

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers

Melbourne – Tuesday 5 August 2025

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WITNESS

Fiona York, Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers. I am Joe McCracken, Chair, and we are going to introduce the rest of the members of this inquiry as well.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good afternoon. Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Hi. I am Aiv Puglielli, North-Eastern Metro.

Rachel PAYNE: Hi, there. I am Rachel Payne from South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ryan Batchelor, Southern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: We have got two members online as well – Michael.

Michael GALEA: Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: And Sonja.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Hi. I am Sonja Terpstra, state Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Thank you. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during the hearing is protected by law, and you are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing. But if you go elsewhere and say the same thing, you may not be protected by that same privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and transcripts will ultimately be made public and put on the committee's website.

Just for the Hansard record, are you happy to say your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of, just into the mic, thanks.

Fiona YORK : Sure. My name is Fiona York, and I am the Executive Officer of Housing for the Aged Action Group.

The CHAIR: Beautiful. Thanks very much. I understand you have about 5 minutes or so for a quick presentation and then we will go to questions. So Fiona, welcome, and I will hand it over to you.

Fiona YORK : Excellent. Thanks for the opportunity to give evidence today. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people, and pay my respects to elders past and present. For those of you who have not heard of us, we are a community-based organisation, we are member based and we have been around for over 40 years. We have been very strong public housing advocates throughout the last 40 years. Our vision is for a society where all older people have safe, secure and affordable housing.

We deliver the Home at Last service, which is funded through the Victorian government, and that assists people who are 50 years and older to understand their housing options, including retirement housing, but a lot of the work is focused on assisting older people to obtain public and community housing in Victoria. We assist around 130 to 160 people a year to obtain public and community housing and that includes applications, as well as moving into public housing and then assisting them with all of the support needs that they may need after that.

We are really lucky in Victoria because we do have a priority system for people who are over 55, as well as 55-plus specific older peoples public housing. Without these two things, we would really find it difficult to have the good outcomes that we see through our Home at Last service, and we are the envy of other states who do not have a similar type of specialist service for older people.

The evidence that I am giving today is based on the input of our over 900 members, including over 40 people who responded specifically to our survey, as well as the service delivery experience, which places us in a really unique position because we actually see the outcomes for people both before finding housing and after actually being placed into public housing. They know what it is like to age in public housing, but they also know what it is like to be living in private rental where they cannot afford the rent and to be at risk of homelessness.

We have seen firsthand the life-changing impacts of having secure and affordable housing, and many people who we assist who have been homeless or have been at risk of homelessness now lead really happy lives in public housing and are better able to contribute to society, to manage their health, to volunteer and to look after grandkids. Those who have mobility issues – and about 50 per cent of our clients do have mobility issues which impact on their housing – are able to get modifications to their homes that they cannot get in private rental or even in community housing. This means that they can age in place in their forever homes, knowing that their landlord will not kick them out and that they will be able to afford the rent for as long as they are alive.

We are genuinely concerned that public housing is essentially disappearing in Melbourne under this program. We have not seen any commitment to growing and expanding public housing, and we would like to see growth in both public and community housing, with no loss of public housing to the community sector. In community housing, rents and bills are often higher, and there are variable policies across providers, which means that tenants may have fewer protections. Public housing provides stability, lower rents and a greater protection for tenants.

There are 12 older persons housing towers that are slated for redevelopment. Many of these tenants, including some of our members, are in their 80s and 90s, and we are seriously concerned about whether they will survive this move. We would like to see that the rights of older tenants safeguarded and that there is specific support provided to older renters, both for those that are in those 12 high-rises and those older tenants that are in the general public housing stock. The support needs to be face to face and accessible, and at the moment we do not see any independent service that is helping older residents understand their rights or options for this redevelopment. The older persons high-rise program, which has been around for a long time, delivered through some community health services, provides a dedicated support to older people in those 55-plus high-rises. But funding is not meeting demand, and it is not really their role to explain the implications and the options for moving.

We are also really concerned about what is proposed to replace the towers. Our understanding is that there will be three times as many apartments on these sites but only a 10 per cent increase in social housing, and none of that is public housing. Simply increasing the general housing stock will not address the housing crisis. Our research shows that there are 160,000 older Victorians living in private rentals on low incomes who cannot afford the rent. They cannot compete with younger people, and they are not likely to get any work. Where are they to go? When government effectively reduces public housing during a housing crisis, they are pushing vulnerable older people into homelessness, and those costs are then pushed downstream into the crisis system, into the emergency departments of hospitals and into residential aged care.

