



### **Victorian Government's Public Housing Redevelopment Program**

The Old Colonists' Association of Victoria (OCAV) is a leading not-for-profit retirement village provider offering a continuum of care from independent living, assisted living and aged care in Victoria. Our four villages in Berwick, Euroa, North Fitzroy and St Helena are home to 500 older Victorians in need. The OCAV was established in 1869 by Victorian founding fathers including George Selth Coppin, a Member of Parliament and philanthropist.

### **Our interest in public housing**

While 73 per cent of all older Australians own their home (Productivity Commission 2015, p9), only 47 per cent of OCAV residents owned their home before moving into an OCAV village. The remaining 53 per cent of OCAV residents were either homeless or vulnerably housed while living with family or friends, in private rentals, public housing or in temporary accommodation.

### **Our interest from a national perspective on housing trends and the elderly**

Meeting the housing and care needs of Australia's increasingly ageing population is a significant challenge, compounded by several other trends:

- Fewer older people will own their homes in retirement and have the security and independence afforded by home ownership in retirement (Productivity Commission 2015, p2).
- More older people will be renting, and be more vulnerable and economically disadvantaged because of that, increasing their risk of homelessness (Productivity Commission 2015, p2).
- Australia will also have increasing numbers of older people who are unlikely to have sufficient retirement savings to be able to meet their living costs (Bridge et al. 2011).

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# OLD COLONISTS'

## ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

### Executive Summary

The OCAV is pleased to make a submission to this important discussion into the Victorian Government's Public Housing Redevelopment Program.

As a leading retirement village and aged care provider in Victoria, we work to provide affordable and safe housing for elderly Victorians in need, whether they live independently, or in supported or aged care living. Many of our residents have lived within OCAV villages for ten years and longer, maintaining relationships with friends and families.

Our services – both affordable housing and support for older Victorians – are in high demand. We currently have a waiting list of 900 across our four villages and we are seeking sites for additional villages to cater for this demand.

As mentioned above, over half of our residents were either homeless or at risk of homelessness before entering an OCAV village. Many lived in public housing which, for elderly people and especially single older women, is regarded as unsafe and undesirable.

### **The adequacy of a proposed 10 per cent increase in public housing (or 1,100 public units) on the sites given the size of the waiting list for public housing.**

Victoria's social and public housing stock per capita is amongst the lowest in the country with 32,000 Victorians currently waiting for public housing and people waiting years to get into public housing.

Further, we note there are 120,000 Victorian households experiencing housing stress that are in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, of which 50,000 are in the very lowest income bracket.

Clearly a 10 per cent increase in public housing is inadequate.

In Plan Melbourne, OCAV argued that 30,000 new affordable properties for low-income earners was inadequate, and we urged an increase to 60,000. However, Plan Melbourne did not recommend a level of public or social housing as a proportion of existing and new housing stock.

While this submission focuses on public housing, we believe it is important to highlight the importance, too, of social housing. According to the Community Housing Industry Association, to provide for all households now eligible for social housing, Victoria would require 76,000 more social housing units. By 2051, that figure is projected to increase to 140,000. OCAV concurs with CHIA for these reasons.

Our view is that social housing run by the community sector, including organisations such as Old Colonists' Association of Victoria, is as crucial as public housing. The reasons for this is that management and ownership of the land is not lost to the private sector, social housing provides the same security as public housing, and generally community operators are more innovative.

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Public housing is the only viable option for an expanding population of older residents, newly settled migrant families, sole parents, people with disabilities and those experiencing chronic physical and mental ill-health, most of whom are on pensions. There are also new groups requiring housing including older people, casual office workers, disability carers, child carers and many others who have degrees but who cannot find employment.

### **The ability to cater for all demographics including families, couples and singles with the proposed housing mix**

We note that older people are not specifically addressed in the TOR for this submission. We believe this is a major oversight.

Older women are a particularly at-risk group, as evidenced by our own research and others. A report prepared by Monash University identified that over half a million older women are living in long term income poverty and increasingly at risk of homelessness.

We also note that living in public housing is no different to living in other communities. There are many different demographics living in the 'public housing community.' The difference is what social mix is proposed, and how that social mix is carried out.

### **The allocation of parts of the sites between the proposed new public and private housing units**

Demolishing public housing and rebuilding alongside private apartments to create a better "social mix" has not worked well when the development has been carried out by private developers. Hence our earlier point about social housing is salient.

