

Primary Care Partnerships

Better access to services



Partnerships are the key

As populations around Australia grow and age, the pressure on governments to maintain and improve health and human services is becoming sharper and more immediate.

It's not simply an economic imperative. Keeping people healthy and strengthening their communities is critical to improving their quality of life. A more effective primary health care system is central to achieving these goals.

The Victorian Primary Care Partnership Strategy, initiated in 2000, has demonstrated that these goals are achievable and that when providers work in partnership they can respond to people's needs more effectively. Eight years on, there is strong evidence that this collaborative approach is leading the way in health reform and expanding beyond primary health.

Victoria's partnership strategy is working

The Primary Care Partnership Strategy has developed 31 Primary Care Partnerships among health services and agencies across Victoria. The partnerships typically include hospitals, community health services, local government, aged care assessment services, women's health services, community drug treatment services, local ethno-specific health services, mental health services, disability services and Divisions of General Practice. The partnerships are growing and engaging with non-health agencies, including police, schools, and community and welfare groups, providing a comprehensive response to local needs.

While driven by the vision of the Victorian Government, the partnerships are operated on a local level. Their strength comes, in a large part, from the fact that they are community based—local partnerships meeting local needs.

Central to this vision is providing better access to services, particularly for people with chronic disease or complex care needs. Life's a lot easier, and outcomes are a lot better, if those services are coordinated.

Working together to improve access to services

Better access to services is the philosophy that underlies every Primary Care Partnership. The aim is to develop, sustain and support a framework for service providers across Victoria that will help them work together more effectively.

Agencies have come together and agreed on how they will coordinate their services. They're communicating better with each other and Victorians now experience a more unified health system. Health and care information is collected in a more consistent way so, with consumer consent, information can be shared by providers. This reduces the need for consumers to repeat their stories every time they see someone new.

Primary Care Partnerships Better access to services

Primary Care Partnerships are placing people at the centre of service delivery, which means they have easier and faster access to the services they need.

Rather than simply look at what each agency can do for a person, health workers now see past the immediate health issue to consider other services within the network from which the person would benefit.

“I always tried to be sensitive to client needs but now I provide a true holistic service.

If I see a client with alcohol issues, I look for related problems that might benefit from the input of another worker, such as poor circulation caused by peripheral vascular disease which may signal foot problems.”

Drug and Alcohol Worker, Bass Coast Community Health Service

Better for consumers, service providers, the health system and government

Consumers

In the past, the complexities of the health system have been challenging for many consumers.

People now experience a seamless and integrated response to their needs. Their health needs are screened earlier. The time required to complete the initial needs identification and assessment process has improved.

Service providers

Before Primary Care Partnerships came into existence some service providers worked largely in isolation, disconnected from other parts of a vast and complicated health system. The partnerships have provided a framework to improve collaborative planning, implementation and evaluation of initiatives.

By working with other agencies, service providers have been able to develop a better understanding of identifying consumer needs, assessment and referral process and their own agency service structures. The partnerships have improved operational efficiency, streamlined services and reduced duplication.

The health system

As a result of Primary Care Partnerships, the health system in Victoria is now more effective.

Staff in member agencies have a better understanding of the local primary health care system and access to detailed information about health services throughout the state. Referral practices have also been improved.

Government

For government departments there is now a structure in place that can be used to coordinate and streamline the provision of health and human services.

This statewide system has proved flexible, resilient and effective, making efficient use of existing resources which has saved time and money.

Making access to services a reality

Better access to services has become a reality through careful planning, cooperation and a shared vision of better health for all Victorians.

A number of enablers have helped take better access to services from a vision of how things should be to how they actually are.

Standard practice

The *Victorian Service Coordination Practice Manual* provides a framework to guide and assist service providers. The manual was developed by the partnerships and outlines standard practices for coordinating services and sharing consumer health and care information.

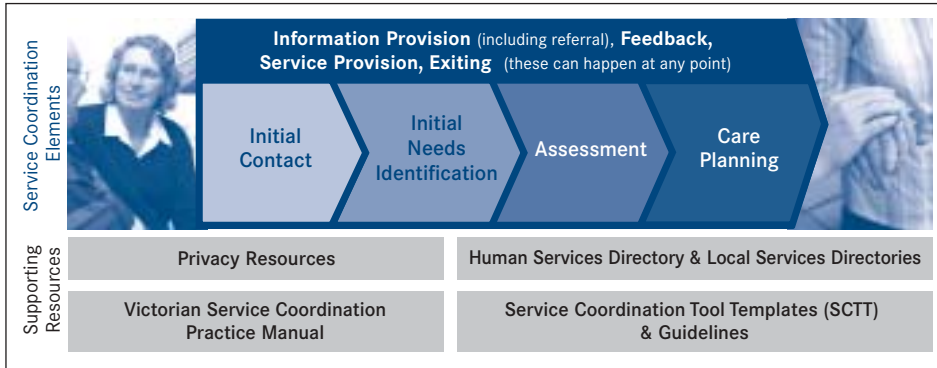
Now agencies are working towards the same goals and are using the supporting resources to reach them.

Common standard tools

To simplify information sharing between service providers, a standard suite of tools (Service Coordination Tool Templates or SCTT) are used to document consumer information, identify consumer needs, coordinate care planning and make referrals. The Service Coordination Tool Templates have replaced more than 350 different tools that were previously used. There is also a version of the tools specifically for GPs.

