



Summary Consultation Report and Government Response

NSW Housing and Human Services Accord (the Accord)

Between the Department of Housing and
NSW Human Service Agencies

Housing and Human Services Accord

Consultations with the NGO sector

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Background

In December 2005 the NSW Department of Housing contracted Age Communication Pty Ltd to facilitate consultations with the non-government sector on the Housing and Human Services Accord. The consultations followed endorsement of the Accord for consultation by the CEOs of Government human services agencies in late 2005.

Six face-to-face consultations were held in Central Sydney, Ballina, Wagga Wagga and Western Sydney with one hundred and twenty six participants representing a range of non-government organisations whose constituencies include:

- People with disabilities
- Women escaping domestic violence
- Families
- People seeking or living in community housing
- People with mental health problems
- Young people
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities
- Aboriginal people

Seven written submissions were also received including submissions from the peak bodies New South Wales Council of Social Services, Shelter NSW and the NSW Federation of Housing Associations.

Section 1: Summary of main findings

The Accord Document

NGOs generally agree with the principles listed in the Accord but suggest they should be expanded to include statements and/or commitments to:

- Honest, regular and good quality communications between the housing and support service providers
- A commitment to shared values
- Co-operation between housing providers and support providers
- Respect for non-government organisations as equal partners with government agencies in supporting clients in social housing
- A client focussed approach and respect for clients' rights
- Equity of access for all clients groups with special needs
- Regular evaluation of the Accord
- Fair and transparent decision making in the operation of the Accord
- NGO participation at a high level in the Accord governance structure was strongly recommended.

Accord Implementation and schedules

General Comments

- Most NGOs welcome the formalisation of collaborations between agencies, both government and non-government.
- The issue of most concern to NGOs is resource constraints in the face of the potential extra demand for services.
- SAAP funded services question their capacity to provide the level of outreach support that may be required if they participate in Accord schedules.

Perceived benefits of the Accord

NGOs agree that the Accord has the potential to:

- Lead to better communication and collaboration between agencies united at the tenant level.
- Assist agencies to consolidate and strengthen existing partnerships that currently support people in social housing
- Improve outcomes for clients through clearer pathways to stable, affordable housing and sustainable tenancies

- Improve joint agency assessment and referral processes
- If regularly reviewed, highlight gaps in the service system which could then be fed into service planning and funding mechanisms
- Enhance government agencies' respect for the skills and expertise of the NGO sector
- Deliver more appropriate and timely housing stock to people with a disability.

Constraints on NGO participation

- NGOs cite a lack of additional resources as the most significant constraint.
- NGOs need clear and ongoing information about the Accord in order to participate effectively.

Implementation of Shared Access

- NGOs support in principle the shared access component of the Accord but require more detail about how shared access will be implemented.
- NGOs suggest that protocols, support agreements, lines of communication and complaints procedures need to accompany local shared access agreements.
- Generally, NGOs believe shared access will strengthen the service network and give greater credibility to the NGO sector.
- NGOs believe that shared access may also benefit tenants and the Department, as NGOs would have an increased commitment to sustainable tenancies.

Evaluation and Performance Monitoring

- NGOs express widespread support for the regular evaluation of the Accord and schedules.
- The main elements NGOs seek for inclusion in the evaluation model are: inclusion of peak bodies; focus on tenants and their stories; mapping of services and blockages in the system; collection of good practice examples; and data collection of cost drivers and benefits to clients.

Facilitating NGO Participation

- NGOs urge negotiation of schedules at the regional level in a planned and timely way that involves all the relevant stakeholders, noting that areas with successful HASI and JGOS agreements have used this approach. Further —
 - The Department of Housing should develop a sample schedule to demonstrate how the agreements work and what they can achieve. The sample could also be used as the basis for regional negotiations.
 - Peak bodies should be involved in the negotiation of schedules.

- existing consultation structures such as interagencies should be used when negotiating regional schedules.
- Valuable existing or lapsed regional agreements could be rejuvenated through the Accord negotiations.

Other Concerns & Issues

- NGOs seek clarification on whether the Accord makes housing conditional on support being provided.
 - NGOs point out that Government agencies at all levels will require regular briefings on the Accord.
 - NGOs suggest that Government and individual NGOs include information about the Accord and applicable regional schedules in their induction programs. This would bolster the success of the Accord over the longer term as the workforce turns over.
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Section 2. Government Response

The Accord Document

Issue

That the Accord could be expanded to include a commitment to shared values, client focus and respect for clients' rights; respect for the NGO sector as equal partners with government in supporting clients in social housing; equity of access for client groups with special needs; and fair and transparent decision making process in the operation of the Accord.