We would like to see 100 per cent of housing built on public land remaining in public ownership. If all 30,000 of the proposed new housing units were public housing, we may go some way to addressing the waitlist, as well as those who are in need who are not on the waitlist, and we know that there are many thousands of people who are unable to apply or are ineligible for public housing that also have a critical need for secure housing.

So far our members are telling us that the government consultations that have taken place around these redevelopments have given residents no real voice about whether the towers should or will be redeveloped. The decision to redevelop was already a done deal, and the consultation was really about discussing how residents would be relocated. They did not feel that was an adequate consultation. It also remains unclear whether all the high-rises are beyond repair or if their conditions vary. We would like to see comprehensive, independent site-by-site evaluations to determine whether upgrading the buildings is feasible and which take into account the cost of relocations on tenants. You can read the rest of our recommendations – which I am sure you would have – in our submission. And I have got some quotes here that have come through our surveys from our members which I would like to share with you today, if possible, just so you can see the words of the older tenants that are speaking to us about this issue. Thank you.

The CHAIR: That sounds good. Thanks very much, Fiona. I appreciate that. I will start off with questions, and then we will go through. I had a look, and one of your recommendations was ‘Adequately fund repairs and maintenance of public housing.’ That suggests to me that obviously it is not at the moment.

Fiona YORK: Yes.

The CHAIR: What makes you say that?

Fiona YORK: What we hear at the moment from tenants in public housing is that maintenance in the past has been difficult and lengthy to obtain, but now it is near on impossible.

The CHAIR: Is that due to demolition works being imminent?

Fiona YORK: No. That is across all different types of public housing, both the low-rises and the high-rises. I am sure there are other people giving evidence today that can speak to this. There has been a long history of a lack of repairs and a lack of upkeep of some of the low-rise and high-rise public housing.

The CHAIR: So the people that you are representing are having difficulties. Is it the quality of the works or that the works just are not happening?

Fiona YORK: Just not happening.

The CHAIR: Which must be incredibly frustrating for people that, as you well know, can be in quite vulnerable situations.

Fiona YORK: Yes. I think it is fair to say that there is a perception that the housing stock is being allowed to run down in order to justify redeveloping it. Whether or not that is the case, that is definitely a perception from some of our members and some of our clients.

The CHAIR: Okay. Would you say that perception is widespread, or would you think it is in patches?

Fiona YORK: Certainly it comes to us a lot, that perception. Whether or not it is widespread, it is anecdotal.

The CHAIR: Okay. Fair enough. One of the other recommendations, I think it was recommendation 9, you had was ‘Safeguard rights and provide support for older renters.’ One of the rights that has been talked about quite heavily in this inquiry so far is about the right to return.

Fiona YORK: Yes.

The CHAIR: What are you hearing about that?

Fiona YORK: We would like to see the right to return. And people, as you would have heard, I am sure – there has been a lot of talk about the breaking up of the communities. We know that for older people it is much more difficult to relocate to a place far away from where they are familiar. That is because you may have your family close by and you may have medical needs close by. When we have spoken to residents in some of the high-rises, they love where they are living because it is close to public transport, it is across the road from the pharmacy and all of those things.

The CHAIR: Can I ask a quick question? With the elderly people that you work with, how do they come to a view about whether they do have a right to return or not? Because there are eligibility criteria. Do they go to someone for advice like yourselves, or do they go to a legal service?

Fiona YORK: Do you mean, has their eligibility changed since they moved into public housing?

The CHAIR: No. I mean, how do they discover that they might have a right to return or not? How do they figure out that they have met the criteria to return? Do they go to you?

Fiona YORK: Yes. Well, my assumption would be that if they are eligible for public housing and they are living in that public housing and they are moved elsewhere, they would still remain eligible when they return. So in the process of getting into that public housing they would have gone through the eligibility criteria, which is around income, assets and age.

The CHAIR: Sometimes people have been there for a long period of time and that –

Fiona YORK: It may have changed. That is correct. Yes.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you for that.

