

# Homelessness Accreditation Policy Framework

October 2024



# Introduction

The Homelessness Accreditation Policy Framework (the Framework) outlines the quality management standards applied to New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) funded homelessness service providers. The Framework outlines the contractual requirements, and high-level procedures for DCJ funded homelessness providers to achieve and maintain accreditation.

The Framework is accompanied by three addendums that have targeted information depending on the role and interests of the reader.

The addendums are as follows:

- Homelessness Accreditation Framework Addendum 1 – Accreditation background
- Homelessness Accreditation Framework Addendum 2 – Additional information about the accreditation process for service providers
- Homelessness Accreditation Framework Addendum 3 – Information for contract managers and assessors

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## Target audience

The Framework outlines important information for all key stakeholders, including:

- DCJ funded Homelessness Providers: staff and Boards
- DCJ Districts and Central Office units
- Peak bodies
- Standard owners
- Assessors working with NSW homelessness providers.

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## Requirement for accreditation

Providers contracted to deliver DCJ homelessness programs and services (for longer than 12 months) are required to:

- achieve accreditation within their contract term
- maintain accreditation and demonstrate continued compliance with the standards.

This applies to providers funded to deliver services under the following programs:

- Specialist Homelessness Services Program (SHS)<sup>1</sup>
- Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP)
- Core and Cluster (C&C)
- Aboriginal Homelessness Sector Growth Project (AHS GP)
- Other programs funded by DCJ to deliver services to people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as outlined in the contract with the Department<sup>2</sup>.

This requirement also applies to providers that are subcontracted to deliver these programs by a lead provider. Please refer to **Section: Subcontractors** below for more information.

For providers **with existing accreditation** who are newly funded or seeking funding under DCJ for homelessness service provision:

- your accreditation must be with one of the four approved standards,
- existing homelessness service provision must have been scoped into your accreditation, or
- if new to homelessness service provision, these services will need to be scoped in at your next reaccreditation.

**Note: receipt of accreditation is not a guarantee of DCJ funding.**

<sup>1</sup> Including but not limited to the Women in Prison Advocacy Network, Northern Youth Project, Women's Community Shelters, Hub.

<sup>2</sup> The requirement for accreditation will be clearly outlined in documents from DCJ such as the tender or grant criteria, program specifications or the contract. Pilot programs are not required to be accredited.

For more background information on the accreditation journey for homelessness services in NSW, the DCJ rationale for adopting accreditation and the pilot program, see **Addendum 1**.

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## Accreditation timeframes

The target date for achieving accreditation will vary based on the provider's services and programs. The accreditation requirement will be clearly outlined in relevant tender documents and/ or contracts.

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## Approved standards and accreditation programs for DCJ Homelessness services

Providers have the choice to accredit their services with one of the following standards and accreditation programs:

- [Australian Service Excellence Standards \(ASES\)](#) by the Department of Human Services South Australia (DHS SA), at the certificate level as a minimum.
- [QIC Health and Community Service Standards \(QIC\)](#) by Quality Innovation Performance (QIP).
- [Accreditation Alliance Australia–New Zealand \(AAA-NZ\) Quality Standards for Community Based Services](#) by the Te Wana Trust, at the accreditation level as a minimum.
- [Evaluation and Quality Improvement Program \(EQiP\)](#) by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS)

These approved standards and accreditation programs develop the capacity of community organisations to strive towards continuous improvement in quality service delivery. The aims of such programs are high quality, evidence-based services that are focused on improved client outcomes. These accreditation programs all involve components of self-assessment and external assessment and are underpinned by a continuous improvement cycle. DHS SA, QIP, the Te Wana Trust and ACHS are referred to throughout this document as 'standard owners'.

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## Updates to the Framework

This Framework will be updated when any required changes occur. Frequency of updates will be in response to need.

Significant changes which will impact timeframes or costs for service providers will be planned in consultation with all key stakeholders. Adequate time will be provided for the implementation of such changes. Stakeholders will be notified whenever updates to the framework occur.

# The accreditation process

The time it takes to achieve accreditation will vary between providers, based on their prior experience with accreditation. However, as a guide, the self-assessment process and collating the required evidence will take around 12-18 months to complete. If a quality improvement plan or quality action plan is needed after the external assessment (on site review), providers will have up to 3 or 6 months (depending on the standard being applied) to complete the actions required prior to achieving accreditation.

Additional information for providers regarding the accreditation process is available at **Addendum 2**. Information for contract managers and assessors is contained within **Addendum 3**.

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## Key things to note about the accreditation process

