

Dear Mark,

Happy International Women's Day. A day to go to brekkies and lunches and celebrate the multitude of achievements of Western Australian women of all ages, cultures and backgrounds.

We celebrate women for their life long unpaid family and community caring work. They bring so much creative, social and intellectual capital to WA communities.

My name is Liz Lennon. I'm an older single women who has experienced poverty, housing stress and homelessness. Let me introduce you to my tribe.

**We're invisible, silent and usually well behaved.**

We're the 50,000+ older female Western Australians living in housing stress and at risk of homelessness. 32,000 of us live in the metropolitan area.

Many of my tribe spend up to 65%+ of their weekly low income on private rental and are terrified of being evicted or rent hikes. Often the homes are not fit for purpose. I can't afford to rent so I move between living with a dear friend and housesitting. Housesitting jobs dried up during the pandemic and I know of older women living in their cars or tents or overcrowded housing.

The private rental market is currently over priced, undersupplied and not always fit for purpose. The eviction moratorium will see older single women being evicted as landlords raise rents. We don't have money or the time [we're ageing] to buy a home and public housing waiting lists are so long we'd all be dead before we got off the list.

My invisible, silent and well behaved tribe may suddenly become very visible Mark.

These older women are your mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties, cousins, daughters and friends.

Let me tell you a little about my tribes lives and how we're ageing into poverty and potential homelessness. We're not ageing well in our communities of choice.

Many of my tribe have lived conventional lives and never been homeless. They've worked hard in often low paid part time jobs and are the backbone of family and community unpaid caring activities.

Did you know Mark that 60% of occupation groups in Australia are dominated by one gender? And guess what? Women dominated occupation groups get paid less than male dominated ones, and many women work part time and/ or have career breaks to care for family. So, if you work in a low paid occupation and it's part time then your wealth [cough] accumulation, savings and superannuation will be much lower than high paid full time workers.

55% of women approaching retirement age have less than \$50,000 in their super balance.

From 2001 to 2026 low income households will increase by 120%, 66% of them will be older women mainly living in private rental.

66% of people aged 65+ will have less than \$400 a week to live on.

My tribe of older single women live on or below the poverty line and do not have safe, secure, sustainable and connected homes.

Mark, I know you care about all Western Australians and maybe because me and my tribe are kind of invisible, silent and well behaved you haven't been brought up to speed about the size, scale and extent of this disaster.

You've been a leader during the covid pandemic and participated in national cabinet. You've fought to get resources and investment to tackle the disaster for all Western Australians.

How about you declare housing and homelessness a national disaster that requires a coordinated national and state strategic planning, policy and resource approach. Get the money and people we need here in WA, to build and repurpose safe, secure, sustainable and fit for purpose homes for my tribe and all Aussies on low to medium incomes. And have a chat with the Feds about a liveable income and to stop shaming the poor and women.

**Mark, you're not alone.**

All Western Australians believe that there is a housing and homelessness crisis and they're willing to help. The building and construction sector sees affordable and social housing as a jobs and infrastructure investment growth opportunity. The community, homelessness and community housing sector are ready and willing to partner with you and have a huge bank of skills.

I'm willing to help.

In the last few years I've been living and researching older single women's housing options and created a couple of documents called Reimagining Home with older single women. They're jam packed with information, research and great examples of social and affordable housing partnerships from around Australia and the world. Docos are on my Liz Lennon site and Shelter WA site.

Older single women on low incomes may be financially poor but we're assets in so many other ways.

Mark, if you don't lead an innovative affordable and social housing supply revolution then tens of thousands of older single women in WA will not only continue to live in poverty, housing stress and at risk homelessness – they will have a vastly diminished quality of life as they age.

This is no reward for their life time of contribution to the workforce, their families and the wider community.

This tsunami – this disaster – will not go away.

We cannot, as a society that sees itself as fair and just, let this group of Western Australians down any more than we already have.

Mark, I'd like to hope that over the next 4 years your government places its attention, policies and money into real investment in creating homes so that older single women on low incomes, and all West Aussies doing it tough, can feel safe and secure and age well in their communities of choice.

Where a government places its attention, policies and resources tells me what it values. I hope Mark that you and your government will value women generally and older women living in poverty specifically by ensuring they have homes so they can age well and continue to contribute to their communities.

If you lead the social and affordable housing supply revolution then maybe I'll have something to celebrate on International Women's Day next year.

Best wishes Liz Lennon March 2021

