

# Part IV.

## Service delivery



# 20. Service delivery

In order to improve the accessibility and quality of services to people experiencing and at risk of homelessness, a number of service delivery issues must be addressed. For example, services need to be much more integrated, flexible and responsive. There are a number of gaps in the service system, and these can only be filled by increasing funding. Generalist service providers need to involve people who are homeless or at at risk of homelessness in service planning and evaluation. The rights of vulnerable service users need to be protected through a nationally consistent system of accreditation or licensing. Working conditions and career pathways for staff and management in the community sector should be comparable with those enjoyed by government and private sector employees working in comparable fields.

## 20.1 Goals

- To improve the delivery of services to people experiencing and at risk of homelessness by:
  - providing appropriate funding for a balance of prevention, early intervention, and crisis transition and support services
  - exploring new and responsive client-focused service delivery models
  - increasing service-user participation in policy development and the planning, implementation and evaluation of services
  - promoting user rights and ensuring that they are respected
  - improving salary and working conditions, particularly for workers in the community sector
  - supporting voluntary management committees, boards and other community-based employer structures
  - improving career pathways for workers in the human services industry.

## 20.2 Priority actions

### Diversity and coverage

**INCREASE** resources for new and responsive service delivery models, particularly for clients with high and complex needs.

**INCREASE** the supply of appropriate and affordable housing for homeless people moving on from crisis services.

**PROVIDE** additional funding for prevention and early intervention programs.

### Linking housing and support

**STRENGTHEN** links between funding agencies responsible for housing, housing support and support services, including mental health services and drug and alcohol services.

## Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- Australian Industrial Commission
- State housing authorities
- State and Territory departments responsible for SAAP, families and communities
- Local government
- Unions
- Homelessness peak organisations
- Employer bodies
- Management committees and boards of management
- Community-based organisations
- Health service providers
- Mental health service providers
- Community housing providers
- Homelessness service providers

**ADOPT** unified funding agreements providing whole-of-government guarantees that resources for housing and support will be available to clients throughout their time of need.

**RESOURCE** responsive services that provide the earliest appropriate access to flexibly managed, long-term housing and support.

**DEVELOP AND FUND** housing and support models that meet the needs of indigenous communities.

### Service-user rights and participation

**PROMOTE** increased participation by homeless people in service planning and evaluation.

**REQUIRE** consistent reporting on the participation of homeless people in service planning and evaluation.

**INTRODUCE** an accreditation system for SAAP providers to ensure that they honour user rights, encourage user participation and understand their duty of care, especially to those with high and complex needs.

### Resources and outreach

**PROVIDE** adequate funding to meet the cost of delivering services in regions with small populations scattered over large areas.

**IDENTIFY AND COLLECT** the information needed for policy development and needs-based planning.

### Staffing

**REDUCE** the staff turnover in the community sector by ensuring salaries and working conditions are comparable to those in other industries and sectors.

**DEVELOP** career pathways for staff in the human services industry.

### Management

**INCREASE** resources for voluntary committees and boards of management.

**DEVELOP** training and mentor programs to enable people who may not have the confidence or skills to become full management committee members — particularly those representing disadvantaged groups — to participate as associate members.

**PROVIDE** adequate funds to pay managers of homelessness services at appropriate levels.

### Related initiatives

- Social housing programs
- Supported accommodation
- Homelessness prevention programs
- Mental health services
- Drug and alcohol services
- Outreach programs
- Domestic violence initiatives
- Stronger Families and Community Strategy (including Young Leadership)

## 20.3 Rationale

### Diversity and coverage

Service providers have valid reasons for targeting different groups of homeless people. They may have developed resources and techniques that work well with some groups and not with others; in these circumstances, it makes sense to focus on the people you can best assist. Then again, some client groups are best dealt with separately — it would be inappropriate to offer services for the victims and the perpetrators of domestic violence in the same location, for example. However, while targeting services to particular groups is easy enough to justify, the consequence is that not all groups are catered for in all places. If a client's needs are too complex to be addressed by mainstream services and they do not belong to any of the groups for which specialist services are available locally, they must either move or cope without assistance. This is especially true for indigenous people in areas where culturally specific services are lacking or poorly developed. Gaps also occur in rural and remote areas that do not have the population to support a multitude of specialised services.

### Linking housing and support

Accommodation services for people who are homeless, exiting homelessness or at risk of homelessness must decide whether to buy and manage residential properties themselves (for greater security but less flexibility), or place people in rental housing that can be changed in line with changing client needs. No organisation can claim to deliver responsive services if its housing stock does not match the needs of its clients, particularly those in crisis. The fact that those needs are so difficult to predict strengthens the case for flexibility. For example, some women escaping domestic violence prefer communal accommodation because it enables them to draw support from their housemates, while others find that group-living simply adds to their stress and prefer to have their own unit.

Managing housing and providing support require very different skills, and few organisations are equally adept at both. Even the most skillful have trouble combining the roles of landlord and support worker — it is hard to establish rapport with someone you have just taken to task for being in arrears with their rent. Despite these difficulties, many organisations still believe support service providers should retain control over housing, rent collection and eviction. They argue that linking housing and support makes it easier to provide an integrated response and maintain consistency and continuity of care. The danger is that support service providers who are also tenancy managers will have little incentive to inform clients of their rights as tenants, that they will be tempted to make support conditional on compliance with tenancy rules (or housing conditional on compliance with the support regime), and that clients will have nowhere to turn should a dispute arise. These dangers can be averted by making a demonstrated commitment to client rights a prerequisite for accreditation.

