National Shelter

Policy Directions Report

Housing at the Edge: Retiring Australians in the Private Rental Market

Canberra | 14 May 2026

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ABOUT NATIONAL SHELTER

National Shelter is a peak body working to improve housing outcomes for low-income Australians

Since 1975, National Shelter has worked towards this goal by influencing government policy and action, and by raising public awareness about housing issues.

Housing at the Edge
14 May 2026

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Executive Summary

Australia is undergoing a profound and accelerating transformation in its housing system, reshaping long-standing assumptions about security, stability, and access to appropriate housing across the life course. Increasingly, older people in Australia are entering retirement without home ownership, marking a significant departure from historic norms, and exposing a growing cohort to housing insecurity in a private rental market that is structurally ill-equipped to meet long-term needs.

By 2031, an estimated 440,000 older households will be unable to access suitable or affordable housing (AHURI, 2026), highlighting both the scale and urgency of the challenge. At the same time, retirees renting in the private market are spending between 45% and 65% of their income on housing costs, far exceeding accepted affordability thresholds and placing sustained pressure on wellbeing, financial resilience, and the capacity to age with dignity and stability. Unaffordable and unstable housing also significantly affects older people's ability to access aged care.

The evidence presented at the Housing at the Edge forum demonstrates that:

- → The issue is structural and not cyclical, reflecting persistent imbalances rather than temporary fluctuations
- → The private rental market is not designed for long-term ageing, particularly in security of tenure, accessibility, and suitability
- → Policy settings remain anchored to outdated assumptions of home ownership, limiting their effectiveness in responding to current realities.

Encouragingly, the forum also identified a range of proven and emerging solutions that provide a credible pathway forward. These include:

- → Rental reform to improve security and quality, ensuring greater stability and confidence for long-term tenants
- → Increased public, social and affordable housing supply to address gaps and provide viable alternatives
- → Shared equity and assisted pathways to ownership for households excluded from traditional housing models
- → Permanently affordable and innovative models such as limited equity housing and community land trusts – balancing access, stability, and affordability.

The core policy challenge is not just identifying solutions, but aligning, scaling, and sustaining them within a coherent national system capable of responding to current pressures while anticipating future demand. This requires coordinated action across all levels of government, stronger policy integration, and a sustained commitment to ensuring Australians can age securely, affordably, and with dignity.

Introduction

The Housing at the Edge forum brought together lived experience, policy expertise, academic research, and service delivery perspectives to examine a critical issue: the growing number of Australians retiring without housing security.

This report synthesises these contributions, supported by AHURI evidence and expert presentations, to set out a framework for system-wide housing reform and a series of policy directions and recommendations for consideration by governments at all levels, including the Commonwealth, with a particular focus on people ageing into retirement.

Acknowledgment is extended to the following expert and lived experience speakers for their thoughtful and considered contributions to the forum:

- Jenny Horst & Coral Fuata
- Dr Tom Alves, Acting Managing Director, AHURI
- Eliza Owen, Independent housing market analyst and former head of research at Cotality
- Dr Ed Wensing, Associate and Special Adviser, SGS Economics & Planning
- Trina Jones, NSW Rental Commissioner
- Fiona York, Executive Officer of Housing for the Aged Action Group
- Harriet Brummelhuis, COO, National Affordable Housing
- Stephen Woodlands, Founder and Managing Director, Head Start Homes
- Professor Louise Crabtree-Hayes, Western Sydney University
- Emma Nicholson, Head of Housing, Uniting NSW.ACT.

Key Recommendations

The following recommendations have emerged from the evidence and the expert contributions provided to Housing at the Edge. Collectively, they reflect a system-wide response to the structural shift toward renting in later life, with a focus on better integration, scale, and long-term impact.

1. **Establish a National Strategy for Renting in Retirement**
   A coordinated national framework is needed to better align housing, income support, and ageing policy settings. This framework should formally recognise that renting should be a secure, long-term tenure and incorporate it into retirement policy assumptions. It could be embedded within the National Housing Plan or established through another appropriate mechanism.

2. **Demonstrably Expand Public, Social and Affordable Housing**
   Significant and sustained growth in non-market housing supply is essential to meet the projected demand. Delivery should be explicitly aligned with demographic change, with targeted allocation to older, low-income renters most at risk of housing insecurity. Adjustments may be required to allocations and prioritisation policies at the state and territory housing authority level.

3. **Reform of the Private Rental System**
   The private rental system must be fundamentally recalibrated to operate as a secure, long-term housing tenure rather than a transitional one. This requires strengthened and enforceable security of tenure, the normalisation of longer-term leasing options, tighter regulation of rent increases to reduce volatility, and consistent, high-quality minimum standards. Together, these reforms are essential to deliver stability, confidence, predictability, and liveability for a growing cohort of long-term renters to age in place.

