



HANZA
HOMESHARE AUSTRALIA
& NEW ZEALAND ALLIANCE

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Work, care and homeshare

Submission to Senate Select Committee on Work and Care

Homeshare programs have the potential to make a significant contribution to improving Australia's work and care systems, but are being held back by inter-agency issues, the transfer of disability and aged care to the Commonwealth and lack of resources.

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ABOUT HANZA

Established in 2009, Homeshare Australia & New Zealand Alliance Inc. (HANZA) is a not-for-profit organisation working to increase lifestyle choices for older, disabled and younger people. Driven by volunteers, it is a collaborative partnership between homeshare providers and potential providers across Australia and New Zealand.

HANZA is the peak body for Homeshare services providing information, advice and resources about homeshare and connects Homeshare programs within Australia and New Zealand to international programs. HANZA is a clearing house of information for people wishing to establish a homeshare program or those looking to find a homeshare organisation in their community. Tax deductible donations can be made via www.hanza.org.au.

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Summary

Homeshare programs bring people together in shared households through a carefully negotiated matching process resulting in the **homesharer** moving into a spare room in an older or disabled person's home - the **householder**. The negotiated and unique agreement for each match involves domestic assistance and company in exchange for free or significantly reduced rent.

Homeshare programs are run by social workers, aged care or disability professionals who carefully negotiate, support and safeguard the shared living arrangements over time. With strong management practices homeshare can provide safe, affordable and sustainable housing for participants.

Homeshare programs have the potential to make a significant contribution to Australia's work and care systems by:

- keeping older and disabled people out of residential care and supplementing in-home services, making them more cost effective and extensive.
- increasing the supply of affordable housing, often in locations where housing is least affordable.
- providing well-located housing options for essential (but not highly paid) workers such as nurses, aged care staff, child care and retail workers.

Homeshare programs have been operating in Australia for the last 20 years but remain small and little-known due to:

- responsibility for them falling across various departments across different levels of government.
- Early programs were funded by state governments, most notably in Victoria. The federal government take over of disability and aged care sectors have ended state block funding.
 - The MyAgedCare and NDIS pricing systems are generally not suitable for shared living programs such as homeshare.

We make the following recommendations to help homeshare reach its potential and provide benefits to Australia's work and care systems:

- Establish an inter-agency taskforce to work on ways for homeshare to be incorporated into aged care and disability services, either within or alongside NDIS and MyAgedCare.
- Resourcing for a round of homeshare pilot programs in both capital cities and regional areas with a view to establishing recurrent funding.
- Resources for HANZA to provide expert evaluation, advice, training and support for the development of the pilot programs, similar to New Zealand's arrangements.

Introduction

The Homeshare Australia New Zealand Alliance (HANZA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care in collaboration with The Australia Institute.

HANZA is the peak body for homeshare services, providing information, advice and resources about homeshare and connects homeshare programs within Australia and New Zealand to international programs. We have often collaborated with The Australia Institute, one of Australia's leading public policy think tanks, to publish research on the economics and policy settings of homeshare.¹ Please note a separate submission will be made to this Committee by the Institute's Centre for Future Work.

Homeshare brings people together in shared households through a carefully negotiated matching process resulting in the **homesharer** moving into a spare room in an older or disabled person's home - the **householder**. The negotiated and unique agreement for each match involves domestic assistance and company in exchange for free or significantly reduced rent.

Homeshare programs are run by social workers, aged care or disability professionals who carefully negotiate, support and safeguard the shared living arrangements over time. With strong management practices homeshare can provide safe, affordable and sustainable housing for participants. Homeshare programs have been operating in Australia for the last 20 years, mainly in Victoria, building on overseas experience dating back to the 1970s.

Homeshare can alleviate some of Australia's most pressing social and economic issues:

- *Aged and disability care* – Homeshare keeps older and disabled people out of residential care and can supplement in-home services making them more cost effective and extensive. Homeshare provides safeguards for vulnerable people who would otherwise be living on their own, and reassurance for family members.
- *Housing* – Homeshare increases the supply of affordable housing, often in central and regional locations where housing is least affordable. Homeshare utilises existing housing stock in the form of spare capacity by offering affordable accommodation without massive infrastructure costs, thereby reducing the threat of homelessness.

¹ See for example Campbell (2015) *On for young and old: The economics of Homeshare*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/on-for-young-and-old/>; Cox and Campbell (2017) *Free room for 'rent': Facilitating semi-formal shared living opportunities for older Australians and people with disabilities*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/free-room-for-rent/>

- *Essential workers* – Homeshare can provide well-located housing options for essential (but not highly paid) workers such as nurses, aged care staff, child care and retail workers, etc. Increasingly, expensive accommodation in inner city and regional areas is a barrier to the recruitment of staff who are unable to afford housing costs. Many businesses and services are struggling to recruit and retain staff due to a lack of affordable accommodation locally.

As such, homeshare programs in Australia relate to several of the terms of reference of the Committee:

d. the adequacy of current work and care supports, systems, legislation and other relevant policies across Australian workplaces and society;

h. consideration of differences in experience of disabled people, workers who support them, and those who undertake informal caring roles;

i. consideration of the policies, practices and support services that have been most effective in supporting the combination of work and care in Australia, and overseas;

This submission begins with some background on homeshare before discussing the challenges that have prevented homeshare reaching its potential in Australia. We conclude with discussion and recommendations on reforms needed to help homeshare help the work and care systems.

How homeshare works

Homeshare brings together older people or people with a disability, who have a room to spare with homesharers, people of integrity prepared to lend a hand in return for affordable accommodation. Homeshare programs undertake careful screening, checks and in-depth interviews of both parties to facilitate a mutually beneficial agreement. The coordinators provide ongoing support for the match to ensure the safety of all parties.

