Communities and Justice

Program Specifications

Opportunity Pathways – Social Impact Investment (OP-SII)

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NSW GOVERNMENT

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the Opportunity Pathways – Social Impact Investment (OP-SII) program and an outline for service providers of the program objectives, service model, expected outcomes, reporting and evaluation approach.

Program Specifications and/or Guidelines may be amended or replaced by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) from time to time. Service providers should comply with the current version of the OP-SII Program Specifications and/or Guidelines.

2. Legislative framework

The primary legislation that underpins the DCJ provision of funding to non-government organisations through OP-SII is the *Community Welfare Act 1987* and associated regulations, which seek to protect and improve the wellbeing of the people of NSW.

All service providers must comply with all relevant provisions in the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983*, the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, and the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*.

The NSW Agreement for Funding of Services (known as Human Services Agreement or HSA) Standard Terms and Schedule outlines service provider obligations, including the requirement that services be provided in accordance with all applicable laws, standards and policies and accreditation requirements.

Clause 6 of the HSA also requires service providers to ensure that all personnel engaged in providing services are properly authorised, accredited, trained and experienced to provide the services, and have completed all mandatory pre-employment screening, including a Working with Children Check clearance.

3. Policy context

DCJ applies the NSW *Human Services Outcomes Framework* to its funded programs. It aims to ensure all children, young people, families and communities to:

- Have a safe and affordable place to live
- Live a healthy life
- Learn, contribute and achieve
- Contribute to and benefit from our economy
- Be safe
- Participate and feel culturally and socially connected
- Contribute to decision making that affects them and live fulfilling lives.

The OP-SII program contributes to this by investing in services which respond to the needs of clients experiencing or at risk of experiencing vulnerability.

4. Program overview

4.1. Objectives

The OP-SII is a trial social impact investment based on *Opportunity Pathways,* a three year initiative under *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW (Future Directions)* that aims to transform the social housing system and break the cycle of disadvantage.

The key objectives of the OP-SII program are to:

- Assist participants to gain, increase or retain employment, by accessing supports and practical assistance, and participating in activities, training and work opportunities
- Encourage and support participants to positively exit social housing or Rent Choice subsidies to housing independence, to reduce their reliance on government assistance, where appropriate.

The program is voluntary and delivered in four DCJ districts from 1 July 2022 until 30 June 2025:

1. New England
2. Hunter Central Coast
3. South Western Sydney and
4. Western NSW.

The OP-SII aims to build on the evidence base of the previous Opportunity Pathways program and trial a social impact investment approach.

4.2. Principles

The OP-SII aims to change how we engage with our clients and set a clear expectation that for many, social housing is not for life, and for those with the capacity, social housing should be used as a stepping stone to greater independence and less reliance on government assistance. This independence is achieved through greater economic participation through accessing education and employment programs with wrap around support and encouraging housing independence (where appropriate).

The principles of OP-SII are:

Voluntary: The program is voluntary and aimed at individuals who demonstrate a willingness to participate and are motivate to provide their economic situation through education and employment.

Person- centred: Training, Employment and Housing Plan (TEHP) and holistic services are built around the aspirations, needs and personal circumstances of each participant.

Strength-based: The program adopts an approach that focuses on a person's skills, strengths and capabilities.

Flexible: Support is flexible to address a range of personal goals and individual barriers to education, employment and employment retention. It may scale up and down as the participant's situation changes.

Long-term outcomes: The program focuses on developing career paths and up-skilling to achieve each participants longer term employment and housing aspirations in addition to helping clients secure a job in the short-term.

Localised: Support services are delivered in partnership with local service providers and employers, connecting people to local work opportunities.

4.3. Program logic

The OP-SII program logic is attached **(Appendix A)**.

5. Program description

The OP-SII is voluntary and supports social housing tenants, Rent Choice recipients and applicants on the NSW Housing Register, (and household members of these groups) to gain and retain employment through access to tailored case management support, training, education and employment opportunities. The program involves:

- Active case management
- Provision of wrap-around support
- Flexible individualised case planning
- Continuity of service delivery
- Pre-employment preparation, and employment and post-employment support
- Housing independence support.

5.1. Eligibility and target cohorts

The OP-SII is designed for eligible clients who, with the appropriate support, aspire and have the capacity to gain, increase and retain employment. Participants may include clients who:

- are not working
- are seeking a job
- want to work more hours or
- want to improve their employment situation.

To be eligible for the OP-SII program, participants must:

- be 17 years or older and meet school leaving requirements
- be unemployed, OR currently working 20 hours or less a week
- be living in public, community or Aboriginal housing, OR receiving a DCJ Rent Choice subsidy (including household members) OR an approved social housing applicant on the NSW Housing Register (including household members)

- consent to engage in the program and, and be able to commit to a TEHP[1]
- consent to provide identifying details about their household and employment to enable eligibility and outcome verification.

Not all eligible clients will be able to participate in the OP-SII.

- Where a client is eligible, but a provider does not have capacity, the client will be placed on a waiting list and support will be offered when a place is available. Timeframes may vary between OP-SII providers
- Where a client is eligible, but is not suitable for OP-SII due to other support needs or barriers that need to be addressed first, the OP-SII provider will refer the client to appropriate services and place them on their OP-SII waiting list. The client will be offered a place once their barriers/support needs are addressed, subject to service capacity.

