

Homelessness Programs Information Paper:

A Duration of Need Approach for Accommodation based Specialist Homelessness Services

Policy Context

“Opening Doors”, Queensland Strategy for Reducing Homelessness 2011-14 outlines the Queensland Government’s approach for reducing homelessness over the next three years.

“The Queensland Government is aiming to achieve a range of improvements to the homelessness service system, such as:

- *improved access to existing and new accommodation and support options,*
- *improved flexibility of available accommodation and services to meet diverse needs,*
- *quickly settle people who are homeless into stable housing,*
- *enable them to sustain their tenancies and*
- *support them to help them engage in community life”¹.*

This includes a commitment to a housing first approach and to “... provide more flexible support options that match peoples’ duration, level and type of need”.

There has been much discussion of new approaches to homelessness service delivery in recent years, some of it generated from international innovations and some from locally developed initiatives. The concept explored in this paper emerged in both the local and international contexts as a key concept to support ending homelessness.

As part of a commitment to “contemporary service delivery” in *Opening Doors*, Homelessness Programs is building an evidence base to underpin decision making and developments in service delivery. This work has identified contemporary approaches that strengthen the likelihood of good outcomes for homeless people and assist in reducing further homelessness. It has also informed a suite of service types (the Service Delivery Framework) that can be used to create more flexible service responses for the range of needs and groups of people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Purpose

The purpose of this information paper is to outline the implications of the concept of providing temporary supported accommodation and support for duration of need - removing arbitrary time limits for all funded specialist homelessness services.

This paper outlines the concept and how this shift is likely to impact on new and existing funded services.

Duration of need is one concept that can contribute positively to an improvement in service delivery for people who are homeless. This is not the last word on this approach, or other

¹ Queensland Government, *Opening Doors*”, Queensland Strategy for Reducing Homelessness 2011-14; 2011,p9

approaches that will emerge as both service providers and the department continue to explore and learn more about improved service delivery.

Recent consultation

The recent consultation on the introduction of the new Service Delivery Framework for Homelessness Programs sought feedback on the adoption of a duration of need approach and the phasing out of categorisation of supported accommodation services based on length of stay. Under this approach, all accommodation based services would provide **temporary supported accommodation** with no time limits set. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive on the adoption of this approach and removing the circumstance where people exited accommodation before their housing needs had been met.

A major concern stated was ensuring that people could still access supported accommodation services *quickly*, even without a “crisis” category of accommodation. Some people were also concerned about the practical issues involved in the previous “crisis” services now having to deal with tenancy issues if their clients stay over 12 weeks.

It is likely that most temporary supported accommodation services will offer an immediate accommodation response unless there are sound practice principles or specific, tailored service delivery (around particular target group needs) that justifies or requires more limited or planned access to their service. For example, particular groups, such as some young people who due to age/maturity issues need to undertake planned programs/activities as part of their stay in temporary accommodation to develop their living skills and to learn about sustaining a tenancy. Without this developmental effort they may be at risk of not staying housed.

In addition, the property configuration of a service (shared or separate houses/units) should not impact on what support clients receive in a temporary accommodation service. A number of services operate through a variety of different properties - traditionally services have delineated a larger property as the crisis response with smaller houses or units identified as transitional. In the duration of need approach these delineations are not useful, because the service that clients receive is an immediate response to their homelessness, regardless of where they are accommodated or their changing support needs during their stay. Services will need to identify how they are offering an immediate response to people experiencing homelessness and this will be reflected in their service agreement with the department.

A duration of need approach

Duration of need is a specified period of time for which an identified service should be provided, based on a person's needs.

The policy intent of the duration of need approach, within the context of homelessness programs, is to improve the opportunities for people to obtain and sustain appropriate housing. Duration of need is a client-centred approach that provides clients with temporary supported accommodation for as long as they require it (but no longer), with an underpinning focus on assisting people to obtain longer-term housing as quickly as possible.

Taking a duration of need approach means providing temporary accommodation and/or support for a reasonable period as the client requires to secure and maintain sustainable accommodation. Ongoing assessment will determine a client's changing needs and services should connect clients with mainstream services to provide ongoing support directed at helping them to sustain their tenancy.

Specialist homelessness services should focus efforts on enabling rapid access to permanent housing and providing/coordinating initial post-temporary accommodation support using relevant mainstream services to take up post-accommodation support in the long-term.

This may mean that clients are provided with temporary supported accommodation for longer than in the past or it may mean that clients exit from supported accommodation at the same time or even sooner than they would have done in the past. Unlike in the past, however, clients would also be provided with some support after they transition to longer-term housing.

It should be noted that homelessness *support only* (i.e. non-accommodation based) services are **not** categorised on the basis of length of support and there has never been a requirement to 'exit' a client after a certain length of time. As with accommodation-based services, the support offered is temporary with a focus on connecting clients with support provided by mainstream and allied agencies post accommodation and where there is a need for long term or ongoing support.

Duration of need maintains an interest in the length of stay of clients. In order to cost services effectively and set targets around client numbers, there will continue to be assumptions made about average or potential length of support and/or accommodation generally based on data analysis of like services and other evidence.

In the past it was determined under the national program framework for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) that for crisis accommodation people should stay no longer than 12 weeks, for medium term 3-6 months and for long term around 6 -18 months.

The new Service Delivery Framework replaces this with one category of "temporary supported accommodation", so that all supported accommodation services funded under Homelessness Programs can now support people in their accommodation for a reasonable period until they are able to successfully secure and maintain independent housing.

