

Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc

Specialist Youth Homelessness Service System interface with HPIQ

A positioning paper

Author: Maria Leebeek



2009

Specialist youth homelessness service system and its interface with HPIQ

Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
Practice	4
Areas for improvements	5
Need to retain the 'no wrong door' policy	5
A common assessment and referral tool	5
OSHS Form 7 needs to focus on homeless people	6
A voluntary vacancy database	6
Special service area in Smart Services Queensland	7

CONFIDENTIAL

Introduction

The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition has been exploring the relationship of the specialist youth homelessness service system with Homeless Persons Information Queensland (HPIQ). In particular QYHC is interested in examining how this relationship, within a right based framework for young people, could be improved to ensure equitable and quality access to services.

This positioning paper is based on a forum conducted in late 2008, follow up discussions with services who participate in the SEQ Accommodation Coordinators Network and consultation with members of the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition.

Background

HPIQ was established in 2006 as part of the Queensland Government *Responding to Homelessness Strategy* as a state-wide information and referral centre that would take the form of a call centre. In the information papers that were publicly released by the Department of Communities it was noted that there were a range of benefits for a call centre in Queensland.

“Benefits of the call centre

This new service will enhance the support coordination for people who are homeless, or are at risk of becoming homeless. A central contact point will improve the consistency and timeliness of information and advice, as well as provide a coordinated response to meet the diverse and often multiple needs of homeless people.

People experiencing housing crises and those with complex needs, such as families, people with mental illness and those with drug or alcohol addictions, will be directed to the most appropriate accommodation or support service.

Callers will receive a brief initial assessment and, where required, will be referred to appropriate specialist services and safe and secure accommodation.

This will remove the need for people to ring multiple organisations and repeat their story many times to find a bed or support.

The service will also collect information about the needs of people who are homeless. This data will be used by the government, community agencies and the community to improve responses to homeless people and assist in the prevention of homelessness”.¹

In the initial scoping for HPIQ it was determined that HPIQ would develop as three phases:

“Phase 1 – Information Provision within the Greater Brisbane region

This phase provides callers with 24-hour information about accommodation issues (eg bond, rent arrears or legal advice), where to find accommodation, financial assistance advice, and where to get practical supports such as food, showers and laundry.

Phase 2 – Assisted Referral and Vacancy Database – pilot from late 2006

¹ Department of Communities HPIQ – Responding Homelessness factsheet

HPIQ will provide 'assisted referral' for clients. This means HPIQ will actively contact key service providers to arrange an appointment, interview, or placement for clients.

In Phase 2 HPIQ will also commence piloting a 'vacancy database', listing currently available accommodation with a limited number of providers. This will help reduce the 'ring around' (and the time, cost and frustration of seeking accommodation vacancies from numerous sources). This phase will commence with a pilot of a small number of providers, within the Greater Brisbane region.

Phase 3 – Expanding Statewide – from late 2006

In Phase 3, HPIQ will start expanding its information service to other geographic areas within Queensland:

- South-East Queensland
- North and Far-North Queensland, and
- Central and South-West Queensland

By mid 2007, subject to the outcome of the trial of Phase 2 (Assisted Referral and Vacancy Database) and consultation with service providers across the state, HPIQ will progressively incorporate additional services applicable to local areas.²

The location of HPIQ is in Smart Services Queensland and is part of a broader call centre. HPIQ provided the ability to access a range of services through QFinder which is the Queensland government directory for health and community services.

There were a range of information strategies associated with HPIQ including a website, wallet card/holder and poster (see picture to the right and below).

The service was initially supported by the Department of Communities particularly at the policy level; this enabled a strategic approach to HPIQ's introduction to the homeless service system.



Practice

HPIQ provides a free call number 1800 47 47 53 (1800 HPIQLD) (toll-free within Australia) for homeless people. The only cost for homeless people is for any calls made from a mobile phone and these are charged at the applicable rate depending on the phone provider.

The public information strategies have enabled the general community to be aware of HPIQ and the services that it can provide.

² Department of Communities information statement

Areas for improvements

Need to retain the 'no wrong door' policy

The concept of a 'no wrong door' policy, where young people can enter at any point into the homeless service system, is strongly supported by the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition.

It must be acknowledged though that the young person should have the choice about what 'door' they choose. We must also note that for many young people it is the relationship with the services that is a key to ongoing engagement.

In essence young people can therefore enter into the homeless services system either by approaching a service in their local community, if they are not aware of a service they may call HPIQ or they may approach the Department of Communities – Housing Area Offices.

