Family & Community Services
Housing NSW
NSW GOVERNMENT

Homelessness Action Plan
Evaluation Strategy
Evidence Note No. 6

Long-term housing and support: Summary of the Homelessness Action Plan Evaluation Findings

The Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) Evaluation Strategy captures evidence of the effectiveness of the different service approaches used by HAP Projects across NSW. This evidence note is a summary of the evaluation findings of four projects that provided long-term housing and support to people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness in rural and regional NSW.

Key points

- Local coordination groups comprising agencies working together on case planning and case management were found to be an effective way to support people to access and sustain long-term housing.
- This multi-agency approach was useful for both early intervention responses and for clients with complex needs.
- In order to work effectively, coordination groups needed strong commitment from government and non-government agencies, as well as agreed processes and resourcing.
- People with complex needs benefited most from flexible support delivered in stages with the intensity of support reduced over time (with the capacity to be increased again if necessary).
- Having access to brokerage funding provided an incentive for services to come together for integrated case planning. This resulted in practical support for clients when they needed it most, leading to improved outcomes.
- Client access to the private rental market could be facilitated by establishing links with real estate agents and private landlords.

Description of service approaches

Four HAP projects that provided long-term housing in conjunction with support were included in the evaluation. The common feature across these projects was the provision of support to people in rural/regional areas with a variety of housing tenures. The projects targeted people at risk of homelessness, as well as those experiencing primary and secondary homelessness.

Two projects, the Riverina Murray HAP Project (RMHAP) and the Rural Homelessness New England Project (RHNE), were made up of two components - early intervention and housing intensive support. They were responsible for case managing clients across a broad range of organisations, with the project providing coordination and brokerage funding resources.

The North Coast Accommodation Project (NCAP) primarily provided assistance to people with low needs and targeted access to the private rental market. The South East NSW Community Connections Project targeted both high and low needs clients across all tenures. These two projects provided case management directly and worked cooperatively with other agencies as needed.

The issues

Evidence shows that in order to assist people to permanently break the cycle of homelessness it is necessary to provide access to housing and facilitate coordinated, client centred support and practical assistance to help sustain a tenancy.

Long-term housing and support approaches need to take different client needs and local service systems into consideration, as there can be particular challenges in rural and regional areas such as distance to services and service options. However there can also be opportunities in some regions, such as access to private rental properties that are more affordable than urban areas.

Aboriginal people represent a particularly high proportion of the homeless population in regional and rural centres. The evidence identifies the need for targeted strategies, developed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal people and organisations to facilitate engagement with services.

Research indicates there are several interlinked components which need to be present to achieve successful outcomes, particularly for people with more complex needs. These components include:

- housing that is provided in a timely way, that is appropriate to a person's needs, affordable, of secure tenure and based on a Housing First approach (thus not dependent on treatment for issues such as alcohol and drug use or mental illness)
- case management that is persistent, client focused and provides practical supports

- effective service integration and cooperation to draw together the range of services and practical support required to sustain a tenancy
- referrals and links to other support services that clients may need.

Findings

All four projects exceeded their client target numbers. As at June 2012 the following numbers of clients had been assisted through the four projects:

- RMHAP: 203 clients over 28 months
- RHNE: 190 clients over 30 months
- NCAP: 1,500 clients over 16 months
- Community Connections: 476 clients over 15 months.

The evaluation found that the higher than expected demand for services highlighted the need for these services in each region, particularly in South Eastern NSW and the North Coast.

The RMHAP and RHNE projects successfully reached people at risk of homelessness (48 percent of RHNE clients, 38 percent of RMHAP clients). In the Community Connections project, in which rough sleepers were the largest client group, people at risk of homelessness still made up over a quarter of all clients assisted. NCAP, which assisted the highest number of clients, had a broad distribution of participants in terms of situation prior to assistance, with people at risk of homelessness making up one-third (32 percent) of clients assisted.

Clients housed in private rental properties made up a substantial proportion of clients assisted across all projects; 76 percent in NCAP, 37 percent in each of the two Rural Interagency Homelessness Projects and 31 percent in Community Connections.

All services identified good responses from real estate agents who appreciated the benefits of services able to provide ongoing support to tenants. Relationships developed between agents and services also led to proactive referrals, with clear benefits for agents such as reduced tenancy management, fewer evictions and reductions in rental arrears.

Success factors

While there were variations in the structure and target groups of the projects, the evaluation found that all projects were successful in delivering positive client outcomes and contributing to meeting the significant demand for supported housing in their communities.

Critical success factors across the four projects included:

- organisational commitment to new ways of working and responding effectively to entrenched homelessness
- holistic and client centred case management – adapting service delivery to meet client needs
- effective use of brokerage funding to sustain tenancies
- successful engagement of the private sector
- effective engagement with Aboriginal services and clients.

The projects also had unique success factors that reflected the different implementation approaches. For example, the two rural interagency projects (RMHAP and RHNE) relied on coordinated service delivery facilitated through local coordination structures, shared decision making, planning and resources.

The evaluation found that this structured coordination approach improved the service system by enabling the sharing of information for the benefit of clients and providing a platform for training and building trusting relationships between services.

The primary focus of NCAP was on the private rental market. Success factors for this project included implementing a comprehensive marketing strategy as well as taking a case management approach. NCAP demonstrated that this approach combined with the employment of Aboriginal case workers can increase Aboriginal people's access to the private rental market.

Challenges

Access to affordable housing was a problem across all projects. Projects worked with social housing providers and targeted the private rental market to increase client access to housing.

The high demand for specialist services in some areas was also a critical issue for supporting clients with complex needs. The strong emphasis on local multi-agency coordination structures to support integrated delivery of services assisted in addressing this issue but could not resolve all service gaps.

Establishing collaborative working relationships with and between local services was another challenge faced by some of the projects in the establishment phase. This required sensitive negotiation and trust building and the evaluations found that this had been successful in resolving barriers to participation from some services.

For further information on the HAP Evaluation Strategy please visit **www.housing.nsw.gov.au**