4. **Scale Assisted Home Ownership Pathways**
   Shared equity and assistance schemes should be expanded to support access to home ownership where appropriate and where market failures exist, with a balanced focus on risk reduction vs. risk exposure. These pathways should be complemented by financial capability initiatives and ongoing support to promote long-term sustainability. Effective delivery will require collaboration between government and the financial sector to ensure such products are accessible, well-regulated, and aligned with households' capacity to sustain ownership.

5. **Enable Community Land Trusts and other Limited Equity Housing Options**
   Policy settings, including assisted home ownership, should prioritise models that retain affordability 'in perpetuity'. This includes accelerating the development of limited equity housing and community land trusts, which provide secure, lower-cost pathways to long term secure tenure and/or ownership without full exposure to market pressures and should be actively introduced and scaled as a core part of the housing system. These models offer a critical mechanism for delivering long-term stability, supporting ageing in place, and ensuring housing costs remain predictable and manageable over time.

6. **Activate Key System Levers**
   Governments should more effectively utilise available levers, including public land, planning frameworks, and financing mechanisms, to increase housing supply and diversity. Requiring mixed-tenure outcomes and leveraging institutional investment are critical to delivering a broader range of housing options. This should include a stronger focus on housing suited to older cohorts, such as accessible, well-located, public, social, and affordable housing, as well as secure rental and ownership options that support ageing in place.

7. **Invest More in Early Intervention**
   Upstream action is essential to reduce the number of households entering retirement in housing stress. This requires targeted, early interventions across the life course, including improved financial capability support, better alignment of income support with housing costs, and targeted assistance for at-risk groups such as long-term renters and low-income households approaching retirement. Integrating housing policy across superannuation, tax, and welfare systems is also critical to preventing compounding disadvantage and reducing future pressure on crisis and aged care services.

   Specialist support within aged care should also be strengthened through dedicated, increased funding for services targeted at older people who are not yet eligible for, or unable to access, mainstream aged care due to insecure housing.

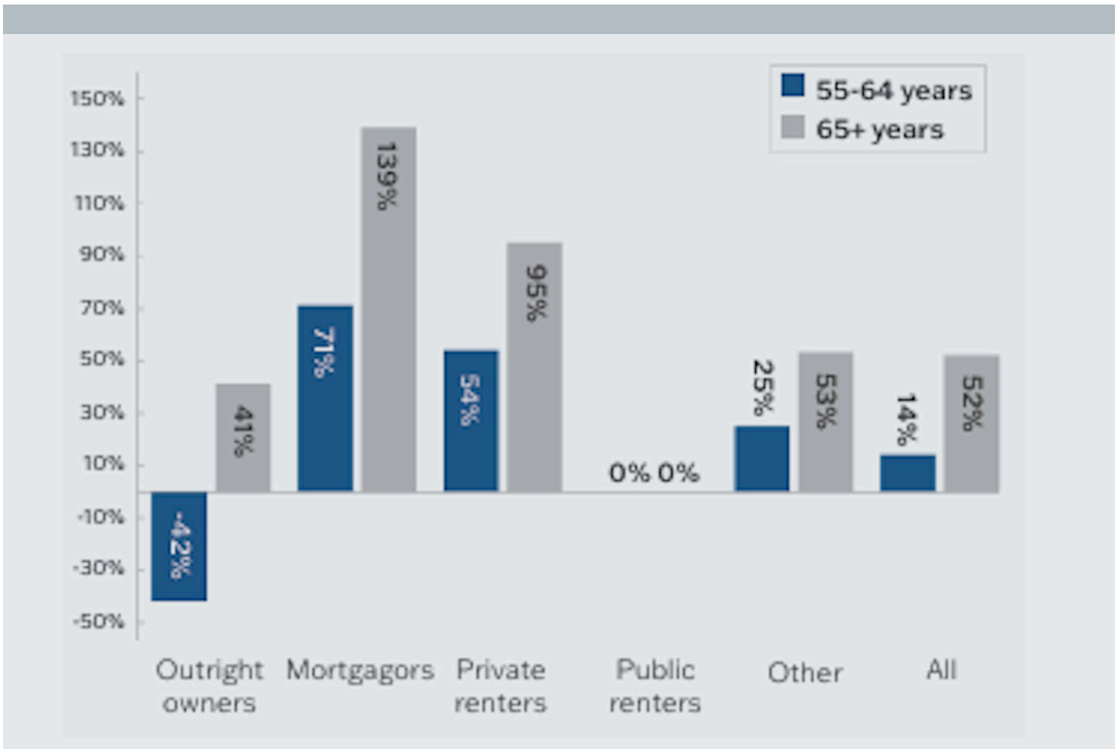
The Structural Shift: Renting into Retirement

Australia's retirement system has historically been built on a foundational assumption: that most people will enter later life owning their home outright. This expectation has shaped superannuation policy, pension settings, and broader notions of financial security in older age (AHURI, 2026).