Fiona YORK: Although I should say that older people are less likely to increase their income. They are more likely to be on the age pension. So I do not think that would be as much of an issue around eligibility. Once people get to a certain age, it is likely that their income is going to stay the same, and that is one of the reasons why private rental is not great for them.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you. I appreciate that. I am now going to hand over to Mr Galea, who is online.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you for joining us today, Ms York. You have touched a couple of times already on the condition of some of the existing towers.

Fiona YORK: Yes.

Michael GALEA: Could you elaborate on what sorts of issues you are frequently encountering or the people that you represent are frequently encountering?

Fiona YORK: I am not an expert on this; I am not a building inspector, so I cannot speak, and that is one of the reasons we would like to see some expertise around this, but what we hear from some of the people, the residents in the towers, is around heating and cooling. Some of the buildings hold on to their heat for quite a long time even after the temperature has dropped outside. We know that there are issues with heating and with ventilation. What we do not know is: is this the case for every single tower block, and what options are there to ameliorate those things? That is the sort of information that we would like to see before we can make a strong statement about whether or not repair options and renovation options are possible.

Michael GALEA: Certainly heating and cooling has been a bit of a theme that we have heard across these hearings.

Fiona YORK: Yes.

Michael GALEA: Are those issues coming to you from one specific tower, or are they coming to you from across different towers?

Fiona YORK: From a couple of them. The reason we would like to see housing that is environmentally appropriate for older people is because older people are disproportionately impacted by heatwaves, and it is one of the silent killers for older people. So because of that we think there should be priority given to those towers that are earmarked for 55-plus older persons. High-rises should be appropriate for older people, and one of the issues is heating, yes.

Michael GALEA: Absolutely. That is very valid feedback. Thank you. If I can ask on a similar and related note, in terms of accessibility, obviously people's needs do change and can change over time, especially for older persons. Can you talk to me about some of the challenges you have supported people with, whether it is with accessibility of their existing units, whether it is things like shower access?

Fiona YORK: Yes. The newer housing that is being built tends to have better accessibility, so what we would like to see in all of the building standards is minimum accessibility standards for people, and that is not just for people with disabilities; that is for all older people, or anyone really – universal housing design principles applied. One of the things that we see, and it is much more prevalent in private rental, is things like steps over baths and steps up to doorways preventing people from being able to age in place, so if they have a fall, they cannot be safely discharged. One of the things that we think is really important to protect around public housing is that modifications for things like ramps and rails can be done relatively easily in public housing. Community housing providers would like to be able to do it, but they do not have the funding. They need to apply for a grant to do that, which means that an older person in public housing can request modifications, and they can get them relatively easily. And yes, it is really important for people in terms of ageing in place.

The CHAIR: Mr Galea, your time has expired, I am afraid. I am going to hand it over to Ms Gray-Barberio now.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thanks very much, Chair. Welcome, Fiona. Fiona, the committee has received dozens of submissions from older residents as well as representation of older residents as witnesses during this inquiry period. They overwhelmingly do not want to move and are distressed by the idea of displacement, and I think you sort of touched on this in your earlier opening statement. Will forced relocation cause harm to older residents in particular?

Fiona YORK: We are concerned about the older residents and the impact of the relocations, particularly some of the people that are in their 80s and 90s, and whether or not they will survive the move or end up in residential aged care away from the communities that they know. So yes, we are concerned for older residents.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: That is pretty heartbreaking to hear. I just want to ask you about what are the services that older people need in particular in public housing, and do you believe that these are being provided during and after the relocation?

Fiona YORK: We do not think that there has been enough help for older people generally. There is the older persons high-rise program, which I mentioned earlier, and that has been a great program for many years, and it assists older tenants for a range of issues. But their role is not to be able to assist with the relocations or to explain people's options or to advocate on their behalf. We saw with some of the low-rise redevelopments in the public housing renewal program that there were not social workers onsite; there were not people that were able to assist older people to find out what their options were and to explain the processes. We think it is really important that there is a dedicated older persons service that can assist people, because things take longer, you need to have staff that are able to work with older people, and we do not have that specific service. A lot of people are doing extra work on top of what they are currently doing in order to support people, but we are not seeing that additional support that is required for older people.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: There would be a lot of older people from diverse backgrounds that would not even know the first step in terms of what questions to ask for accessing that information; what happens to them?

