

The Low Cost Accommodation Support News

Community Connections Program | Older Persons High Rise | Housing Support for the Aged | SAVVI Supporting Connections

Autumn 2009

Welcome to edition nine of the Low Cost Accommodation Support News, a newsletter for program managers, workers, and regional staff involved in the Low Cost Accommodation Support programs funded through the Aged Care Branch of DHS. **This edition features -**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• White Paper Facts for Victoria• Access & Equity Project update | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• OOH Update• Statewide Forum Planning 2009• Union St Hi Rise |
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White Paper Facts for Victoria

The Federal Government's White Paper A Road Home; and the National Affordable Housing Agreement and a raft of other national partnerships around housing, nation building and jobs will mean significant change to the homelessness support system.

Each State and Territory will have substantial responsibilities under these instruments. Most of the responsibilities for homelessness are subject to the Homelessness National Partnership.

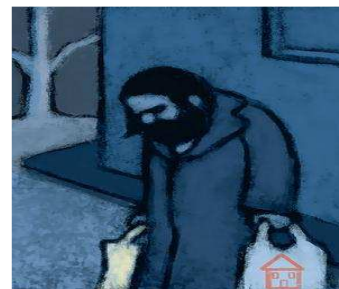
Under the White Paper, the Victorian Government has to achieve the following by 2013: (not all items are included)

- A 50% increase in the number of people engaged in employment, training, or education after presenting at specialist homelessness services;
- A 25% increase in the number of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who have improved housing stability, family engagement, school and work participation outcomes.
- A 25% reduction in the number of people exiting care or custody into homelessness.

- A 20% increase in the number of families who maintain secure, safe and sustainable housing following domestic and family violence.
- A 25% reduction in the number of people exiting from social housing and private housing into homelessness.

In order to achieve these targets the State Government will need to undertake the following; (main items included only)

- Provide additional support for private and public tenants; including advocacy, financial counselling and referral services to help people sustain their tenancies.
- Deliver additional prevention and early intervention services for a proportion of families at risk nationally.
- Implement a policy of no exits into homelessness from statutory, custodial care or hospital settings.
- Deliver additional services for a proportion of 12-18 year olds at risk of homelessness nationally to remain connected with their families, where it is safe and appropriate.



For more information about the White Paper facts see www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

Access & Equity Project

@ SVDP Housing
Services

Homelessness, its enough to make you sick!

The Access & Equity Project at St Vincent de Paul Housing Services is now in its 14th month of operation. Although initially funded for 12 months, it was extended towards the end of last year and is now scheduled to be finalized in December 2009 with a possibility of an additional extension beyond that date.

Broadly, the project's goals are to examine access & equity issues for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with a specific focus on those with unmet health needs in Moreland & Hume.

It aims to identify, develop and trial practical and sustainable ways to improve systemic responses, thereby positively impacting on the health and well being of extremely marginalized community members.

The project takes place against a societal backdrop of great challenges and in a climate of significant systemic change. With the advent of a new Labor government in November 2007, homelessness was explicitly discussed & placed on the national agenda.

For the first time in many years we saw the beginning of a spirited national discourse on what it means to be "homeless".

In his first interview on the ABC as Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd referred to homelessness as "a national obscenity" stating:

When I visited homeless shelters during the campaign, the turn away rate for those who presented is horrific. Now this is just wrong in a country as wealthy as ours."

Whilst the use of the phrase "homeless shelter" may demonstrate a less than

sophisticated grasp on what the homeless service system actually looks like (particularly in Victoria), his statements were at least evidence that the new government was prepared to take up its responsibilities in addressing homelessness.

In 2008 both the Federal government's Green Paper & subsequent White Paper on Homelessness were released. Both state that "addressing homelessness is now a very important part of the Australian government's social inclusion agenda."

Whilst responses to the Green & White Papers & their options have been mixed at times, the overall view seems to be that at long last we now have an opportunity to set achievable and meaningful targets. This will create better funded, more flexible and collaborative services that are adequately equipped to address and resolve homelessness in Australia.

Although it has been encouraging to witness the Rudd government's apparently genuine commitment to developing a "new approach to homelessness" it is also clear that we are currently facing a homelessness & housing affordability crisis of unprecedented enormity. Australia has a long way to go to make up for the chronic neglect its social/public housing sector and welfare system has experienced over the last decade or so.

