



Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW

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Response to NSW Housing and Human Services Accord

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Accord. It is encouraging to see the Department of Housing seeking ways to work with other government and non-government organisations (NGO) to assist people to address their housing and other support needs.

While we appreciate the intent and direction of the work undertaken we would strongly urge the Department to consider the following:

1. Without a substantial increase in resources to provide more public housing and more support services, the Accord may only serve to expose the gaps and tensions in the current 'system' for assisting people to sustain viable tenancies, either in the public or private sphere. People from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) with disability and their families whom the Department of Housing (the Department) has accepted as eligible for priority housing are waiting in dire circumstances for more than a year to get it. Wheelchair accessibility and other modifications to accommodate disability needs and equipment take forever to finalise. The size and type of accommodation available presents difficulties for large families.

2. In our experience of advocating for people from NESB with disability and their families it is extremely difficult to get the various government agencies to accept their responsibilities to provide services. This is particularly obvious where a person has multiple disabilities or does not fit neatly into eligibility criteria, some of which appear designed to deny people services rather than provide them. We understand that the reasons for this are mostly not enough facilities: supported accommodation places, or places in group homes, or beds in hospitals, or team members in the community, or funded non-government, community based services or capacity building programs, etc.

If the Accord does not address the lack of facilities, resources and changing needs of people who are eligible for public housing, it is unlikely to make much difference to people from NESB with disability. We do not see how the Accord can be implemented successfully without additional funds.

The following responses to the key consultation questions are set out in point form and summarise our concerns. I am happy to expand on these points and provide further details if you wish.

1. What are the key principles that enable good practice partnerships to provide support services to clients? Does the Accord align with these principles?

We endorse the principles set out in clause 4 of the Accord. We also believe the following additional principles are required to enable good practice partnerships:

- Equal contribution and cooperation by participating agencies.
- Shared values, e.g.
 - client service focus – staff recruitment, training and operations should reflect the diverse population the agencies are funded to serve, and agencies should be culturally competent, able to respond to anyone eligible for their services regardless of the person’s cultural background. The question should be: how will this benefit the client, not how will it affect the Department or other agency concerned.
- Equitable access to services for all people with disability, including people from NESB with disability.
- The community education strategy about the Accord should include strategies for informing NESB communities.
- Clear communication between partners, with clients and stakeholders.
- Adequate resources across regions.
- Monitoring and evaluation to improve the system.
- Clear appeal and complaints procedures where services are refused, changed or withdrawn.
- Transparent consultation with the supported accommodation and community sectors and with other non-government organisations.
- NGOs have the right not to participate in the Accord, without any negative implications.

2. Do the features of the Housing and Human Services Accord sufficiently support the objective of greater collaboration to assist clients with complex housing needs to live independently? If not, why not? How then could greater collaboration be achieved?

- It is not clear how the Accord fits with NGOs’ obligations to their funding bodies, in the kinds of services they are funded to provide and the regular reports they are required to make.
- It is not clear how ongoing collaboration with the NGO sector regarding other Department of Housing policies will fit with the Accord, e.g. the Department’s undertakings to consult on anti-social behaviour provisions.
- Will there be an ongoing consultation/ monitoring mechanism with NGOs to provide feedback about the Accord and how well it is working?
- With no extra financial resources allocated to support the Accord, potential partners will be restricted in what they can offer or whether they can participate in the Accord at all.
- If the Accord is based on regional partnerships/ schedules, provisions will have to be made for tenants who receive support from one or more Accord partners

and who want to transfer to another region. The Accord should facilitate the tenant receiving the same kinds of support services in either region.

- The Department must establish clear lines of responsibility, e.g. who is the lead agency responsible for case management; what activities the Department is responsible for; what happens when someone falls through the gaps in service provision – who is responsible for picking up the pieces.
- The Department also needs to establish a clear complaints policy and procedures for resolving any difficulties tenants experience as a result of partnership arrangements.
- The Department needs to respect the expertise of the NGO sector and listen to feedback provided.

