

Heat on over cold houses

By JODIE STEPHENS

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Northern Suburbs Medical Service GP Andrew Jackson

MARGARET Sturzaker struggles to breathe as she sits stationary on her couch.

The 77-year-old woman has severe chronic lung disease, and last winter she almost died from a collapsed lung and pneumonia.

Northern Suburbs Medical Service GP Andrew Jackson has requested on medical grounds that Mrs Sturzaker have a heat pump installed at her Mayfield home. He has not received a response.

However, Community Housing Ltd, which manages Housing Tasmania properties at Ravenswood, Waverley, Rocherlea, Mayfield and Mowbray, has in the past year launched a heat pump program as a priority.

The company's overall aim is to have heat pumps in every property it manages in Launceston.

Dr Jackson said he had requested heat pumps or housing transfers for four patients living in both public and private housing this winter.

He said too many people like Mrs Sturzaker were left in old properties not designed to withstand damp and cold conditions, with dated bar heaters he considered inadequate.

“It’s pensioners, as is usually the case, living in very old poor housing stock, and while wood heating has largely been phased out, it’s time to take the next step and for people like this lady in particular, there’s a very strong case,” he said.

Dr Jackson has taken to measuring the inside temperatures of homes belonging to patients with chronic conditions, and he said Mrs Sturzaker’s house was 14 degrees earlier this week.

“That is an uncomfortable temperature for young, fit people, and it’s certainly not a good temperature for someone with Margaret’s severe advanced lung condition,” Dr Jackson said.

“No question cold is a significant stressor, and it makes people like Margaret prone to a range of infections, including mould-type infections in the lung.”

Community Housing Ltd managing director Steve Bevington said that since the organisation took over management of Housing Tasmania properties in Launceston’s northern suburbs a year ago, it had started a property upgrades program and spent almost \$500,000 installing 120 heat pumps.

Mr Bevington said they were committed to increasing the number of heat pumps installed next financial year to about 160 properties, with an additional 180 installations the year after.

He said CHL did prioritise requests from tenants with medical conditions if they produced a medical report, but because of budget constraints Mrs Sturzaker’s request had to be put on priority for the new financial year.

Housing Tasmania manager of housing operations Lynden Pennicott said that all landlords in the public, private and community sectors had to meet the same requirements under the Residential Tenancy Act when it came to heating.

He said they had to provide adequate heating in the main living space, which was determined based on the property’s design.

“There are standards as to what sort of range you need a heater to be to heat the space of X-squared metres, and we make sure our heaters are at or exceed the size required to heat that main living area space,” Mr Pennicott said.