

COMMON EQUITY NSW

Newsletter

WINTER EDITION // AUGUST 2023

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COMMON EQUITY
CO-OPERATIVE
HOUSING

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Cover Photo

Front cover photo: Nick Sabel and attendees at Sector Consultation Day March 2023
Photo credit: Jane Dempster

Do you have a
story to tell?

Let the sector know what your Co-op has been doing!

Contact nicole@commonequity.com.au or call 02 9356 9223.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land throughout Australia and pay our respects to them, their culture and their Elders, past and present. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.



A message from the CEO

Welcome to our 2023 Winter edition of the Newsletter.

As I write we await the roll-out of the Federal governments much anticipated housing reform package under the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF). The HAFF is expected to see the delivery of some 30,000 social and affordable homes across the nation over the next 5 years with a significant number expected in NSW. This will start to address the ever-growing affordable housing crisis and likely significantly expand the community housing sector.

It is important that Co-op Housing is part of this social and affordable housing growth as we need to have a diverse housing system and not a one size fits all approach. Advocacy and raising the profile of Co-op Housing both at state and national levels is therefore vital. In this edition you can read about our work as part of ACHA, a national network of Co-op Housing peaks as one way in which we are working collaboratively to promote and grow Co-op Housing opportunities across Australia.

The UWS research project will also be integral to this work providing the evidence base needed to promote the many benefits of Co-op Housing. The research results will soon be released and will also be showcased at the next AHURI National

Housing Conference in Brisbane later in the year.

You can also read about our continued work in contacting MP's and providing opportunities for them to visit housing co-ops. Your participation and support in these visits are greatly appreciated as by working together we can better demonstrate the value of Co-op Housing in creating strong and inclusive communities.

I would like to give a special mention of thanks to Loretta who recently left the Newsletter Editorial Board, and a warm welcome to EO from Planet X who recently joined.

Finally in some sad news, Wayne Stamp from Planet X Co-op passed away recently. Wayne was very involved in the Co-operative Housing sector over many years. He was also a member of the Newsletter Editorial Board. He will be sorely missed.

Nick Sabel, CEO

SECTOR CONSULTATION SESSION

Positive Ageing and CCA



Having your say!

Photos: Participants getting involved on the day.

On Saturday 20th May CENSW held an in-person consultation forum for the sector to discuss the Positive Ageing Action Plan (PAAP) and Company Co-operative Agreement (CCA) at the Masonic Centre, Sydney CBD.

The event was well attended with 36 representatives from 17 of our Co-ops. The day was facilitated by Scott Lappan-Newton from Gauge Consulting who managed to guide and support the members through both key documents with questions, actions and scenarios to contemplate. A number of key actions were agreed upon which CENSW will oversee as well as seeking direct input from the sector through working parties and other feedback mechanisms.

The PAAP morning session looked at four key action areas: fitting housing to needs; supporting health and wellbeing; strengthening connections and sustaining Co-operatives and tenancies. A few actions sit under each of these areas, attendees were asked to vote for their first, second and third most important actions they believe CENSW should implement.

The top two actions fell under 'Fitting housing to needs', item 2, first (37 votes); Property upgrades to support positive ageing at home (accessibility and mobility), second (22 votes) item 1 Property assessments to support positive ageing at home, thirdly, with 11 votes, under Strengthening connection, item 1, Strengthen engagement and collaboration with older tenants.

Attendees also voted to set up a Working Group to support PAAP actions.

The afternoon session started with Nick presenting on the CCA review process. He discussed the government and regulatory

environment community housing providers sit under and provided information on what the CCA is and why it needs updating.

The process has already been going for some time, but it was acknowledged that this is an important piece of work and we need to get it 'right'.

A few key areas of hopes and concerns were highlighted by attendees, these included:

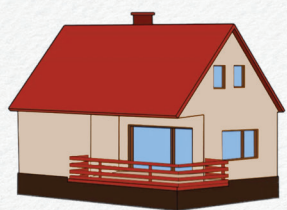
- Opportunity for a considered but efficient CCA co-design process that builds sector trust.
- Need for clear roles, with opportunity to better delineate responsibilities and improve processes.
- Concern about impact on Co-op members, especially the cost of any new arrangements.
- Opportunity to advocate for Co-op recognition.

Participants preference for further collaboration on the CCA review resulted in them voting for a new working group to be established which will include Co-op members and CENSW staff.

The CCA discussion was robust and critical for CENSW and the sector to move forward, as there needs to be collaboration and clear understanding of the changes and expectations for both CENSW and Co-operatives.

RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE

ARTICULATING VALUE IN HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES



This research project is jointly funded by the Australian Cooperative Housing Alliance (ACHA) and the Australian Research Council (ARC). The aim is to build an evidenced-based picture of rental housing cooperatives across Australia.