- Please keep in mind that there are a limited number of accreditation bodies. If providers don't book in with their preferred assessor early, they might not be able to complete the external review within DCJ timeframes.
- All DCJ funded homelessness services need to be included in the scope of the assessment. See **Section: Scope of accreditation**. It must be clear in the providers accreditation report that the DCJ homelessness services were included in the scope of the assessment.
- The assessor will visit the service to verify the self-assessment. This usually occurs within 6 weeks of a provider booking the external review. Site visits include an agreed timetable of people to meet with as part of the external review.
- If some aspects of a service need to improve, your assessor will develop a plan which outlines actions that need to be implemented before accreditation is finalised. Providers have up to 3 or 6 months (depending on the standard being applied) from the date of the external assessment visit to complete actions in the plans and to submit them to the assessor for a review. If the number of actions to be reviewed is significant or completing these will take longer than 6 months, there may be a need for providers to undergo another mini assessment, or re-survey, to ensure that compliance requirements are met fully. This is an additional cost that is the provider's responsibility to pay.
- Providers should receive the formal accreditation report within 6 weeks of the site visit. Providers that have not received the report by then, need to contact the standard owners to discuss any impacts to their timeframes. Please also advise DCJ via [SHSprogram@homes.nsw.gov.au](mailto:SHSprogram@homes.nsw.gov.au).
- When accreditation is achieved and the external assessment report is finalised, the standard owners are notified, and an accreditation certificate is issued. This is usually within two weeks. If a provider chooses to only accredit their homelessness services, the certificate can reflect that. See **Section: Scope of accreditation**. All providers need to provide a copy of the certificate and report to DCJ by emailing the [SHSprogram@homes.nsw.gov.au](mailto:SHSprogram@homes.nsw.gov.au) mailbox. **Subcontractors:** please include your key contact from the lead provider in your email to DCJ.
- The accreditation process needs to be repeated every three to four years, per the cycle of your chosen accreditation program, to maintain accreditation. The date of accreditation is typically recorded as the last date of the assessor's site visit, though this may vary.
- Note: Providers are to continue to implement any Service Development Plan or Performance Improvement Plan. This is irrespective of accreditation status or whether a provider requires a Quality Action Plan/ Quality Improvement Plan.

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## Scope of accreditation

Providers can seek an accreditation assessment in the following two ways:

- For their whole organisation (corporate functions and all service areas)

- For their funded service area only (corporate functions and for the DCJ funded homelessness service area).

When engaging the assessor, providers need to be clear about which level of accreditation they are seeking and to present the details of all their DCJ funded homelessness services to the assessor.

If a provider is delivering homelessness services contracts at multiple sites, then the assessor will work with the provider to determine how many, and which sites need to be visited. The assessor will develop a schedule of interviews with people within the organisation they wish to speak with, potentially including executives, Board/ committee members, volunteers, frontline staff, and clients. The assessor may also discuss the need for interviews with external stakeholders, which could be organised as a group meeting.

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## Subcontractors

Providers that receive DCJ homelessness funds, directly via a contract or indirectly via a subcontract, are required to achieve accreditation, and maintain accreditation thereafter. The compliance requirements are in the lead provider's contract with DCJ.

As subcontractors do not have a direct contracting relationship with DCJ, it is the responsibility for lead agencies to ensure that their partners are accredited or working toward accreditation when issuing homelessness funding.

Please refer to the policies on the DCJ webpage [Subcontracting](#) for further information about what constitutes a subcontracting arrangement. Subcontractors can have a discussion with their lead provider if they are still unsure if they need to be accredited. Lead providers can seek clarification from their DCJ Contract Manager.

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## Costs of accreditation

All costs are set by assessors and standard owners. Costs vary depending on the assessor used, the size of the organisation and the level of accreditation. For an estimate of costs, please refer to the standard owners.

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## Submitting evidence for accreditation

Standard owners will all have different evidence requirements and methods for submitting evidence. Providers should refer to the evidence guidelines set out by the accreditation agency. Assessors and providers should work together to ensure that the method used for submitting evidence suits the provider and is an accepted platform for the accreditation agency. This can include but is not limited to a hard copy workbook using document sharing hardware (like a USB) or a file sharing platform or the Breaking New Ground Standards & Performance Pathways (BNG SPP) portal.

Many providers have used the [BNG SPP portal](#) for self-assessment against the former NSW SHS Standards. The BNG SPP portal will continue to be available for providers to assist with the accreditation process, where relevant. Please check whether your assessor will accept evidence via the BNG SPP portal.

## What does accreditation involve:

Gather information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit the Homelessness NSW website to access resources. Visit the websites of the approved standards and accreditation programs to understand which one suits your organisation's needs.</li></ul>
Choose a program and assessor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Choose a standards and accreditation program, and assessor (where relevant).</li></ul>
Self-assessment and evidence preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather document relevant to the requirements of the standards. This process can take up to 18 months to complete the first time.</li></ul>
Site visit with assessor (external assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Book the site visit no later than the October before the end of your contract term.</li></ul>
Complete any actions for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete any essential recommendations made by your assessor, by the March before the end of your contract term.</li></ul>
Accredited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Send the accreditation certificate and report to SHSprogram@homes.nsw.gov.au once you have received the documents.</li></ul>
Recorded by DCJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DCJ will confirm receipt and acceptance of the certificate and report.</li></ul>
Maintain accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage in the continuous improvement cycle and ensure you are re-accredited prior to your accreditation expiry.</li></ul>



## Provider notifications to DCJ

Providers are required to:



Provide regular updates to their DCJ Contract Manager on their progress with accreditation during contract management meetings.



Immediately notify DCJ via email **SHSProgram@homes.nsw.gov.au** if at any stage of the self-assessment or external review it seems they or their sub-contractors will not achieve accreditation.



Immediately notify their DCJ Contract Manager if their service delivery or a partner's service delivery will be significantly impacted by the accreditation process. Partners should advise their lead provider immediately.



Notify DCJ when they have achieved accreditation by submitting the accreditation certificate and report to **(SHSProgram@homes.nsw.gov.au)**. If accreditation is not achieved, notify DCJ as soon as possible to discuss next steps. **Leads** can forward the documents on behalf of their subcontractors.

# Program management and monitoring

The Homelessness Accreditation Program is delivered by Homes NSW.

Updates to the policy framework are drafted in consultation with peak organisations, and standards owners, where possible. These updates will be approved by the relevant Executive Director, Homes NSW.

Any updates to the framework that will result in significant changes to timeframes or costs will be informed by consultation with all key stakeholders.

The implementation of accreditation will be monitored to ensure providers have access to the information, and resources they need to gain accreditation

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W: [www.dcj.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au)

