

Staying home: supporting ageing in place

Debbie Faulkner
University of Adelaide



The background of the slide is a green-tinted image of a cityscape. In the foreground, a river flows under a multi-arched stone bridge. The city skyline in the background includes several tall skyscrapers and a prominent building with a dome. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds.

Ageing well in public housing

AHURI Report No 369 November 2021

Project members

Valued team contributors to the research:

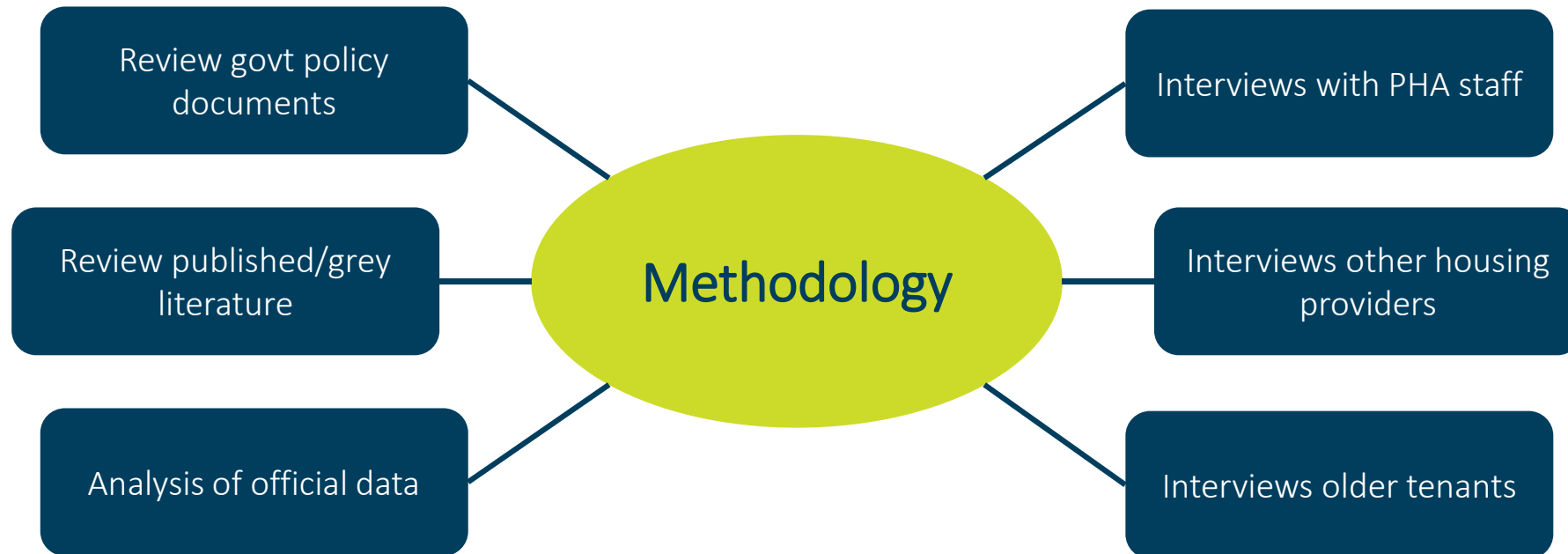
- › Dr Julia Verdouw, University of Tasmania
- › Dr Peta Cook, University of Tasmania
- › Dr Selina Tually, University of South Australia (now Flinders University)
- › Dr Edgar Liu, University of New South Wales
- › Professor Bruce Judd, University of New South Wales
- › Dr Helen Barrie, University of South Australia
- › Dr Veronica Coram, University of South Australia (now Flinders University)



Purpose of research

- › Main objective of this research: to examine the challenges and possibilities for PHAs in supporting their older public tenants to age well
 - › Six inter-related research questions:
 - › What are the policy responsibilities/directions of government and PHAs with regard to older public tenants?
 - › What are the demographic characteristics/current housing circumstances of older public housing tenants?
 - › What are the current and expected needs of older public housing tenants (including housing providers' understanding of the needs of older people)?
 - › What are the roles, responsibilities, challenges and possibilities facing PHAs in supporting older tenants to age well?
 - › What policy and practice initiatives and innovations exist for older tenants within PHAs?
 - › What are the advantages and disadvantages for governments of catering to the needs of older people by providing additional services/facilitating access to services to enable tenants to age well?
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Methodology



