

MEDIA RELEASE

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Working Group calls for a national agenda for action to fight older women's housing insecurity and homelessness.

On 23 August 2018, the National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group will deliver a paper, *Retiring into Poverty - A National Plan For Change: Increasing Housing Security For Older Women* at an event hosted by the Parliamentary Friends of Homelessness and Housing Affordability, at Parliament House in Canberra.

Senator Doug Cameron (ALP Senator and Shadow Minister for Housing & Homelessness), Senator Janet Rice (Greens Senator for Victoria) and Andrew Wallace (Liberal MP) will all speak at the event.

Dr Maree Petersen from the University of Queensland will speak about the issue of older women in housing insecurity and homelessness and Ms Jeanette Large, CEO of Women's Property Initiatives in Victoria will speak to the report's recommendations.

Older single women are the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness and most of them have never been homeless before. This paper identifies the underlying systemic and compounding causes of older women's homelessness, examines the devastating impact of gendered economic inequality and the key policy areas that require attention.

It calls for and outlines a national agenda for action to address the alarming 31% rise in homelessness amongst older women between the 2011 and 2016 censuses and the incredible 97% increase in the number of older women forced to rent in an increasingly unaffordable private market over the 10-year period to 2016.

The working group brought together by the Mercy Foundation consists of housing and homelessness policy leaders, researchers and practitioners and has been examining policies and advocating for more effective strategies for older women to access affordable, safe, secure and appropriate housing and enjoy good health as they age.

The Federal and State Governments are finalising negotiations on the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). It is essential that the NHHA includes strong actions to address the problem of older women at risk of homelessness.

In its recommendations the group calls on the Federal Government to implement a comprehensive national strategy to:

- Encourage State governments to create additional permanent social and affordable housing options for women in each State and Territory.
- Address the current financial insecurity of older women, rectifying inequities in superannuation policy and examining the national income support system and Commonwealth Rent Assistance to improve outcomes for women.
- Include special measures to assist women at retirement age who have not accumulated superannuation due to lower lifetime earnings and caring duties.
- Address the underlying causes of gendered economic inequality and discrimination across policy domains to prevent deprivation in older age for women and ensure these problems don't continue into the future.
- Ensure that national aged care policy and programs consider housing adequacy – especially for programs delivering in home care - to support women to be healthy, safe and secure as they age.
- Establish a Seniors Housing Gateway Program to better address the housing support needs of vulnerable older women and expand the Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) Program.

“Housing is older women’s most basic need. Provision of affordable, appropriate permanent housing is essential to ageing well. The Working Group calls for new policies that address the poverty, ageing and housing of older women.” Said Felicity Reynolds, CEO, Mercy Foundation.

“It is a disgrace that women who spent periods of their life out of the paid workforce caring for children and other family members are now finding themselves penalised and penniless when they have reached retirement age.” Said Ms Reynolds.

To access the report https://www.mercyfoundation.com.au/latest_news/retiring-into-poverty/

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