The research focuses on co-operatives that are part of CENSW, CEHSA in South Australia, CEHL Ltd and United Housing Co-operative in Victoria, and Co-operation Housing in Western Australia. The project is uncovering what works in housing co-operatives and will assist the sector and policy makers best support the sector.

It will also help address emerging challenges and foster potential opportunities.

A final report is being prepared and results will be launched later

this year. Over the last two years, tenant-members, co-operatives and partners have contributed extensively to this research by providing their experience, expertise, and perspectives throughout the entire process – from collaborating on the project design, to contributing to data and evidence collection activities, and participating in sector wide conversations and presentations.

The emerging findings are painting a picture of the diversity and strength of housing co-operatives across Australia.

The research team is deeply grateful to all tenant-members and partners who have contributed their time and expertise throughout the project period. We look forward to releasing the findings so they can be translated into practice and have a positive impact on shaping the future and growth of housing co-operatives.

Initial project results have been promoted by team members co-presenting a session on 'The Future of Community and Tenant Engagement' at the CHIA NSW Conference held in May this year. The panel comprised of Associate Professor Louise Crabtree-Hayes, Nick Sabel CEO of CENSW, and co-operative tenant-member Yvonne Jenkins. The panel generated a lot of interest on the value of sector diversity, tenant-member voice, and holistic delivery. It was great to see the project contributing to a strengthened sector voice. A similar panel will be presenting at the AHURI National Housing Conference in Brisbane in October.

Please email Dr Liz Ayres Western Sydney University

Layres@westernsydney.edu.au

if you would like to be added to the mailing list for project updates. You can also visit :

www.housingcoopresearch.org.au



ACHA Australian Co-operative Housing Alliance

ACHA is an alliance of the Common Equity organisations that deliver Co-operative Housing across Australia.

It was formed 5 years ago with the aim of working collaboratively to advocate for the benefits of the housing co-operative model and the growth and diversification of the social housing sector in Australia.

ACHA is now more established and looking to be recognised as a national voice for Co-op Housing, with its members to be viewed as authorities in the delivery and development of Co-op Housing.

The members meet quarterly, have developed a Strategic Plan with clear goals and work on joint projects that benefit each organisation.

CENSW hosted the last ACHA meeting in May 2023 which included a tour of Planet X Co-op and tenant-member, Wayne Stamp explaining how the Co-op operates. It is valuable seeing the diversity of the Co-op Housing sector in each state. Building the power of this collaborative network amongst Common Equity peaks is another way in which we are seeking to strengthen the Co-operative Housing voice to be a thriving sector nationally.

Over the next year ACHA plans to:

- increase the supply of Co-operative and community-led housing.
- contribute to the development of good governance practices for Co-ops.
- ensure ACHA is represented at key housing conferences.
- actively contribute to the national Co-operative Housing agenda.

Over the long term we want to:

- Increase Co-op Housing nationally, across every state.
- Explore diversification of Co-operative Housing models.
- Ensure Co-op Housing is recognised across the board as a distinct form of housing.
- Articulate the value of housing co-ops as distinct from other housing forms.
- Have a national Co-op Housing conference annually.



Vale Wayne Stamp

We lost a committed member of the Co-operative Housing movement recently, Wayne Stamp, Planet X.

He was very involved with the Association to Resource Co-operative Housing (CENSW's predecessor) and CENSW being both on the Board, Newsletter Editorial Board and of course a constant at all our forums and events. He will be missed!

How Rent Reviews 'work'

BY LIZ BRADSHAW, CO-OP MEMBER



To understand the process, which can seem complicated and intimidating, Liz Bradshaw, spoke to the Co-operative Development Team. Hopefully, this explanation will make the process easier for everyone in the future.

Common Equity does rent reviews on behalf of most Co-ops as well as for tenants in direct managed properties.

It is standard practice for everyone living in Co-operative Housing to pay 25% of their gross income up to a ceiling of market rent for their type of property. This sounds straightforward.

Market rents should be reviewed yearly and should be calculated according to the Community Housing Rent Policy using data from the Department of Communities and Justice Rent and Sales Report.

More than 98% of Co-operative Housing tenants do not pay market rent. Co-operatives have been undergoing this process lately, after interruptions caused by COVID-19

Rent reviews are conducted every six months. During this

period tenants are asked to provide proof of income for the calculation of the rent.

If you are employed, permanent or casual, you will be asked to provide four consecutive pay slips.

If you are on a Centrelink benefit, you can opt to have Centrelink share your details with CENSW, which is an easy way to manage the process. You will need to give your permission for CENSW to do this through an ICS Form, which can be obtained from the Co-op Development Team.

