basically since the 1980s, and now we think even in the last 10 years or so it has declined by at least 50 per cent. It used to be supported by government and it was run often by small not-for-profits – the Lions clubs and the RSLs and things like that – but with that decline it means that there are less and less affordable options because they are being sold off because of the land being valuable or being replaced with much more expensive retirement housing options which have ingoings of \$400,000, say, which no-one can afford if they are on low incomes. So we did used to have options, we did used to support them, but the sheer volume of the ageing population in conjunction with the housing crisis and the decline of those types of housing means that we are really at a crisis point now for the older population, particularly those that have been lifelong renters or on low incomes for their whole lives. This

is why we need some action now, because it really is truly a crisis, and looking at the numbers it is only going to get worse, as you have probably been hearing for the last two days.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. And this one is perhaps a little bit more of a smaller part of the issue, but we have also heard here and there in hearings about granny flats and in some cases them having to be torn down, which I could imagine would lead to issues if in order to support intergenerational living you have to go and then build a whole new one yourself because the previous owners had to tear their one down. Have you had much feedback from your clients, members or stakeholders in relation to intergenerational living and living with family members?

**Fiona YORK:** There is a really great program, the movable unit program, in Victoria, which is public housing, and it is basically a unit that is constructed in the backyard of someone's home to allow that, and then when the person passes away or moves into residential aged care it can be moved elsewhere. It is the envy of other states, that program, but it is just not enough. We know that lots of older people do want to live with their friends and family, but it can be fraught, as Ben is probably about to attest to, in terms of elder abuse. But I think if it goes well, yes, absolutely that is an attractive option. But, yes, there are some issues which maybe Ben would like to speak to.

**Ben ROGERS:** Look, I will say we definitely support intergenerational living. You have heard from plenty of older people for whom that works. But I suppose to provide a bit of context, as well as, as I said, at COTA Victoria – Council on the Ageing Victoria – I also work for Seniors Rights Victoria, which is the only elder abuse focused community legal centre in Victoria. Particularly what we have seen in recent years, particularly with the increasing financial stress being felt more broadly by society, is intergenerational living can lead to quite a few instances of elder abuse. Particularly following the pandemic and particularly with the current cost-of-living pressures, with a lot of the people facing elder abuse that we support, it is particularly around financial elder abuse, and it is quite common that you will see that someone has moved home to live with their parents and there is a bit of inheritance impatience and they decide, 'Actually, I want to try and get this home for myself at an earlier opportunity', and that can lead to all sorts of elder abuse. But in particular I will say I know of, I think, a case study that we previously identified in our annual report – it is particularly around granny flats – is people constructing with the idea that, 'Oh, I get to stay here on my own property, and I can move my son and his family back into our property,' and then what happens is you end up being kicked out and you are losing your home. That is where ideally services like ours can come to support you. So I think intergenerational living offers a lot of benefits, but there needs to be support. There needs to be protections. I think that is the key: it cannot be a wild west. It is something that if we want to create more structural opportunities, there has to be structure in place.

**Michael GALEA:** Very interesting. Thank you, both. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Michael. Dr Mansfield.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you, and thank you, both, for your submissions and for being here today. I might go back to something that you touched on, Fiona, around public housing and the need for more public housing. We have heard a lot about there being a supply issue, but I noted in both your submissions you have identified a particular type of supply problem rather than it being, you know, a broad supply problem. I just wondered if you wanted to expand on why public housing is so important for people as they age.

**Fiona YORK:** The reason that we think public housing is important is because the rent is capped at 25 per cent of their income, and they can age in place. They can stay there as long as they need to. So those two elements are really important, but we also need to have minimum standards around cooling, as has been mentioned today, and accessibility. So a lot of the older public housing stock has two- or three-storey walk-ups, which is difficult. About 50 per cent of our clients have mobility issues which impact on their housing, and we have people calling us who do not want to go into hospital to have operations because they are afraid that they will not be able to be safely discharged into their homes – and that is in private rental mainly. So I think, yes, we absolutely support public housing for those reasons, and we do think that government needs to provide housing for the people where there is no market solution, which is a lot of people. I think in terms of how to make that supply happen quickly, we have got lots of suggestions there, and I am sure you would have heard today. But in terms of ageing in place, Victoria does have 55-plus-specific housing, which is fantastic. We do

have priority access on the Victorian Housing Register for people aged 55-plus. Both of those things are good things. We just need a lot more stock, well-designed stock, in places where people want to live.

