



# Evaluation Report

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## Introduction

The 4<sup>th</sup> World Homeshare Congress was held in Melbourne, Australia from 5-6 November 2015.

Homeshare brings together older householders or householders with a disability who could benefit from help in the home and companionship, with people of integrity prepared to lend a hand in return for affordable accommodation.

The conference theme '*Homeshare ticks the boxes*' recognised the role it can play in finding a solution to the demographic, economic and social pressures many countries face.

The objectives of the Congress were:

- to expand the number of people benefitting from the Homeshare model in Victoria and other parts of Australia;
- to provide an opportunity for Homeshare program co-ordinators to get together and share experience, learning from one another;
- to promote to policy makers the value of Homeshare as a means of preventing dependency, as a housing solution and of ensuring continuous improvement in services;
- to extend information on Homeshare to a wider audience within Australia and to our Asian neighbours.

## Attendance

One hundred and five (105) people from Australia, Japan, England, Scotland, France, Belgium, Spain, Germany and the United States of America attended the Congress.

This expanded exposure of the Homeshare program was one of the key objectives of the Congress. Given Australia's location in the Pacific, attempts were made to interest China and Singapore in the Congress but no delegates were sent. Conversely, Japan sent three delegates, one of whom was a Homeshare householder.

The delegate list was made up of:

- consumer groups whose interests cover householders and homesharers in all their diversity;
- representatives from Homeshare International;
- representatives from established or developing Homeshare programs in Australia;
- delegates from Homeshare programs in UK, Europe and America;
- mainstream and ethno-specific aged care agencies especially those providing Home Support and Home Care services;
- aged care industry groups such as Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) Victoria;
- Australian community organisations which could either operate a Homeshare program or support one through, say, referrals;
- student housing groups;

- government officers from local, state and federal departments whose area of interest would encompass Homeshare: health, ageing, housing, student housing and education;
- print and electronic media representatives who can promote Homeshare;
- freelance researchers and research institutions who can build on previous evaluations of the program.

## **Events and activities of the Congress**

Over the two days of the Congress, 11 presentations on various aspects of the Homeshare program were delivered.

Titles were as follows:

- Why Homeshare warrants a worldwide movement
- The Homeshare Vermont model – a 30-year success story
- The economic and political significance of Homeshare in Australia
- The HANZA ambition – 2000 to the future
- The Victorian Homeshare project
- USA shared housing – niche to mainstream
- Europe’s intergenerational homesharing – social enterprises
- Q&A panel and audience discussion on the role Homeshare can play in tackling some of the social and economic opportunities and challenges that an ageing population presents
- The objectives, role and progress of the Homeshare International Research Advisory Group
- Support and Development of Shared Lives Plus in the United Kingdom
- The Tokyo based Homeshare program – NPO Heartwarming House

The Q&A panel was comprised of Barbara Mountjouris, from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, leading Australian demographers and commentators Bob Birrell, Don Edgar and Patricia Edgar, together with Professor Malcolm Johnson from Homeshare International. It was chaired by former Senator Lyn Allison.

Presentations were complemented by three concurrent workshops covering the expansion of the Homeshare model to the disability sector in Australia, the use of ‘staff’ volunteers from professional backgrounds in matching householders with homesharers in Vermont (USA), and the “Community of Practice” model introduced by Australia in 2013.

Homeshare staff from Australia and overseas manned permanent displays of material in respect of their own programs so that participants could explore in more detail the various models which have been developed throughout the world.

## **Ministerial involvement**

In Victoria, Homeshare is a HACC funded program which attracted additional State funding in 2013 so that the four metropolitan regions of Melbourne could be covered. It stands to

be transferred to the Commonwealth under the HACC transition program currently underway.

Given that the Victorian department of Health and Human Services has heavily influenced Commonwealth policy in respect of aged care and disability in the past, the Congress provided an opportunity to showcase the wellness and reablement aspects of the program as well as its potential to be a national program embracing a variety of client groups across several sectors such as housing, aged care, disability and family services.

So it was particularly pleasing that the Victorian Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing Martin Foley MP officially opened the Congress. During his opening remarks he announced that Homeshare would be trialed in public housing in Victoria. This has been a vexed issue for several years. The new project not only expands Homeshare clientele but lends credence to the social and financial benefits of Homeshare.

Both local and overseas participants recognised the significance of this initiative.

### **Feedback from delegates**

Feedback from the 52 evaluation forms completed after the Congress indicated that:

- 50 participants acknowledged the benefits of the Homeshare program;
- 17 stated they were motivated to establish a Homeshare program, or support one;
- Government representatives and organisations from interstate indicated interest in the program. Feedback suggested that in some cases, interest had been renewed.

Feedback reinforced the message that Homeshare is a low cost program that employs under-used housing to overcome social isolation of householders and ameliorate housing and financial stresses of homesharers.

The second take-home message was that the Homeshare International model is amenable to variation in respect of client groups, funding and staffing whilst containing the risk associated with unrelated people living with each other.

### **Key learnings from the Congress**

Remarkably, the Melbourne Congress attracted twice the number of registrants than the previous Congresses in Europe.

The learnings from the Congress have been evaluated as follows:

- that whilst adhering to the international model, Homeshare models vary remarkably, especially in Europe;
- that volunteers from professional backgrounds can be used effectively to match householders with homesharers. This is in contrast to paid employees;
- that Homeshare could be used readily in a disability context. Much interest was expressed in this, especially by the Australians and French;
- that Homeshare can be used for a wide variety of consumers such as families, not just the aged;

- that the type and emphasis of householder and homesharer can differ in Homeshare models throughout the world. For example, only students can be homesharers in the German program (because it is a student housing program) whereas in Australia few restrictions apply;
- that Homeshare programs throughout the world are not all totally reliant on government funding. In some models, householders and homesharers make a financial contribution to the exercise;
- that, for funding application purposes, it is possible to measure the financial benefits of the Homeshare program;
- that international research needs to be maintained to demonstrate what works and what doesn't in a Homeshare context;
- that Homeshare continues to reap social and financial benefits for its participants. In this respect, it accommodates government policy on wellness and healthy ageing;
- that marketing may need to be directed at a younger population so that the program is not associated with increasing incapacity to carry out day to day activities.