At its most basic level, homeshare works on the idea of mutual benefit. The householder provides a bedroom and shared facilities. In exchange, the homesharer provides approximately 10 hours per week of practical assistance such as cooking, cleaning, shopping and gardening, as well as the added security of having someone else in the home overnight.

Most importantly, homesharers also provide company. HANZA has numerous examples of homeshare matches where, through the development of genuine trusting relationships between homesharer and householder, a previously isolated householder has enjoyed renewed opportunities to participate in their community.

It is, important to note that homeshare is about sharing. It is not a substitute for formal care; if a Householder reaches the stage where formal, qualified care is required, it is important that this responsibility does not fall on an unqualified homesharer. This is an issue that is closely monitored by homeshare program staff.

Homeshare can, however, be a great complement to formal care programs. Homesharers can play an important role in improving the care of householders, for example with reminders about medication, transport to appointments and keeping family closely informed. HANZA can provide numerous examples to the Committee if it would be of assistance.

Beyond the benefits to the householder, homeshare also helps promote the development of inclusive communities, helps with provision of affordable housing, takes some of the strain off local aged care and health services, and promotes a positive and healthy attitude to ageing and living with disability. It also helps with housing accessibility, which is an increasing problem for young people, particularly for care sector workers working in expensive metropolitan areas.

Challenges for homeshare in Australia

In contrast to the USA, UK, Ireland and around 20 other nations around the world, homeshare in Australia has received little support from governments, key agencies and organisations. The New Zealand government has recently announced a new homeshare program, including resourcing for HANZA to train and support the programs.² Yet despite homeshare programs operating in Australia for over 20 years, they remain largely unknown outside of the areas in which they operate — parts of Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra.

A key factor in homeshare's lack of progress in Australia is that it involves various departments across different levels of government. State governments funded early programs, most notably in Victoria, but also in the ACT, SA and NSW. However, when the federal government took over funding of the NDIS and the Aged Care Reform process this support largely ended. The focus turned rather towards personal care, residential settings, prescribed services and processes that increased administrative burdens for service providers and a resulted in a limited and standardised menu of services. Efforts by supportive ministers such as former Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt, have not endured many changes of minister and personnel.³

Homeshare is generally not funded for on-going availability through these Commonwealth programs. The few remaining homeshare services have struggled without the support of, and inclusion in, the new aged care and NDIS frameworks, leaving service providers without resources to develop and expand this flexible and innovative service offering.

The costs of a homeshare program are small by the standards of the care sector. However, skilled staff are required to ensure that program participants are trustworthy and generally suitable for homesharing, and that the homesharer and householder are a good match. This is critical; if the householder is to be safe, the homesharer must be properly vetted with interviews, background checks, etc. Even when a match is made, the arrangement requires ongoing monitoring to ensure that both parties are safe and happy, and that both are having their needs met. This is especially important in the case of older householders, whose needs may change and/or intensify as time passes.

² NZ Office for Seniors (2022) *September stakeholder newsletter*, <https://mailchi.mp/0902879a0bdd/office-for-seniors-july-stakeholder-newsletter-14180199?e=2d10949ed2>

³ <https://twitter.com/KenWyattAM/status/920221276416876544>

It is also crucial for the householder's relatives to have confidence and trust in the person living with such an important member of their family.

If programs are under-resourced, the ability of staff to carry out these duties is undermined. This may be because staff are "spread too thin" — required to oversee and monitor too many people — but also because they are required to take on other duties that are not directly related to the maintenance of successful homeshare matches. In the case of homeshare, this is often related to the constant necessity to promote and raise awareness of the program — where this promotion is the responsibility of homeshare co-ordinators and staff, the result is a reduction in their ability to actually run the program.

The fact that homeshare programs are generally operated by a relatively small staff, often under the auspices of larger organizations, can mean that their success or failure is contingent upon the individuals involved — where, for example, a homeshare program is operated as part of a range of offerings by a larger agency, and the individual who commissioned the program moves on for whatever reason, the result can be that institutional enthusiasm is lost and the program becomes neglected.

Helping homeshare help with work and care

When properly resourced and administered homeshare has been successful. The best Australian example of this has been in Victoria, where in 2007 the Minister for Aged Care, Lisa Neville MP, convened a Ministerial Advisory Committee to examine the state's aged care industry. The result of this was the provision of ongoing funding to the Wesley Homeshare Program, now Uniting Homeshare. That program continues to this day, but is again insecure and reliant on ad hoc, short term agreements with the Commonwealth.

The potential of homeshare to grow into a significant part of the work and care systems is demonstrated by the recent experience of the UK. In 2015, the Lloyds Bank Foundation announced the launch of a £2m National Homeshare Programme, encompassing eight programs around the country. The Lloyds initiative ended in 2017, but the individual homeshare programs it set up continue to flourish with innovative, sustainable business models that have been influential on recent Australian practice.

The Victorian and UK examples show that with institutional support, homeshare can grow and make a significant contribution to the community with a level of investment that is a minute fraction Australia's home care budget. With this in mind, we turn to our recommendations.

Conclusion and recommendations

We urge the Committee to make the following recommendations:

- The establishment of an inter-agency taskforce, including at least aged care, disability and housing portfolios, to work on ways for homeshare to be incorporated into aged care and disability services, either within or alongside NDIS and My Aged Care.
- Resourcing for a round of homeshare pilot programs, along the lines of the UK's recent experience. This would be delivered over 3-5 years to further build the evidence on outcomes, costs and benefits in the Australian context with a view to establishing recurrent funding for homeshare programs. These pilots need to be supported across different portfolios and be placed in both capital cities and regional areas.
- Resources for HANZA to provide expert evaluation, advice, training and support for the development of the pilot programs, along the lines of New Zealand's recent engagement with us.