All this takes place in a climate of perhaps the most chronic housing shortages Australia has seen in recent times. Homelessness & housing affordability is increasingly becoming a "mainstream issue" in ways that we have not previously seen.

Those who are "traditionally" marginalised; rough sleepers, people with significant and untreated mental health issues, pension level SRS residents, older & prematurely aged people on limited incomes, and significant numbers of people within Indigenous and CaLD communities, are potentially at risk of being pushed further and further into the margins. They are now competing with the growing numbers of middle and low income earners for the ever shrinking pool of semi affordable private rental as well as the resources of an already over stretched Homelessness Service System (HSS).

A key challenge for government and services alike is how to design and deliver a HSS that can do more than just “cope” with the increased demand it currently faces. It’s also critical that both government & the HSS don’t lose sight of its obligations to those community members for whom access to services & support has always been difficult & characterised by inequity and fragmented responses.

The project has been exploring various themes over the last 12 months, including but not limited to; the health implications of homelessness, food insecurity and social isolation, the Federal & State government’s social inclusion agenda, (as well as overseas models), health inequities and the social determinants of health.

The notion of ‘home’ and the diverse meanings, assumptions and realities that it represents is also being explored. Thinking about definitions of “home” is very pertinent when examining access to HACC services for people experiencing homelessness. Consider the following from a social inclusion perspective;

“HACC funds services which are targeted to frail older people, people with disabilities and carers; providing basic support and maintenance to people living at home.”
(Victorian HACC Program Manual 2003)

What is immediately apparent is that experiencing homelessness places people **outside** of the defined client group. They are not “at home,” in the broadly understood sense, they are *homeless*.

There appears to be a significant degree of confusion within HACC services about its responsibility towards people experiencing homelessness. There also appears to be a fairly widespread belief within both HACC & the HSS that council based HACC services “don’t work” with homeless people. An all too common refrain throughout project consultations has been;

“Don’t you have to have a home to get HACC services?”

This is more than simply a point of semantics. There is considerable power in definitions. Language is a powerful tool in either promoting social inclusion or creating exclusion.

Could HACC perhaps define itself as seeking to assist people to remain in their chosen community as opposed to *at home*?

As Johnson points out;

‘...current definitions of homelessness are based on Western concepts of home, literally based on the structural aspect of walls and windows rather than a place of belonging, feeling safe and feeling connected to one another. How is it possible that a country with a rich living Aboriginal history and one that is arguably the second most multicultural country in the world that we continue to reduce “home” to bricks and mortar? A more inclusive measurement may include the street, the neighbourhood or a geographic region.’

(M.Johnson, Sector Development Officer Shelter SA, The Green Paper edition, 2008).

The project’s consultation process highlighted the real & pressing need for the project to develop a range of grass roots & strategic opportunities for local & regional community services from a wide range of sectors and disciplines to come together and contribute to the development of new ideas and practice models that could be then trialed and evaluated. So far these have included;

The development of the **Health Time Day Working Group** initially in Moreland but with a view to replication in Hume. The Health Time Day network in Moreland comprises of practitioners from local services (SVDP Community Connections Program, RDNS Homeless Person’s Program, Centrelink, and Moreland Community Health Centre & Moreland Council amongst others) who collectively deliver a facilitated event each month at locations in the community where people with unmet housing, health and support needs gather.

Events have been delivered on a monthly basis at a large walk up estate in Glenroy since October 2008.

The development of the **Health & Homelessness Network**, a strategic group that brings together representatives from across Moreland and Hume, (primarily those in senior management positions) from homelessness services, local community

health, local government, area mental health services, drug & alcohol services, Centrelink, RDNS Homeless Person's Program, NW DHS, NW Homelessness Networkers and the Moreland and Hume Primary Care Partnerships to look at ways to improve service system responses and collaborative practices and pathways between sectors.

The network has been meeting every six weeks since August 2008.

The development of a **partnership arrangement with Enmaraleek Aboriginal Association** and SVDP Housing Services of a fortnightly outpost service targeting Indigenous community members requiring assistance & support with unmet housing and health issues. The outpost has been operational since June 2008.

The involvement in two separate regional working groups developing ways to address Food Insecurity issues in Moreland & Hume with an ultimate aim of creating a sustainable **Café Meals Program** in both regions

If you would like to find out more about the project or would like to join the mailing list for updates, please contact;

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US!!!!!!!

Something new has been happening at the Union St. High-rise building this year. We are celebrating our birthdays!!!!!!