The following are considered target clients for the OP-SII:

- Public housing or Aboriginal housing tenants (tenancies managed by DCJ) who:
  - are on a two year lease – the intention is to engage them in the OP-SII to support them to exit the lease in the two year timeframe
  - are due for a lease review of a two or five year lease - the intention is to engage them in the OP-SII to work towards exiting within the timeframe of their new lease
  - have a household member on Youth Allowance – the intention is to support young people to engage in employment and exit social housing, thereby reducing intergenerational disadvantage.
  - Parent's whose youngest child has started school - these individuals may be in a better position to participate in OP-SII as their child/children are at school. The household may also be transitioning from Parenting Payments and have increased mutual obligations and additional incentives to participate in training and/or obtain or increase employment.
- Community housing tenants – target clients are to be agreed with participating providers.
- Rent Choice subsidy recipients – the intention is to build the capacity of tenants and reduce tenants requiring continued assistance after the expiry of the subsidy.

5.2. Support and referral periods

The **intervention (or support) period** for all clients is a minimum of four months. A maximum period of support is not prescribed. Providers will:

- assess appropriateness of the program and provide support/referral accordingly
- schedule clients' progress review as part of their TEHP
- report on length of engagement.

[1] Participants are considered as recruited only after this stage

The four month period is to allow sufficient time for administration/on boarding, completion of a TEHP, commencement of employment, and realisation of a 13 week employment outcome (minimum).

The **referral period** (period during which referral may be accepted) is 30 months. Referrals will cease on the 31 December 2024, unless otherwise advised.

5.3. Services

The service provider will be required to (but not limited to) deliver the following services:

- Promotion of the service to the target cohorts and other relevant stakeholders
- Establishment of referral protocols that are comprehensive and focus on attracting and retaining participants into the program (this includes referral pathways with the key local DCJ or community housing provider(s)
- Identification, recruitment, assessment and acceptance of referred clients
- Co-develop a comprehensive person centred case plan TEHP with each participant that has been recruited to the program
- Services delivered to clients including training, workshops, one on one support, case management and wrap around support, coaching and mentoring, work experience placements, job placements and work retention support, where needed
- Provide post-employment support service for six months (or more if required)
- Support participants to achieve their stated education, employment and housing independence goals, as identified in the TEHP
- Manage brokerage funds to assist participants to address any problems or barriers that prevent them from completing the OP-SII program.

The program is voluntary and should be focused on developing career paths and upskilling to achieve each participants longer term employment and housing aspirations in addition to helping clients secure a job in the short term.

The HSA (contract) clearly articulates outcomes to be achieved by each provider and how these will be monitored and measured.

5.4. Supporting Aboriginal clients

A key priority for DCJ is to improve long-term outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and their families. This includes a focus on:

- growing and strengthening the capacity of Aboriginal participants
- assessing and improving the cultural capability of mainstream service providers that work with Aboriginal people and communities
- improving outcomes for Aboriginal people who access DCJ funded services.

OP-SII providers should seek to build respectful relationships with Aboriginal specific services and their local Aboriginal communities, and identify opportunities to work together to achieve the best outcomes for Aboriginal clients.

6. Program Outcomes

DCJ funded programs are required to align to the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework. The Human Services Outcomes Framework provides a way to understand and measure the extent to which DCJ makes a long-term positive difference to people's lives and enables us to build evidence of what works in improving wellbeing.

The intended OP-SII outcomes are:

- **Economic:** participants achieve and are engaged in employment in a field or industry identified in an agreed Training, Employment and Housing Plan
- **Education and Skills:** participants have improved skills through training or education and improved work readiness
- **Empowerment:** participants improve their confidence, increased self-esteem and hope for the future
- **Social and community:** participants are role models for a working lifestyle to family and peers
- **Health:** participants have improved physical and mental health and wellbeing
- **Home:** participants achieve housing independence, where appropriate.

Please note: While the OP-SII intends to achieve and collect data on the above outcomes for participants, only the education, employment and housing outcomes specified in the HSA Schedule are payable. Further detail, including outcomes definitions, evidencing and verification is available in the HSA Schedule.

7. Underpinning Service Delivery Principles

7.1. Using behavioural insights to influence behaviour and attitudes

Providers are expected to use a behavioural insights approach to engage with social housing clients, set goals and identify aspirations and assist participants to work towards achieving them.

Behavioural insights recognises that to influence the choices and decisions of clients, program design should set out to make these choices and decisions 'easy, attractive, social and timely'[2].

Providers are encouraged to use this framework in designing their service delivery model.

[2] http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioural-insights/

Behavioural Insight principle	Examples of activities by DCJ, AHO or Community Housing Provider (CHP)	Examples of activities for OP-SII providers
E How do we make it easy?	Sign ups in the home – take the messages to the client. Use of IVY application to do on the spot referrals to the program.	Provide outreach to participants and provide a full suite of support and brokerage to remove all barriers to engagement. Work with housing providers to make the referral process early and easy.
A How do we make it attractive?	Provide clear and positive messages about the benefits of participation and housing independence – for example, housing independence means a person has the ability to move to different locations and have access to a broader range of housing choice in the private rental market	Provide clear and positive messages about the benefits of participation and housing independence – for example, the ability to move to different locations and have access to a broader range of housing choice in the private rental market.
S How do we make it social?	Use of positive case studies of success to promote the social element of engagement. Communicate with broader tenant groups. For example through housing provider newsletters. This could include regular articles in Your Home on employment, opportunities and success stories.	Use of positive case studies of success to promote the social element of engagement. Recruitment of groups of cohorts in the same location so that people have peer encouragement. Develop a peer mentoring network. Communicate with broader tenant groups. For example through provider newsletters. This could include regular articles on employment, opportunities and success stories.
T How do we make it timely?	Incorporate the message of setting housing independence goals into the application process. Incorporate this message into correspondence with tenants during the sign up process. Not just messaging about 'how to be a good tenant' but messaging about 'how social housing should be used as a stepping stone' Incorporate this message into correspondence with tenants at allocation of a social housing property. At time of sign up of all new tenants – this will include messaging around setting goals for employment and housing independence and being referred immediately to OP-SII. Continue to deliver this message to clients during Client Service Visits in their home and through other correspondence received by the client during the tenancy.	OP-SII providers to respond to referrals within 48 hours of receipt OP-SII providers to meet and do goal setting with the client within a week of referral so that momentum is maintained.

