

A home *for* hope

Stepping up for older women in crisis



Annabelle Daniel OAM says when the refurbishment is complete, there will be a total of 100 WCS safe beds for older women in New South Wales.

A former aged care home in Southwest Sydney is set to begin an exciting new chapter. Once a home for older Australians, the building owned by not-for-profit provider Whiddon will soon help meet a different and urgent need to accommodate older women seeking safe transitional housing.

Through an inspiring partnership between Women's Community Shelters (WCS), Housing All Australians (HAA), Hume Housing, Urban Property and Whiddon, the Glenfield site will provide 28 safe beds a night for women aged 55 and over, alongside wraparound support services to help women rebuild their lives and find permanent homes.

Tragically, homelessness is rising sharply among women aged 55 and over, many of whom have spent their lives caring for others. "This is an opportunity to deepen our connection with the broader community we're part of and create even greater impact," said Chris Mamarelis, CEO of Whiddon. "It reflects the evolving role of aged care providers and not-for-profits as leaders in driving social impact and contributing to stronger more connected communities, beyond the people we directly support."

A rising crisis, a shared responsibility

The number of older women without secure housing rose by nearly 40 per cent between 2011 and 2021. In New South Wales, reports of abuse and neglect of older people have more than doubled in five years, most involving women, and often in the context of family violence or financial insecurity.

WCS creates safe havens for Australian women escaping the cycle of violence and homelessness. The organisation reported a 20 per cent increase in women seeking assistance from 2023 to 2024. Even with a 41 per cent increase in safe bed nights during that time, growing demand meant WCS was still forced to turn away one in every two women due to a lack of availability.

"As well as continuously growing our crisis shelter network, we are striving to create longer-term transitional housing such as this 'meanwhile use' conversion of a vacant aged care property," said Annabelle Daniel OAM, CEO of Women's Community Shelters. "These properties are not only housing where women can find safety and stability, but safe havens where they can also rebuild their lives with specialised support and community."

“Older women are a group increasingly experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We know that rents are incredibly unaffordable, and that there is a housing crisis across Australia. So being able to provide accommodation and support for 28 older women is going to be life-changing. We love that we are doing this in collaboration with amazing partners, like Whiddon, Housing all Australians, Hume Housing, Urban Property, and with the backing of the New South Wales Government. It’s a meeting of minds.”

Aged care with purpose

Whiddon and Housing All Australians saw Glenfield’s potential as more than a vacant site. While no longer suitable for residential aged care, it was rich with possibility for a new kind of care, grounded in community need. “This is a project rooted in the very values our sector is built on: dignity, compassion and care,” said Chris. “It reflects the evolving role of aged care providers as not only care deliverers but active participants in the wellbeing of our communities.”

The transformation of Glenfield is being led through an innovative ‘meanwhile use’ model, co-funded by the New South Wales Government’s Homelessness Innovation Fund and championed by key state ministers. Urban Property Group completed the full refurbishment pro bono, Hume Housing will oversee tenancy management and wraparound support, and WCS is leading the governance and day-to-day running of the accommodation and its support services.

From shelter to opportunity

Whiddon’s involvement in Glenfield goes beyond property provision. As part of its longer-term commitment, the organisation will offer retraining and employment pathways to women residing at the shelter. “We’re excited about providing ongoing and sustainable support,” said Chris. “As an aged

care provider, we see the strength, resilience and potential older women bring to our workforce and our communities. Creating employment pathways is a natural fit and one we’re proud to invest in.”

Glenfield also builds on Whiddon’s Collaborative Health Care Initiative, an aged care-led model that brings together health departments, peak bodies, academics and community groups to drive better outcomes for older Australians. “It shows what’s possible when purpose-driven organisations and public policy come together in a shared response to complex community challenges,” said Annabelle.

“When Glenfield opens, it will lift WCS’s number of safe beds for older women per night across our network to 100. That’s a significant milestone that will change the story, and save the lives, of so many women seeking safety in our community.”

What it means for aged care

For aged care leaders, Glenfield offers a compelling model: how existing infrastructure and expertise can be reimaged to serve older Australians in new ways. It also reflects the growing expectation that aged care providers operate not just as service providers, but as community partners, working alongside housing, health and social sectors to deliver holistic solutions.

“This initiative is just one example of how our sector can think differently and act boldly,” said Chris. “Whether through partnerships, innovative housing models, or collaborative care frameworks, aged care providers have an essential role to play in building a fairer, safer society, especially for older Australians who are most at risk.” ■

Whiddon
whiddon.com.au



L-R: Team partners Annabelle Daniel OAM (WCS), Tracey Sharp (HAA), Jen Dixon (WCS), Neesha Eckersley (WCS) and Samatha Palmer (HAA).



The former Whiddon aged care site to be redeveloped.