That assumption is now rapidly eroding. The forum heard that:

- → Home ownership rates are declining across successive generations, particularly among low- and moderate-income households
- → Renting is increasingly a long-term, and often permanent, tenure rather than a stepping stone into ownership
- → A growing proportion of households are now entering retirement:
  - Renting in the private market
  - Carrying mortgage debt into later life
  - With savings that are insufficient to absorb rising housing and living costs.

These trends point to deep structural changes across the housing system, labour markets, and patterns of wealth accumulation. The result is a fundamental reshaping of retirement outcomes, and one that challenges the long-standing policy premise that secure, outright home ownership will underpin financial wellbeing in older age.



Source: calculations from HILDA Survey and ABS population projections in Ong et al, (2019)

Lived Experience and Human Impact

Older renters face deepening instability, insecurity, and rising costs, with many experiencing a growing fear of homelessness and exclusion from housing systems that no longer respond to their needs.

Lived experience contributions at the forum, including powerful accounts from Jenny Horst and Coral Fuata, two older women from different backgrounds, highlighted the human consequences of these structural shifts. Their stories underscored that housing stress in later life is not only financial but deeply personal, affecting wellbeing, identity, and connection to community (HAAG, 2026 & FFA, 2026).

The forum heard that older renters face:

- → Persistent instability, including an increasingly competitive rental market, and often intersecting age and gender discrimination (HAAG, 2026)
- → Frequent and often involuntary relocation disrupting social and support networks
- → Ongoing fear of eviction, even when meeting rental obligations
- → A reduced sense of dignity, control, and belonging in their housing situations.

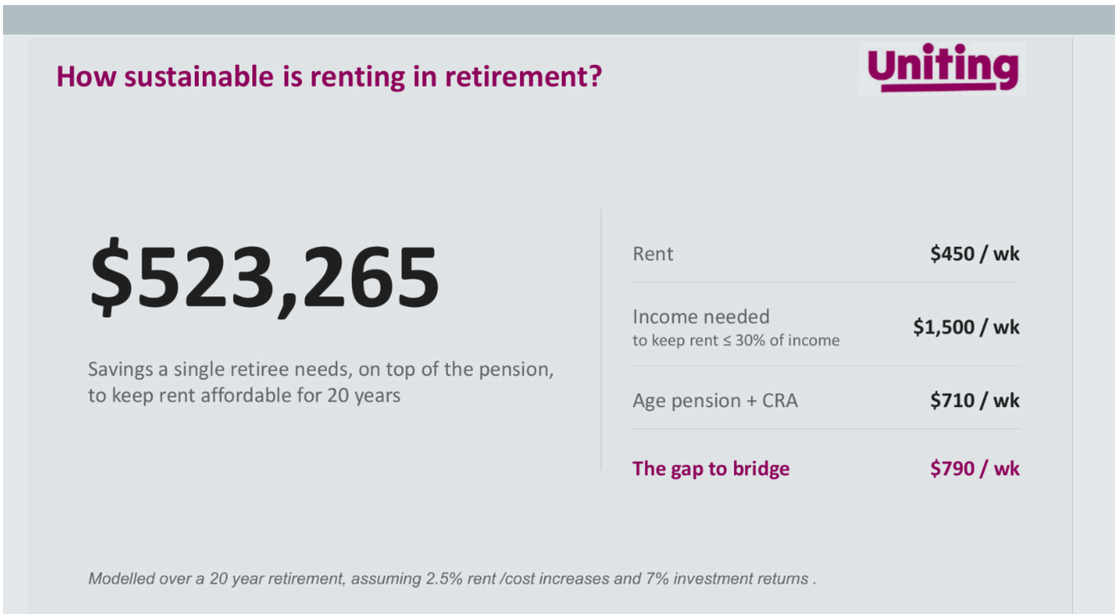
Service providers confirm an increase in:

- → Financial stress as fixed or limited incomes fail to keep pace with rents
- → Housing insecurity, with more older renters unable to secure long-term tenancies
- → Risk of homelessness, including a rise in older women presenting for assistance.

Modelling by Uniting NSW.ACT (2026) shows:

- → Pension + CRA: \~$710/week
- → If rent is $450 a week (lower end of market)
- → Required income for affordable rent: \~$1,500/week
- → Gap: ~$790/week.

This gap demonstrates that renting in retirement is not simply difficult; it is structurally unsustainable for many, with the mismatch between income support and market rents driving ongoing insecurity and hardship.



Source: Uniting NSW.ACT presentation, Housing at the Edge (May 2026)

Market Conditions and Affordability Pressures

Several contributions at the forum note that the private rental market is under sustained and intensifying pressure:

- → Median rents are rising to ~$698/week (Crabtree-Hayes, 2026), placing increasing strain on low and fixed-income households and reducing capacity to absorb other essential costs
- → Vacancy rates at ~1.7%, reflecting an exceptionally tight market with limited choice and heightened competition for available properties (Owen, 2026)
- → Rental availability is declining, particularly for smaller, more affordable dwellings suited to older renters, further constraining appropriate housing options.