The calculation for Centrelink tenants is usually 25% of the primary benefit, 25% of the energy supplement and 100% of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) that you are eligible to receive. It should be noted that Co-operative Housing tenants are not eligible to receive CRA themselves. The Federal government gives CRA to the

tenant which is then passed on to the Housing Co-operative. It is important to remember to always advise Centrelink when your rent changes as the amount of CRA may also change.

Some Co-op tenants are self employed, have irregular or largely fluctuating incomes.

For these tenants it is best to speak your Co-op Development worker to discuss what is needed for your circumstances.

When your circumstances change you need to let your Co-op and CENSW know as soon as possible so that a new rent calculation can be done.

Need more help?

For assistance with assessing your income and any information about rent reviews you can contact the Co-op Development Team at cdt@commonequity.com.au

ALPHA GALLERY

Q&A with Gallery Director, Ira

For more info
contact us...
alphahousecoop.org

Q: Please introduce yourself and explain your role at the gallery.

I am the Director of the Alpha Gallery committee. There are five of us on the committee: Nick, Liz, Zio, Owen, and myself. We are responsible for running the space, in consultation with the other members of the Alpha House Co-op. The gallery was set up around 1998.

Q: Do artists collaborate with each other?

Yes but more than anything it is a place rich with conversation and sharing of resources - sometimes the collaborations extend beyond us living here at Alpha.

Q: What kind of activities and exhibitions happen here?

A wide range. You can have an exhibition here that includes a variety of mediums including painting, sculpture, installation and video-art. The space is a blank canvas and can be used in various ways. We also hold music gigs here, poetry readings or story-telling.



Q: Do you do life drawing or other classes? Can anyone attend?

Yes, we have a weekly sketch club held on Sundays from 2-5pm. Everyone is welcome to come. The fee is currently \$20/16.

Q: What is the criteria for co-op members of Alpha House being accepted?

They need to be professional artists, meaning that they have a portfolio of work to show. Formal training is not a prerequisite.

Q: How can people in the community hold an exhibition here?

Send us an email - with your idea/proposal. We will then review and discuss with you the possibilities and logistics of your event such as dates, etc. You will need to sign a hire contract and pay the hire fee, which is relatively affordable.

You will be responsible for organizing and managing your event as the gallery is run by volunteers and their time can be limited.

CENSW Advocacy Continues



Spreading the word!

CENSW has continued with advocacy work in a range of ways. We have kept up our MP campaign – post NSW State Election - contacting newly appointed ministers to congratulate them on their new positions. This includes Ministers holding portfolios most relevant to the NSW Co-operative Housing Program: Chris Minns (Premier); Rose Jackson (Minister for Housing); Kate Washington (Minister for Families and Communities); and Paul Scully (Minister for Planning and Public Spaces).

Image: Federal MP Dai Le at the Vietnamese Seniors Co-op earlier this year.

Labor NSW made a number of Housing Commitments in the leadup to elections such as: a funding commitment for build-to rent projects on the North and South Coasts; all Government surplus land developments to include 30 % social and affordable housing; and continuing to lobby federal government for an effective distribution of the Housing Australia Future Fund for NSW. Our contact with Ministers has reiterated the

NSW Co-operative Housing Program's alignment with and capacity to contribute to delivering on these commitments. We have requested meetings to discuss the Co-operative Housing model and its benefits.

The Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) is a Federal Government initiative, currently being tabled in federal Parliament. HAFF proposes a \$10 billion investment fund with the goal of developing 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties throughout Australia in the first five years. The proposed funding program is financially complex and currently pushes a substantial financial risk onto CHPs in its delivery. The Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) NSW is currently advocating for CHP sector needs through the development of a discussion paper as a basis for lobbying government for an effective model for the HAFF. CENSW has participated in numerous consultations and discussions relating to the HAFF and has provided detailed input onto the CHIA paper. We have advocated for the need for a model which is accessible for smaller CHPs (such as CENSW – with a flow on to Co-ops) and a model that enables diverse housing solutions including the NSW Co-operative Housing Program.



JENNY LEONG MP

Out & about in our community

"In early March, it was my pleasure to visit Alpha House Co-op Erskineville and get to meet some of the wonderful creative community who call the housing co-op home. From a gallery space to common gardens and creative workshops, Alpha House is a shining example of communal living and the strong, lively sense of community and creativity it can foster."

"During my visit, the love that Alpha House residents have for their home was evident – as was the need to raise awareness about co-ops as a viable alternative to private rentals, particularly given the housing affordability crisis we now face. I congratulate all members of Alpha House for creating and maintaining such a strong and welcoming community, and look forward to seeing more housing co-operatives established in the Inner West and beyond in coming years."



We are moving!

Our new address from
1 September 2023 will be...

Suite 11.01, 46 Market St
Sydney, NSW



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CO-OPERATIVE
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