Homelessness Programs

Vacancy Capacity Management System

Service Coordination Protocol

June 2012
1. Background and purpose
Homelessness Programs through the Homelessness Information Management Program (HIMP) project team is delivering several key projects that align with Priority 3 of Opening doors – Queensland Strategy for Reducing Homelessness 2011- 2014, working better for stronger services – better coordinating and integrating policies programs and services, using and sharing data, and improving local case coordination.

The HIMP projects are:
- Access Framework;
- Common Homelessness Assessment and Referral Tool (CHART); and
- Vacancy Capacity Management System (VCMS).

By the end of July 2012 the majority of funded specialist homelessness services will have access to and utilise the VCMS. All specialist homelessness services using the VCMS are required to implement the protocol.

The purpose of this service coordination protocol is to assist:
- improving client pathways by ensuring accurate vacancy and capacity information is available;
- improving client experience by ensuring consistent practice and processes at the ‘front end’ of the specialist homelessness service system;
- services using the VCMS by providing information about tools, resources and support available; and
- services using the VCMS by documenting clear expectations about the respective roles and responsibilities of referring and receiving services.

This protocol will be regularly revised and updated.

Clarification or inquiries regarding the protocol should be directed to himpmailbox@communties.qld.gov.au. The Protocol is available on the Department of Communities website http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/housing/community-and-homelessness-programs/homelessness-programs/homelessness-information-management-program .

You will also find forms on the website relating to:
- New users – VCMS access request
- Changes to existing VCMS users
- Changes to properties
2. Accurate vacancy capacity information

2.1 Accommodation and support services – internal referral

Accommodation based services are required to note a vacancy regardless of whether the service has already allocated a client to the vacancy from their internal referral processes.

In order to eliminate the possibility of a vacancy being listed that cannot be referred to because a client has been allocated from an internal referral process, services are requested to change the vacancy status of the property to ‘unavailable other’ and note in the vacancy limiting conditions section that a vacancy does exist but will be filled internally. Once filled the vacancy status can then be changed to occupied. This will maintain data integrity around the number of vacancies that exist at any one time.

Some services may have capacity to upload vacancies outside 9-5 Monday – Friday, even though the vacancy will not be filled until next working day. Services may indicate in the information box if there are specific requirements about when a referral can be made.

Exceptions: Same House Different Landlord and Youth Head Lease properties are not included on the VCMS.

2.2 Non – Accommodation Services

Non-Accommodation services will not have a vacancy status recorded against their service. This will mean that when conducting a search either by target group or region for example, every service within that search criteria will return as available. By the nature of these services, case loads, intake and capacity to respond to inquiries can vary on a daily basis.

If services are experiencing capacity limiting conditions (case loads, staff illness), this can be detailed in the capacity limiting conditions section. These services include:

- Street To Home
- HomeStay
- Information and referral hubs.

Services should also utilise the information section detailing what their service offers and any specific guidelines around referrals.

Referring services will need to check capacity limiting conditions and information sections before contacting the service and/or making a referral.

2.3 Maintenance of vacancy/capacity service information

Services are required to maintain this information as often as possible and as appropriate to the service. It is requested that services update the VCMS as part of their business process when a client either enters or exits their service. There is no set time for services to refresh information except in the case of availability dates. If a service has given a date when a property will become available it is expected that on this date the property is then changed to a vacancy status of vacant or, if necessary, the availability date is changed to a future date. The availability date should never be in the past, this will generate an exception report and services will be asked to adjust this field.

The frequency of updating information is at the discretion of each service.
For example:
- A medium/long term service has a client exiting tomorrow. The VCMS needs to be updated as close as possible to the day/hour when the vacancy has occurred.
- For some services vacancy capacity information might only be updated during core 9-5 business hours Monday – Friday.
- For larger immediate supported accommodation services it might be appropriate to continually update vacancy information, seven days per week.
- A youth service may have a vacancy occur over the weekend. The service may list the vacancy as it becomes available even though intake cannot occur until the next week day.

