

MEDIA RELEASE

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PUBLIC HOUSING STUDY AIMS FOR BEDROOM TAX ALTERNATIVE

A new study tackling the controversial issue of under-occupied public housing will look at an alternative to the 'bedroom taxes' and other harsh measures used to oust tenants with spare rooms.

With 8,700 under-utilised public housing units in Queensland, and more than 30,000 people on the waitlist, freeing up these homes is seen by many as a crucial step in addressing the shortage.

The UK and NSW governments have been criticised for trying to move tenants on by charging them for the bedrooms they aren't using, a strategy welfare groups say just pushes the most vulnerable into greater hardship.

Now a joint study by UQ and affordable housing provider BHC will examine an alternative model based around a Brisbane apartment complex specifically built to address the problem.

The \$15 million, 57-apartment Caggara House development will provide new, modern units for local seniors who, having raised families in 3 and 4-bedroom public housing properties, no longer need the space or find them hard to maintain.

UQ Associate Professor Lynda Cheshire said studying residents living in the development would help researchers understand the dynamics of transitioning people out of under-occupied housing.

"There is often a sense of trepidation, fear and loss for people leaving both the homes where families were raised and the neighbours they have grown close to," Associate Professor Cheshire said.

"We will follow tenants who opted to move to Caggara House, and others who preferred to stay, over three years and find out what measures lead to positive experiences.

"This will help us enact policies that are sensitive to people's needs and concerns."

Associate Professor Cheshire said a similar study in the UK showed bedroom taxes hadn't worked because there weren't enough smaller properties available, while the emotional ties tenants have to their homes and communities were discounted.

"The study found most tenants chose or were forced to stay in their properties and pay the tax – which left them with less money for essential items like food, utilities and rent."

BHC CEO David Cant said, while there was sadness at leaving a home full of memories, tenants were also excited about the next phase of their lives.

“Transitioning to Caggara House does not disadvantage tenants financially and enables them to stay in their local area – which addresses two of our tenants’ key concerns,” Mr Cant said.

“They are able to remain active members of the Mt Gravatt community, which they have contributed and connected to for decades.”

Marianne, the daughter of new Caggara House tenant Lynda, said it was a difficult decision but her mother was confident it was the right one.

“I knew it was coming for years and just hoped she would move before the house and yard became too much for her,” Marianne said.

“But Caggara House is absolutely beautiful and, every time I go and see Mum, I look around the unit and can’t believe that she lives in such a lovely place.

“It’s a load off my mind knowing that she’s in a secure complex with wonderful neighbours she can have a cuppa and chat with.”

CAPTION: *Caggara House Mt Gravatt has been a success story for tenants transitioning from under occupied public housing.*

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