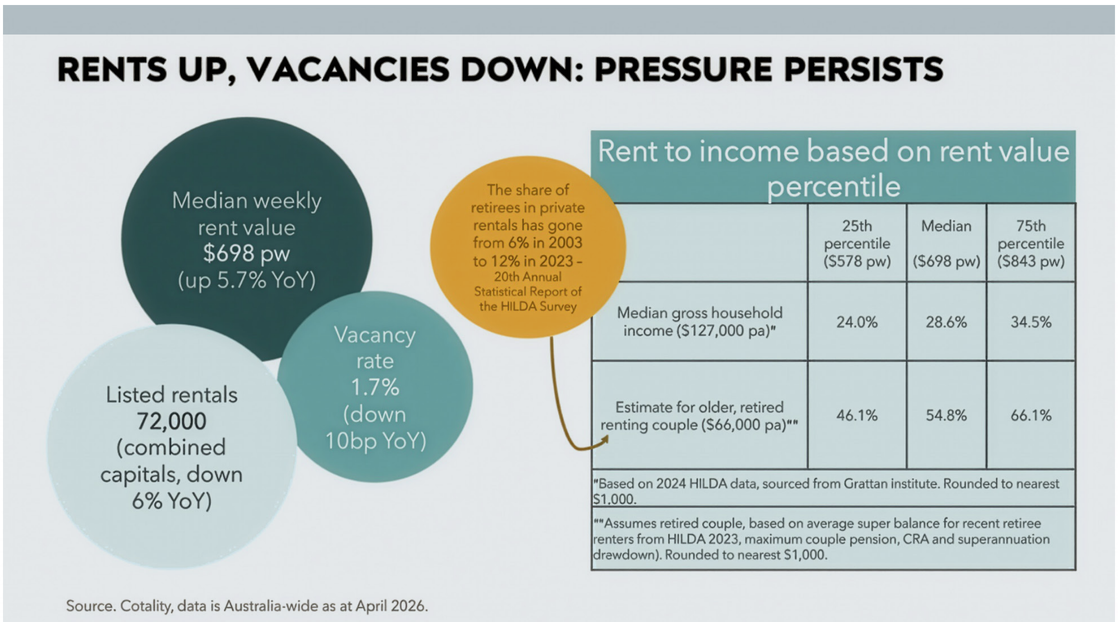
Affordability modelling confirms:

- → Pensioner households face severe to extreme unaffordability across most rental markets, limiting access to suitable and stable housing (SGS Economics, 2025)
- → Rent consumes 46–66% of income (NAH, 2026), far exceeding commonly accepted affordability benchmarks and leaving little buffer for financial shocks.

These pressures are:

- → Persistent, with no evidence of meaningful short-term relief and limited indicators of easing conditions
- → Widespread, affecting metropolitan, regional, and rural areas alike, indicating a system-wide challenge rather than localised stress
- → Structurally embedded, driven by long-term supply constraints, income settings, and market dynamics rather than temporary fluctuations.

The evidence and personal experiences noted at the forum reflect a rental system where affordability, availability, and access are increasingly constrained, particularly for older renters on fixed incomes who have limited capacity to adjust to rising costs or housing instability.



	25th percentile ($578 pw)	Median ($698 pw)	75th percentile ($843 pw)
Median gross household income ($127,000 pa)"	24.0%	28.6%	34.5%
Estimate for older, retired renting couple ($66,000 pa)""	46.1%	54.8%	66.1%

"Based on 2024 HILDA data, sourced from Grattan institute. Rounded to nearest $1,000.

""Assumes retired couple, based on average super balance for recent retiree renters from HILDA 2023, maximum couple pension, CRA and superannuation drawdown). Rounded to nearest $1,000.

System Failure: Why Current Settings Are Not Working

Current housing outcomes reflect a growing misalignment between system design and lived reality. Across multiple dimensions, existing policy and market settings are no longer fit for purpose, particularly amid demographic change and the growing number of long-term renters.

At the most fundamental level, there is a persistent mismatch between housing supply and need. New supply is not only insufficient in volume, but increasingly unaffordable for low- and moderate-income households. As prices and rents continue to outpace incomes, access to appropriate housing is becoming more constrained, placing sustained pressure on both the private and subsidised sectors.

Within the rental market, structural limitations further compound these challenges. The system continues to prioritise flexibility and turnover over stability. Short-term leases remain the norm, offering limited certainty for tenants and little capacity to establish long-term homes. For older renters in particular, this lack of security is deeply problematic. Housing options are often poorly suited to ageing, with limited availability of accessible, adaptable, or supportive dwellings that enable people to remain in place as their needs change (HAAG, 2026).