### Further research

We need to know more about:

- the service delivery options available and the resource levels required to meet the needs of minority target groups and individuals
- the social and economic effects of homelessness prevention programs
- effective service delivery models and funding options for small populations covering wide geographic areas
- the conditions under which housing and support should be linked or separated
- the training and support needs of volunteer committees and boards of management and their members
- meaningful national salary benchmarks for staff working in homelessness services.

## Service-user rights and participation

While people experiencing homelessness may find it difficult to participate in planning and evaluating services, they should be given encouragement to do so. Service users see things differently to service providers — they have different priorities and a different perspective on how things work. Input from clients can be used to ensure that services are relevant and effective.

Homeless people are already extremely vulnerable. They have trouble accessing services and often suffer discrimination. It is therefore imperative that their rights as service users be protected. While many organisations recognise and respect the rights of their clients, homeless people continue to have negative experiences with service providers and in some cases may be excluded from services altogether. Given that access to housing, income support, emergency relief and supported accommodation may literally be a matter of life or death for especially vulnerable homeless people, it is essential that organisations providing these services closely monitor their performance on client rights and commit themselves to improving that performance over time.

## Resources and outreach

The funds available for homelessness services are finite and demand is high across the country. Many service providers make their dollars go further — and make themselves accessible to scattered populations — by operating outreach services. There are practical limits to how far these services can go — you know you have reached those limits when outreach workers spend more time on the road than with clients. Rostering workers to be in particular places on particular days is a more efficient way to cover a wide area, but it almost inevitably means that that services will not always be available when they are needed.

Even in metropolitan areas, homelessness organisations may not have the resources to provide services 24 hours a day. No matter how carefully they match their opening times to their client's activity patterns, people in crisis cannot be guaranteed access to services at all times.

## Staffing

Taxing work, unpredictable shifts, relatively low pay levels, non-portable long service leave, limited maternity leave, and the frequent absence of a career structure all contribute to high staff turnover in community-based organisations providing services to homeless people. The introduction of awards has improved things slightly; however, not all organisations in all States are operating under an award and some of the awards in place leave important issues unresolved. The loss of experienced and trained staff always threatens the quality of services.

## Management

Boards and committees of management in the community sector are responsible for large sums of money, industrial relations, complying with legal requirements and more. Their responsibilities are growing all the time. While the community rightly expects those responsibilities to be discharged honestly and competently, there is a limit to how much it can demand of volunteers. Many boards and committees are struggling to maintain their membership — there just are not enough people with the skills and the time to make a serious contribution. Organisations serving minority groups (indigenous people, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds) and organisations based in small communities find it especially difficult to attract volunteers.

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## 20.4 Evidence

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### Diversity and coverage

Community housing models have proved unsustainable in small communities and remote areas. For example, in many parts of Tasmania and the Northern Territory, community housing is effectively another form of social housing, dependent on subsidies and unlikely ever to be self-sustaining.

Crisis services are also difficult to run outside large population centres. A domestic violence service established in central Queensland was expected to meet the needs of the regional city it is based in and the rural communities around it. However, with travel times of up to six hours one way and local demand already exceeding the service's capacity, individuals and families in outlying communities can expect little assistance.

### Linking housing and support

In Victoria, SAAP services provide support and Transitional Housing Managers manage tenancies. Youth and women's refuges manage their own housing stock. In most other States and Territories, crisis and transitional housing and support are provided by SAAP services — tenancy management and support are not separated — and longer-term housing is provided by other agencies with little or no support. We still have a lot to learn about when and under what circumstances housing and support should be linked or separated.

### Service-user rights and participation

In the SAAP sector there is no consistent national legal framework protecting user rights and worker conditions through accreditation or licensing.

## Resources and outreach

Traditionally, programs have been funded on a per capita or historic basis. It is now recognised that Commonwealth funding should be provided according to need. However, the information required for policy development and needs-based planning is not available for all parts of Australia or all people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

## Staffing

In some States and Territories, SAAP services are respondents to the CASH award and some are respondents to the SACS award. In the ACT, SAAP services are not respondents to any award.

Community workers and government workers in the same or similar service delivery positions do not receive equivalent pay. For example, direct-care workers in the ACT government's disability support area currently receive \$112 per fortnight more than direct-care workers in the community sector. This is before penalty rates are taken into account. Penalty rates are also higher in the government sector.

SAAP providers and other community organisations report losing staff to other employers, or being obliged to arrange rosters around second jobs, which staff accept because they invariably come with higher pay.

## Management

The GST has imposed additional demands on volunteer boards and management committees, which have had to master the requirements of the new tax and introduce administrative arrangements to meet those requirements. Treasurers and other committee members have had to comply with increasingly exacting accounting standards, including the requirement that they adopt accrual accounting. As employers, management committees also need to keep up-to-date with the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (Cth) and *Workplace Relations Regulations 1996* (Cth) — particularly as they pertain to dispute prevention and settlement — and the relevant State and Territory *Workplace Relations Acts*. They must also have some knowledge of the *Racial Discrimination Act*, the *Sex Discrimination Act*, and the *Disability Discrimination Act*.

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