3. What opportunities does the Accord provide to non-government providers of housing and support that will better support clients with complex housing needs? How can we best maximise these opportunities?

- Joint assessment procedures would result in more streamlined service delivery for clients. But it is not clear who will do the assessment/s required for long or short term leases, what criteria will be used to assess whether a person has short or long term public housing needs, and how partner agencies will work together on these needs assessments.
- A central directory of services (e.g via HSnet) should save time.
- NGOs should have greater access to data – this will allow more opportunities for research and evaluation of what works and what doesn't.
- The Department should consider how current assessment procedures for support services and priority housing could be amended to enable joint, culturally competent assessments.
- The Accord should encourage cultural change within participating agencies including the Department.

4. What constraints may affect or prevent participation in the Accord by non-government organisations? How might they affect participation?

- Lack of additional resources for agencies to join the Accord.
- Onerous reporting requirements additional to NGOs' obligations to report to different funding bodies.
- Lack of flexibility for potential clients in choosing the support services required.
- Geographical eligibility constraints.
- Governments' apparent preference for dealing with large NGOs could lead the Department to ignore what smaller NGOs have to offer.

5. How should the non-government sector be involved in the development of schedules to the Accord? What needs to be in place to encourage maximum input into relevant schedule development?

- Regional consultation with potential partners, i.e. local, community based agencies in each region.

- The Department needs a consultation strategy to engage NESB communities, clients and potential partners.
- Ongoing consultation strategy and mechanisms in developing the schedules – not just a series of one-off meetings.
- Adequate time for community based organisations to consult members, management committees, clients.

6. How can Shared Access benefit clients of non-government agencies? What needs to be in place to enable this to happen?

- Shared, transparent assessment procedures would obviate the need for multiple assessments – this would save time for clients, partner agencies and the Department.
- Streamlined referral procedures would benefit clients who already receive support services.
- The Department needs to take into account the implications of programs and services run by other State and Commonwealth departments and how they interact with the Accord. Clients should not have to jump through any more hoops as a result of the Accord.
- Our concerns about shared access are that:
 - it may exclude clients in need of housing who approach the Department without having the support of any partner agencies – because they don't know about the services these partners provide, or because they are not eligible for support services for bureaucratic reasons, or because services are not sensitive to their cultural needs. We do not want the Accord to be yet another reason for refusing service to potential clients of the Department. Many people from NESB with disability have no idea of the support services available in NSW – we do not want the Accord to become an extra barrier to such people receiving housing.
 - it will infringe a person's privacy
 - it will not be sensitive to a person's needs, including cultural needs.

7. How can the non-government sector best participate in the development of a performance monitoring and evaluation schedule to the Accord? What elements should this schedule include?

- Ongoing consultation/ feedback procedures – at regional and head office level.
- Standardised procedures across regions where possible.
- Clear complaints procedures – how and where to complain when something goes wrong.
- Clear tenant transfer procedures – from one Department of Housing region to another – will the client still receive the support services they need in the new region?
- Protocols for using and paying for (and budgeting for) interpreters when necessary. Who pays in what circumstances – the Department? Partners?

8. What other comments would you like to make about the NSW Housing and Human Services Accord?

- Trying to implement the Accord without providing any additional resources is unrealistic.
- What is the government's strategy for long term housing for people with low incomes?
- How does the Accord link with other social housing developments?
 - Redfern/ Waterloo redevelopment
 - Community housing
 - Port Jackson housing company
 - Impact of the public housing reforms over the past 3 years on large estates (30% of public housing)
- It would be great to see the Department providing resources for community development, especially in large public housing estates. This could involve leadership training, create employment opportunities, and create spaces where NGOs could do some community development and community education, e.g. for existing tenants to become more accepting of new tenants with disability, including people from a NESB.
- How will the Accord link with local government services?
- How will the Accord link with other NSW and Commonwealth programs/ requirements?
 - Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
 - Housing & Accommodation Support Initiative
 - Joint Guarantee of Service for People with Mental Health Problems
 - Department of Ageing, Disability & Home Care accommodation
 - Welfare to work program
 - Nursing homes
 - Transport

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