7.2. Client participation in program design and delivery

It is expected that the OP-SII providers will take a participatory design and continuous improvement approach to program design, implementation and monitoring. This will include strong client participation, as well as engagement with DCJ and other stakeholders.

7.3. Partnerships to access relevant services

OP-SII service providers will need to have a clear understanding of existing State and Commonwealth programs which may place mandatory obligations against many potential participants.

For example, for many participants their source of income may be a JobSeeker Payment. These participants will have a Job Plan in place which links receipt of income to their plan. It will be the OP-SII provider's responsibility to establish networks with local providers such as Workforce Australia, Transition to Work and Parent Next providers.

OP-SII providers are expected to develop referral and partnership arrangements to facilitate a participant's access to a range of services to deliver the core components of the program. This includes identified in the TEHP to provide wrap around support, services that deliver training, voluntary services that facilitate pre-employment (such as Dress for Success), voluntary services that facilitate access to driving lessons, and many more.

Providers are expected to have and/ or form strong partnerships with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, migrant and refugee support organisations to facilitate referrals and to facilitate culturally appropriate service delivery.

7.4. Partnerships to facilitate work opportunities

A key focus of the program is that a participant has access to employment opportunities with wrap around support. It is important that the participant is offered opportunities for training and courses that are highly relevant to local jobs.

Importantly, the OP-SII provider is expected to work with training partners experienced in working with clients facing multiple barriers or complex needs. The provider is expected to proactively partner with local employers to facilitate a participant's access to work placements, work experience and employment options. This includes partnerships with employers who have a demonstrated commitment to employing clients from diverse backgrounds.

Work placements must also be relevant to the participant with a clear link to the participant's TEHP. Work placements must have a direct link to the training that a participant undertakes, to facilitate a smoother transition to employment.

The provider must also build relationships with employers to support work retention and any issues that may have arisen. The provider must ensure further support can be provided to program participants, where appropriate, to increase capability and further reduce barriers.

7.5. Culturally appropriate service delivery

The providers will ensure that there are culturally competent approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and clients who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure that:

- clients are engaged into the program successfully
- person centred case plans (TEHP) identify any barriers that a participant may have to accessing training or employment. Some of which could include cultural and/or language barriers. An example could include the participant requiring specific language skills for a work context
- the case manager assigned to the participant has culturally competency to work with the client groups
- the employment, training and other activities are suitable to any specific cultural requirements.

DCJ may set targets for the expected proportion of Aboriginal participants in specified locations.

8. Service Delivery Core Components

8.1. Client recruitment, referral and assessment into the program

Participation in the program is voluntary and flexible. Participants may self-refer, be referred from housing providers, other support service providers or employment agencies. The provider should take a proactive and creative approach to promoting the service and recruiting participants, also using Behavioural Insights techniques as mentioned above (see section 7).

It is expected that OP-SII providers will establish and maintain active referral pathways with the following:

- **DCJ Housing Tenancy** teams located in the service locations, in order to get referrals for social housing tenants
- **DCJ Housing Access and Demand** teams located in the service delivery locations, in order to get referrals for clients who are experiencing homelessness and applying for social housing assistance
- **DCJ Rent Choice** officers located in the service locations, in order to get referrals for clients in receipt of a Rent Choice subsidy.
- **Community Housing Providers (CHPs) and Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs)** – their Access, Tenancy and Rent Choice teams
- **Support providers** of the client groups to encourage referrals into the program
- **Employment agencies** to encourage referrals into the program.

The above parties (DCJ and other services) are expected to proactively work with the OP-SII providers to make referrals using the standard OP-SII Referral form. DCJ will also implement internal referral protocols in operational policies and procedures.

Providers will also promote the OP-SII directly to clients e.g. through SMS campaigns (via DCJ to DCJ tenants), letter boxing (via DCJ to DCJ tenants, or CHPs to their tenants), pop ups in social housing estates, working with neighbourhood centres and a range of other strategies. Providers must work to motivate clients to participate in the program and ensure access is provided using Behavioural Insights principles of EAST, as mentioned above (see section 7).

Providers will work proactively with DCJ Central Office, DCJ District offices and participating CHPs and ACHPs to identify and implement appropriate promotional strategies.

Providers will undertake a comprehensive assessment of all clients who are referred to the program to determine their eligibility and suitability for the program in accordance with the eligibility criteria above. Once a client has been assessed and eligibility and suitability for the program determined the participant must sign the **Participant Privacy Notice and Consent** form before any services can be provided.

The assessment will be used to inform the development of the TEHP. As part of the assessment, providers will determine the level of support a client may require and their individual needs. This may include assessing barriers that may impact on participation such as a criminal record which may impact employment post training. Similarly assessing whether a client has had long term disengagement from the labour market; low levels of confidence to undertake formal training; low levels of literacy; and personal issues that impact their ability to meet the commitments associated with formal training and employment.

It is the responsibility of providers in collaboration with DCJ and participating CHPs and ACHPs to develop appropriate assessment tools to develop a comprehensive person-centred client assessment and TEHP. Providers are expected to document reasons for declining referrals.

8.2. Person-centred case planning

Providers will co-develop a comprehensive person-centred case plan called the Training, Employment and Housing Plan (TEHP) with each participant that is accepted into the program and provided with a service. The TEHP will be informed by a detailed assessment of the client's needs.

