

MEDIA RELEASE

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Older Australians need national plan to address chronic housing stress

Leading seniors advocate, COTA Australia, today joined Anglicare in calling for a national plan for affordable housing, with the latest housing snapshot showing just 3.4% of rental properties nation-wide were affordable for people on an aged pension.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Ian Yates said Anglicare's Rental Housing Snapshot released today highlights the need for urgent action to address the impact of housing costs on people on low incomes, including older Australians on pensions.

The Snapshot shows that couples on an aged pension would find just 3.4% of properties suitable on the survey weekend and less than 1% of the listed properties were affordable for single people on government payments, including Newstart.

"Older Australians fare slightly better than many other household groups in the snapshot but most pensioners in the private rental market are in urgent need of help," Mr Yates said.

"We know that the risk of poverty increases exponentially for older people if they are not home owners, particularly if they rent privately, however almost 1 in 5 over sixty-fives does not own their home outright.

"With demand for social and supported housing growing while supply shrinks, and house prices continuing to rise, private rental is often the only option. However, AIHW research shows that 37 per cent of renters over 65 receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) in the private rental market spend over 30 per cent of their income (including the CRA) on housing costs – 30 per cent being the accepted limit above which housing stress is experienced.

"There is also a growing number of older Australians, particularly older women, who are at risk of homelessness for the first time in their lives when they simply can't make increasing rental payments."

COTA Australia joins Anglicare in calling for a National Plan for Affordable Housing supported by all states and territories. COTA Australia also reiterates its previous calls for a 30% increase in the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and the establishment of an Affordable Housing Growth Fund to increase the supply of affordable social housing.

"Older people on low incomes are at greater risk of housing getting out of reach as they age. They don't have any superannuation to draw on and often have high medical costs. And often they'd like to keep working but, because of age discrimination, can't.

"Secure long-term tenure and affordable rents are absolutely vital to keeping older people in their communities, where they can access services, maintain their friendships and support networks, and remain independent.

"Governments must make it a priority to work together on a fair plan that makes sure all Australians can access affordable, safe, secure housing.

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COTA Australia is the peak policy development, advocacy and representation organisation for older Australians representing over 500,000 older Australians across every State and Territory.