

Housing Pathways Outcomes Evaluation Summary

Housing Pathways was introduced in April 2010 as the multi-provider delivery system for social housing assistance in NSW. It is a partnership between Housing NSW, the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) and 26 participating Community Housing Providers (CHPs). Housing Pathways provides a single application process for social housing and private rental assistance, as well as the single NSW Housing Register (waiting list).

The Housing Pathways Outcomes Evaluation assesses Housing Pathways two years after its implementation (the evaluation fulfils a commitment in the Housing Pathways monitoring and evaluation framework) and focuses on three main areas:

1. whether applying for housing assistance has become simpler, easier and fairer under Housing Pathways
2. the progress in bringing public and community housing providers into a closer partnership
3. identifying possible improvements and enhancements.

To ensure an independent review, ARTD Consultants were engaged to undertake the evaluation. The final report was submitted in November 2012 and this document is a summary of the outcomes of the Housing Pathways Outcomes Evaluation Report.

Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken using the Housing Pathways monitoring and evaluation framework and program logic. It used a mixed method approach to collect data against key evaluation questions. The methodology included:

- an analysis of available administrative data from the 18 months prior to the evaluation
- a survey of Housing NSW and CHP staff (conducted on-line with over 360 responses)
- an applicant survey (conducted by telephone with over 390 clients who applied for housing assistance in the previous six months)
- interviews with key internal and external Housing Pathways stakeholders (15 interviews were conducted by phone).

Overall findings

Overall, the evaluation found that Housing Pathways is providing an effective integrated pathway into social housing. Evidence in support of this finding includes:

- that there is now a single access pathway into social housing in NSW—93 percent of applicants understand they can apply for housing assistance through either Housing NSW or a community housing provider (CHP) and the same proportion are willing to be housed by either provider type
- the role of the community housing sector has grown—the proportion of applications received and processed by CHPs increased over the first two years of implementation from four percent to seven percent
- CHPs have been working with more complex clients since the introduction of Housing Pathways. In 2011/12, CHPs allocated 50 percent of social housing to priority approved applicants
- the majority of applicants are satisfied with the service they received from their housing provider and found the application process simple and fair

- the majority of staff believe Housing Pathways is more transparent, efficient and a simpler way of providing housing assistance to clients
- There is a high level of cooperation between Housing NSW and the community housing sector.

There were no significant areas of concern that were identified regarding the overall Housing Pathways system. However, the evaluation identified the following areas for improvement:

- ensure vulnerable clients are effectively and efficiently supported to apply for the assistance they are eligible for
- clarify arrangements for the facilitation of private rental assistance
- Housing Pathways staff are kept informed about implementation issues, policies that different organisations are working under, that they are sufficiently trained and skilled to ensure assessments are accurate and consistent and all stakeholders have confidence in the system.

Detailed findings

Housing Pathways is proving an effective mechanism for integrating and coordinating access to social housing across providers

During 2011/12, there were over 69,000 new applications for housing assistance processed through Housing Pathways. Of these, over 18,000 applications were approved and added to the NSW Housing Register. Just under a quarter of approved applicants (4,353) were approved for priority housing assistance. The volume of applications successfully processed through Housing Pathways demonstrates that it is an effective mechanism for integrating and coordinating access to social housing in NSW.

Access to housing assistance is easy and fair

Ninety-three percent of surveyed applicants knew they could apply for housing assistance at a CHP or Housing NSW office and would accept housing in either sector.

Around two-thirds of surveyed applicants agreed the process was simple and fair and were satisfied with the overall service they received from their housing provider in the last six months.

Four out of five applicants are satisfied with the process when applying for assistance

Four out of five applicants agreed that the housing assistance forms were easy to complete and they did not need help to apply for housing assistance. One in five applicants found it hard to fill out the housing assistance forms and were the least satisfied – these include applicants who were older and did not speak English at home and applicants who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

There is little difference in the profile of people assisted across public and community housing providers

Since Housing Pathways was introduced, initial sector differences in the profiles of applicants allocated housing appears to have diminished. In 2010/11, one-half of the applicants allocated housing by Housing NSW were priority approved compared to one-third of applicants allocated housing by a CHP. In 2011/12, this had changed with priority approved applicants accounting for half of the allocations made by both Housing NSW and CHPs.

Staff and stakeholders support 'No Wrong Door' but more work is needed to make it function in practice

Most staff agree with the principles of 'No Wrong Door', with 67 percent of staff agreeing that there is no wrong door for applicants seeking social housing. There was some confusion around the facilitation role of CHPs for private rental assistance (PRA) products but this has since been clarified and practice guides for CHPs developed.

Housing NSW and CHPs are working together to deliver Housing Pathways

Housing Pathways presumes a strong, effective partnership between Housing NSW and CHPs. Most staff surveyed believe they have a 'networking' or 'cooperative' relationship with members of their partner organisation. It was identified that using available opportunities to strengthen and clarify working arrangements in some areas would be valuable, particularly at a local level.

The common elements of Housing Pathways make it a more efficient system but there is opportunity for improvement

Sixty percent of staff surveyed agreed that Housing Pathways is more efficient than the previous system and is a simpler way of providing housing assistance to clients. Some inefficiencies were identified in the alignment between the forms and data entry in HOMES, which have since been rectified.

Recommendations

The final report makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Explore new ways to support vulnerable applicants to apply for housing assistance including making the forms available for completion online so applicants can be more easily assisted by Housing Pathways providers and other support service agencies.

Recommendation 2: Explore ways of sharing information with other human service agencies, including specialist homelessness services and other NSW agencies, where these organisations can provide verifying information to support the applications of clients with high needs.

Recommendation 3: Make information about all providers' allocation policies more readily available, for example, on the Housing Pathways intranet.

Recommendation 4: Regularly disseminate summary information about the pattern of applications and allocations to all housing providers to support informed discussion about Housing Pathway outcomes.

Recommendation 5: Use templates similar to those in the appendices of the *No Wrong Door Operational Protocol* (Paper 3) to clearly define the working arrangements between Housing NSW and other housing providers across each district. Once described, the working arrangements should be distributed to all providers, including other human service agencies that refer clients for housing.

Recommendation 6: Continue to engage with external stakeholders, particularly other human service agencies to provide regular updates on Housing Pathways policies and procedures.

Recommendation 7: Continue the focus on refining the Private Rental Assistance (PRA) policies and procedures, and recommend that any changes are widely and consistently communicated to Housing Pathways providers; use the release of the procedures to bring Housing NSW and CHP staff together at the local level to discuss what PRA facilitation will look like in their area, especially given the variability in local partnerships.

Recommendation 8: Continue to offer training jointly to Housing Pathways staff, both face to face and via e-workshop.

Next steps

The findings of the evaluation have been considered by the Housing Pathways Advisory Council, which has provided detailed comments to FACS Housing NSW. FACS Housing NSW has accepted all recommendations made by the evaluation.