

lies, who may be under extraordinary pressures, they may be homeless or living in boarding houses.

He added that: 'Many are living very isolated lives and the research supports that many in this category are probably presenting with dual diagnosis issues, with a range of mental health problems which of course further compounds their autism. It is possible that some may be getting HACC [Home and Community Care] support'.

This has implications for public housing policy. How many 'mentally ill' people have gravitated to public housing because they have undiagnosed autistic spectrum disorders, they have been wrongly diagnosed and treated, and their original neurological problem has been exacerbated by stress-related mental illness?

Some preliminary work is being done in Britain. Research by the National Autism Society of the UK in 2001 showed that nearly 50% of adults with autistic spectrum disorders were living at home, and only 54% of the more able adults were happy with where they lived.

A discussion of autistic spectrum disorders and housing on the society's website predicted a large increase in the need for accommodation services in the future.

It is distressing for autistics to be hiding away in their parents' homes or inappropriately housed, and it is distressing for their families. It is also a loss to society of some very bright and talented people. Housing solutions to launch these young people into community integration must be seen as an important component of the NSW Government's mission to make us 'stronger together'. ☺

Deaths in public housing: It's a beat-up

By **Robert Mowbray**, Tenant Advocate, Older Persons Tenants' Service

There are currently over 60,000 older people living in social housing across New South Wales. And the media is trying to scare them.

In recent months there has been much hype in the newspapers about tenants of Housing NSW dying alone in their units. There was much publicity about two men from Waterloo who were all but skeletons when their bodies were discovered in 2006 and, this year, a man from Yagoona whose body was found 12 months after he had died. *The Sun-Herald* (20 January 2008) reported: 'Many seniors are forced to live in cramped public housing units, next door to drug users, alcoholics and the mentally ill. Many ... fear dying alone.'

Jordan Baker (in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 19–20 January 2008) quoted figures from the State Coroner. It took custody of 299 and 283 decomposed or

decomposing bodies in 2006 and 2007 respectively. All had been dead for at least seven days before their death was reported. Some had been dead for almost two years. Most deaths were due to natural causes, but some died by their own hands or in accidents. Most were found in their bedroom or lounge room.

And only 22 of the 582 had died in Housing NSW premises over those two years. That is, less than four per cent were tenants of Housing NSW ... not 20 per cent, not 50 per cent!

It's a beat-up to say it's the fault of an uncaring Housing NSW!

The isolation of many older persons is a problem for all of our society and the solution lies with each of us. ☺

Adapted from an article in The Voice of Pensioners and Superannuants of NSW, March 2008, p. 7.



'Raise your hand if you're waiting for public housing' t-shirts are available from the National Tenant Support Network.

Please email TSN@thenexus.org.au or telephone (02) 6492 0355 for more information.