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**Q1**

Name of organisation

Older Women's Network

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**Q2**

Your name

Yumi Lee

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**Q3**

Position

CEO

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## Q10

Describe the experiences of people struggling to access affordable and suitable housing in the context of your organisation's work.

The Older Women's Network advocates and campaigns on behalf of older women, and has done so for over 35 years. It currently auspices an employment program-'Pathways' and the 'Violence Against Older Women' support and education program; as well as supporting local groups across NSW.

OWN has prioritised advocating to end homelessness for older women since the massive growth in the past decade of homelessness for women aged over 55. (Stone, Reynolds, et al,2023). OWN has also taken concrete action to house help homeless older women by raising funds to build housing that will be managed by the Women's Housing Company.

The following experiences are drawn from the recent experiences reported by the project managers of the OWN Employment Pathways Project and the Violence Against Older Women project. A common baseline for women entering either of these programs is the lack of secure, stable and suitable housing. Escaping violence, recovering from trauma and obtaining financial security (either through work or welfare systems), begins with safe housing. This is not a new or startling discovering. The women in these programs not only reinforce what we know about how housing is central to rebuilding a life, but reveal how the services that are in place fail to take or actively discriminate against the needs of older women.

The following description is confidential: please do not make publicly available.

### Short Case Studies

#### Eviction notices without cause

A had what she thought was stable accommodation. She had been employed prior to the COVID lockdown, but as her industry had been decimated, she was finding it difficult to find work. She had been promised work over the holiday period, shortly before she was evicted without cause. Exhausting any savings, faced with homelessness and the struggle of finding employment, her offer of employment was withdrawn. The combination of age discrimination in employment and poor protections for tenants lead to homelessness for older women.

#### Location – a lack of choice

Several clients in regional and outer metro areas have found housing, but are unable to find work because the location is car dependent and there is no public transport. The employment program has found older women can be highly experienced and skilled in high demand area but unable to afford rents close to work. Forced into city fringes and regional areas they remain stuck and living in poverty.

#### Unsafe Living Arrangements

B is an older women who has always been employed, but is now searching for work and finding that her age is blocking her usual avenues for job seeking. Faced with no income and homelessness she accepted a room in an acquaintance house. This has resulted in a toxic relationship and exacerbated previous trauma. Her mental health has deteriorated and unable to work. She is not officially homeless, has no income and unable to find alternative housing.

#### Caring role continues post homelessness

Older women are often a carer for a relative or friend with a disability or frail aged. They may not be living with this person, but still have a responsibility and need to stay geographically close to this person. For example, C is homeless, she cannot find suitable accommodation for herself and her adult daughter who lives with a serious mental health condition. She continues to pay rent for her daughter's accommodation, putting herself at risk.

#### Unsafe environments

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D is living with a young relative who is experiencing substance abuse, making his response to her volatile. He continually threatens her with eviction. She has been unable to find alternative accommodation.

### Older women a non-priority

E left her home, as is common in domestic violence, at short notice and with few possessions. She lived in a park for three weeks. Assumptions are made about older single women having somewhere to stay. Priority is given to women with children. Experiencing violence limits the ability of women to negotiate in the depths of trauma, and limits where they can safely go if they do not want to be found.

### Pets

G continues to live in unsafe conditions, for the sake of her pets. She fears for the lives of if she leaves them behind. Finding rental accommodation where a cat or dog, or both are accepted is extremely difficult.

### Cost of moving and starting again

Constant moving due to evictions, rent increases or for safety reasons, bears a huge financial and emotional cost. It is difficult to prepare and put your best self forward to look for work in these circumstances. When they are escaping domestic violence and wanting to move to another major city, the cost of losing their job and supports is a overwhelming burden.

### Climate crisis

H has been made homeless because of floods in her regional areas, she is unable to drive and with no public transport, unable to afford the cost of moving house and rents in town, she is stuck in a damaged property and unable to travel for work.

### Domestic Violence and coercive control

J found herself homeless when her relationship ended. In what she thought was a trusting relationship, she found her name was not on the property deeds. She was left with nothing and no access to the family home.

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### Q11

Respondent skipped this question

Describe the flow-on impacts of the housing crisis in the context of your organisation's work.

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### Q12

Respondent skipped this question

Describe how current policy settings impact housing affordability and access to housing from your organisation's perspective.

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### Q13

Respondent skipped this question

Describe what actions your organisation believes should be taken by governments to most improve affordability and access to housing.

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### Q14

Respondent skipped this question

Is there anything else your organisation would like to share with the Commission?

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