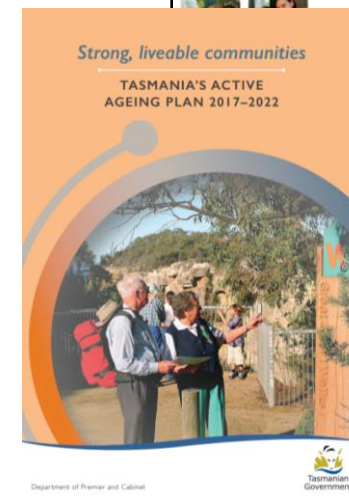
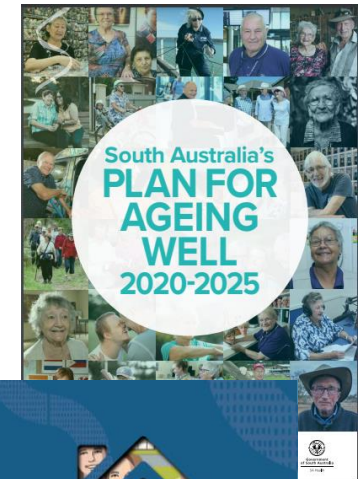
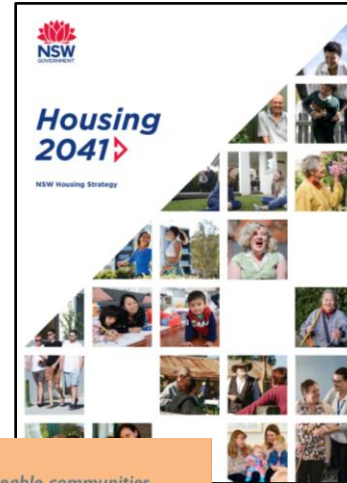
Background

- › PH traditionally provided affordable, stable and secure housing option –akin to home ownership
- › Policies people initially housed under change over time with implications for tenants
- › PH system under considerable pressures & facing multiple challenges
- › Evolutions in other social domains and social policy – ageing well
- › Good access to services, connections to community and appropriate housing foundations of ageing well



Ageing in public housing: strategies and policies

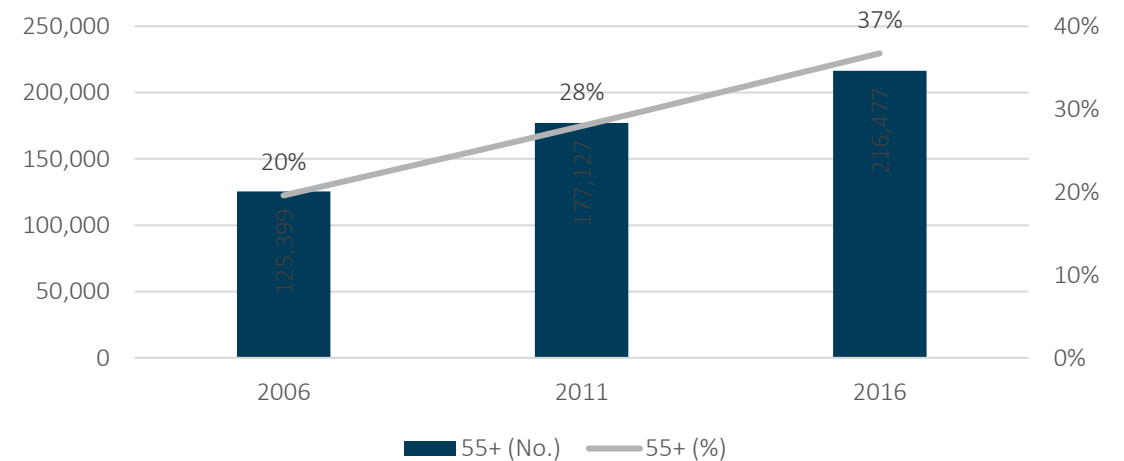
- › States and territories each have housing strategies in place with some alignment in vision, goals and outcomes, but variability in extent to which older people in public housing is a focus
- › A number of policies, legislation and other instruments to support ageing well strategies –
- › Nationally, Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) program addresses needs of older people homeless or at risk of homelessness



Older people in public housing

- › Number and share of older people in public housing increased over time.
- › Older people are more likely to be living alone
- › Likely to have been living in public housing for a number of years.
- › Older tenants most commonly lived in detached housing in 2016 (41.9%)
- › Older tenants needing core activity assistance increased from 14% 2006 to 26% 2016
- › Unpublished data indicates older people comprise around 20% of people on public housing wait lists.

