

3 August 2021

The Hon Alister Henskens MP
Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Minister

Priority Housing Age Criteria

I write to request that you lower the current age criteria for priority housing to 65 years in recognition of the growing cohort of older people in severe housing stress and increasing housing unaffordability.

Currently the standard qualifying age for priority social housing approval in NSW is 80 years, with a lower setting for First Nations people. The criteria in Victoria is 55 years of age.

Facing housing insecurity or homelessness is challenging at any age but for older citizens, the impact can be severe. An increasing number of vulnerable older constituents and community support service providers have contacted me about unaffordable housing costs especially in the inner city and the very long wait for approval and allocation of social housing. I have advocated for a number of people over 60 years of age in financial distress, who cannot secure affordable rental accommodation and don't have family or community support.

Older people face administrative and eligibility barriers that exclude them from secure housing at the very time when they have very limited income and increased costs resulting from the ageing process. High rents and low incomes result in people living in temporary, sub-standard conditions and choosing between necessities like food and medication.

The 2017 report *The Older I Get the Scarier it Becomes* from The Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) in conjunction with the Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning recorded a 50 per cent increase in the number of older people at risk of homelessness in NSW in the previous five years. The 2020 Western Sydney University report *Older Women in the Private Rental Sector: Unaffordable, Substandard and Insecure Housing* identified that women aged 55 and over were one of the fastest growing groups facing homelessness. COTA NSW and The Ageing on the Edge NSW Forum support lowering the age.

With long wait lists for social housing in NSW I am concerned that older people are at risk of increased deterioration linked with physical and psychological co-morbidities, with greatly increased risk of homelessness and subsequent severe impacts. Secure housing is the first line of defence in ensuring the health and wellbeing of older people, and I ask that you consider increasing access to social housing for older people by making priority housing more accessible.

Could you please lower the qualifying age for priority social housing approval to 65 years and inform me what action you will take?



Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a cursive 'G' and a long horizontal flourish.

Alex Greenwich
Member for Sydney