

3.3 Client information

New tools are being developed to support SHS providers to share client information in line with legislative requirements and client approvals through client consent/referral forms. SHS providers are required to take reasonable steps to ensure clients understand why the information will be shared and with whom, and to seek their consent.

The tools will also outline clear parameters for disclosing client information beyond the scope of client consent. SHS providers will be expected to comply with these in circumstances such as unlawful activity or where it is suspected a young person or child is at risk of significant harm under Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons (*Care and Protection*) Act 1998.

3.4 Accurate and up-to-date service information

A comprehensive service directory and linked vacancy management system that provides real-time information about service options and capacity is being developed. SHS providers are required to maintain their service information and regularly update vacancy / capacity management information as relevant information changes or becomes available.

3.5 Client Information Management System

The streamlined access system will be supported by a new Client Information Management System (CIMS). The CIMS will capture the functionality of all client records including initial assessments, client consent as well as case management and referral arrangements. It will incorporate protocols and business rules to enable these processes to occur. The CIMS will also support reporting requirements as part of the national Specialist Homelessness Services Data Collection.

Implementation of the CIMS is likely to occur beyond July 2014.

4. Quality Assurance System

4.1 Overview

The Quality Assurance System provides a way for SHS in NSW to identify, achieve and demonstrate quality service provision. The system provides a basis for continuous quality improvement within the service, guiding a service provider through review against a set of quality requirements (standards, client charter and complaints handling) and identifying where improvements can be made.

The Quality Assurance System is also part of FACS processes for monitoring and ensuring the quality of the services it funds. It incorporates the requirements of the National Quality Framework for Homelessness Services (NQF) and is part of a nationally consistent approach to quality management in the SHS sector.

The contents of this section are subject to further change and consultation, in particular through the Sector Reference Group and Panel of Experts. This version provides organisations considering applying to the SHS prequalification scheme with information on the key components of the Quality Assurance System and associated requirements for providers. A more detailed version of the Quality Assurance System will be finalised and made public before any funding is awarded.

4.2 Quality components

There are three components within the Quality Assurance System:

Title	Description
The SHS Standards (Appendix A)	The NSW SHS Standards build on the national SHS Standards.
The SHS Client Charter (Appendix B)	The Client Charter is based on the National Homelessness Statement of Principles, which is one of the components of the NQF and part of providing a consistent approach to quality service provision across the Australian SHS sector.
The SHS Complaints Mechanism (Appendix C)	The Complaints Mechanism is a complaints management and monitoring system which incorporates the principles of the NQF.

4.3 Requirements

Progress against meeting the SHS Standards will be the main indicator of quality assurance for the SHS Program. SHS providers in NSW are required to demonstrate their progress in meeting the SHS Standards. Where a provider does not fully meet the Standards, it will be expected to demonstrate continuous quality improvement against the Standards over the course of the funding period. The long-term goal is for all providers to fully meet the SHS Standards. This is not a requirement for the next funding period, but where necessary providers are required to make progress towards fully meeting the standards during this period.

Providers must have a Client Charter available to clients that reflects the content of the SHS Client Charter. This requirement is incorporated into the SHS Standards under *Standard 1: Promoting, upholding and exercising rights*.

Providers must also have a complaints policy and procedure that is compliant with the SHS Complaints Mechanism. This requirement is incorporated into the SHS Standards under *Standard 1: Promoting, upholding and exercising rights*. SHS providers are required to report on the number and resolution of complaints through the Community Services contract management framework.

4.4 Assessment of compliance with quality standards

A provider's performance against the quality standards will be assessed either by the provider itself through a self-assessment, or by an external organisation, or a combination of both. External assessment is preferred, as best practice.

Where the SHS Standards are equivalent to another recognised quality framework, accreditation under these frameworks will be recognised as compliance with the relevant SHS Standards.

The long-term goal is for all SHS providers to be externally assessed and accredited against the SHS Standards. This is not a requirement for the next funding period, however it will ultimately become a requirement for all providers.

Appendix A: The SHS Quality Standards

Structure of the Standards

The eight SHS Standards fall into two groups: those dealing with service delivery; and those dealing with the governance and management of the organisation.