The TEHP must be realistic and contain achievable goals for the participant. It must be tailored to the individual participants situation, support needs, employment and housing aspirations. For example, the TEHP will take into account the need for a client to find a job in the short term, while working towards achieving longer-term, sustainable employment. The TEHP will also clearly articulate the participant's desired housing aspirations and a specific plan to positively exit social housing or private rental subsidies, where appropriate.

The TEHP will clearly articulate all services the participant will be linked into to provide the wrap around support, the timeframes for completion of all activities and goals, and how the participant will be supported to achieve these goals. Examples of what may be detailed in the TEHP include (but are not limited to):

- The participant's short-term (6 months – 1 year), medium term (1-2 years) and longer term (2-3 years) employment goals, and other relevant goals (linked to the Human Services Outcomes Framework)
- The participant's short-term (6 months – 1 year), medium term (1-2 years) and longer term (2-3 years) housing goals and the steps required to achieve these goals (noting this will be a different approach for a social housing client and a Rent Choice recipient)
- Key issues and barriers the person is facing and their support needs
- Education or training proposed for the participant
- Steps the participant commits to undertaking to engage in training or paid work and how they will be supported to achieve these steps
- Steps the participant commits to undertaking to achieve their housing outcome goal e.g. understanding how to apply for private rental and how they will be supported to achieve these steps
- The frequency of contact needed with the service provider to support the client through the program. There is strong evidence that the higher the number of contacts, the more positive outcomes in increasing employment. Providers are therefore required to meet with clients at

whatever frequency is necessary to ensure ongoing engagement and positive outcomes are achieved, taking into account client needs and their involvement with other agencies

- The amount of brokerage required for the client to reduce barriers to training and employment.

The TEHP must be agreed and signed by the participant, and all parties who will have a role in supporting the participant in the program.

8.3. *Active case management*

OP-SII providers are required to use an active case management approach to provide ongoing wrap around support throughout the duration of a participant's engagement with the program.

The provider will develop and review the TEHP; and support the client in achieving the agreed outcomes (see Figure 1 below). In developing the TEHP, it is up to the provider to determine with the participant which activities are required to achieve the desired outcomes.

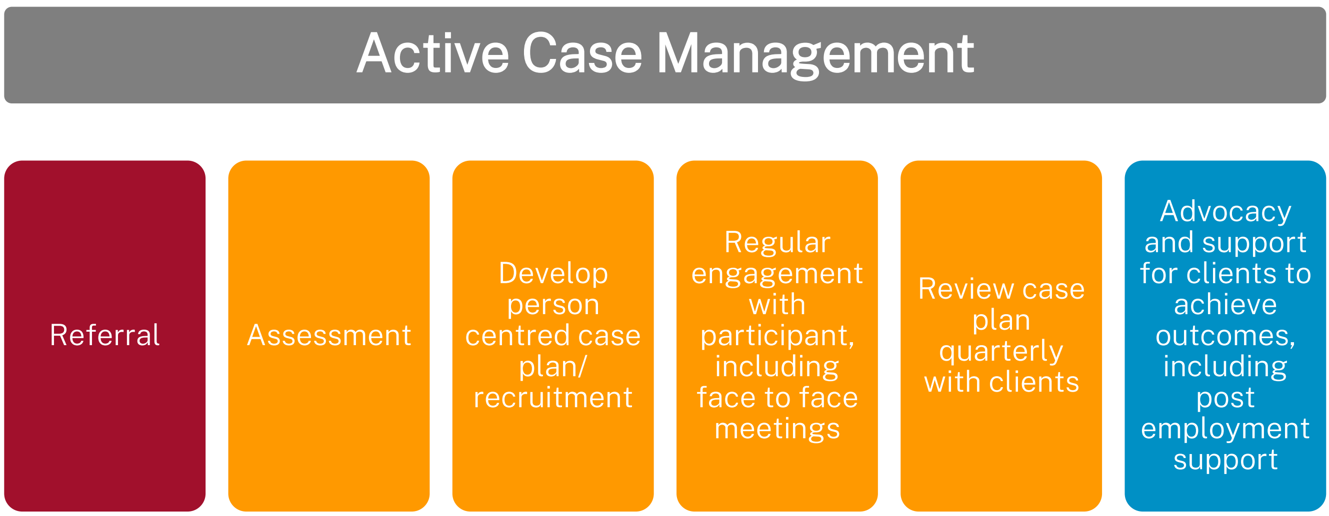
The providers are required to meet with clients on a quarterly basis (or more frequently where more intensive support is required) to review their TEHP. The TEHP reviews will:

- record progress towards, achievement of, and evidence for Outcomes; and
- update the plan to reflect whether a Program Participant's situation has changed.

The provider is required to support and advocate for the participant to achieve the activities and goals within the TEHP. Following each review the provider will:

- provide personal reminders to attend activities, such as courses and activities; active follow up on non-attendance
- advocate and support participants to address challenges and barriers to achieve their agreed plan, including making referrals to manage other needs such as health and wellbeing; or access to child care
- coordinate with other service providers to ensure participants are receiving the support to achieve their goals and aspirations
- undertake action that will encourage the re-engagement of participants who have disengaged from the program. This includes working closely with employers and ensuring on-site support and mentoring is available.

Figure 1. Active case management approach to service delivery



8.4. Pre-employment preparation service

Pre-employment preparation is for participants that may require extra support prior to involvement in employment. Participants will be offered a range of pre-employment preparation activities, if required, to address any barriers to seeking employment. Providers are expected to assess the participant's needs and tailor a program to each individual, either through direct delivery or through referral and coordination with other existing services. It is expected that the provider will ensure activities are flexible e.g. allowing courses to proceed even with relatively small numbers of clients.