Response

The Government notes that –

- The Accord document describes the Accord's purpose, target groups, roles of signatory agencies, governance structures, commitments and principles that underpin the provision of cross agency housing and support services to social housing clients.
- The Principles outlined in section 4 of the Accord enshrine the values of cross agency co-operation, fair and equitable access to support services for current and future social housing clients, and upholding the rights of the client.
- Principles 4.1 to 4.9 in the Accord include a commitment to:
 - Secure and affordable housing to assist clients of human service agencies by providing stability and the opportunity to build support networks
 - Maximising the outcomes for clients that receive services from government agencies;
 - Enabling people to live independently and improve their life opportunities through the provision of stable affordable housing linked to health, justice and community support services
 - Support services that address the needs of vulnerable households to sustain their tenancies
 - Collaboration between service agencies for the effective provision of services and support where the client has a range of needs
 - Joined up responses to address the extent and interconnected nature of disadvantage and client needs
 - Long term improvements to neighbourhoods and the quality of life for residents through partnerships and neighbourhood management strategies to build on the strengths and resources within the community
 - Respect for the confidentiality and privacy of clients
 - The right of clients to receive services that respect, and are sensitive to cultural and linguistic backgrounds

- Addressing the changing demographics of people with support needs through the continued development of new responses, products and services

The Government believes that the Accord document sufficiently reflects the principles raised by the NGO sector in relation to access and equity, fairness and social justice for social housing clients and supports these principles unequivocally.

The Government supports the additional inclusion of the following principles to the Accord:

- NGO services are respected as critical partners with government in supporting clients in social housing.
- Commitment to shared values, client focus and respect for client rights is essential.
- Fair and transparent decision making processes are required in the operation of the Accord.

In addition, the Government recognises that that the NGO sector works within a set of prescribed service standards that maximises the rights of the client and is committed to ensuring that these standards are upheld in the provision of support services to social housing clients with complex needs assisted under the Accord.

Issue

That peak bodies be included in the design and implementation of the Accord, and that housing and support provider NGOs have representation at the senior level of the Accord governance structure.

Response

The Government notes that

- The coordination of governance arrangements under the Accord is the responsibility of the Department of Housing in collaboration with the signatory agencies, through the Senior Officers' Group.
- Section 5.3 acknowledges the pivotal role the non-government partners of signatory agencies have to play in providing support to clients receiving housing assistance and that those signatory agencies are responsible for enabling their NGO partners to support the Accord through their contracted services; while Section 6.4 explicitly commits the Department of Housing and other signatory agencies to giving social housing clients ongoing input, through defined consultation mechanisms, into the development of housing related support systems.
- To this end a number of forums are already being used to seek feedback and advice in relation to the broader Reshaping Public Housing reforms, including the Accord. These include the Reshaping Public Housing NGO Reference Group and the Public Housing Customer Council. Membership of the

Reshaping Public Housing NGO Reference Group includes Shelter NSW, New South Wales Council of Social Services (NCOSS), Tenant's Union of NSW, Homelessness NSW and People with Disabilities.

- In addition to the Department of Housing's own consultative mechanisms, signatory agencies to the Accord have their own consultative structures with the NGO sector.

The Government recognises that the NGO sector is likely to be a key stakeholder in statewide, regional and local partnership agreements that will be Schedules to the Accord

The Government is accordingly committed to the ongoing involvement of the peak NGOs and NGO service providers in the development of:

- A monitoring and reporting policy and procedure
- An evaluation framework
- The Shared Access model
- A Complex Housing Needs Screening Tool
- A joint Assessment Framework
- Schedules to the Accord that involve NGOs
- Other tools to assist in the implementation of the Accord

The Government supports the additional inclusion of the following clause in Section 5, Governance:

Clause 5.4: Peak NGOs will be consulted on the development of statewide Schedules where their services will be affected and participating NGO agencies will be signatories to relevant local level agreements under the Accord.

Addition to Clause 5.7: NGO groups will be consulted during the review.

Implementation of the Accord

Issue

That the Accord has already been signed off by signatory agencies without consultation with the NGO sector

Response

The Government notes that Human Service agency CEOs endorsed the Accord as a *consultation draft* so that the non-government sector would have an opportunity to comment on the framework document. Implementation of the Accord will involve the Department of Housing developing agreements and business processes with other human service agencies and NGOs trialing service models and consulting in an ongoing way with those affected by the Accord. To this end –

- **The Department of Housing recognises** the important role the NGO sector will play in the implementation of the Accord and the provision of high quality support services for social housing clients with complex needs.
- **Human Service CEOs acknowledge** that implementation of the Accord is dependent on genuine NGO participation in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for clients.
- Further, **the Government acknowledges** the expectation of the NGO sector that they be consulted with and/or included in the development of policy and tools for implementation of the Accord. In particular, the Government believes that it is both important and beneficial for the NGO sector to be involved in the development of the Complex Housing Needs Screening Tool, the Assessment Framework, and Schedules to the Accord.