This has greatly simplified information sharing and because the templates are embedded into software it is easy to generate and share the information electronically.

This diagram illustrates how the elements of Service Coordination fit together.



Secure electronic communication

There continues to be significant growth in the sharing of consumer health and care information between Primary Care Partnership member agencies using secure electronic systems.

In 2006–07, more than 34,000 e-referrals were made between 450 services using secure electronic systems, nearly double the previous year. In 2007–08, more than 95,000 e-referrals were made between services.

Improved electronic communication between agencies supports services to be better coordinated, resulting in improved outcomes for consumers.

It's simple, secure and highly effective.

Services directory

Agencies are now able to access information about other services quickly and effectively using electronic service directories. The Human Services Directory is being developed to be the core source of service contact information, which means human services providers will only have to update information in one directory.

Sustainability

The tangible outcomes better access to services brings are central to the sustainability of this statewide approach.

“A small investment of one to two per cent of an agency’s operating costs in the first year to assist in the implementation of service coordination with investment in technology, staff training and the design of new operation procedures and processes ... not only produces tangible benefits for the agency and for their clients but it is expected to lead to improved operational efficiencies and quantifiable savings over time.”

KPMG Report



“The actual service time received by clients during appointments is increased by approximately half an hour per client when client registration information and the outcomes of a needs screening are recorded on the Service Coordination Tool Templates and forwarded as part of a referral.”

Bass Coast Community Bass Coast Community Health Service

Primary Care Partnerships Better access to services

Service coordination is widespread

The coordination of services has been embraced by agencies across Victoria and integrated into their practices.

In 2008, 200 Primary Care Partnership member agencies reported on the implementation of standard practice for service coordination. The results indicate high levels of service coordination. Over 90 percent of the responding agencies have partly or fully integrated better access to services practice standards in most areas of service coordination.

Particular areas of consistent practice include: obtaining consumer consent for disclosure of information, response to urgent and routine referrals, monitoring people between referrals and providing referral feedback. These areas are vital to achieve efficient sharing of consumer

health and care information, effective coordination of services and preventing people from 'slipping between the gaps'.

Achieving tangible benefits

"Better access to services delivers a number of benefits ... earlier identification of client needs, better management of waiting lists, improvements in service navigation and coordination and greater operational efficiency ... all for a relatively small investment."

KPMG Report

A KPMG evaluation report, completed in 2004, looked at the benefits of service coordination for agencies and consumers.¹

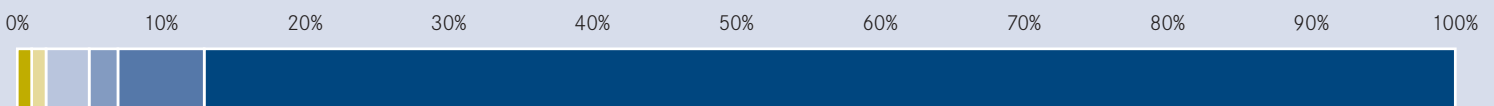
The report found that response times were improved and more targeted, service provision was streamlined and operational efficiency was improved. It also found substantial, sustainable benefits including:

- reduced administrative duplication and shorter intake and assessment times
- improved waiting list management with immediate attention in urgent cases
- earlier identification of client needs
- more timely and relevant information for clients
- clearer staff understandings and role definitions
- 'more resilient' partnerships between service providers.

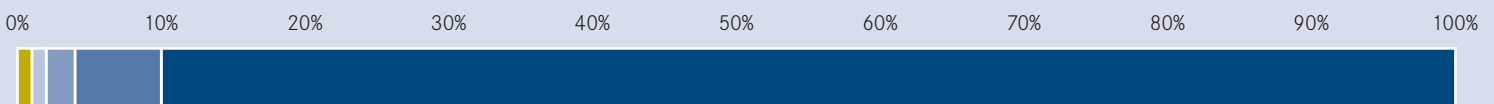
¹ KPMG, 2004, *Analysis of the Impacts of Service Coordination on Service Capacity in the Primary Health Care Sector*.

Sample of the results indicating the level of acceptance of service coordination protocols in participating agencies.

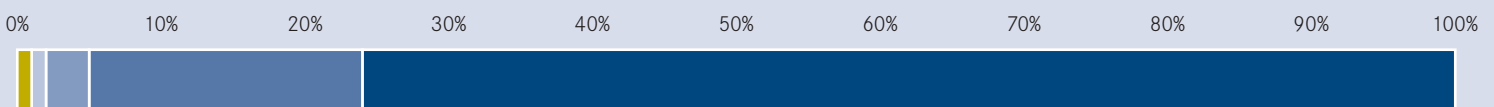
Percentage of agencies that respond to 'urgent referrals' within two working days.



Percentage of agencies that practise agreed protocols relating to the disclosure of personal information.



Percentage of agencies that follow up consumer inquiries within one working day.



■ Not Applicable ■ No Response ■ Less than 10% ■ Between 10% and 50% ■ Between 50% and 90% ■ More than 90%

Other brochures on Primary Care Partnerships are available at www.health.vic.gov.au/pcps and include:

- *Better health—stronger communities*
- *Chronic disease prevention and management*
- *Electronic revolution supports better care*
- *Responsiveness to community issues*