

Responding to Aboriginal Homelessness: Summary of the Homelessness Action Plan evaluation findings

The Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) Evaluation Strategy captured evidence of the effectiveness of different service approaches used by HAP Projects. This evidence note is a summary of the evaluation findings on projects that provided services to Aboriginal people.

Key points

- HAP projects have achieved positive housing and quality of life outcomes for Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal people made up one third of clients receiving services through HAP projects included in the evaluation
- Earlier identification and referral of Aboriginal people who are at risk of eviction was identified as important to ensure tenancies are sustained
- Taking a whole of client/family/community perspective in case planning was found to be necessary to address the drivers of homelessness for Aboriginal people
- The successful approaches to preventing and responding to Aboriginal people who are homeless included:
 - the employment of Aboriginal staff, including caseworkers
 - establishing effective partnerships with Aboriginal organisations through regional coordination groups
 - intensive client-focused integrated case management
 - providing ongoing support to clients for at least 12 months
 - outreach-based service delivery strategies
 - partnerships with community housing providers
 - marketing strategies with private real estate agents
 - access to flexible, tailored, brokerage funding to help Aboriginal people access and sustain a tenancy.

Description of service approaches

Projects specifically targeting Aboriginal people included the Coastal Sydney Tenancy Support Service, which provided assertive outreach to rough sleepers and support for young people leaving care. Other projects that focused on Aboriginal clients included three that involved working with people leaving custody and the North Coast Accommodation Project which assisted

Aboriginal people to enter the private rental market.

Key features of many HAP projects, including those with a focus on assisting Aboriginal people, were access to flexible and practical brokerage funding which could be used to assist with relocation and housing establishment costs and help to meet debt through co-payment arrangements. In addition access to specialist health, training and community services were of great benefit to clients and assisted with long-term successful outcomes.

The issues

Aboriginal Australians make up a disproportionate number of the homeless population in NSW. The causes and solutions for Aboriginal homelessness can be different to those of non-Aboriginal Australians and require service delivery approaches that show respect for Aboriginal people's culture and values.

Severe over-crowding is the most common form of Aboriginal homelessness and is often a means of avoiding crisis accommodation and rough sleeping. Persistent over-crowding is often a trigger for problems that can lead to eviction.

Inter-related problems of poverty, domestic and family violence, incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental illness are other major risk factors that contribute to chronic homelessness for Aboriginal people.

Research has shown that there is a need for better integration of mainstream social housing with homelessness, crisis and emergency services to improve Aboriginal people's ability to access and sustain a tenancy. Services also need to be designed and implemented with input from Aboriginal people and organisations.

Support services need to develop responses to discrimination by landlords and neighbours especially in private rental. They also need to take account of cultural factors such as responsibilities to family members particularly at times of mourning which

can lead to an influx of people into a household causing stress from overcrowding and may result in unforeseen expenses such as funeral costs.

A lack of knowledge of the services available as well as feelings of shame have been identified as barriers to service access for Aboriginal people.

Findings

Service provision to Aboriginal clients was found to have been enhanced through the HAP projects, by delivering tenancy support, financial counselling, housing assistance, case management, advocacy and facilitating linkages to health and specialist support services.

The projects have shown that flexible service models with tailored approaches provide successful outcomes.

Success factors

Critical success factors included a strong focus on strengthening linkages between mainstream and Aboriginal services through coordination structures and employment initiatives to increase the numbers of Aboriginal staff across housing support services.

Coastal Sydney Aboriginal Tenancy Support Service (CSATSS) implemented a direct service delivery approach to the provision of case management, by building in-house capacity to deliver housing support to Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people. The service is based on a traineeship model, overseen by an Aboriginal service manager and team leader.

The North Coast Accommodation Project (NCAP) also employed Aboriginal staff who developed effective relationships with real estate agents that helped to sustain and facilitate access to private rental options for Aboriginal tenants.

Both NCAP and CSATSS used training packages to support the capacity of Aboriginal tenants to maintain their tenancy. NCAP accessed the 'Rent It Keep It' Aboriginal specific resource, while CSATSS developed a living skills training package and employed a worker to deliver the training in an outreach capacity in people's homes. The provision of financial advice and facilitating access to financial counselling also proved an effective service response.

Successful service provision also included access to flexible brokerage funding that was tailored to meet and address individual client needs, including rental arrears where this was appropriate, and built on the principle of co-payment.

Tenancy support services on the Mid and Far North

Coast and the rural interagency projects delivering housing and support services in the Riverina and New England areas, all developed effective multi-agency coordination structures with participation by Aboriginal services who referred clients and participated in the development of integrated case management plans.

Case plans often built upon the client's established relationship with the Aboriginal organisation and enabled access to brokerage funding that was immediate if needed. The involvement of Aboriginal organisations in the broader planning and prioritisation of brokerage funding allocation, service system planning and delivery meant that other services became better informed about the needs of the local Aboriginal community.

Mainstream services in some regions reported that it was the first time they had worked with Aboriginal services. In other areas, coordination groups cemented relationships between services and further developed knowledge of risk factors and culturally appropriate responses for Aboriginal people.

Challenges

Services identified the need to continue to develop referral networks to ensure early identification and prompt referral of Aboriginal clients at risk, prior to reaching crisis point. Services with a primarily early intervention focus reported that it was difficult to work effectively in this area when significant time and resources had to be directed to respond to clients in crisis.

Services providing intensive case management, housing and support services to Aboriginal people with complex health or addiction issues, identified that support needed to be for longer periods with the flexibility to decrease or increase this support depending on client need. This was also true for Aboriginal women escaping domestic and family violence.

Access to affordable and appropriate accommodation was also a problem in many areas. Strategies to address this included building stronger partnerships with community housing providers and private rental agents/landlords.

For further information on the HAP Evaluation Strategy see www.housing.nsw.gov.au