Number and per cent of public housing tenants aged 55 years or older, Australia, 2006-16



Source: TableBuilder: Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset 2006–2011–2016

Experiences of older tenants: valuing public housing

“I’m thankful to have a home, believe me. The fortnight before I shifted I had nowhere to go, literally [private rental lease to end in 2 weeks]—a real blessing and I’m just like so thankful I have somewhere to live.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, SA)

“I tell everyone I live in Housing and I’m proud to be in Housing. I had a home and a dreadful breakup and things, but when I saw it I cried, I thought how lovely.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, TAS)

“I’ve just got vertical blinds put in and, you know, made it like a real home. I’ve been there 25 years [laughs] ... I should call it home. It is home, so yeah.” (Public housing tenant, regional town, SA)

“I call it Lily Cottage. It’s even got the name on the door and my son’s a painter and decorator ... He’s painted it all out lavender or pink or whatever. I just treat it as if it’s [my] house. Yeah, it is very pretty, I like it ... It feels like home. If you come into my little house you’d feel at home and all of that but it’s not on the paper, is it? Yes, but it’s home to me.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, TAS)

Experiences of older tenants: suitability of public housing

“I wouldn’t like to move into a one-bedroom, I’d have to have two because I mean I have grandchildren come and stay and my partner’s up and down every night at the minute waiting to get into the hospital to see about his prostate and he would have a room of his own, you know what I mean? If he was having trouble like that; so I’d have to have at least two bedrooms which I don’t know whether Housing will allow us to do that.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, TAS)

“There’s a lot of people in two, three-bedroom houses that want to downsize as well. Well, the trouble is there’s no two-bedroom houses for them to go toWe haven’t got enough public housing and we haven’t got enough appropriate public housing for single tenants, especially single older tenants.” (Public housing tenant and tenant advocate, middle suburbs, SA)

“We asked [about a transfer] about five years ago ‘cause like I said it’s a three-bedroom [where we currently live] but they’re small bedrooms and we said well we wouldn’t mind if you put us into a two-bedroom unit. They said no, if you moved out you get a one-bedroom unit and the lady come ‘round and does a thing, she said you’re better off just staying here where you are. (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, TAS)

Experiences of older tenants in public housing: Liveability

“I like it being only for seniors, it’s really important to me ... and I like it that there’s not loud music and other kinds of things teenagers naturally do and young people ... those kinds of things that cause tension are simply not present.”
(Public housing tenant, inner city, NSW)

“They’re all about the same age, just the block that I’m in, it’s four people 50 or over. I think it is a good idea because it’s great to have the mix and everything but of course we’re all of the same sort of mindset.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, SA)

“... they’re mostly older people here. There’s only 23 [units] here ... Yes, which is good; it’s nice and quiet, you know, there’s no wild parties and no yelling and screaming and like a lot of places and it’s quite good that way.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, SA)

“People know each other and support each other. Recently when my little dog passed away I had so many things left on my doorstep to help me. Like three cans of Red Bull ... [Laughter] ... all sorts of things. But people really care.”
(Public housing tenant, inner city, NSW)

Experiences of older tenants: security of public housing

“Yeah, that’s the only worry I have, if they say because I’m one in a three-bedroom house, if they’re going to say you need to go in a unit and that’s the only thing I worry about but I don’t want to go into a unit. Well maybe they know I’m old. I said look, I’m 90 now, how much longer am I going to live? Let me finish my days off here.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, TAS)

“... we have actually no security here with our tenancy. Under Tasmanian tenants’ legislation Housing [Tasmania] at any stage can just decide and give us absolutely no reason whatsoever to not renew our leases. They just did it to a guy out in [name of place] and he took it to court for three years. He won.” (Public housing tenant, inner city, TAS)

“Yes, well I’ve got a woman behind me that’s got dementia and she’s had no help from Housing SA apart from a letter saying they are going to kick her out into a one-bedroom flat with her two dogs and her car and sort of tear her away from all her friends next door and she’s actually dropped her bundle and she’s just beside herself ... they’re [SA Housing Authority] going to start kicking people out into small flats and without, there’s no, ‘Do you want to go or not?’, you are just going and they’ve been really ruthless—she’s been there 35 years.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, SA)

Experiences of older tenants: suitability of public housing

“But it’s got a bath in the bathroom which is very high because it’s one of the high baths and we’re finding it harder now ‘cause my partner, he’s 71 and now he’s finding it a bit hard getting into the bath.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, TAS)

“... I’ve been really struggling being there because there’s far too much lawn and the slope and everything else ... and two very steep stairs at the front and about eight stairs at the back which I know I’m going to be in trouble with before very much longer with my knees but sadly I’m in a situation where I can’t afford to move.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, TAS)

“Getting any maintenance done on the property that’s over 30 years old ... it’s driving me crazy, actually.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, TAS)