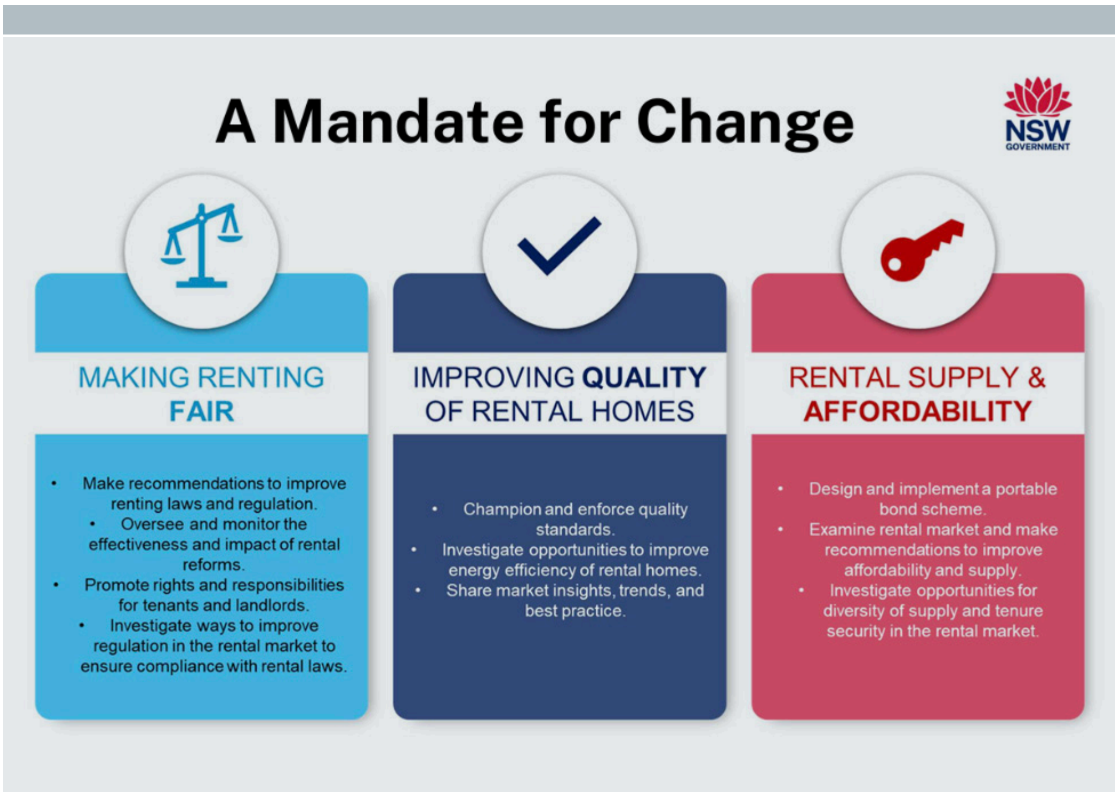
Policy settings also reflect a disconnect between assumption and reality. The retirement income system continues to be built on the expectation of outright home ownership, leaving those who rent in later life exposed to significantly higher costs and risks. At the same time, housing policy and ageing frameworks operate largely in parallel, with insufficient integration across domains that are increasingly interdependent. This fragmentation reduces effectiveness and limits the capacity to respond to emerging needs.

In terms of public and social housing, current allocation settings vary significantly between jurisdictions. For example, Queensland's income thresholds can exclude some older couples on the age pension, whereas in Victoria, households aged 65+ meeting income and asset thresholds may be automatically prioritised.

Lack of harmonisation across state and territory planning and regulatory frameworks also remains a barrier to scaling investment into affordable rental housing, including institutional and international capital (e.g. for Build-to-Rent projects), which relies on consistent and predictable policy settings.

Finally, regulatory settings in the rental system remain anchored in an outdated paradigm. The framework was designed to support a mobile, transitional rental population, rather than a growing cohort of long-term tenants. As a result, settings do not adequately provide for permanence, security, or the conditions required to sustain tenancies over time. Taken together, these factors point to systemic failure rather than isolated gaps. Without a deliberate shift in how the system is structured and aligned, these pressures will continue to intensify, particularly for those already facing the greatest housing disadvantage.

As highlighted at the forum by Trina Jones, NSW Rental Commissioner, the framework was originally designed to support a mobile, transitional rental population, rather than a growing cohort of long-term tenants. The forum heard that NSW's proactive reform agenda is now beginning to reset this approach, strengthening security, fairness, and accountability in ways that are establishing a national benchmark. However, in many jurisdictions, settings still fall short of providing the permanence, stability, and conditions required to sustain tenancies over time.



