

The Housing and Mental Health Agreement

Q&A

May 2012

What is the Housing and Mental Health Agreement?

The Housing and Mental Health Agreement is a formal partnership between NSW Health and the Department of Family and Community Services (including its Divisions of Housing NSW, Community Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care and Aboriginal Housing Office), which was signed in August 2011.

The Agreement aims to improve housing outcomes and the general well-being of people with mental health issues who are living in social housing, or who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Agreement does not involve establishing a new program or service. Rather it builds on existing strengths in the way government agencies and NGOs work together to provide local services.

Why do we need a Housing and Mental Health Agreement?

People with mental health issues often experience difficulties accessing and maintaining safe, affordable and stable housing. Mental health issues can disrupt tenancies and reduce a person's capacity to live independently. At the same time, unstable housing can contribute to the deterioration of mental wellbeing.

Timely attention to people's housing and support needs can reduce the likelihood of mental health deterioration which in turn may reduce demands on mental health and other support services.

What will the Agreement do?

The Agreement will help service providers deliver streamlined and integrated services to clients with mental health and housing issues. It will also assist clients to access the full range of services for which they are eligible.

The Agreement will operate within existing resources and, where possible, make use of current structures such as local interagency housing and mental health committees that are particularly robust and effective.

Each partner agency will separately determine client eligibility, access and prioritisation according to its own policies, procedures and legislation.

How will the Agreement be implemented?

The Agreement will be implemented through the Housing and Mental Health District Implementation and Coordinating Committees (DIACCs), which align with Local Health Districts.

The DIACCs are accountable for implementing the Agreement.

What will the DIACCs do?

The purpose of each DIACC is to improve coordination of services between providers in the housing, mental health and support systems in the local area, rather than to focus on individual clients.

The DIACCs will be composed of both government agencies and non-government organisations. Each DIACC will also engage consumers and carers in the work of the Committee. The regular meetings of the committees will provide opportunities for senior representatives from the local organisations to come together formally to work toward achieving the aims of the Agreement.

The DIACCs provide a mechanism to address homelessness and risk of homelessness for people with mental health issues and, importantly, for raising and escalating systemic issues within the areas they cover. Each DIACC will develop a work plan that builds on current good practice activities and outlines the actions the Committee will undertake to achieve its deliverables.

What do the DIACC work plans involve?

The DIACC work plans will show how partners will:

1. Promote good practice in delivering coordinated services at the local level.
2. Collaborate with non-government organisations as equal partners.
3. Strengthen integrated service planning.
4. Deliver coordinated client-focused services.
5. Improve transition planning to prevent homelessness.
6. Embed the principles and commitments of the Agreement into standard business practice.

Guidelines to support the implementation of the Agreement have been developed which explain the structure and purpose of the DIACCs, their deliverables, the work planning process and their reporting responsibilities. These will be published on the Housing NSW website (see below) once they are finalised.

How can my organisation get involved?

Involvement from housing, homelessness and mental health NGO service providers is critical to the success of the Agreement. Some NGOs will be formal members of their area's DIACC, however all relevant service providers are encouraged to participate, whether through sharing information or by raising issues of concern in the local area.

Where can I find more information?

The central point for information about the Housing and Mental Health Agreement is on the Housing NSW website at: www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Housing+and+Mental+Health+Agreement.htm

Further information about implementing the Agreement will be published on this website as it becomes available.

To find out more about your local DIACC, you can contact the regional staff of your funding agency. They will be kept up-to-date about the progress of the DIACC in your area. Or, if you have any questions, please email HAMHA.Enquiries@facs.nsw.gov.au. Your email will be forwarded to your local DIACC so that they can provide the most appropriate information.