**Ben ROGERS:** I completely agree with Fiona. It is about that stock. It is a particularly great backstop for the more vulnerable elements of society that we deal with. It means you are not left to fend for yourself to an extent, and anything that can provide that security around ageing in place has to be welcomed. Particularly when we looked at, you know, even just the recent Homes Victoria report around renting and the average length of renting, I think 20 months is the average length of a rent in Victoria in metropolitan Melbourne as of June. That is not a long time. You know, people need time to build roots in communities and to trust people, to know, you know, that they like the doctor down the road and that they can access them. And I think that is something that is underrated and underappreciated, particularly as we look at an ageing society.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** The government has put money towards the Big Housing Build. In terms of how much that has delivered and how much it is projected to deliver, in your view is that enough?

**Fiona YORK:** No. Unfortunately it is not enough, and we are seeing public housing at the moment that is being demolished through the public housing renewal program with the proposed 10 per cent increase. Ten per cent is just not enough. Our view is that public land should be earmarked for public housing because land is valuable and government land is even more valuable, so let us leverage that to be able to provide as much housing that is government housing that can stay there in perpetuity for the good of the tenants. So we really do think that public land needs to be used for public housing because land is valuable, especially land in desirable places to live where there are connections to community, where there are medical services, where there is transport. It is very important that we hold onto that valuable thing that Australian taxpayers have, Victorian taxpayers have, which is our land assets.

**Ben ROGERS:** Again, I completely agree with Fiona. For us, we always look towards the ageing population and the growth of people that are going to be over 65. The numbers keep getting more real, and they are often quite scary. And it is especially aligned with the fact that, increasingly, older people do not own their own homes, which I think is something that was a bedrock for so long. Stock will have to increase.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Another suggestion in your submission is around inclusionary zoning. What role do you think that could play in meeting that shortfall of public housing?

**Fiona YORK:** I think there has been some talk around inclusionary zoning recently, which I think is fantastic. I think our organisation supports inclusionary zoning being in all new builds, not just on publicly owned land. Wherever there is a development going up, a proportion of that should be some type of community housing or public housing. Affordable housing, we think, needs to be better defined, and it needs to be enforced, because 75 per cent or 80 per cent of the market rate is not affordable. We also need to ensure that that component is actually quality housing, so it is not the dodgy apartment down the back of a beautiful block, which is sometimes the case. Where I live in the inner city, in Footscray, there are empty blocks going up all the time, and there are people homeless on the street right in the front of them. It seems like a very big disparity between the need and the housing stock. So we need to level the playing field, and if planning permission is to be given, then it must include by law some form of inclusionary zoning for affordable and public housing.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Dr Bach, do you want to continue with some questions?

**Matthew BACH:** Yes. Thanks so much, Chair. And thank you for coming and for your evidence. A real theme of what we have heard from others thus far has been around how some recent changes have been made that certainly, from the feedback we have received thus far, have met with broad approval, but nonetheless that we could do better to enforce some of those changes. I note the comments that you have already made, but nonetheless I would like any further perspectives from you on how enforcement could be done better, especially thinking of the cohort that you principally represent.

**Fiona YORK:** Yes. I think regulation is not effective without enforcement, and we do have an issue in that lots of rights where they do exist are not adequately exercised because of the lack of enforcement. We do not believe that tenants, especially vulnerable tenants, should be responsible for their own dispute resolution in taking on their landlords or, I should also say, retirement housing providers – we have been calling for a

retirement housing ombudsman for some time. It is a really big power imbalance, and it should not be on the tenants and the residents to enforce their own rights. So yes, I do think that dispute resolution and repairs and maintenance and management issues are a constant refrain that we are hearing, and it has been raised by the Ombudsman. It has been raised in other inquiries many times before, so we do think there needs to be stronger enforcement by government of the existing regulations and legislation but there needs to be stronger regulations and protections as well. I think they go hand in hand.

**Matthew BACH:** Thank you very much. Chair, that is all from me, in addition to the excellent questions from other members.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Bach. I am just following on from the question that Dr Bach asked. I am just curious in relation to the age bracket. I know you mentioned ageing. At what age stage in their life do they meet that criteria? Or is there no limit and it can just be any age?

**Fiona YORK:** For our service?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Fiona YORK:** Yes. So for our service the age cut-off is 50. For public housing the priority age is 55, and for some of the older persons high-rises and other older persons public housing it is 55 as well. So 55 is how it is considered in the housing context. In the aged care context, it is 65. So that can be quite difficult to navigate for older people as well, because they may fall through the gaps there.

**The CHAIR:** Definitely it is one cohort that I think has been really not captured well, based on homelessness and home security. Like you said, most people assume older people are home owners, so it is one area which I think – I am not sure – has been overlooked in many ways. I am just curious: in relation to those who come to your service, are they people downsizing or people who have been renters for a long period of time and suddenly, due to their economic situation, have been pushed out of the market?