Source: NSW Rental Commissioner presentation, Housing at the Edge (May 2026)

Scale and Future Demand

Demand pressures within the housing system are set to intensify significantly over the coming decades, driven by intersecting demographic and structural trends.

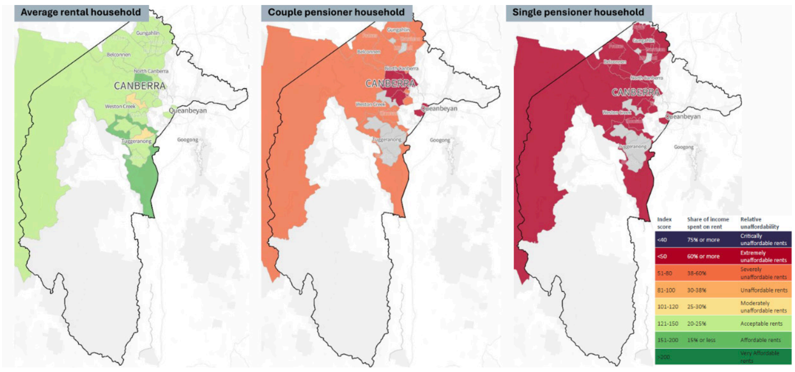
Most notably, the number of older renters is increasing rapidly, reflecting both declining rates of home ownership and the ageing of existing renter cohorts (Crabtree-Hayes, 2026). This shift represents a fundamental change in the composition of housing need, with more people entering later life without the security traditionally associated with ownership.

At the same time, broader population ageing is accelerating. As life expectancy increases and the proportion of older people in Australia grows, the demand for stable, appropriate, and affordable housing will expand in both scale and complexity. This will place additional pressure on systems that are already under strain.

Demand for public, social and affordable housing is also rising, as more households are priced out of the private market or unable to sustain long-term rental arrangements. Waiting lists are growing, and without substantial increases in supply, the gap between need and provision will continue to widen.

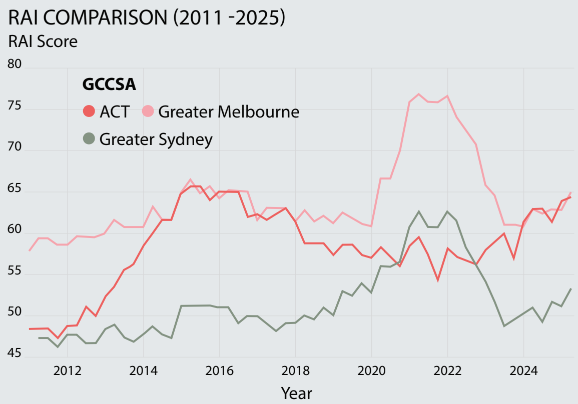
These intersecting trends point to a challenge that is both foreseeable and compounding. Without early and sustained intervention, the scale of unmet need will continue to expand, making future responses more complex, costly, and difficult to deliver.

Key insights - ACT



Pensioner couples - ACT, Sydney, Melbourne

- → Rents are 'Severely unaffordable' for pensioner couples
- → For them, rent equals 46% (Melbourne and ACT) to 56% (Sydney) of income
- → All 3 jurisdictions saw an improvement in the past year, with ACT improving since late 2021



Source: SGC Economics & Planning (RAI 2025)

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Housing Pathways and Solutions

The forum then moved from evidence into action. It focused squarely on the range of solutions required to respond to the emerging housing challenge, with particular emphasis on regulatory reform and the systems needed to enable change at scale. Discussions highlighted the need to strengthen rental protections, expand public, social, and affordable housing, and accelerate the adoption of new models of secure tenure through planning, funding, and delivery reform. There was broad recognition that existing policy settings are no longer fit for purpose, and that coordinated changes across regulation, investment, and development processes will be essential to deliver a more stable and responsive housing system in the future.

1. Strengthening the Rental System

Reforms currently underway demonstrate important progress in modernising the private rental sector and recognising its growing role as a long-term tenure:

- → Ending no-grounds evictions (where it still exists) and harmonising state and territory rental legislation – providing renters with greater stability and protection from arbitrary displacement
- → Limiting the frequency of rent increases to improve cost predictability and household financial planning
- → Improving transparency and minimum standards, helping ensure rental properties are safe, liveable, and fit for purpose (Uniting NSW. ACT, 2026).

While these reforms are necessary, they are not yet sufficient to respond to the scale of structural change. For a growing cohort of older renters, the private rental system is becoming their primary housing pathway into retirement.

Further reform is required to ensure renting is:

- → Secure, with tenure arrangements that support long-term occupancy and reduce the risk of disruptive moves in later life
- → Predictable, with clearer frameworks around rent setting and increases to avoid financial stress
- → Suitable for ageing, including accessibility standards, modification rights, and design that enables people to age in place safely and with dignity.