Service delivery (Standards 1 to 5)

The five service delivery Standards deal with the way in which services are provided to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and to support them to achieve safe, affordable and stable housing. These Standards describe the rights of clients, the principles that should underpin service delivery and how services should be delivered to achieve positive outcomes for clients.

Standard	Title	Description
1	Promoting, upholding and exercising rights	Clients receive services that promote and uphold their rights and safety and support them to effectively exercise those rights.
2	Service access and equity	Clients are provided with fair and transparent processes ensuring equity of access for all clients and identifying and removing barriers for clients who may experience disadvantage in accessing the service.
3	Decision making and participation	Clients are actively supported to make choices and decisions about their service and to actively participate as a valued member of their chosen community.
4	Service outcomes	Clients are assisted and supported to achieve positive outcomes by the development, delivery and review of quality programs and services that meet individual client needs.
5	Service system	Outcomes for individuals and communities are improved by the service provider working collaboratively with other service providers and agencies.

Governance and management (Standards 6 to 8)

The three governance and management Standards deal with the way in which the organisation supports the achievement of its service objectives. These Standards describe the leadership, direction and longer-term planning of the organisation and the systems and processes to carry out day to day activities.

Standard	Title	Description
1	Governance	The governing entity defines clear goals and purposes for the service provider, adapts to and manages change, develops strategies to achieve and monitor the service provider and is accountable for all its activities.
2	Systems management	There are effective management systems and strategies to ensure the service provider's goals are met.
3	Human resource management	The service provider develops and supports its workforce, both paid and voluntary, to ensure the effectiveness of its services.

Appendix B: The SHS Client Charter

Context

A client charter is an important way to give clients a clear, simple picture of their rights with regard to your service and to show them that the service has a commitment to respecting those rights and to providing them with a quality service.

It is a requirement that SHS providers have a client charter. The Homelessness Charter is one of the components of the National Quality Framework (NQF) for Homelessness Services and part of providing a consistent approach to quality service provision across the Australian SHS sector.

How to make use of the charter

Each SHS provider should adapt the Client Charter template (provided below) to its own client needs and adopt this formally within their services. In adapting the template, services should keep the existing content but may adapt wording to suit their client group and make any additions they consider appropriate.

The Client Charter should then be made available to all clients. How a service does this will depend on the particular circumstances and client group but may include:

- displaying the charter in key areas of the premises where clients will see it
- making the charter available in accessible formats or in other languages
- providing a copy of the charter to individual clients
- explaining the charter to clients as part of an intake process.

All staff and volunteers should be aware of the Client Charter and understand its purpose and use, which may include:

- ensuring it is included in the orientation for all new staff and volunteers
- reviewing and discussing the charter and its use in staff development and training
- reviewing clients' responses to and understanding of the charter as part of service review and planning processes.

The Client Charter template

Are you currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?

We will work with you to make sure you receive the best possible assistance to avoid becoming homeless or, if you are homeless, to access safe, affordable and secure housing.

We are committed to working with you in a respectful way that protects your dignity, is fair, and does not discriminate.

- You will be treated in a professional, courteous and caring manner, and receive the same quality and level of service based on your need, regardless of your gender, religious, cultural or linguistic background, sexual orientation, age, disability or family status.
- Your personal privacy will be respected and confidentiality protected, except where we have a legal obligation, and we will explain to you what this means when you use our service.
- You have the right to use our service if it matches your need and what we are funded to provide.
- We will work in partnership with you to identify your needs and develop a plan with you and other agencies to meet your needs.
- You have the right to put forward a complaint and we will respond in a confidential, respectful and timely way.
- We will inform you of your rights and responsibilities when you receive a service from us.
- You will be provided with opportunities to take an active role in the decision making processes of our service.
- We will provide you with a range of suitable referral and support options so you can make a decision on who you prefer to work with.
- We aim for you to feel safe and we will have systems in place to ensure protection from harm.
- You can expect our service to meet health and safety requirements.
- We will regularly ask for your opinions, and seek suggestions on the services we offer.
- If you have a child under 16 years, you have the right to have their needs considered and linked to suitable responses.