Fiona YORK: Around 60 per cent of our clients are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. And so –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Sorry, did you say 60 per cent?

Fiona YORK: Yes. We have a really high number of bilingual staff as well and we have a community education program that reaches out to communities to assist them. For that reason we are pretty familiar with some of the barriers. It is not just about written, translated materials, although that is really important, but we also have to recognise that a lot of people have low literacy in their first language as well and there is a lot of reliance on adult children to navigate the system. If you do not have those supports, you can find it really difficult to get the basic information. So we need translated written material, we need to be able to work with the ethno-specific organisations and the bilingual workers within organisations to assist people and the information needs to be culturally appropriate. It is a lot of work. It is a big undertaking.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I have run out of time. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am going to pass over to Mr Batchelor now.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Ms York, for coming in. Your submission says, at recommendation 5, that you would like the government to:

Exempt refusals of offers in high rises from being considered "valid offers" and provide tenants with clear timelines.

Just so I understand this correctly, you are saying that at the moment tenants who are being relocated – and we have had a few at our South Yarra hearings, older residents who went through this process, so I am drawing on their experience that they usually get two offers of places – to another high-rise tower that it should not be counted in the two, is that right?

Fiona YORK: Yes. And it is not just the people that are being relocated, it is anybody on the VHR.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Anyone?

Fiona YORK: Yes. The reason for that is that people do not want to move into a tower that they think they are going to have to move out of in a couple of years; they really want to be moving into their forever homes. So we would like for that offer to be considered exempt in some way from those two offers.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Sure. Obviously the redevelopment program is going over –

Fiona YORK: Many years.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I should be able to do the maths, but many years, until 2050, right?

Fiona YORK: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Twenty-seven years. Is that –

Fiona YORK: Will any of us still be here?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Yes. Who knows. How long do you think –

Fiona YORK: The exemption should apply?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Yes. Like, if the government is aware that, given that it is going to have to stage the program, one of the towers is not going to be redeveloped for 15 years or 10 years – like, I am just trying to get a sense of whether it is a forever thing or is it related to the condition – you know, you talk about accessibility and safety issues that some people fear in different towers to the ones that they are living in at the moment. Is that part of it, or is it all the future displacement?

Fiona YORK: I guess our perspective in that recommendation was coming through our Home at Last service, where we are talking about people that are not in any type of housing. So what we do not want to have happen is to have them move into, say, North Melbourne and then in a couple of months have to relocate again or a couple of years have to relocate again. If we had a strong timetable and we knew that they were all going to be happening at a pace, and this is what, you know –

Ryan BATCHELOR: So that, first tranche would be in this block of time and the second tranche, third tranche –

Fiona YORK: Right. Then if you were offered somewhere in Prahran and you knew Prahran was going to be knocked over next year, then you would not have to accept that offer and then be penalised and knocked off the priority list.

Ryan BATCHELOR: But if it was in 10 years, for example, it might be okay.

Fiona YORK: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I just want to go back to your point about heating and cooling – sorry, not just heating and cooling, but the other thing you mentioned was the accessibility standards and the step-over baths, which may not sound like a big issue to a lot of people –

Fiona YORK: It is a big issue.

Ryan BATCHELOR: but I know it is a big issue for older people. All of the apartments in the high-rises have step-over baths into showers at the moment, don't they?

Fiona YORK: I do not know if all of them do, but certainly some of them do, for sure. Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: We have got Homes Victoria coming in tomorrow and this is one of the things I want to follow-up with them on, which is, we have had advice certainly – and the committee has done tours of the towers to have a look at them and one of the issues that was raised in those tours was that it is difficult to

renovate the bathrooms to get rid of the step-overs because everything is concrete, and the nature of the plumbing and ceiling heights – anyway, I am sure someone will be able to explain it to me tomorrow. If you cannot get rid of the step-over showers, is that a problem for older people?

Fiona YORK: Yes, it is a problem, and that is again why we would like to see the information that shows that these places cannot be renovated. We are not experts at this, but what we do know is that we would like to see 55-plus housing meet minimum accessibility standards and minimum environmental standards.

Ryan BATCHELOR: That would include doorways as well as bathrooms?