2. Expanding Public, Social and Affordable Housing

Social housing remains the most effective and reliable response for households with the lowest incomes and highest levels of need, particularly older renters who are unable to compete in the private market:

- → Low-income households who are increasingly priced out of private rental
- → High-need older renters facing compounding vulnerabilities including health, mobility, and fixed incomes.

There is growing recognition that supply-side responses must go beyond traditional models and incorporate innovation in delivery and tenure:

- Conversion of existing assets, such as retirement villages, into affordable long-term rental housing to rapidly expand supply
- Development of long-term, community-based housing solutions that integrate support services and foster social connection.

Expanding this stock is not only about increasing volume but also about ensuring the right types of housing are available, dwellings that are appropriate, accessible, and affordable over the long term.

3. Early Intervention and Home Ownership Pathways

Earlier intervention in the housing system can prevent households from entering retirement in precarious or unaffordable rental situations. Shared equity, community land trusts, and assisted ownership models provide a mechanism to rebalance access to secure tenure:

- These models work by reducing the upfront barriers to ownership, particularly the deposit requirements that exclude many moderate-income households
- Shared equity models typically involve a one-off equity contribution that remains an asset on the balance sheet of the investor. This enables recycling of capital over time, supporting ongoing and scalable delivery of affordable home ownership
- There is also a need to tailor shared equity approaches for older households with "moderate savings" but low incomes. Current schemes tend to favour low deposits and higher incomes over longer loan periods, whereas this cohort often has higher deposits and requires shorter loan terms. This may require models in which the government acts as a "patient lender" or guarantor in exchange for equity
- By enabling access to secure tenure earlier in the life course, these pathways can improve long-term housing stability
- Over time, they can also reduce system costs by lowering reliance on income support and housing assistance in later life.

Key features of these models include:

- Government-backed equity contributions or guarantees that reduce borrowing requirements
- Eligibility for people who have fallen out of home ownership (e.g. due to relationship breakdown), that is, people who are not first home buyers
- Financial capability and support programs to sustain home ownership over time
- Rent-to-buy pathways create a gradual transition from renting into ownership
- Ownership can be kept affordable in perpetuity.

Emerging discussions also point to the need for more flexible mortgage products tailored to older households. This may require innovation from financial institutions, including shorter loan terms, alternative serviceability assessments, and products aligned to retirement income streams.

These approaches recognise that, for many households, access to ownership is no longer achievable through market mechanisms alone.

4. Community Land Trusts and Limited Equity Housing Models

Limited equity housing is an umbrella term for models in which residents invest in an affordable level of equity. Residents can sell or bequeath their homes at an ongoing affordable rate. These models blend aspects of owning and renting and create a pool of permanently affordable homes, so are sometimes called ‘intermediate tenures’ as they address a critical gap. Community Land Trusts (CLTs) and Limited Equity Housing provide greater security without full exposure to market risk:

- → Delivering permanent affordability by removing homes from the speculative market
- → Protecting housing from price escalation while still enabling residents to preserve or build some equity
- → Supporting intergenerational equity by ensuring future households can access the same benefits.
- → Entry through relatively small financial contributions (approximately 5–7%), making participation feasible for lower-income or older households
- → Stable, cost-based rents that are linked to operating costs rather than market fluctuations
- → Long-term tenure arrangements that support stability and planning in later life (Uniting NSW. ACT).

These models:

- → Ensure investment delivers enduring, rather than one-off, affordability outcomes
- → Keep housing assets accessible across generations, rather than allowing them to be lost to market pressures
- → Bridge the gap between renting and ownership in a constrained housing market
- → Support ageing in place by providing secure, predictable housing over the long term
- → Reduce exposure to market volatility while maintaining a degree of resident control and security.

Collectively, these approaches shift the focus from short-term access to ownership toward long-term system stewardship and equity. They offer stable alternative pathways for households unable to access traditional ownership, while providing greater security than private rental typically allows.

5. System Levers and Enablers

A number of critical system levers remain underutilised and, if activated, could significantly accelerate the scale and impact of housing responses:

- → Public, benevolent, and other low-cost land, which can be strategically deployed to reduce development costs and prioritise affordable housing outcomes
- → Planning contributions that can capture value uplift and redirect it toward housing supply. This includes planning mechanisms such as inclusionary zoning, density bonuses, and streamlined approvals. For example, NSW has introduced planning incentives and concessions to support the delivery of affordable housing, while Victoria has implemented dedicated pathways and planning provisions to accelerate projects that incorporate social and affordable housing.
- → Government guarantees that can de-risk investment to reduce overall housing delivery costs, and attract private, benevolent and institutional capital
- → Institutional partnerships that align government, community housing providers, and private finance (Crabtree-Hayes, 2026).

There is opportunity to activate and coordinate these levers.

Convergence: Toward a Coherent Housing System

The discussions at the forum revealed a high degree of alignment among contributors, pointing to a shared understanding of both the nature of the challenge and the required shape of the response.