It is still envisaged that for most previously "crisis" services, most clients will move through the service quite quickly due to the nature of their needs and the temporary nature of the accommodation. However some clients will need more time to be able to transition out of the supported accommodation successfully and this time is important to ensure that transition is a success. While it may take more time initially, there should be fewer repeat stays and tenancy breakdowns post-support.

Supporting people for as long as they need does not mean that they can only access support through being accommodated. Future service delivery models will be more flexible in terms of support being able to follow clients once they exit the accommodation to ensure that their new tenancy is sustainable. This is also in keeping with a housing first approach which aims

to house people as quickly as possible with the necessary support to maintain the tenancy, rather than trying to meet all of the person's needs or sort out all problems in a temporary living situation before taking up housing.

A duration of need approach does not mean that people can stay in temporary supported accommodation forever. It is not good practice for people to 'live' for an extended period of time in specialist homelessness services as this is essentially keeping them homeless long term and also prevents others in need from accessing that assistance.

It is acknowledged that there is a lack of affordable and appropriate housing in many parts of Queensland and this is even more difficult for some clients due to their specific situation, for example people with poor rental history, large families. Services will need to actively work with local real estate agents and other service providers, including social housing and community housing providers, to achieve successful housing outcomes. The department acknowledges the efforts of many providers in finding and accessing housing for clients in the current market.

The principles supporting a duration of need approach include:

- Specialist homelessness services provide *temporary* support and supported accommodation
- In line with a housing first approach, the stay in temporary supported accommodation should be as short as possible, with transition to longer term housing as the goal
- A focus on client needs in the context of case management, and doing 'whatever it takes' to make the move to housing
- Regular and ongoing assessment of need
- Supporting the client to find, establish and be able to sustain independent housing
- Ensuring that client has the community, social and agency support needed to sustain them in independent housing
- Encouraging clients to be self reliant by providing them with the skills necessary to obtain the services they require and to avoid dependency on homelessness services.

Duration of need is a concept also employed in long-term social housing assistance. Periodic tenancy reviews ensure that social housing assistance is provided only to those who still require it.

Implications of duration of need approach for services

New funding

In terms of new service responses, Homelessness Programs will provide funds for service delivery models that are best able to support people to access housing as quickly as possible and then provide support and agency/community connections to sustain the tenancy.

In future, Homelessness Programs will only fund temporary supported accommodation services that are able to both support people whilst they are accommodated, and have the capacity to provide/coordinate post-temporary accommodation support (mobile support) for people after they have exited to housing in order to establish and sustain their tenancies.

This is similar to the follow-up support provided by many services now, but in future it will be built in, more extensive and will be based on duration of need. It may not be necessary for the supported accommodation service itself to provide the mobile support because it may be provided in partnership with another service provider, but the service model or local service system model, will need to identify and incorporate post-accommodation support where it is required by the client.

Existing services

Homelessness Programs will be working with existing service providers to clarify whether removing the length of stay requirement will have a major impact on their service delivery. Some services have already indicated that they have identified a need for a longer length of supported accommodation linked to developmental needs for some clients than they have been able to offer under their crisis model and they would like to adjust their service agreement in order to meet this need. Other services will have been working with the recommended length of stay as a guide only for some time and may not experience any major change.

For services that are currently providing medium/long term accommodation with support, Homelessness Programs will be exploring whether this accommodation and the support provided is the same as that provided in a crisis service except that people can or do stay for longer. Or whether it is truly is a transitional model in that the service offers specific planned programs / activities in order to develop the skills necessary to maintain independent housing. This is the difference reflected in the service delivery framework in the Homelessness Program Guidelines. Given that length of stay is no longer an issue, these services may not need to change the services they offer or how they offer those services but they may be re-categorised more accurately.

In terms of categorising services, those services that currently have a combination of crisis and medium term accommodation with no difference in service delivery other than the length of time a client can, or does, stay will have just one type of service delivery across their different properties. Where there is a clear difference in the service offered, **or** the means of access, then these would be distinguished as two different service types. For example, a youth service with a shelter (with immediate access and stay based on need) – *immediate accommodation*, and a couple of ‘transition to independence’ or share-house houses/units (with planned access requiring interviews with housemates and a more detailed assessment) where young people have structured programs/activities to enable them to move on to independent housing – *transitional accommodation* .

Many temporary supported accommodation services have operated a stepped approach where people move through crisis to medium term or transitional accommodation. This is inconsistent with a housing first approach to service delivery, as it can be seen as merely increasing the amount of moves a person needs to make to get into more stable housing. The ideal is to reduce the steps and get people into housing as soon as possible and offer the support there.

Homelessness Programs will be exploring with service providers whether the funds for supporting current medium/long term accommodation would be better applied to supporting previously homeless people who have been housed either in private rental or social housing.

This part of the service system could then provide mobile support aimed at tenancy sustainment for people exiting the temporary supported accommodation system. Freeing service providers from tenancy and property management would increase capacity to support more people. This would also ensure more successful tenancies for people who have experienced homelessness and would allow for more flexible support that follows the client rather than only being tied to specific properties.

For existing services, Homelessness Programs will be working with supported accommodation providers to explore how services can incorporate a duration of need approach into their existing service delivery. This may require partnerships with other services and local service system approaches to ensure that people receive support for the duration of their need rather than only the period for which they are temporarily accommodated.

Services will need to continue to meet any legislative obligations for managing tenancies. Information about relevant legislation is available from the Residential Tenancy Authority.

Implementation of the duration of need approach

Homelessness Programs is implementing an evidence based approach to program management that incorporates duration of need approaches in service delivery.

Evidenced based service delivery is being implemented through the transition to output based funding for specialist homelessness services, which should be completed by 2012-13.