“Well my house was built in 1950 ... I wasn’t even born then! But what they’ve done for Aboriginal people when they started in [Regional Town]—they bought all those old houses that should have been condemned in the first place— all those old stone houses, they bought them but they should have been knocked down ... they put Aboriginal people in there and all the walls, all cracks in the walls and all that ... they’re still bad.” (Public housing tenant, regional town, SA)

Experiences of older tenants: maintenance and modifications

“I’ve found them to be very good. They look at all the various health needs that you’ve got and I’ve seen in the flats around here there’s ramps for wheelchair access and I’ve got in the shower and all that, there’s handles and non-slip, you know, mats and all that sort of stuff. So, I think that they are doing a very good job.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, SA)

“... and everything you need sometimes from the housing; they come and fix for you.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, NSW)

“... they just say ‘well, there’s no money for maintenance’ ... they talk about the budget.” (Public housing tenants, regional town, SA)

“I rang them up and asked them to clean my gutters and they told me if I can’t get up and clean my gutters I shouldn’t be living there ... I shouldn’t be living there! I’m too old to be living there! I should give it up for somebody else because I can’t get up and clean my gutters.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, NSW)

Experiences of older tenants: location of public housing

“Yes, it’s nice and central. I’ve got two choices of going to two different shopping precincts; there’s a bus stop right out in front of my home which is excellent—I usually walk to the shops and catch a bus back with my groceries ... It’s nice and quiet, very quiet actually. I’m tucked away behind the street, so I don’t hear any traffic and the people are all good.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, SA)

“I can walk everywhere within five minutes, the bowls club, the pub if I wanted, the supermarket, bottle shop, whatever in five minutes.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, TAS)

“Well I like my area; I live just down from the kindy and in the mornings I go out and sit on my veranda and watch my two grandies walk to school, I can see them walk right in the gate at the school. So, it’s handy there for me”. (Public housing tenant, regional town, SA)

“We’re not on the bus line here so we can’t just jump on a bus. I mean I’m lucky, we’ve got cars but there’s no bus line here for us to be able to go anywhere. There’s no shops near where we could do grocery shopping.” (Public housing tenant, inner city, TAS)

Experiences of older tenants: location of public housing

“Cause there are dramas, someone was fighting last night and then there’s [a woman], there’s the kids. There’s always something going on ... just screaming rows all night on the other side, everything echoes through. We’ve had loud music and dogs and fights and stabbings and suicide ... the lot.” (Public housing tenant, inner city, TAS)

“I was taking Valium because I couldn’t sleep because I was so anxious and I thought am I going to have another breakdown over this person next door? I was really scared that I was going to hurt myself or him ‘cause I didn’t know how to stop the nightmare.” (Public housing tenant, inner city, TAS)

“You just hang on to what you’ve got basically because you live inside of your house and you make it nice and comfortable and you try not to have too much to do with what’s going on outside anymore. It used to be everyone in the street would go and talk to each other; now it’s, don’t go out there when it’s dark ... because it’s black out there and there’s people out there robbing the pizza guy and whatever. So you stay inside a lot more than you used to”. (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, SA)

“Depression, it brings on depression, so mental problems it can bring on because of that [problem tenant behaviours], because you feel lonely, you don’t want to do anything so it brings on depression for that reason that you can’t talk to anybody again.” (Public housing tenant, inner city, TAS)

Experiences of older tenants: tenancy management

“They’ve [Housing Tasmania] really helped me, they’ve helped me from domestic violence, they’ve helped me immensely through everything ... do you know what I mean? They’ve really come forth for me and I’ve got no qualms and [property officer’s] been absolutely wonderful, like to what she can do in her ability.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, TAS)

“Well we’re just a problem to them [the PHA], basically because we’re always complaining about something or, you know, the big thing is our last housing manager ... he wouldn’t do anything to help us with our carpark issues and stuff, he just went, ‘Oh, call the police; deal with it amongst yourselves’. Oh, it’s just like, it’s pointless, it’s been really bad.” (Public housing tenant, middle suburbs, SA)

“I’ve had a couple do that to me—just come out and say are you okay and I say yeah. But then when you make a complaint, like you ring up and make a complaint, they don’t want to know you. It’s like push you—sweep you under the rug. Oh well you’re old, you’re going to die shortly or we’re going to move you if you keep complaining more and more.” (Public housing tenant, outer suburbs, NSW)

Experiences of older tenants: stigmatisation

“I call it prejudice ... prejudice, we’re in the gutter ... we’re at the bottom rung of the ladder.” (Public housing tenant, regional town SA)