Pre-employment preparation needs to focus on engagement, using behavioural insights and other approaches. This should include:

- an approach to inspiring and motivating participants to begin setting goals and engaging in the program
- an approach that supports participants to develop confidence, self-esteem and resilience in order to lay the foundation for ongoing engagement in the program
- an approach that sets up peer support networks early, so that participants feel part of a social activity, and links participants to appropriate mentoring
- an approach that ensures participants overcome obstacles to participation for example, providing personal reminders about attendance; active follow-up of any non-attendance and referrals to deal with issues that arise

Pre-employment preparation activities will further include, but are not limited to:

- English language skills, including industry-specific English skills
- Literacy and numeracy skills
- Driver's licence attainment
- Independent living skills
- Personal presentation skills, including access to suitable work attire
- Addressing drug and alcohol, or other health or mental health issues through links to appropriate services
- Support to address practical barriers, such as childcare
- Soft entry into work activities, such as two to four hours of work exposure rather than a full working day.

8.5. Employment support service

Participants will be connected to education, training and employment opportunities tailored to their needs, aspirations and capabilities. Case managers will identify strengths, skills and aspirations of each person and match these to job categories and relevant courses which are likely to lead to job opportunities. They will also:

- assist with identifying, providing and/or accessing good quality training linked to real work experience and job opportunities
- liaise with local employers to identify job opportunities that match the individual's capabilities and aspirations, and connect the participant to these opportunities
- actively assist with the application and interview processes

Training courses and activities may be delivered by the providers or by referral to other services to ensure the participant has the skills to attain and retain employment and may include:

- access to pre-vocational or vocational training courses relevant to local employment opportunities and aspirations. Courses offered cover a wide range of interests appealing to a diverse client group

- support with learning job readiness skills (e.g. CV writing, computer literacy, interview/presentation skills, digital literacy, communication skills, teamwork skills, self-management skills, time management)
- supporting life skills and resilience (e.g. how to resolve conflict, how to regulate behaviour, how to deal with disappointment)
- facilitation of volunteer, work experience or job opportunities through links with local industry partners
- assistance with job search and entry into paid employment
- access to specialised support for disabilities (access to modified equipment, computers, transport, etc.)
- assistance with transport to access training and employment
- personal and specialist support to address psychosocial issues such as lack of confidence and difficult home environments
- follow-up support and industry specific mentoring to retain employment
- access to mentoring opportunities including culturally and regionally appropriate mentoring, life skills mentoring
- access to peer support networks to build positive influences and share skills and experiences

OP-SII providers are expected to identify opportunities to establish new or link to existing social enterprise, in locations where other employment opportunities may be limited.

8.6. Post-employment support service

Once a participant has secured employment, OP-SII providers are expected to continue to support participants to ensure they are able to retain employment for 6 months (or more if required). Post-employment support may include:

- working with employers to understand the work that the participant will be engaged in, to develop tailored coaching for the participant on work tasks
- working with employers to understand any issues that may arise or have arisen, such as workplace relations, to support the participant with tailored coaching, mentoring and practical skills
- working with employers to address any barriers arising for the participant or employer and negotiating with employers adjustments as needed
- working with employers to ensure on-site mentoring is available for the participant.

Note: If the role is found to be unsuitable for the participant or employer, the provider must work with the participant using a supportive approach to build on the strengths and experience and seek further training, education and/ or other work opportunities.

8.7. Housing independence support service

A key outcome of this program is to increase housing independence, where appropriate.

As part of the assessment process, the provider will ask all participants what their housing independence aspiration is, for example to positively exit social housing. There will be different approaches when working with Public Housing, Community Housing, Housing Register and Rent Choice clients due to their individual housing circumstances.

The provider is responsible for supporting the participant to achieve their stated housing independence outcome, which will be identified in the TEHP. The provider will partner with social housing providers to plan the participant's transition to housing independence.

Where the participant's aspiration is to enter the private rental market, the provider will liaise with relevant services such as DCJ Housing Rent Choice or CHP equivalent to support this. Rent Choice officers have strong links with real estate agents. Social housing clients may also be eligible for Rent Choice Transition, a medium term tapered subsidy to support positive exits from social housing to establish housing independence in the private rental market.

8.8. *Locations of service delivery*

The OP-SII will be delivered in the following locations from 1 July 2022 until 30 June 2025:

- **Hunter Central Coast:** Central Coast, Cessnock, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens
- **New England:** Armidale Regional, Glen Innes Severn, Gunnedah Shire, Gwydir Shire, Inverell Shire, Liverpool Plains Shire, Moree Plains, Narrabri Shire, Tamworth Regional, Tenterfield Shire, Uralla Shire, Walcha Shire
- **South Western Sydney:** Campbelltown, Canterbury- Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Macquarie Fields
- **Western NSW:** Bathurst Regional, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Dubbo Regional, Forbes, Narromine, Oberon, Orange City, Parkes, Wellington

OP-SII providers have key service outlets in the locations they will be delivering the program, but also offer outreach or pop up services, as needed, including co-location with key referring partners, such as DCJ.

The services must only be delivered within the district and locations identified in the HSA.

9. Brokerage

Brokerage refers to the flexible use of designated funds to purchase goods and services to enable participants to participate in and complete the program. The purpose of brokerage funding for OP-SII is to:

- deliver responses that are flexible and consistent with the identified needs of the participant
- assist participants to address any problems or barriers that prevent them from completing the OP-SII program.

OP-SII brokerage funds are only to be used if there are no alternative sources of financial assistance available to address the identified needs of the participant.

9.1. *Value for Money*

OP-SII brokerage funds should only be used to achieve effective client outcomes. OP-SII providers are required to ensure accountability, transparency and value for money in the expenditure of brokerage funds.

