



Homeshare: The Need for Recognition

A follow-up to our initial submission,
Homeshare: Getting On Together, which was lodged
with the Royal Commission on 7 July 2019
(reference AWF.001.03574)

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ABOUT HANZA

Established in 2006, Homeshare Australia & New Zealand Alliance Inc. (HANZA) is a not-for-profit organisation increasing 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.

The objectives of HANZA Inc. are to work in a co-operative way:

- To achieve recognition and acceptance of homeshare as a means of assisting individuals, families, communities and governments to meet their goals in relation to inclusive communities, affordable housing, and positive and healthy ageing and living with disability;
- To achieve recognition and acceptance of the International Homeshare Model as the valid model for Homeshare in Australasia;
- To achieve a long term sustainable financial model for Homeshare;
- To facilitate the establishment throughout Australasia of Homeshare; and
- To promote best practice in Homesharing across Australasia.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

In this document, we make the following recommendations:

1

That homeshare be recognised as a viable option for older Australians who wish to remain in their homes.

That homeshare matching services are made available to all who want to participate in a homeshare program.

2

3

That homeshare be embedded in the aged care system via individualised packages and/or block funding.

That the Minister direct the CHSP to work with HANZA and the aged care sector to develop cost-effective, replicable homesharing models across Australia.

4

5

That homeshare schemes are given sufficient governmental and legislative support to be able to establish themselves and grow sustainably.

INTRODUCTION

HANZA has been extremely disappointed to find no mention whatsoever of homeshare in any of the research papers commissioned and published by the commission in 2020. It is this omission that has prompted us to prepare this follow-up submission.

Having discussed homeshare's benefits at length in our submission, we were encouraged by the declaration in the Royal Commission's Interim report that "we have heard many examples of providers who deliver innovative and effective models of care... crucially, we have heard about these positive examples not just from the providers themselves, but from the people they care for." As the Royal Commissioners had previously shown an interest in homeshare — in February 2019, Commissioner Tracey described homeshare as "a very useful tool to... avoid the need to go into residential care", and officers of the Commission subsequently contacted a homeshare pair who had featured in an article in *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* — we were confident that homeshare was one of these "positive examples".

We have thus been disappointed and confused to find no mention of homeshare in any subsequent Royal Commission publication. It beggars belief that a team led by Flinders University could carry out an extensive international search for "innovative models of aged care" and fail to mention homeshare, or that the recently published Research Papers 4 and 5 could discuss research into Australians wanting to remain at home while again ignoring homeshare. The opening sentence to the latter's accompanying media release is quite literally homeshare's key objective:

Australians of all ages want to be assisted to live independently in their own home during their retirement years rather than ever having to go to an aged care facility, new research from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has shown.

The apparent disappearance of homeshare from the Royal Commission's radar, at a time when the Commission is looking into the very problem that homeshare was created to address, is as concerning as it is bewildering.

This submission has also been prompted by the Covid-19 outbreak, which has had a profound, worldwide effect on older people and on the aged care sector. As with any aged care program, homeshare has had to adapt and evolve to a reality of a pandemic in which older people are the single most at-risk demographic.

The pandemic has also demonstrated new ways in which homeshare can help the community. Our program Home Share Melbourne, which extends the homeshare model beyond the rubric of aged care, has been able to help several vulnerable people affected by the pandemic. The resources and ingenuity of program staff have been stretched to the limit in continuing to make new matches while complying with social distancing restrictions. But the rewards of being able to achieve new matches for householders at serious risk of being very isolated have been significant. On many occasions, the presence of the homesharer has, quite literally, been a lifesaver.

WHY HOMESHARE MATTERS

As we set out in our initial submission to the Royal Commission (*Homeshare: Getting On Together*, submitted in partnership with The Australia Institute in July 2019, and given reference number AWF.001.03574), homeshare is a proven and successful model for allowing Australians to stay in their homes as they get older. Being able to remain at home is critical to mental and physical wellbeing, and many older Australians have identified it as a key driver of quality of life; research conducted by the Australia Institute in 2015 found that 82% of people “intend[ed] to stay in their own home for as long as possible”.