When I first started work as a case manager at the building, a couple of the tenants asked me when my birthday was. Two months later, on my birthday, there was a little card and best wishes from them. It was so nice to be remembered.

That day I decided to do the same thing for them. Many tenants are socially isolated and some have told me that they do not remember the last time somebody remembered their birthdays. However, it was really hard to keep track of the dates of nearly 90 tenants individually. I realised I needed a better approach to reach them and also to create a sense of community among the tenants.

The Union St Birthday Club was born from that idea and started this year. Every month we celebrate tenants' birthdays according to their star signs. Twelve parties a year are manageable for the program and all look forward to sharing their special day with fellow neighbours.

The week before the party, birthday cards inviting the birthday girls (!) and boys (!) to the community room are hand delivered to flats. Flyers are also posted to inform other tenants about the date and time.

The program provides a variety of food and small presents. Birthday girls and boys also wear glowing bracelets or hats, to stand out from the crowd. They laugh, but they keep them like a treasure. Every party is different from the one before, constantly improving with new ideas from the tenants.

In January, two tenants who had never previously been to any of our high rise activities came to the birthday club to celebrate their birthdays with others. One

of these tenants was celebrating her 90th birthday.

In February we gained another two new tenants for the club. One man told me that he never celebrated his birthday as he does not like them. But there he was, sitting with the group and having his cake.

At our third party we had another two new tenants. One of them was from an adjoining public housing complex, celebrating his 90th birthday.

I once read somewhere that "because time itself is like a spiral, something special happens on our birthday each year; the same energy that God invested in us at birth is present once again". Believe it or not, it happens at Union St High-rise building every month during the Birthday Club.....

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News from the Office of Housing

Changes to the Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Regulations 2001

On 11 December 2008, new regulations were introduced to cover rooming houses of four or more people in the Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Regulations 2001(HPA).

Changes

The HPA Regulations definition of a rooming house has been changed to align with the Residential Tenancies Act 1977 (RTA) definition of four or more people. In addition to achieving consistency in the definitions between the two pieces of legislation, this change provides a range of additional protections to residents of rooming houses with four and five residents including requirements about:

- The number of people that can be accommodated in one room

- Room size
- Maintenance
- Cleanliness
- Supply and quality of drinking water
- Discharge of sewerage and waste water
- Refuse
- Ratio of toilet and shower facilities

In 2007, the State Government committed to improving the regulation of rooming houses in order to enhance protections for vulnerable people living in rooming houses.

Before the changes, the HPA Regulations and RTA contained different definitions of a rooming house. Each piece of legislation placed different requirements on rooming houses which led to confusion about which provisions and conditions applied to which rooming houses. The HTA regulations applied to properties with six or more people while the RTA properties applied to those with four or more people.

There has been considerable interest in improving standards of accommodation in rooming houses, particularly in relation to health and safety issues. These new changes also respond in part to those community concerns.

Statewide Forum 2009 –

The Statewide Forum this year will be held on December 2 & 3 and will be once again held at St Vincent's Hospital in Fitzroy. If you would like to be part of the planning group for this event please let me know ASAP.

There will be at least three planning meetings throughout the year and meetings will be held at DHS in Lonsdale St.

Also, if you have any ideas for a theme for this years Forum, please pass these on to Shane Mc Donald at DHS.

Meeting dates for 2009

Community Connection & Housing Support for the Aged programs

Tuesday 21 July – 11am-1.30pm

OP Hi Rise Support Program

Wednesday 2 September – 10am-11.30am

SAVVI Supporting Connections

Wednesday 22 April – 2.00 - 4.00pm

Wednesday 24 June – 2.00 – 4.00pm

Statewide Forum

November 2009 (December 2 & 3)

Useful Information

Need help with implementing the MDS V2.01?

Contact the HACC Help desk on Ph: 9096 7255
E-mail – haccmds@dhs.vic.gov.au

Victorian HACC Website

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc>

Office of Housing Website

www.housing.vic.gov.au

Contacts

If you have a story, event or a program you would like to share with colleagues from other Low Cost Accommodation Support Programs please let us know and it can be included in the next edition of this newsletter (word limit 500 words or less).

All correspondence to Shane McDonald at Department of Human Services, SRS & Accommodation Support Unit, Level 12, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000.

Ph: 9096 7227

Email: shane.mcdonald@dhs.vic.gov.au

Low Cost Accommodation Support Programs Webpage

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/services/lowcost/index.htm>