Care should be taken to ensure that brokerage funds that are paid for goods and services are paid at a fair market rate and not inflated. Consideration must also be given as to whether the intended expenditure is the best use of resources to meet the identified client outcomes.

9.2. Identifying participant needs in the TEHP

The TEHP will articulate the brokerage that may be required for the activities and log any brokerage requirements. The provider is required to support and advocate for the client to achieve the activities and goals within their TEHP. The plans must be reviewed regularly and following each review the provider(s) may identify and log any brokerage requirements as they arise.

OP-SII providers must include in the TEHP whether the client is accessing other brokerage funds, such as through other State or Commonwealth programs, to ensure that funds are targeted and used for their intended purpose and clients are not accessing more than one source of brokerage funds for the same purpose. This may include brokerage from the DCJ or programs funded by DCJ, such as Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Rent Choice. OP-SII providers will be responsible for liaising with the participants' Rent Choice officer or their Case Manager if the participant is accessing alternative sources of brokerage funding.

A TEHP Development Guide is attached at **Appendix B**.

9.3. Management of brokerage funds

If required, brokerage funding of up to $2,000 is available for each participant within the program funding, if participants are not already receiving brokerage funds from other DCJ funded programs. The provider is expected to examine whether alternate funding options are available (e.g. a Leaving Care Plan, Supported Independent Living package, Transition to Independent Living Allowance, No Interest Loans etc.)

Brokerage money will be held and used by the provider. Up-to-date records of all brokerage provided to each participant, including invoices/ receipts for all goods and services must be maintained and provided for acquittal to DCJ. DCJ may audit these records at any time. The provider will be asked to provide aggregated reports on brokerage expenditure.

Brokerage funds may only be used for brokerage purposes. Repurposing of brokerage funds for non-brokerage purposes is at the discretion of the DCJ central office OP-SII program manager. Applications for repurposing of brokerage funds are to be made in writing to OpportunityPathways@dcj.nsw.gov.au and cc District contract managers.

9.4. Brokerage funds – inclusions and exclusions

Brokerage funds **MAY** be used for the following purposes:

- transport costs to training or employment – fuel vouchers, Opal Card top ups, driver education
- childcare and/or caring costs – Family day care, centre-based care, respite care, vacation care, before and after school care, pre-school
- licences/photo ID/birth certificates
- educational related costs e.g. stationery, books
- general support costs e.g. reading glasses
- medical and dental expenses – which cannot practically be met through Medicare covered

services in a timely manner and which are essential to achieving educational or employment goals; essential optical and dental expenses; mental health expenses to assist the participant in preparing for employment or training which are not covered by Medicare or where there is a gap from the Medicare reimbursement

- employment related costs - interview/work ready clothing and shoes (if these cannot be sourced from services such as Dress for Success)
- emergency brokerage requests e.g. food, medical, crisis
- other – any brokerage requests outside these categories are to be assessed by the providers.

The final decision on expenditure of brokerage funds for participants is the responsibility of the provider, and providers need to document and justify their decisions and this may be subject to audit by DCJ.

Brokerage funds **MAY NOT** be used for the following purposes:

- cost of purchasing a car
- housing assistance e.g. advance rent, bond payments or rent or water arrears as these are available through existing DCJ products
- any debts incurred i.e. property damage, credit card debt
- any costs that can be met by other programs
- a subsidy to be paid to employers
- office/work station fit outs for our participants when commencing a new job.

Please note: These lists are not exhaustive.

Additional note: For OP-SII clients also accessing Rent Choice products the Rent Choice brokerage should be accessed first unless specific to employment or education costs to meet the identified participant outcomes.

9.5. Brokerage Expenditure Plan

A Brokerage Expenditure Plan **(Appendix C)** is expected to be completed by the provider(s) to examine whether alternate funding options are available.

If an OP-SII client requires brokerage, the provider will:

- maintain the Brokerage Expenditure Plan. The plan must detail the types of goods and services received and the costs of the required goods and services
- keep up-to-date records of all brokerage provided to each participant, including invoices/receipts for all goods and services and this information will be made available for audit by DCJ when requested
- include details on the process used to assure cost effectiveness, this may include sourcing two quotes for services, where appropriate.

9.6. Brokerage linked to OP-SII participants

OP-SII clients may be receiving brokerage from other DCJ funded programs. The Brokerage Expenditure Plan for each client should identify this. Brokerage from other DCJ programs that OP-SII clients may receive include but are not limited to the following:

a. **Rent Choice** recipients have access to up to $3,000* in brokerage to assist the client in establishing and maintaining their tenancy and/or to cover relevant work/study related costs.

   *Rent Choice Transition recipients can access up to $5,000 in brokerage funds.

   Information about Rent Choice brokerage in the *Private Rental Assistance Policy*.

   Rent Choice brokerage funding is managed by the Rent Choice officers. OP-SII providers are responsible for liaising with the Rent Choice officer to determine if the participant is accessing Rent Choice brokerage funding, what they have used brokerage funding for and if the brokerage has been exhausted.

b. **Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS)** clients have access to brokerage to assist them to obtain and maintain independent housing by addressing the issues that put them at risk of experiencing homelessness or prevents them from accessing housing. The amount of brokerage is determined by the program area on a case by case basis.

   Information about SHS brokerage is available in the *SHS Program Specifications*.

   The OP-SII provider will be responsible for liaising with the SHS Case Manager to determine if the participant is accessing SHS brokerage funding and for which of the brokerage expense categories.

c. **Other brokerage**: The OP-SII providers are responsible for determining if the participant is receiving brokerage funds from other sources, including Commonwealth programs. This information should be clearly included in the Brokerage Expenditure Plan.

