



COTA **NEW SOUTH WALES**

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 19 March 2015

OLDER WOMEN OVER-REPRESENTED IN AN EMERGING ELDERY UNDERCLASS

“Older women are increasingly at risk of homelessness in the NSW. Years of inaction from both major parties have led to a private housing market that is excluding older women,” said CEO of COTA NSW Ian Day. “Whoever forms Government after the March 28 election needs to make reform of the NSW housing market an absolute priority.”

In the past two years COTA NSW has undertaken two major surveys of people aged 50-plus in NSW. Both surveys confirmed that older women are struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

“We were alarmed to find that 25% of women responding to our latest survey were living on incomes of \$25,000 or less,” said Mr Day. “It’s possible to live on this income if you own a home,” said Mr Day. “But many older people – especially women – do not.”

“Older women in this cohort are having to rent in an ever-inflating rental market. Sydney is now the third most expensive housing market in the world, and this is distorting the price of property throughout the State. We are hearing increasingly disturbing stories about women who are living in squalid, unsafe and insecure housing, and they’re putting up with these conditions because the alternative is homelessness.”

“Women often pay the price for investing years of their lives in unpaid care. Older women are much more likely than their male counterparts to have spent years out of the paid workforce. They reach older age with little superannuation and few savings as a result. If they haven’t been able to buy a home when they’re young, they’re in no position to do so as they age.”

“It’s important to note that older women are the ‘canaries in the mine’.” While older women are over-represented among those struggling to find secure, affordable housing, increasing numbers of older men are in a vulnerable position too. Successive governments have tended to treat older people like a homogenous group, and they’ve assumed that all older people have managed to acquire a home. This is simply untrue.”

The last COTA NSW survey found that single older people were much less likely to own a home than their married/partnered peers. Only about 60% of respondents who were single/never married owned their home, with the rate of home ownership falling to about 50% of respondents who were separated/ divorced.

“Older people in this group – men as well as women – are also extremely vulnerable in the current private rental market.”

“We’re calling on both major parties to announce comprehensive responses to the State’s housing crisis. We need to see more action to increase quantity – we need to increase the supply of housing and to increase density around hubs – but we also need to see measures to improve the quality of affordable accommodation. Unless action is taken to stop older people sliding into poverty, we face the very real prospect of seeing the rapid emergence of what can only be described as an elderly underclass.”

END **See overleaf for case-study/interviewee details**

CEO, Ian Day, is available for interview: 0417 210 234

MEDIA CASE STUDY: GLENYS BUSELLI

Background:

- 66 years old, divorced, originally from Adelaide, living on Central Coast for decades
- Degree in adult education – has worked in a women's refuge, in drug and alcohol counselling – has counselling experience but no specific training
- Has been living on her nest egg (somewhere between 300K and 400K) since 2008
- Has been on the age pension for 1.5 years

Living Situation:

- Has been paying rent since she got divorced 20 years ago
- Currently lives in a granny flat
- Has been struggling to find a house to buy, very disillusioned by real estate agents and their dodgy dealings
- Has finally found a house she could afford in Toukley, which she has recently bought

Media contact conditions:

- Happy to do print/online and radio interviews
- Ms Buselli is eloquent and has an appreciation of the broad issue of housing unaffordability

To arrange an interview with Ms Buselli contact Susan Humphries at COTA NSW on 0404 894 401.