

Report reveals extent of housing issues facing older people

November 7 2014, by David Stacey

The State's laws governing family accommodation agreements and enduring powers of attorney urgently need to be changed, according to a new report to be launched on Monday.

Professor Eileen Webb, from The University of Western Australia's Law School, is the lead author of the report, *Security of tenure for the ageing Western Australians - Does current legislation meet Seniors' ongoing housing needs?*

Professor Webb, Co-Director of the Consumer Research Unit in the Faculty of Law, said the research team conducted interviews and focus groups with seniors and/or their family members and friends, representatives from government and non-government organisations and agencies working with seniors and/or in the housing area.

"The insights were invaluable and took this project from being a sterile piece of academic work to research that, we hope, demonstrates the human face of housing issues affecting [older people](#) in Western Australia," she said.

Professor Webb and her co-authors Associate Professor Aviva Freilich, Pnina Levine and Ben Travia identified several issues of concern, including the need for more education for seniors to prepare them for making accommodation decisions and the need for stronger laws, particularly in relation to more marginal forms of accommodation.

"For example, in some cases older people can be evicted on a whim," she said.

The team also found that bullying was rife among landlords, management and, in some cases, other residents; that seniors in rental accommodation were too frightened to ask for repairs to be done for fear of rent rises or eviction; and the most vulnerable seniors, those who were homeless or in boarding and lodging accommodation, had little or no legal protection and yet their numbers were growing.

Professor Webb said the research began several years ago as the impact of Western Australia's resources boom became evident.

"While it brought years of prosperity for some, for many - especially those on lower and fixed incomes - the rising cost of living became problematic," she said.

"Housing and rental prices soared and many people who had rented for many years found themselves unable to afford to stay in their homes or meet rising rental costs. Even those [seniors](#) who wanted to downsize faced difficulties regarding supply, location, price and amenity.

"As people age, housing security is of considerable importance and the downside of the changing economic circumstances was, in our view, falling disproportionately on older people."

Professor Webb said the report found that the two areas of most pressing need for legislative intervention were family accommodation agreements and enduring powers of attorney.

"These areas are responsible for huge losses for older people, including the loss of their home, but there is little formality of legal protection and, if the matter has to be pursued in the court, the costs are prohibitive."

The research, commissioned by the Council on the Ageing Western Australia (COTAWA) and funded by Lotterywest, will be launched at the University Club on Monday 10 November and the full report will be available online early next year.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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