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More can be done to ensure aged care system meets is legislated responsibility for older women experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness

The Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) today released its three papers addressing older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. These papers were developed in collaboration with a range of experts from the housing, homelessness and aged care sectors and have been endorsed by a wide range of organisations from these sectors.

The first paper is a Background Paper which provides an introduction to older women’s diverse pathways into homelessness, their individual needs and Australian services currently available to support them. It summarises the latest evidence from research, as well as evidence from practitioner and service provider insights.

The second paper is a Position Paper with recommendations to Federal, State and Territory Australian governments based on the evidence summarised in the Background Paper.

The third paper outlines things to consider when working with older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. It is targeted primarily at practitioners and service providers who are not experienced with, or specialists in, providing services to older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

The research findings and reports from service providers summarised in AAG’s Background Paper – Older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness indicate that the implementation of aged care service information, assessment and delivery is not meeting the intent of the Australian aged care legislation at this stage, especially regarding older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt AM, says “I am keenly aware of the plight of the increasing number of older women at risk of or experiencing homelessness and am pleased at the work being done to highlight the issue.

“The Turnbull Government is working to assist these vulnerable people, with a range of supports through the viability supplement expansion component and the Homeless supplement. The Government also provides funding to support older people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness, under the Assistance with Care and Housing sub-program of the Commonwealth Home Support Program, as well as broader initiatives addressing seniors with diverse needs.”

“The service providers, researchers and other experts who contributed to these have so much good will, expertise, dedication and experience”, says Dr Sandra South, Senior Policy and Research Officer at AAG.

“The aged care and homelessness sectors agree about what needs to be done to ensure older women have appropriate, affordable and secure housing and the aged care legislation is in place to support this; it just needs to be implemented differently.”

“AAG sees the recommendations as a roadmap for providing solutions to older women’s homelessness”, says Associate Professor Christine Stirling, President of the Australian Association of Gerontology.
The Position Paper identifies five key areas where improvements can be made to ensure that older people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness have access to the right services:

1. A fundamental need for social and institutional change to address the lack of affordable, appropriate and secure housing supply, as well as to address the lower socio-economic status of women compared to men.
2. Changes to ensure that the aged care system can meet its legislated responsibility for meeting the needs of older people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.
3. The integration of aged care, homelessness, health, social service and disability systems.
5. Expansion and further development of services that are appropriate for the age, gender, and needs of older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Minister Wyatt commented, “While our comprehensive plan includes measures to make more homes available for Australians by collaborating across all levels of government, we are providing funding certainty to those organisations that deliver frontline services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

“As part of a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, the Government will provide $375.3 million of new funding over three years from 2018-19 to State and Territory governments to fund ongoing homelessness support services”, says Minister Wyatt.

“The evidence and recommendations presented in AAG’s papers addressing older women experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness show that there is a need to further develop appropriate services for older people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness in Australia”, says Associate Professor Stirling.

“There is a need for services capable of providing specialist support for older women experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness due to the rapid increase in older women in the homelessness statistics and their unique risk factors and needs”, says James Beckford Saunders, Chief Executive Officer of AAG.

“Through reviewing the evidence from research and incorporating the experiences of service providers and experts in the housing, homelessness and aged cares sectors, AAG has highlighted that there is a need for integration of the different systems. Older women experiencing, or at risk of homelessness need to be identified earlier and referred to services capable of meeting their individual needs”, says Associate Professor Stirling.

“We all need to stop and reflect on our own potential prejudices and biases regarding older women and homelessness, the evidence shows that all it takes sometimes is a single crisis to propel a woman into homelessness”, says Mr Beckford Saunders, “This means that many women are experiencing homelessness for the first time in later life, after a lifetime of secure housing and economic and social participation in society.”

Today – 6 August 2018 – is the first day of Homelessness Week (#HW2018, #EverybodysHome).

Come meet Tonye and Sandra at AAG’s exhibition table and get your hard copy of the AAG papers on older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness at the National Homelessness Conference 6-7 August 2018 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

The Background Paper, Position Paper and Things to consider paper are available here on AAG’s website.
All three of the AAG papers on older women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness have been endorsed by the following organisations:

- Australian Network for Universal Housing Design
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning, The University of Adelaide
- City of Port Phillip
- Common Ground
- ECH
- Housing Choices South Australia
- Housing for the Aged Action Group
- HOME at last
- International Longevity Centre Australia
- Mercy Foundation
- National Shelter
- Shelter SA
- Wintringham
- Women’s Property Initiatives
- Young Women’s Christian Association, Australia
- Young Women’s Christian Association National Housing

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About Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG)

Australian Association of Gerontology’s (AAG) purpose is to improve the experience of ageing through connecting research, policy and practice. Since 1964, AAG has been Australia’s peak body linking professionals across the multidisciplinary fields of ageing. Its 1300 members include: researchers, aged care leaders, geriatricians, nurses, allied health professionals, policy makers & advocates for older people. Visit www.aag.asn.au