

Portfolio summary: Housing options for older Victorians

What is the issue?

Victoria's housing affordability crisis is increasing housing stress and insecurity for many older people.

Growing numbers of older Victorians are renting in the private market, carrying mortgage debt later in life, or facing barriers to downsizing and relocating to more suitable housing. Rising rents, low vacancy rates, insecure tenure, and cost-of-living pressures are contributing to increased financial stress and risk of homelessness, particularly for older single women.

Melbourne has seen a large decline in affordable rental listings, with vacancy rates at their lowest in 20 years,ⁱ and rents rising steeply.ⁱⁱ Older people can face additional barriers in the housing system due to ageism, disability, poverty, insecure income, social isolation, or experiences of elder abuse.

At the same time, affordable and accessible housing options remain limited. Social housing supply has not kept pace with population growth and demand, while many retirement and age-specific housing models continue to require stronger consumer protections and more accessible design standards.

Older Victorians need access to a wider range of affordable, secure and age-friendly housing options that support independence, wellbeing and community connection.

Key facts

- Between 2011 and 2021, the number of renters aged 55 and over in Victoria increased by 77%,ⁱⁱⁱ with many spending up to 50% to 80% of their fixed income on rent.^{iv}
- Women over 55 are the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness with 240,000 across Australia at risk.
- Three quarters of older Australians report owning their own homes, with 22% still paying off a mortgage.
- Downsizing is an appealing option for a third of older people but 40% of these see affordability and 32% the availability of suitable properties as barriers.
- Those aged 55 years and older in Australia increased by a third between 2011 and 2021, yet the number of older social housing tenants increased by only 11.4 percent.

Our advocacy agenda

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria advocate for a housing system that provides older people with affordable, secure, accessible and appropriate housing options across all forms of tenure.

Specifically, we advocate for:

- increased investment in public and community housing that meets the needs of older people;
- stronger renter protections and more accessible tenancy systems;
- accessible and adaptable housing design standards in all new housing;
- fairer protections and dispute resolution mechanisms for retirement housing residents;
- housing strategies and planning processes that explicitly consider the needs of older people; and
- support for innovative and alternative housing models that improve affordability, accessibility and independence.

We also support national reforms to improve housing affordability and rental assistance for low-income households.

Recent COTA Victoria documents:

To support systemic reform and sector development, COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria regularly contribute to government consultations, policy development, research, and sector capacity building.

Recent examples include:

- [Member Briefing: Victoria's Housing Statement – What does it mean for older people?](#)
- [Submission response to the Inquiry into the Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia](#)
- [Submission response to the Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria](#)
- [Submission to Review of the Retirement Villages Act 1986 Exposure Draft Bill](#)

Feedback on any issue raised in this briefing can be provided through our policy advocacy survey tool accessible at: [COTA Victoria Policy Advocacy - Feedback on Publications – Fill out form.](#)

Last updated: June 2026

ⁱ Anglicare Australia. (2025, April 30). Rental affordability snapshot 2025. Anglicare Sydney.
<https://www.anglicare.org.au/media-centre/news/rental-affordability-snapshot-2025/>

ⁱⁱ Department of Families Fairness and Housing Victoria. (2024). Past Rental Reports.
<https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/past-rental-reports>

ⁱⁱⁱ Housing for the Aged Action Group. (2025). Submission to the inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria.
https://www.olderrenters.org.au/sites/default/files/haag_submission_inquiry_into_the_supply_of_homes_in_regional_victoria_2025.pdf

^{iv} Power, E. R. (2020). Older women in the private rental sector: Unaffordable, substandard and insecure housing. Western Sydney University. Retrieved October 2024 <https://www.mercyfoundation.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Older-women-in-the-private-rental-sector.pdf>