Fiona YORK: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. Ms Payne, over to you.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Fiona, for presenting before us today. In your submission you note that the Victorian government has made a deliberate shift away from public housing towards community housing under that umbrella term ‘social housing’.

Fiona YORK: Yes.

Rachel PAYNE: What do you see the consequences are of this shift in language?

Fiona YORK: It obscures the fact that we are actually divesting of public housing, and the reason that we think it is important is because there is that 25 per cent cap on rent. There are relatively clear processes around complaints and repairs and maintenance. Although having said that, there is a big backlog in public housing repairs and maintenance. What we are concerned about is that there is a lack of consistency around community housing providers and the way they deliver the housing. We would like to see the recommendations of the social housing regulation review implemented, which would then align a lot of those things and make it clearer for tenants. So we think then, as I mentioned earlier, that there needs to be growth in both public housing and community housing and not one at the expense of the other.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you. Additionally, in your submission you talk about the importance of a clear definition for affordable housing. Could you speak more about the importance of this?

Fiona YORK: Yes. When announcements are made that there is going to be a certain percentage of affordable housing, we want to know what ‘affordable housing’ is defined as, and at the moment 80 per cent, 90 per cent, 79.5 per cent of the market rate is not affordable. If we had public housing that was much more plentiful, we would not have this scarcity mentality and we would not have to have such strict eligibility requirements, and it would become a much more normal thing for people on low incomes and key workers to be able to access, as well as people that are on government support payments. So at the moment the solution for some people that are not eligible for public housing is so-called affordable housing, but we know that that is not actually that affordable for the majority of people.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you. My next question relates to the redevelopments, and you did make comment on this in your opening statement, but I might just ask anyway in case you would like to expand. Your submission states that critical details on the redevelopments regarding land ownership, development types and preservation of public housing remain undisclosed. What impact has this had on your ability to properly advocate on behalf of your members?

Fiona YORK: We would really like some more clarity about what is happening. I think if the public housing towers are in such a state of disrepair that they need to be replaced, then we need that information to be clear and transparent. We have these parcels of government-owned land in prime locations, which are exactly the places where older people want to be living – close to public transport, close to amenities et cetera. It is a fantastic opportunity to increase the housing stock for public housing, but we just do not seem to be doing that, and our members would like to know and our clients would like to know why. How are we going to be addressing the housing crisis if we do not start properly investing in housing in these locations? We do not actually need to increase housing stock per se, the general housing stock – we have housing stock that no-one

can afford with empty apartments all over Docklands and Footscray, for example – what we need is housing that people can genuinely afford to live in forever.

Rachel PAYNE: Okay. Great. Thank you, Chair. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. We are now going to go to Ms Terpstra, who is online.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Thank you, Chair, and thanks, Fiona, for coming in and giving your presentation today. I was just having a quick squiz at your submission but also reflecting on some of the evidence that you have given today, in particular in regard to older persons. I note that you were saying earlier some of the experiences that older people are having in the towers relate to things like heating and cooling and that the towers can retain their heat over long periods even when the temperature has cooled outside. From a health perspective, what sorts of things are you hearing from people who might be speaking to you about the ongoing impacts those sort of extremes in temperatures are having on their health and their ability to heat and cool their own living spaces in the towers as they currently are?

Fiona YORK: We have not heard anything specifically from older tenants about the impact of heatwaves on their health. We do know scientifically that, as I said earlier, heat affects older people in a different way to younger people. What we mainly hear, though, is that people enjoy where they live and they want to stay there. Yes, there are some inconveniences around things like repairs and maintenance and lack of air conditioning and things like that, but the broad message that we get is that people enjoy living where they are living in public housing.

Sonja TERPSTRA: We have heard evidence about the challenges that the age of the towers is presenting – things like ageing systems, sewerage, heating and cooling, those sorts of things. Of course as people age, often their accessibility requirements change as well – that is an ongoing evolution for some people – and as you say quite rightly, if there are any changes in someone's health or accessibility requirements, that is going to present challenges, especially if you try and retrofit something to help them stay in the place that they live. It is very clear what you are saying – that people want to stay where they are living – but how do you then manage that, because whenever you update or modify something, there is going to be some level of inconvenience to somebody at some point in time. What would be your recommendation on how someone could live in an apartment while it is being upgraded or demolished?