**Fiona YORK:** Yes, it is an interesting question. The data that we released last week for Homelessness Week which was looking at the census data shows that in the last 10 years there has been a 77 per cent increase in older renters and there has also been a decrease in the number of people who own their own homes at the time of retirement. They are on the lowest incomes as well, often. So we think that there is an emerging issue of older people who are holding mortgages at the time of retirement on fixed incomes who may be facing homelessness in a few years. Older women have often been home owners in the past and have fallen out of home ownership due to marriage break-ups, family violence and all sorts of factors, which means that they are suddenly in the private rental market, and then there is that cohort that have always rented. It is disproportionate, though, to just the ageing population. It is increasing faster than the ageing population is, which indicates that there are a lot of hidden homeless out there. As I was saying before around the LGBTI cohort, a lot of older people may not identify that they are at risk, and that is why we need to have early intervention to make sure that people are making a housing plan before they end up falling off the cliff out of private rental into homelessness, which all of those people now on fixed incomes are probably going to be doing in the next couple of years. It is a mixture of things. I do think it is an emerging issue. The data is showing that it is an emerging issue, and we need some really strong planning to deal with it.

**The CHAIR:** I think that the housing will definitely be required. I am just wondering: should we be focusing more on aged care, retirement or social housing for this cohort? Because as you said, it is a break between 50 and 55 and 60, and people are falling through the gaps. Implementing housing does not happen overnight, so which area should the government be focusing on more?

**Fiona YORK:** Our data shows that there are 160,000 older renters 55-plus at the moment, and 85,000 of those are on the lowest incomes. There is basically no solution for them in the market apart from public housing and low-cost retirement housing. The issue that we have in Victoria is that the asset limit is around \$35,000, so if you are an older woman that has a small amount of superannuation or savings, or an older man as well, basically between \$35,000 and \$300,000, there are basically no options for you. There used to be that low-cost retirement housing and independent living units, but it does not exist anymore. So we need options like cooperative housing, co-housing models and low-cost retirement housing to fill that gap. We also need the injection of public housing, which you have heard a lot about today. Then in terms of residential aged care, the federal government is the jurisdiction for residential aged care, and it really is in Australia basically end-of-life



care. The focus is to have people in their homes as long as possible, but it is not possible to be able to deliver home care, personal care, shopping assistance and all of those sorts of things which enable people to age in place in their homes if their home itself is unstable. So there are very few options for those people, because local government used to provide a lot of those types of supports, and unfortunately that is also disappearing. It is difficult to be able to provide ageing in place, aged care in the home, without housing.

**Ben ROGERS:** I think, look, definitely from our perspective the emphasis has to be on growing the housing supply any which way – public or private. Older people tend to not want to go as much to aged care as well; that is something we keep finding. I think we may have referenced it in our submission, but Anglicare Australia found actually the high cost of renting is forcing people into aged care when they do not want to be there, because aged care is more expensive than renting privately, which is something that really needs to be considered. People want to live in their community; they want to live independently. It is how we can facilitate that, and housing is a key aspect of that. I would just love to echo Fiona’s point around that, which is if the home is not appropriate, then the home care cannot be appropriate, which means people are being forced into decisions that they do not want to make and having to go into care. I think especially with public aged care in Victoria at the minute, there are only a set number of places, and that is not going to increase to meet the gaps where the rest of the housing market is failing.

**The CHAIR:** I totally agree with you. I know you said overall that housing is important, but I think it is also very important that we identify where we really need to focus when it comes to the planning stage and we implement where we situate in the municipality the extra services and requirements of those needs to aid that cohort. So it is definitely housing, but we need to actually identify where we need to focus it on the most so we develop the right housing for those cohorts.

Thank you very much for your submission today. We have got 2 minutes left. I will just open it to anyone who wants to add a few more questions before we wrap up.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Feel free to rule this out if this is not exactly in scope, but one of the points that, Ben, in your submission you referred to, in my understanding, is that fixed pensions are not keeping up with increasing rental costs. We have spoken about the increased pressure with rental increases; we have gone to that in previous contributions. The other part of that sentence is the fixed pension. Do you both have a view as to what level that actually should be set at? Is it adequate? Should it be increased – by how much?

**Ben ROGERS:** I cannot give you an exact answer on what we would like to see, but we would say it needs to be more. In particular we would love to see the age pension increase, but more importantly we would love to see greater financial support for older people in various different forms. I think the age pension has to be one component of that, but I think we identified whichever way we can make sure that older people are supported to live sustainably, that is something we have to look at, whether it is an age pension or whether it is another form of financial resource.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Michael, do you want to add anything else? All good?

**Michael GALEA:** I do not think I have anything else. Thank you, though.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. In that case, I thank you so much for coming today – much appreciated. I again thank you, the panellists, for giving your time today. It has been valuable, and your contribution will be definitely evaluated and considered deeply when developing our recommendations down the track, so thank you. That brings the hearings to a close for the day.

**Committee adjourned.**