

## **CROSS-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS**

FRAN THORN: I'd like to start by paying my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and their elders past and present, and I'd also like to thank my colleague Penny Armytage for joining me here today to give I think very visual evidence of the fact that we're very committed to working in partnership across our departments.

In order to avoid ritual humiliation or execution and in case my verbosity doesn't make this point crystal clear, I'd like to start by saying that be in no doubt that I fully support the work that's going on through the partnerships arrangements that the department is involved in, in particular the primary care partnerships, which are showing enormous benefits but, indeed, across all the partnerships that the department and all its agencies engage in. It's absolutely crucial to our work and crucial to our future but, most importantly, it's crucial to the well-being of all our clients. And without a doubt we know that a significant number of our clients have many, many needs, and it's increasingly clear that the services we provide must be coordinated. It's not helpful to our clients to develop and provide services that are articulated through the single-program lens, as has often been the case.

We know that a person's needs are inter-related and so are their health and well-being needs. For example, if a person has depression, they double their chances of developing diabetes; the more chronic diseases an individual has the greater the chance that he or she is not working; as experienced with our housing clients, tenancy issues are usually associated with, or a symptom of, much more profound health, welfare and social problems. These myriad of issues, in turn, impact on a person's home and family life, how they are able to relate to their friends and the world around them. These are not atypical examples; this is the reality for our clients, who in many cases are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in this community.

Meeting each need in isolation does not address their reality. Our clients expect agencies to talk to each other and work together to coordinate services. Indeed, they are pretty astonished at all the evidence that we provide them that we do not, and quite rightly so.

The Department of Human Services is Victoria's largest state government department. Sometimes this size is a strength and sometimes it's a challenge as we strive to help people of all ages keep their lives on track, their families together, a roof over their heads and their health protected and to do this in a coordinated and integrated manner.

There are many challenges we face in meeting our core responsibilities, but we know partnerships can provide more and even more effective ways to tackle these issues. We also know from our own experience that developing partnerships is not an easy thing to do. They need to be built on common ground, and, surprisingly, given the fact that we all seek to serve the same people, to meet the same needs and often share very, very common values, we sometimes find it difficult to find common ground. Fundamentally, identifying common ground is about understanding needs of people and the communities in which they live. It sounds simple, but there is always a predisposition to focus on difference or the specifics of the particular program we work through, and this will always result in missed opportunities and less effective services.

It's also about understanding how our own organisation can lead a partnering effort and about respecting the expertise of partner organisations in what they bring to the table. People who partner with DHS will often say, 'You have all the power. You have all the money,' but that's not true. That's just one thing we bring to the table. We also bring some expertise in a number of areas to the table, but, most importantly, our partners bring their expertise, their service delivery and their innovation to the table, and it is just as important and just as strong as those things we contribute, and in the end our partnerships stand and fall on mutual respect for each other and our contributions.

I think we would all agree that a coordinated approach to meet the needs of people we serve is fundamental. This coordination needs to happen within and across our organisational boundaries; it needs to happen at the local level; it needs to happen across agencies; and it also needs to happen across government, both at State and Commonwealth levels.

In Victoria we've made some excellent advances in partnering across government. Some of our success stories include neighbourhood renewal, primary care partnerships, Child First, and the high-risk tenancies projects. These are a testament to the partners who have worked together to make these the success they are. All of these initiatives do great work to provide a coordinated response to meet people's specific needs. They're showing real benefit for people and their communities in which they live, and for the participating agencies and for government as well.

DHS has a very significant expenditure of \$13 billion. Nearly 80 per cent of this budget is spent on services provided by approximately 2,300 external organisations, and most of the rest is spent on services delivered by DHS directly. So, you see, we have a very significant stake in making sure that both we partner with all those agencies, we partner across government to deliver good services.

Effective partnership between ourselves and these organisations is essential to achieve a coordinated approach and a particularly strong response to clients and to give us the best value for our investment through reduced duplication of services and improved outcomes.

So what does this mean looking to the future? Start with your own organisation and engage your leaders, engage yourself. If you are the leaders, engage leaders of other organisations. For example, my department has recognised the need for greater alignment of services, coordination of initiatives across programs. To address this, the department-wide service coordination standards will be developed by April 2009, and

these will promote linkages across the program boundaries that have often been a barrier to partnership. We're getting better internally at our own partnering, and we're also growing our partnership with the private sector. An innovative development to boost affordable housing for those on low to medium incomes is taking shape in Melbourne's Docklands precinct. Housing and community building has been working in partnership with Melbourne Affordable Housing to deliver this successful project. When completed in December 2009, 57 apartments will be available for affordable rent through the Not-For-Profit Housing Association. This is the first project of this scale where a major developer has partnered with the Not-For-Profit Housing Association. We are also involved in a range of other partnerships with other government departments. Best Start and the Victorian Government response to problem gambling are two notable examples. Best Start is an early-years initiative and involves a partnership between DHS and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. A state-wide evaluation of Best Start highlighted the program's success in establishing and maintaining effective partnerships, resulting in joint projects, planning and professional development. Early positive effects of Best Start projects indicate increased breast feeding rates and consumer participation in maternal and child health services. And I'm sure my colleague Penny Armytage will talk more about the strategy to tackle problem gambling.

These examples that I've mentioned demonstrate that partnerships are built on common ground and a shared agenda to meet our client's needs. Victoria is leading the way in human service system reform, and that reform is strongly founded on how we work across our government and with our non-government service system. Our non-government service system is at the very heart of the strength of our reform approaches and that we also have opportunities to build on our successful partnerships. This work is critical for us. It's time that we as government departments and you as our partners take the next step, from partnerships that are focused on specific client

problems and programs to partnerships that are much more client focused, seeing the client as a whole person with multiple needs that we do our best to connect rather than requiring them to be our system integrators, as we have too many times in the past. Some are doing it very well now, but my ambition is that we in the not too distant future will be recognised nationally for how our partnership approach to service delivery is a model for all to emulate. Thank you.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**