“I got no support whatsoever. I got laughed at, I got jeered at, I got sneered at and I got total disinterest and then towards the end of the last five years it was, ‘Well we don’t have any housing, there’s nothing we can do’ ... I mean there’s a lot of great people but there are some that just, you know, make you feel very demeaned by what you are going through and, as it is you, let’s say 90 per cent of people are, you know, you don’t want this but it comes to a point where you don’t have a choice and you don’t need to be a treated in a way that’s not polite.” (Former public housing tenant, outer suburbs, SA)

“... another thing is that I find where people enjoy the fact that it doesn’t look like a housing commission building which is really important believe it or not. It’s not that people are embarrassed about being in housing, they’re not. But other people may jump to conclusions about us being in housing and just these type – just the quality of the home that’s supplied to you changes a lot of different things. It changes the way you look at life.” (housing tenant, middle suburbs, NSW)

Current and expected needs of older tenants: viewpoints of housing provider professionals

- › Staff who work closely with tenants generally have positive attitudes about older tenants and are acutely aware of their vulnerabilities - *I suppose they're the most easiest group to manage from a tenancy perspective. (Housing advisor, Victoria)*
- › Older people are strongly attached to their homes

"... we tend to find older people that have been in three-bedroom homes, in those tenancies for a long time and they've raised their families in those homes; there's a lot of sentimentality around that because that's where they raised their children. A lot of them don't want to move because they feel very attached to that property." (Frontline worker, SA)

"I have a lot of older people that have kept their properties immaculate over the years, and they've added things to them. I helped, earlier this year, move a lady, who was in a detached unit. She'd spent 30 years developing this property, the gardens were amazing, the inside ... She'd done things like put floorboards in and beautiful blinds. I think older people tend to make it their home, as opposed to it just being another house they're renting. And I don't know if that's a generational thing." (Frontline worker, regional SA)

Current and expected needs of older tenants: viewpoints of housing provider professionals

- › While older people are strongly attached to their homes, some frontline workers were beginning to see the need for change or a change in people's attitudes because of policy changes.
 - › Some frontline workers felt older people were less likely to complain and were more accepting of their circumstances than other population groups they encountered regularly.
 - › Co-location of older people can have a positive effect of developing communities, including older people looking out for each other.
 - › Workers often felt that older people were not necessarily the best judge of when they needed services and supports to make life easier.
 - › Many professionals noted that for their older public tenants' lack of family supports and the prevalence of abuse by family members and others in the community are serious concerns, raising to the fore the need for alternative means for providing care and support.
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System responsibilities and challenges for supporting ageing well

- › PHAs face challenges that impact on their capacity to support the needs of older tenants. There is no clear answer to the question of when age alone should qualify someone for priority consideration.
 - › The desire of tenants to remain in the house where they have raised their family, must be balanced with the need to free up larger properties for households on the wait list eligible for such dwellings.
 - › The limited housing stock designed to meet the needs of older tenants (for example, in relation to mobility), remains a concern for PHAs and tenants
 - › As some older tenants lack a supportive network of family and friends, their ability to age well in public housing is linked to the capacity and willingness of PHAs to identify need for and/or facilitate the provision of care and support services
 - › With an almost singular focus on housing people with complex needs, staff reported that the expectations of their jobs sit outside the bounds of most of their training and beyond what they feel should be expected of them and their role
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System responsibilities and challenges for supporting ageing well

- › Frontline workers mentioned the need for more knowledge and information about holistic support services for older tenants, greater flexibility in allocations and other policies, and collaboration between service providers
 - › This research touches on the needs of Indigenous people. A much deeper and culturally nuanced look at ageing well in social housing for this group is warranted, paying clear attention to systemic disadvantages, needs and cultural understandings of the intersections between kinship, culture and Country.
 - › Senior staff questioned whether the public housing system in its current form is best placed to house older people.
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Implications of research for policy makers

- › Senior management understanding older peoples' current experiences
 - › Clear and better alignment between ageing well policies and housing policies, specifically those concerning social and public housing.
 - › Reduced caseloads for staff, decreased tenant-staff ratios and provision of professional and ongoing training to staff
 - › The introduction or expansion of tenancy support or practitioner roles, with an express purpose of prioritising person centred support.
 - › Providing good quality and well-located age-specific housing options that meet Liveable Housing Guidelines within PHA portfolios.
 - › Development of feedback mechanisms for innovative projects, structures and approaches within the public housing sector (and beyond) in order to support them being scaled up for wider benefit.
 - › Moving beyond the mindset of being 'just a landlord'.
 - › Continuing to develop and learn from partnerships with community housing providers, other not-for-profit and aged care service providers to develop supportive housing environments where tenants feel valued and supported
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