As a client of a Specialist Homelessness Service you have a responsibility to:

- Be respectful of others, including staff, volunteers and other clients
- Be respectful of the organisation's property
- Be an active participant in your service, including taking part in case planning and management sessions and fulfilling your commitments under your case plan
- Actively and positively contribute to resolving your own homelessness or risk of homelessness
- Participate in the service in a fit state (not under the influence of drugs or alcohol)
- Maintain confidentiality regarding information about other clients or participants in groups or programs
- Provide accurate information about yourself in order to receive the best service.

Appendix C: SHS Complaints Mechanism

Context

Under the SHS Quality Assurance System and Standards, it is a requirement that SHS providers implement a complaints management and monitoring system which incorporates the principles of the National Quality Framework for Homelessness Services.

All clients have the right to make a complaint about a service if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service. They have the option of making their complaint to the SHS provider (internal complaint) or to the NSW Ombudsman or other external body (external complaint).

SHS providers must have a system in place that enables clients and others to make complaints and for those complaints to be resolved, where possible, by the service. All complaints, whether the SHS provider believes them to be well informed or not, must be treated with respect and handled seriously. Where an external complaint has been made, the SHS provider has a responsibility to engage with the external body dealing with the complaint.

Information on the number and resolution of complaints should be recorded by SHS providers and reported to FACS (as the funding body) through the Community Services contract management framework.

Characteristics of an effective complaints mechanism

A complaint is any situation in which a client or someone acting on behalf of a client(s) tells an organisation that they are dissatisfied with the way in which the service has been delivered or the provider's general practices or policies.

Complaints may be made by clients about aspects of the service, or be made by other agencies or individuals acting on behalf of a client.

Complaints are best seen as just one part of a client feedback system with the focus being on actively gathering feedback on a continuous basis rather than passively waiting for complaints.

A well designed complaints handling system can also provide an important source of information for the provider, helping it to identify and deal with any issues that are impacting the quality of service delivery or that pose a risk to clients or the organisation.

A complaints handling mechanism should be based on the following principles:

- fair
- equitable
- objective and impartial
- confidential
- based on natural justice
- timely

and should:

- follow a due process
- create an environment of openness and trust
- demonstrate a balanced approach
- follow a clear policy/procedure that everyone knows about
- monitor and report on the progress and outcomes of complaints.

Effective implementation of a complaints handling system is dependent on:

- people understanding their right to make a complaint and how to go about it. Where necessary, assistance should be provided to clients to help them prepare or lodge a complaint. Information about the service's complaint system should be included in any client service statement and at intake
- staff understanding the procedures and being skilled in creating an environment that welcomes complaints and feedback. Effective complaints handling should be incorporated in learning and development opportunities for staff.

How to implement the complaints mechanism

The SHS provider must have a complaints policy and procedure that reflects the requirements of this section in addition to other external requirements, legislation or contractual obligations.

The policy should describe the provider's commitment to ensuring that anyone using its services has the right to lodge a complaint or to appeal a decision of the organisation and that their concerns will be dealt with in a manner that is fair, accountable and transparent.

Complaints policies must outline:

- how complaints may be lodged with the provider – this should specify the information that will be needed, and what form it needs to be in
- who will receive the complaint and what process will be used to register the complaint
- how the complaint will be investigated – the process must be fair and thorough and individuals should be protected during the process
- the time frame for each step of the process
- how the complainant will be notified of the outcome and whether they will have any right of appeal.

Complaints handling procedures must:

- allocate responsibilities for receiving and managing complaints
- have set time frames for dealing with and resolving complaints
- have a method for keeping a record of complaints, monitoring their progress and their resolutions
- provide guidelines to help staff resolve matters as informally as possible
- ensure that the client is kept informed of progress at each stage and informed of the outcome in writing.

A 'user friendly' version of the complaints policy should be made available as a pamphlet, poster or information sheet for clients.

Information recorded on the volume of complaints and their outcomes must be reported to Community Services through the contract management framework.