Convergence was clear in the following areas:

- A central insight is that effective policy must operate on two fronts at once—responding to immediate housing need while also reducing the drivers of future demand. Focusing on one without the other risks either entrenching crisis responses or failing to protect those currently experiencing housing stress
- There was also a clear shift away from viewing housing as a set of separate, fixed tenures. Instead, contributors emphasised the importance of a connected system that supports progression and movement over time. Housing pathways need to accommodate changing circumstances, enabling people to move between different forms of rental, assisted options, and ownership without disruption or loss of stability
- Security emerged as a non-negotiable feature of this system. Stable, long-term tenure is particularly critical in later life, where housing insecurity can have cascading impacts on health, financial wellbeing, and access to care. Ensuring that people can remain securely housed as they age is fundamental to both individual outcomes and system sustainability
- Equally, maintaining affordability over time was identified as essential. This requires deliberate safeguards to ensure that investment—particularly public subsidy—continues to benefit those it is intended to support, rather than being diluted or lost through market pressures
- There was strong convergence on the need for high-quality data and evidence to underpin policy and program responses. Better use of data across systems and over time is critical to understanding need, targeting interventions, and measuring impact, enabling more planned and effective housing solutions.
- Finally, there was strong consensus that fragmentation across policy domains continues to undermine progress. Housing outcomes are shaped by decisions across planning, taxation, income support, and ageing systems. Without greater coordination and alignment, even well-designed initiatives struggle to achieve consistency or scale.

The convergence across these themes highlights the need for a housing system that is intentionally designed, joined-up, and capable of delivering stability across the life course.

Underpinning this convergence is a fundamental shift in how housing outcomes are conceived. Contributors consistently emphasised that the system must be centred on people, their needs, pathways, and lived experience, rather than being driven primarily by property or market outcomes.

As a further illustration, Head Start Homes described this as “people before property” - a framing that positions housing first and foremost as a platform for stability, dignity, and participation. This lens reinforces the need for policy settings that respond to people across the life course and supports a more coherent, human-centred housing system.

Key Policy Directions for Government

In addition to the key recommendations identified at the beginning of the report, the evidence points clearly to the need for a more coherent, integrated housing system that supports people across the life course, rather than relying on outdated assumptions about tenure and stability. This requires a shift from fragmented responses to a deliberate, coordinated national housing policy framework.

Several key policy reform directions emerge from the evidence.

- **Renting must be recognised as a permanent and legitimate form of tenure and housing typology**, not simply a transitional stage on the pathway to ownership. This shift in perspective is essential to ensure that policy settings deliver long-term security, stability, and appropriate protections for renters across all age groups, including those entering retirement
- There is a critical need to **expand housing supply across all tenure types**. This includes not only home ownership, but also public, social housing, affordable rental housing, and diverse models that respond to varying needs and income levels. Without sustained investment and growth in supply, affordability pressures will continue to intensify
- Policy must better **support transitions between tenures over the life course**. People's housing needs and circumstances change over time, and the system should enable movement between ownership, private rental, and supported housing without exposing individuals to undue risk or instability.
- **Housing policy must be more effectively aligned with income support and aged care systems**. For older people in Australia, in particular, housing outcomes are deeply intertwined with pension settings, health needs, and care systems. Greater integration across these domains is essential to achieving stability and wellbeing.
- Finally, there is a need to scale what is already known to work. Proven models, some of which were profiled at the forum – whether limited equity models including community land trusts and cooperatives, shared equity, pathways to home ownership, and innovative delivery partnerships – must move beyond pilot stages to become embedded features of the housing system.

Together, these directions point toward a housing system that is more responsive, inclusive, and fit for purpose amid structural change.

Conclusion

Australia can no longer rely on home ownership as the default foundation of security in older age. The assumption that people will enter retirement with a paid-off home is no longer holding, and this shift has profound implications for housing policy, income support, and wellbeing.

The rise of renting in retirement is not a temporary disruption; it is a defining structural change. It is the result of long-term housing market pressures, demographic shifts, and increasing barriers to ownership. It is inevitable, and already well underway across the country.

This emerging reality demands a deliberate and systemic response. The key challenge now is not to reverse the trend, but to design and deliver a housing system that reflects it. Such a system must provide genuine security of tenure, ensure affordability on fixed incomes, and uphold the dignity and stability that older people deserve.

Importantly, the pathway forward is known. The policy solutions exist, and the evidence base is strong. What has been missing is not knowledge, but scale and commitment.

The task ahead is therefore one of implementation: translating proven approaches into sustained, coordinated action. Meeting this challenge will require leadership, investment, and a willingness to reframe long-held assumptions about housing in later life.

Source: Head Start Homes presentation, Housing at the Edge forum, Canberra, 14 May 2026.

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