10. Withdrawal and exit from the program

Participation in the program is voluntary and participants may withdraw or exit at any time. However, as part of active case management, providers will endeavour to re-engage a client who has disengaged from the program.

Providers will need to document all reasons regarding exits in the data collected. The circumstances under which participants exit the program may include:

- The participant advises the provider that they no longer wish to participate in the program. The provider is expected to detail the reason for the exit and through a continuous improvement approach, determine if there are deficits within the program that need to be addressed.
- Failure to maintain participation in the program, for example not participating in a course being delivered. The provider is expected to analyse if there were further barriers that could not be resolved using brokerage funds.
- The participant has achieved the employment or housing goals set out in the TEHP. The provider is expected to detail the achievement and continue supporting the participant if they have to re-engage due to a change in circumstance.

11. Links to other programs

DCJ and other NSW and Commonwealth Government departments implement a range of initiatives which relate to employment and other opportunities for tenants. It is important that OP-SII providers understand how the program intersects with other initiatives and what each of these initiatives offer for clients, in order to avoid duplication and to learn from successful programs.

Other initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Rent Choice
  - Rent Choice and OP-SII FAQs are available here
  - Please note: OP-SII providers are required to participate in Partnership Facilitation Group (PFG) meetings for Rent Choice Youth clients where there is site alignment
- The Premier's Youth Initiative
- Smart and Skilled
- ParentsNext
- Workforce Australia for individuals

12. Governance

12.1. *Program Management*

The program management function within the DCJ will be performed by the Strategy, Policy and Commissioning division, Housing, Homelessness and Disability directorate, Strategy and Design branch. This Directorate will report to the DCJ Housing, Homelessness and Disability Steering Committee, which is chaired at the Deputy Secretary level.

12.2. *Program-level Governance*

OP-SII will involve a dual program level governance mechanism, made up of two separate governance groups – an **Operations Group** and a **Joint Working Group**. These governance groups are detailed below and are in addition to local governance mechanisms.

Operations Group	
Membership	• DCJ Central program management team – Strategy and Design, HHD, SPC • District – Commissioning and Planning (contract manager) (one per district) • DCJ Housing Operations OR Community Housing Provider (one per district) • DCJ Central – Community Housing Branch • FACSIAR • Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes • OP-SII providers (one per provider)
Frequency	Potentially monthly July-September 2022 during transition and quarterly thereafter (one fortnight before JWG)

	Full schedule to be distributed separately.
Purpose	Governance and monitoring of OP-SII implementation and delivery and fulfilment of provider contracts
Standing items	• Review quarterly performance • Oversee implementation • Monitor providers' deliverables against program objectives • Discuss provider implementation issues and recommend solutions • Identify continuous improvement opportunities

Joint Working Group (JWG)	
Membership	• Commonwealth Government, Department of Social Services • NSW Treasury – Office of Social Impact Investment • DCJ Central program management team • Members of the Operations Group, as necessary/invited
Frequency	Quarterly - one fortnight after Operations Group Full schedule to be distributed separately.
Purpose	Governance, monitoring and fulfilment of Bilateral Schedule
Standing items	• Review quarterly performance • Monitor program deliverables against agreed objectives • Monitor data linkage • Discuss program management issues (that may be escalated by the Operations Group) and recommend solutions

The Terms of Reference for each governance group will be agreed at the respective first meetings.

12.3. Local Governance

OP-SII providers are expected to establish, chair and provide secretariat support for a local governance group for each location of operation and to determine its membership or access an existing advisory committee.

OP-SII local governance membership should comprise the following:

- Local DCJ/CHP/ACHP Housing staff
- Local DCJ Commissioning and Planning staff
- Local industry bodies
- Local employers
- Specialist homelessness services or other relevant support providers
- Aboriginal support provider/s
- A tenant representative

- An Aboriginal community representative and/or a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse community representative connected with the program

Providers should organise and chair the LDIC meetings, the distribution of agenda and minutes, along with relevant updates and progress reporting. A summary report on each local governance meeting is to be provided to the DCJ central office team via email (OpportunityPathways@dcj.nsw.gov.au).

The local governance groups is responsible for:

- considering implementation issues, referral pathways, service user feedback reports, client disengagement concerns and quarterly service data. Service user data provided to the local governance groups will be de-identified
- discussing and agreeing on actions to be taken to address issues such as low referrals or take up; or when clients disengage
- discussing requests for local adaptations for the service delivery within their district and recommend these and model improvements to the Operations Group for consideration and decision
- discussing unique brokerage requests and the actions to best meet the clients' needs.

Local governance group meetings are held quarterly unless otherwise agreed by members.

13. Roles and Responsibilities

OP-SII providers

- Deliver and monitor the services
- Undertake continuous improvement of the services in collaboration with DCJ and other partners
- Comply with contractual requirements on progress and financial reporting, including Brokerage Expenditure Plan
- Ensure all reporting and evidentiary requirements are provided within the agreed timelines.
- Undertake program promotions to recruit participants
- Facilitate local advisory committees and attend all other inter-agencies as required to ensure successful delivery of the program
- Build and maintain relationships with all stakeholders
- Submit reports including progress reports to DCJ using agreed formats.
- Manage relationships with referral delivery partners and ensure their services are delivered as required.
- Comply with DCJ directions, policies and guidelines regarding the use of the OP-SII module within the HOMES Partner Portal.

DCJ Central Office

- Manage the central coordination of the program.
- Collaborate with providers to ensure the program is meeting requirements.

- Collaborate with the providers to ensure the program is continuing to meet requirements and address issues arising.
- Comply with DCJ directions, policies and guidelines regarding the use of the OP-SII module within the HOMES Partner Portal.
- Manage the evaluation of the program in partnership with FACSIAR.