As a recent University of Melbourne report identified the redevelopment of the Carlton public housing estate from 2005 handed at least \$300 million in revenue to developers while also probably lifting property values in surrounding streets. "The social-mix approach to inner-city estate redevelopments in Australia is driven more by an imperative to capitalise on the sale of public land than it is to assist public tenants," the report found.

According to Dr Kate Shaw, social geographer at the University of Melbourne, public and private residents on the new estate are not mixed<sup>1</sup>. Instead they are separated with separate gardens. This leads to a displacement of social capital, and often has serious effects on mental and physical health.

OCAV argues that if Melbourne is to effect real change in housing all private-public housing there should be clear percentages/ number of public housing units identified from the start, and that this figure is not contestable.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/social-mix-approach-to-public-housing-is-failing-research-finds-20170616-gwsj3m.html#\\_blank](http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/social-mix-approach-to-public-housing-is-failing-research-finds-20170616-gwsj3m.html#_blank)

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We also believe that the social mix on these estates should be indistinguishable. Rather than create special estates, OCAV argues that public housing should be built throughout the city, as happens today.

This however requires bold leadership and well-regulated partnerships with the private and community sectors.

*Specific points:*

Public housing stock must be diverse and be accessible to diverse communities and their resources and infrastructure.

New housing stock must be planned with design needs of the future which might incorporate disability and ageing needs. For example, simple steps such as placing plywood under plaster sheeting in bathrooms, makes it easier to add grab rails later.

Unit style design rather than mews style – in other words, design which provides privacy are often better suited to people with support needs. Every effort should be made to ensure people are not subjected to neighbours with low tolerance to people with vulnerabilities so discretion in allocations is an important consideration also.

**The effects on current public housing tenants, including:**

- a. whether they will be moved to accommodation that is secure, stable and fit for purpose;**
- b. whether they will be moved to accommodation that is close to existing social support networks, educational, health and welfare services;**
- c. whether current tenants will be able to return to the estates;**

OCAV is under no doubt that current public housing tenants should be included in every step of the redevelopment of their home. Just because they live in public housing does not mean they are not entitled to full consultation or a viewpoint.

The accommodation they are moved to has to secure, stable and fit for purpose. It must be close, or as close as possible, to their existing homes to maintain social networks, schooling, and services such as health and welfare support.

**The lack of public condition assessments of the estates or alternative options such as refurbishment of all or part of the existing housing units**

We are concerned about this. Victoria has had decades of underinvestment in public housing, and many of the housing estates have gone well beyond repair and maintenance.

Ongoing maintenance of any public building stock is vital to ensure that residents are living in safe, secure and pleasant accommodation. This includes maintenance to gardens. We understand this is not the case, and that many of the properties scheduled to be redeveloped are low-rise, typically rundown and have high maintenance costs.

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Public housing in Victoria has seen a decline in government investment, rising management and maintenance costs and with a 'patch up' approach to the physical buildings. In our view, every public housing estate should have ongoing maintenance assessments and there should be a rolling, prioritised maintenance program to reduce long-term costs.

OCAV runs a regular maintenance program across its four villages. This investment pays dividends, resulting in effective community involvement, lower and fewer maintenance issues. Our residents are encouraged to be part of decisions about improvements to their village.

Refurbishment should mean more than physically upgrading properties, it should include ensuring the surrounding amenities are updated and kept in good condition. This is especially important in an era where there is not enough good quality public housing.

**The removal of planning controls from local councils, and planning implications surrounding communities including existing neighbourhood character, traffic flow and provisions of services.**

We believe that public- private housing estates should be no different to other housing: local council should be responsible for planning and planning implications. There is already a well-tracked path for intervention – through the local council planning committees, VCAT and, if need be, to the Planning Minister. The Planning Minister should be the last port of call.

However, we do believe that current planning barriers could be simplified to prevent delays in delivery of housing for the needy.

**The transparency and genuine community consultation with affected residents, neighbouring communities and the broader Victorian community regarding the short, medium and long term implications of the PHRP model as currently proposed.**

Residents of public housing neighbourhoods already find it hard to engage in the political processes and debates.

As a matter of course plans for each site should be developed with input from current tenants, the local community and other stakeholders. Proposed land uses, scale and type of new residences and recreational spaces should also be included.

By involving the community from the start, any potential for disagreement either with developers, council or indeed private owners will be reduced significantly.

Public housing should be located where there are other essential services close by. These include adequate public transport, quality public schools and social and support services.