Fiona YORK: I do not think I would like to see anyone living in a place while it was being demolished, but I do take your point. There are going to be inconveniences for people, and they may need to deal with those as they come. I do not think that renovations are necessarily as disruptive as demolitions, and that is why we would like to see the evidence as to why it is necessary.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Sure. But on disruptions, say if you have got a mobility issue and you need a walker to get to your toilet or to your shower and your water is off, how would a person be expected to shower or clean their teeth or access water in an apartment where the water is shut off because it needs renovation?

Fiona YORK: I would hope that people were not living in housing with no water.

Sonja TERPSTRA: But if there are plumbing issues, sometimes water does need to be shut off, especially if pipes need to be replaced. I am just wondering from your perspective how you would see that actually being managed.

Fiona YORK: For a short period of time while the water is being repaired? I am sorry; I am not quite understanding the question. I think people get ramps and rails and home modifications regularly as part of the ageing process. Occupational therapists will come into a home and they will do an assessment, and they will say, 'These are the modifications that are required in order for an older person with mobility issues to stay in the home.' The advantage of public housing is that the government often pays for those modifications, ramps and rails. If they are not in public housing, then they have to find money to do it themselves, and that places them at risk.

Sonja TERPSTRA: But I think the challenge is what types of modifications. You would have to agree, wouldn't you, that sometimes it is not possible for someone to stay in an apartment if there are extensive modifications needing to be done, because the mobility –

The CHAIR: I will just say quickly, we have just got to finish off this one. I do not mean to cut you off, Ms Terpstra, but please respond, if you would like to, to the rest of the question, then we will have to move on.

Fiona YORK: Yes, I agree that sometimes people will have to leave in order to have homes modified.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Great, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Terpstra. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. I understand that this week Hank, a public housing resident from an older person's tower in Northcote, locked himself to a drilling machine to prevent works in advance of the upcoming demolitions at the Flemington estate. I understand he has done this because he is worried about his home but also about every public housing resident's home that is set to be demolished under the current plan and the idea of the destruction of the current public housing system that we have in this state that so many people rely on. This is obviously a very strong indicator of how some older residents are feeling about the government's plan. From your perspective, what avenues do older residents have to try and protect their homes and to advocate for their rights?

Fiona YORK: I think it does indicate how strongly people feel about the issue, and it does also speak to how important people's feelings of safety and security are. At the moment it has been difficult to get information about the future, and I think that makes people feel afraid. The more information that we have, the better we are able to advocate. People in public housing, I think, have felt that their voices have not been heard for a long time, which is why we are pleased to be able to give evidence here today and we are pleased that people have had the opportunity to make submissions. The more that we listen to residents and how these decisions of government are impacting them, the more able I think decision-makers will be to take those things into consideration.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. We have heard testimony through this inquiry process, even earlier today, that relocation staff, under whatever guidance they have been given by Homes Victoria, are using effectively any negotiation tactics that they can in order to get a relocation done. We heard specifically about that this morning. From your experience in the work that you do in the community, have you heard of any examples where older residents in particular are signing relocation agreements under questionable circumstances?

Fiona YORK: I can probably speak more to some of the previous relocations than this one. I do know that people do feel a lot of pressure to leave, and I do not know if people are getting all the advice that they need at the right time. Relocation teams are there to relocate. They are not necessarily, as I mentioned earlier, social workers or people that can actually go through options. And there is a time pressure. So yes, I think older people are feeling under a lot of pressure, and it would not surprise me to hear that people are signing things that they do not necessarily want to but that pressure is there.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I ask: how would this style of negotiation impact outcomes for older people in particular?

Fiona YORK: This is exactly why we want to see a specialised service for older people, because we think older people do need more time, especially people, as you mentioned earlier, from non-English-speaking backgrounds. We would like to see people that are trained to work with older people to go through the options in a way that gives them enough time to understand everything before they take options, yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That is my time.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much. Fiona, thanks very much for your evidence today and for appearing before the inquiry. That is an end to this session now.

Fiona YORK: No worries.

The CHAIR: You will be provided with a proof transcript. Have a look at it, see if it is all right, tick it off and then we will go from there.

Witness withdrew.