3. Consistent practices and process (client experience)

3.1 Enquiries from people experiencing homelessness

Services are required to provide assisted referrals after clients have been assessed. An assisted referral means that a service has done an initial assessment of the client, gaining enough information to appropriately match that client to a vacancy. The appropriateness of the match will be enhanced by the information provided and read in the vacancy limiting conditions, and information sections of the property details screen. Once a potential match is found it is expected that a referring service will call the service with the vacancy to confirm the availability and the appropriateness of the client.

When calling a service and referring a client, only the referral information should be referenced. The referral address details should only be given once the receiving service with the vacancy has confirmed it is willing to accept the client for entry into their service.

Services are also able to use the system as a resource register by conducting an agency search and passing on service details for future reference for clients.

_The VCMS is not intended for general public access and specialist homelessness services are NOT to provide information regarding vacancies to potential clients._

3.2 Enquiries from third parties

This includes enquiries from friends, relatives, police, Centrelink and other services.

Services are required not to provide vacancy/capacity information to third parties. Nor can third parties make ‘bookings’ for future accommodation.

Third parties can make an enquiry and request assistance from the service and then, based on the assessment, the assessing service will determine the appropriate course of action.

_The VCMS is not intended for general public access and services are NOT to provide information regarding vacancies to third parties._

3.3 Matching

Matching of clients to vacancies is at the discretion of the receiving service. Generally speaking the more information detailed in the information and vacancy/capacity limiting conditions sections will give a better understanding to a referring service of matching a client to a vacancy.
In order to maintain consistency regarding the use of the information and capacity limiting conditions or vacancy limiting conditions sections of the system services are required to use these in the following way:

- The information section is to be used for static data, data that is not likely to change for example, ‘meals provided’ ‘disabled access’ ‘laundry facilities’ ‘shared rooms’. Static information is information that will not change on a regular basis and that may affect the suitability of a client being referred to the service.

- The Vacancy Limiting Conditions section is to be used for dynamic data that is likely to change on an irregular basis. For example, ‘currently due to house dynamics can only take low needs clients’, ‘staff absences, limited referrals’. Dynamic information is information that will change constantly, is dependant on other circumstances and may affect the suitability of a client being referred to the service.

3.4 Service unable to provide assisted referral

If services are unable to provide assisted referrals either because of limited capacity or because the person requesting assistance falls outside the target group of the service, the service is required to follow their usual practice in providing general information about other services that may be able to assist.

4. Support services

4.1 Accessing the VCMS

In order to add new users a User Access Request form will need to be completed and forwarded to the HIMP mailbox. After being received a user name and password will be issued. It will be the expectation that online training be completed by all new users.

The User Access Request form should also be completed in the case of needing to have a user deleted or user details changed and sent to the HIMP mailbox to request this to occur, this will have to be confirmed and signed by the manager of the service.

The User Access Request form is available by request through the HIMP mailbox: HIMPmailbox@communities.qld.gov.au or via the web.

If a user forgets their password, locks themselves out of the system or for any reason requires a password reset the user will have to contact the helpdesk for this to occur. The helpdesk phone number is 1300 847 435. The helpdesk will take the user details and forward the details to the VCMS administrator to have the details reset.

4.2 VCMS not operational

When services cannot access the VCMS, assessing services will be required to revert to telephoning other services for vacancy and capacity information. Apart from telephoning there is no alternative backup.

If the system is experiencing technical difficulties that may take some time to resolve an email will be sent to all users informing them of the outage. A follow up email will be sent when the system is functional.
If a user is having difficulty in accessing or using the system, or encounters any other issues with the VCMS they will be required to resolve the issue by calling the helpdesk phone number 1300 847 435.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Domestic violence assessment and referral protocol
The primary pathway for referral is through DVConnect. However in some regional situations, providers may have local protocols in place where clients can be referred directly to the refuge without going through DVConnect. These local arrangements will remain in place.

5.2 Homelessness assessment and referral protocols
Local assessment and referral protocols (e.g. HPIQ/BHSC/HART 4000 to Roma House, HPIQ to IIYS) will remain using existing assessment tools and referral protocols.

5.3 Services continue to use their own assessment tool
Until the Common Homelessness Assessment and Referral Tool (CHART) is implemented, services will continue to use their own assessment tool.

Phone calls will still be necessary to determine the level of information required to make a referral.