POSITION PAPER
OLDER WOMEN WHO ARE EXPERIENCING, OR AT RISK OF, HOMELESSNESS

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Acknowledgement of Country
Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders both past and present. For further information see AAG’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing Advisory Group (ATSIAAG).

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ABOUT THIS POSITION PAPER

The recommendations in this AAG Position Paper have been developed based on the evidence summarised in the Background Paper—Older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. This Position Paper is aimed at Federal, State and Territory Australian governments.

A companion document titled “Things to consider when working with older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness” has also been developed. It is targeted primarily at practitioners and service providers who are not experienced with or specialists in providing services to older women experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

In all its work including this paper, AAG adopts an inclusive definition of womanhood which includes self-perception and/or perception by others as a woman, including a person’s appearance, expression, identity or physical characteristics, that may be in accord with or opposed to, their physical anatomy, chromosomal sex or sex assigned at birth.

For the purposes of this paper, AAG defines “older women” as women aged 50 years or older, or from 45 years or older for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in line with international research evidence and Australian aged care service legislation for people who have experienced homelessness (1).

Although this paper focusses on older women’s experiences of homelessness, many of the recommendations apply to all older people in Australia who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.
RECOMMENDATIONS TO AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS TO ADDRESS THE INCREASING RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR OLDER WOMEN

Fundamental need for social and institutional change

Recommendation 1: Develop and formulate a national housing framework with support from all Australian governments that delivers long-term solutions to ensure affordable, appropriate and secure housing supply (2-4).

Recommendation 2: The Federal Australian Government commits to ensuring there is adequate housing supply for older Australians, including enactment of the recommendations made in the National Aged Care Alliance’s 2018 Position Paper ‘A secure, affordable home for older Australians’ (5).

Recommendation 3: Strategies are implemented now to boost economic security for women and prevent heightened risks of homelessness in later life (6).

Recommendation 4: The lower socio-economic status of women in society when compared to men must underpin any attempts to address the risk factors for homelessness that older women are more likely to experience than older men. For example, a public policy emphasis on addressing family violence as a cause of homelessness is paradoxical if women must partner with men to achieve housing security (7).
Meeting the needs of older people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness is the responsibility of the aged care system

Recommendation 5: Include questions addressing housing and the risk of, or experience of, homelessness in the aged care assessment processes and provide appropriate pathways to Assistance with Care and Housing services for older people, as well as home care and residential aged care services tailored for people who have experienced homelessness.

Recommendation 6: Review and enhance the Assistance with Care and Housing Sub-Programme of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme to better meet the needs of older people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

Recommendation 7: Establish a capital pool to enable specialist aged care providers to build residential aged care facilities for older people who have experienced homelessness that is appropriate for their financial, wellness and health needs.

Recommendation 8: Review, increase and index the Homeless Supplement for residential aged care providers to meet the costs incurred by facilities in providing specialised services for older people who have experienced homelessness.

Integration of aged care, homelessness, health, social service and disability systems required

Recommendation 9: Establish a dialogue and linkages between the aged care, housing and homelessness sectors.

Recommendation 10: Support Specialist Homelessness Services to understand and be able to refer people to appropriate aged care services, from services providing Assistance with Care and Housing for older people to those providing specialised residential aged care for people who have experienced homelessness.

Recommendation 11: Educate and support disability, social service (e.g. income support) and health providers so that they know about, and are able to support people’s access to, services for older people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Recommendation 12: Ensure older people who have experienced homelessness and are eligible for aged care from 50 years or older, or from 45 years or older for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are not forced to apply to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
Recommendation 13: Incorporate an assessment of older women’s housing situations in an appropriate manner into all contacts with older women seeking services and support, as many of the issues that lead people to seek help (e.g. poor health, bereavement, abuse) are risk factors for homelessness.

Recommendation 14: Ensure providers of housing and homelessness services to older women are prepared to implement assertive methods of contacting older women, including through more mainstream community services. A ‘housing’ rather than ‘homelessness’ discourse is appropriate.

Recommendation 15: Include outreach services to support older people at risk of homelessness in the face-to-face hubs to support aged care system navigation that are currently under development.

Early detection and intervention must be prioritised
Services must be appropriate for older women

Recommendation 16: The Australian Government regulates minimum access features in the National Construction Code for all new and extensively modified housing, including both public and private housing.

Recommendation 17: Ensure services are sensitive to the experiences and needs of individual women. For example, women who experience homelessness for the first time in later life due to a single crisis may not be comfortable approaching a service for people with complex needs who have experienced long-term or repeated homelessness (8,9).

Recommendation 18: Develop a range of housing and homelessness services, in addition to long-term housing solutions, in environments that suit the needs and experiences of older women, from prevention to age- and gender-appropriate housing in a crisis.

Recommendation 19: Ensure housing reflects older women’s needs, as well as their desired level of social interactions. Assumptions about women’s preferred living conditions (e.g. communal living) based on their gender should be avoided.

Recommendation 20: Consider the effects of the current and future aged care reforms in Australia on older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. This includes the suitability of reforms, including individual-based funding models, for those in precarious housing (10).

Recommendation 21: Support the expansion and development of more aged care services that can provide appropriate and sufficient support and care for older women who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. In providing these services, a person-centred and relational approach should be adopted (see AAG’s paper “Things to consider when working with older women who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness”).

Recommendation 22: Ensure that all services and supports are individually tailored to meet the diverse life experiences and needs of older women, including their:

- cultural and sexual identities
- health and disability needs
- housing needs
- support needs related to their desired level of independence, including the need for supports to ensure social connectedness

Recommendation 23: Ensure courses and training modules in health, allied health, aged care leadership and personal care at Australian universities and Registered Training Organisations cover the risk factors and needs of older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.
REFERENCES


8. Incerti K. Personal communication in response to request for input into AAG papers on older women and homelessness. 2018.


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