DCJ District Commissioning and Planning

- Contract manage providers to ensure activities are being delivered as intended and in line with the HSA.
- Comply with DCJ directions, policies and guidelines regarding the use of the OP-SII module within the HOMES Partner Portal. This includes verification of client eligibility and outcomes.
- Designated contact to liaise with OP-SII providers to provide support and ensure that the program is being delivered as planned.
- Ensure DCJ Housing staff and other providers are linked into the program and actively referring.
- Provide feedback on program development and implementation to DCJ Central Office as required.

Rent Choice officers

- Refer clients wanting support to access private rental, including Rent Choice to the local OP-SII provider.

DCJ Access and Demand and Tenancy Management

- Proactively refer tenants/applicants to the program.
- Intensive tenancy management, as required.

Local CHPs/ACHPs

- Proactively engage with the local OP-SII provider and refer tenants/applicants to the program

14. Data Collection, Reporting and Monitoring

OP-SII providers are required to comply with DCJ reporting and data collection requirements as specified in the HSA Schedule. Providers must have systems in place to allow them to meet their data collection and reporting obligations.

Performance information, including evidence of outcomes, is required to be collected by service providers at the client level and entered directly into the DCJ's performance reporting solution.

OP-SII will complete financial reporting requirements in accordance with DCJ's Annual Accountability process and details set out in the HSA Schedule.

14.1. HOMES Partner Portal

DCJ has created a data collection and reporting solution, OP-SII module within the HOMES Partner Portal, and will provide a user guide and training to provider(s). OP-SII provider(s) must collect and input individual client information directly into the solution.

In the case of any issues or questions relating to the OP-SII module in the HOMES Partner Portal provider (s) will contact their DCJ Commissioning and Planning officer who will escalate to DCJ Central office, if necessary.

OP-SII provider(s) responsibility relating to access of the OP-SII module in the HOMES Partner Portal:

- provide DCJ with a written request for your Personnel to access the OP-SII module, including the name, position and email address, of Personnel that require access to the HOMES Partner Portal. This will ensure that all users are set up with their own login details for audit purposes. DCJ may in its sole discretion grant or refuse access to the OP-SII module to your Personnel.
- notify DCJ immediately of any OP-SII program personnel resignations so their access to the HOMES Partner Portal can be immediately removed by DCJ.
- participate in a User audit every six months until the conclusion of the OP-SII program. DCJ will provide the current list of users and the provider(s) will have 5 Business Days to confirm the accuracy of the user list.

OP-SII provider(s) are responsible to ensure their Personnel:

- take all reasonable step to prevent unauthorised access
- do not access any information, including Personal Information, in the HOMES Partner Portal unless authorisation has been received from the client through a signed **OP-SII Referral form**.
- use the clients first name, last name and date of birth when searching for a client to create a Referral in the HOMES Partner Portal. This will ensure the privacy of other clients with the same name.
- access and use information, including Personal Information, in the HOMES Partner Portal for the sole purpose of operating the OP-SII program.
- take all reasonable steps to prevent the **unauthorised** modifications, access, use and disclosure of information, including Personal Information, held in the HOMES Partner Portal.
- use the OP-SII module in the HOMES Partner portal in accordance with the training provided by DCJ, the user guide disseminated, and any further notices or advice provided by DCJ.

Annual Review

At the end of each Financial Year, DCJ (in collaboration with the Joint Working Group) will complete a review the Services, delivery of Outcomes and operations of the HSA (Annual Review).

The Annual Review will include a review of:

- the performance of each OP-SII provider in achieving the Objectives set out in the HSA Schedule
- the performance of each OP-SII provider in delivering the Outcomes set out in the HSA Schedule
- the quantity of Outcomes
- the proportion of Outcomes with and without supporting documentary evidence
- actual program costs compared against the Budget, submitted as part of the Annual Accountability process
- insights from the data linkage process(es)
- such other matters that DCJ may require from time to time.

The purpose is to determine if performance is meeting the Outcomes, as specified in the HSA Schedule and whether any changes are required to improve performance.

15. Evaluation and Data Sharing

OP-SII providers are required to participate in an evaluation of this program through the provision of data and participation in other evaluation activities as set out in the evaluation plan. Providers must ensure that adequate client, case management, financial, operational records are kept and maintained.

Further details about Evaluation are included in the HSA Schedule.

15.1. Data sharing and privacy

OP-SII participants' data will be shared with a number of stakeholders for reporting, verification, evaluation, research and service improvement.

A **OP-SII Referral form** (**Appendix D**) must be signed by clients referred into the program and securely stored by the service provider(s). By signing this form, participants authorise DCJ and the OP-SII provider(s) to access personal information held by DCJ for the purpose of assessing eligibility. Provider(s) should not access client information in the OP-SII module in the HOMES Partner Portal unless the signed form has been received.

The **Participant Privacy Notice and Consent form** (**Appendix E**) must be signed by participants and a copy must be securely stored by the service provider(s) and provided to DCJ on request. By signing this form, participants authorise the collection, use and sharing of their personal information for reasons outlined in the form. An individual is not considered a participant in the program, and is therefore not eligible for services, until this form is signed.

Participants must be given a copy of privacy and consent form to keep.

16. Notified policies and standards

All OP-SII service providers are required to be familiar and comply with following policies and standards:

- DCJ Funded Contract and Management Framework
- NSW Interagency Guidelines
- NSW Government Redress Scheme Sanctions Policy
- NSW Modern Slavery Act 2018
- Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) and Regional Procurement Policy (for contracts > $3m)
- Aboriginal Procurement Policy (for contracts > $7.5m)
- COVID-19 management and vaccination policy for DCJ service providers

Communities and Justice

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W: https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/

NSW GOVERNMENT

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