The homeshare model was developed in the US during the 1970s, and has existed in Australia for over 20 years. The idea behind homeshare is simple: it involves matching older people (“householders”) who have a room to share with younger people (“homesharers”) who can live in that room and offer domestic help and companionship to the householder in exchange for reduced or free rent. The model revolves around the idea of mutual benefit: the householder gets to remain in their own home and receives assistance with domestic tasks they might have found challenging to perform alone, while the homesharer gets relatively cheap accommodation. At its best, though, homeshare is more than a transaction: it bridges generation gaps and creates profound friendships, often lasting well beyond the end of the accommodation arrangement.

In short, then, homeshare is exactly the sort of “innovative model of aged care” for which the Royal Commission is searching. It is also exactly the sort of model that would benefit greatly from the Commissioners’ attention. As we explained in our initial submission, homeshare programs have often fallen between the cracks as far as funding goes; its outcomes often cross the lines of traditional government portfolios, and it has been difficult to find sustained funding.

It is a testament to the strength of the homeshare model that programs have managed to flourish despite this precarious and insecure funding environment. However, lack of official and institutional support means that programs have continually fought uphill battles for both funding and recognition. We have advocated strongly for homeshare’s inclusion in the NDIS price list and support within MyAgedCare, and in this submission we call again for the model to get the support that it warrants.

HOMESHARE AND COVID-19

We made our initial submission to the Royal Commission almost exactly a year ago, in July 2019. The intervening 12 months have been what one might politely call “eventful”.

Covid-19 is terrifying, and especially so for older people, who are the most at risk from a pandemic that shows no sign of slowing down. In this new reality, the desire of older Australians to stay at home and avoid residential care is stronger than ever, and understandably so: there are well-documented cases from all around the world of the virus laying waste to nursing home populations.



A still from the recent episode of the ABC's Compass program, which focused on homeshare matches past and present. We highly recommend that the Commissioners view this episode, which is available on iView.

The pandemic has reinforced the value of any and every approach to aged care that can keep older people out of residential care. Homeshare certainly offers older people a chance to do exactly this, but it also offers a chance for their life at home to be safe, affordable and fulfilling. Covid-19 means that it is more important than ever to have a homesharer who is sensible, trustworthy, and sensitive to the needs of the older person in whose home they are living. The homeshare matching process, and the experienced professionals who carry it out, are invaluable in ensuring that this is the case.

As well as underlining the value of existing matches and of the homeshare model for older people, the pandemic has also led to new applications of the homeshare model. When we made our initial submission, Home Share Melbourne — a HANZA-backed social enterprise that extends homeshare into the provision of accommodation for people with disability, asylum seekers, and youth at risk of homelessness — was still finding its feet, having just completed its first year of operation.

Fast forward 12 months and the program is thriving — and several of the matches that it has made this year have involved finding accommodation for people who have lost employment and/or housing as a result of the pandemic. Again, it is a testament to the strength and flexibility of the homeshare model that HSM has been able to respond so quickly to, and provide real help to people disadvantaged by, a completely unprecedented crisis.

CONCLUSION

In the media release of 13 July 2020 that accompanied the release of Research Papers 4 and 5, the Royal Commissioners — the Honourable Tony Pagone QC and Ms Lynelle Briggs AO — explained how their research had confirmed that Australia’s aged care system needs major reform to align with community expectations:

Australians want the Government and community to assist older people to live well in their own homes for as long as possible. The Royal Commission has been investigating how to achieve that.

For many people, the key to achieving that is to not live alone. Homeshare provides an affordable, safe, and enjoyable way of doing this. Skilled, high quality Homeshare matching services need to grow and spread throughout Australia to make Homeshare available to all who want to participate, and for whom it is suitable.

The time has come, after 20 years of lobbying, for Homeshare to take its deserved place in the home and community support sector of aged care. HANZA therefore calls on the Royal Commission to make the following recommendations in its final report:

1. That homeshare be recognised as a viable option for older Australians who wish to remain in their homes.
2. That homeshare matching services are made available to all who want to participate in a homeshare program.
3. That homeshare be embedded in the aged care system via individualised packages and/or block funding.
4. That the Minister for Aged Care direct the CHSP to work with HANZA and the aged care sector to develop cost-effective, replicable homesharing models across Australia.
5. That homeshare schemes are given sufficient governmental and legislative support to be able to establish themselves and grow sustainably.