The Government appreciates the feedback from the NGO sector through the consultation process and is responding to that feedback.

Issue

That NGOs are currently operating within resource constraints and will be unable to meet any additional demand for services as a result of the Accord.

Response

The Government notes that

- The objective of the Accord is to improve access to stable, affordable housing for clients with complex needs. It is also expected that Schedules to the Accord will consolidate existing housing and support arrangements by providing an enabling framework for new initiatives that encompasses existing arrangements and facilitates new partnerships, service guarantees and integrated delivery models for priority client groups.
- Under section 6.5 of the Accord, it is clear that signatory agencies will work within the limits of their core activities to:
 - support clients with the greatest need for public housing
 - provide ongoing assistance to clients living in social housing to support them in sustaining their tenancies
 - work with clients to increase their capacity to move from public housing to other forms of affordable housing
 - address systemic barriers associated with social disadvantage in larger public housing estates.

The Government advises that

- Specific commitments of resources will be articulated in the Schedules, including any additional expenditure. For example, it is expected that the Shared Access model will make it easier for high priority clients of support

agencies to gain access to public housing thereby reducing the time agencies spend seeking housing or supporting people in unstable housing.

- In the governance arrangements outlined in section 6.8, the Department of Housing has committed under the Accord to provide resources from those available for a range of forms of housing assistance, including responsive tenancy management, community regeneration and financial assistance to take up accommodation in the private rental market.
 - The Accord commits signatory agencies to better plan and coordinate the delivery of services for clients with complex housing needs. The Accord monitoring and evaluation process will provide signatory agencies with a clear understanding of the cost drivers and resource gaps that may need to be addressed in the future.
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Issue

The NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) in its written submission was concerned that Accord governance arrangements would enable individual funding agencies to decide whether and how they would consult with NGOs about changes and enhancements envisaged under the Accord. NCOSS commented that this arrangement was at odds with the more collaborative approach articulated in *Working Together in NSW*.

Specifically, NCOSS commented that Governance section 5.3 (*“Individual signatory agencies will be responsible for enabling NGO partners to support this Accord through their contracted services. This may include formal arrangements between signatory agencies and their relevant NGO partners”*) did not reflect the partnership arrangements specified under *Working Together for NSW*.

Response

The Government notes that

- The document *Working Together for NSW* is an agreement which establishes the goals, values, principles and framework for relationships between the NSW Government and non-government human services organisations.
- The Human Services CEOs Group is currently considering priority implementation issues in relation to the agreement.
- A principle outlined in *Working Together for NSW* includes making open communication and consultation between government and non-government organisations a priority, particularly where changes to policies, programs or services are being considered or advocated.
- Similarly, the commitments outlined in Section 6 of the Accord obliges the Department of Housing and signatory agencies to work cooperatively to plan,

coordinate and deliver services to assist clients with support needs to sustain social housing.

- Further, Section 6.4 of the Accord includes a commitment to providing mechanisms, which enable social housing clients input into the development of housing related support service systems.

The government commits to consultation with the NGO sector in the development of Schedules that reflect partnership agreements under the Accord. NGOs will also be involved, through a variety of consultative and advocacy measures, in other aspects of Accord implementation.

The Government supports the addition of the following clause in Section 6, Commitments:
Section 6.2: add

- **Ensuring consultation with the NGO sector in relation to the above actions.**

Accord schedules

Issue

Some NGOs were unable to comment on the implementation of the Accord in the absence of an example or a template of a schedule. They requested that Accord signatory agencies develop a sample schedule to demonstrate how agreements under the Accord will work and what they can achieve.

Response

The Government notes that

The Accord is an overarching framework within which schedules will be developed as new partnerships and agreements are developed on a statewide, regional or local level.

- Schedules will describe the housing and support agencies, the client group, the objectives, the governance mechanisms, the service boundaries, the resources, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and other details.
- The Department of Housing is currently developing a sample schedule following a review of existing Memoranda of Understanding and service level agreements from both government and non-government sources.
- The NGO sector will be invited to have input into the development of any sample or template schedule, and will be invited into the development of any schedule to which they are a signatory.