The critical issue is to ensure that there is seamless services delivery regardless of where the young person enters, but we need to acknowledge that there are service constraints. We have tried to capture this concept as a set of smoothly turning cogs where each aspect of the service system is integrated into each other (see figure 1).

Finding: Maintain a 'no wrong door' policy.

A common assessment and referral tool

To improve the coordination with the specialist homeless service area work on a common assessment and referral tool needs to be developed. This would enable a smoother path in the referral processes between specialist homelessness youth services and also between services and HPIQ.

There is clearly some work that needs to be completed before this process can be implemented especially around client confidentiality and privacy. This work would be best undertaken by the NGO sector. However a basic data set of information collected as part of the referral process that streamlines the process is generally accepted as being an essential first step. Further this process would assist young people in the sense that they do not have to repeat their story at each system/service interface.

Developing a 'tool' that can be used across the government and non government sectors would also facilitate better data collection.

Finding: To support the development of a common assessment and referral tool to be developed by the NGO sector.

OSHS Form 7 needs to focus on homeless people

In responding to young people at risk of homelessness and who are homeless we also need to be acutely conscious of the focus of data at the input points. One area that needs improvement is the interface of the Department of Communities – Housing area offices with HPIQ and the specialist homeless service system.

Currently the Client Intake and Assessment Process (CIAP) for the Housing Area Offices is focussed on the assessment of potential tenants on the basis of their need. This form is currently incredibly long (18 pages) and requires a substantial evidence base to be collated by potential tenants to prove the nature of their circumstances.

If homeless people are approaching a Housing Area Office and it is clear from the start that they require a homeless service response, then a more productive working relationship with HPIQ and the specialist homeless service system needs to occur to ensure homeless people are serviced appropriately. By making amendments to Form 7 Housing Area Offices can refer more easily to the specialist homeless services or engage with HPIQ.

It must be recognised that HPIQ has the capacity to create more robust relationships with the specialist homeless service sector. Further, in seeking information from the homeless person this should be currently based on the HPIQ intake system. This can be refined in time as a Common Assessment and Referral tool is developed and will ensure a timely response to a person's accommodation need, in addition this will minimise the need for people to go through the full CIAP process when it is not appropriate.

In addition the assessment may need to be conducted by a worker in the specialist homeless service system who has more appropriate training and relevant skill set than that of a front office staff member at the Housing Area Office.

Findings: Amend the OSHS Application Form.

A voluntary vacancy database

Keeping track of vacancies has been an ongoing issue for many years. Much of the issue has been related to the need for a database system that can be applied throughout the homeless service system and how the database can capture the vacancies in a 'real time' manner.

The other issue that always manifests itself when the discussion of vacancy databases arises is the concept of vacancy management ie who determines who gets housed, where and when.

The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition would advocate for a vacancy database that is voluntary and focussed in the first instance on the crisis service system.

The current service system has a range of resource constraints. Attempting to manage vacancies, by government, in the specialist homeless service sector would raise the issue of whether government was willing to accept the liability of a placement into a service where the service was indicating that

they did not have the capacity to resource/support that person. Secondly any vacancy management debate needs to consider whether this would be compatible with a 'no wrong door' policy.

Some other States in Australia have attempted or are utilising a 'one door' policy however there have been some unintended negative consequences especially for young people who are chronically homeless and who present with challenging behaviours.

Findings: A voluntary vacancy database needs to be developed.

Findings: Any discussion on vacancy management systems must include the NGO sector in meaningful consultation.

Special service area in Smart Services Queensland

For HPIQ to be effective in providing a central point of contact for homeless people and a level of coordination in the homeless service system it needs to be able to actively engage with services. During Phase 1 there was a lot of engagement with the specialist homelessness service system as to how HPIQ could function and complement the existing service system.

In effect HPIQ acted as a catalyst for strategic discussion with and within the specialist homelessness service system about service entry points for homeless people. This momentum was lost when HPIQ was transferred from the Department of Communities to Smart Services Queensland. In effect the concept of HPIQ being more than a call centre was lost in the process. The full concept of HPIQ, articulated by its three phase development has not been fully explored. As a result it currently has some operational challenges with regard to how effectively it can respond to homeless young people and support the existing specialist homelessness service system.

Findings: There needs to be discussion about the strategic location of HPIQ with government and government services.

Figure 1: Homeless Young Person interface with Homeless and Housing Services

