

# NSW Housing and Human Services Accord (the Accord)

Between the Department of Housing and NSW Human Service Agencies



New South Wales Government  
Initiative



NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

# **NSW Housing and Human Services Accord (the Accord)**

**between the Department of Housing and NSW Human Service Agencies**

- to assist social housing clients with support needs,**
- to assist clients of human services agencies with housing needs, and**
- to reduce social disadvantage in larger public housing estates**

## **I. Background**

The Department of Housing funds or manages over 140,000 social housing<sup>1</sup> dwellings in NSW. Housing assistance is provided to households most in need, such as those that include people with disabilities, the aged or the homeless. Concurrently a growing proportion of clients of human services agencies are also applicants eligible for housing assistance, or are already living in social housing.

Assisting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged households to live independently and maintain their tenancies involves clients having access to the support services they need. The joint commitment from all human services agencies to work together in serving mutual clients living in social housing is a key requirement for NSW. For this Accord, references to human services explicitly include the Department of Corrective Services, Community Offender Services.

The Reshaping Public Housing reforms, announced by the Premier and the Minister for Housing in April 2005, have created new opportunities across human services for those most in need to be assisted more effectively.

Eligibility for public housing is based on both the income and housing need of a household. Housing need can arise from households living in circumstances seriously harmful to their health and wellbeing, or where individuals are at risk of homeless, or are having problems accessing affordable, suitable housing in the private market. People can also have high housing needs if they are not provided with the support necessary to live independently in the community. These situations can be compounded by the complexity and multiplicity of a person's support needs and their inability to secure stable, private rental housing.

From 1 July 2006, new public housing tenants will be offered a fixed term lease (of two, five or ten year periods). The length of the tenancy offered will depend on the extent and projected duration of the applicant's need for assistance. Towards the end of the lease the tenant's circumstances will be reassessed to determine whether they remain eligible for a further tenancy.

Key elements of these reforms may be extended to community and Aboriginal housing.

The housing reforms will enable greater collaboration between all human service agencies to assist mutual clients. This includes working together on needs assessments,

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<sup>1</sup> Social housing providers covered by the Accord include the Department of Housing, directly managing properties through Public Housing services (involving Public Housing stock as well as those properties owned by the Aboriginal Housing Office) and individual non-government organisations registered with NSW Aboriginal Housing Office or the Office of Community Housing (as NGO partners participating in the Accord arrangements).

decision-making about the allocation of clients to social housing stock, supporting these clients over the period of their leases, and reviewing their needs at the end of their leases.

A review of the housing and support services already provided to tenants has identified a number of existing supported housing partnerships in NSW. These include the *Joint Guarantee of Service for People with Mental Health Problems and Disorders* and the *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative*, both of which are partnerships between the Departments of Health and Housing. Other partnerships include the coordination of services for homeless people through the Partnership Against Homelessness and whole of government initiatives for tenants living in disadvantaged housing estates.

The NSW Government is committed to consolidating existing housing and support arrangements and providing an enabling framework for new initiatives through this Accord. The Accord aims to more clearly define the different roles of human service agencies in providing supported social housing and assisting low income people with support needs to sustain their tenancies. The Accord seeks to encompass existing arrangements and to facilitate new partnerships, service guarantees and integrated delivery models for priority client groups.

The Accord also promotes cross agency agreements that improve services for tenants of large social housing estates. This will focus on more effective use of existing programs and resources.

With over a third of social housing households concentrated in estates, cross agency effort is required to assist in reducing the compounded disadvantage experienced by people living in these environments.

The Accord will provide the overarching framework for a range of key initiatives such as cross agency agreements in relation to community regeneration, a new shared access system to assist households with complex needs more effectively, and new service models for different client groups.

## II. Structure

The Accord comprises:

- the document's **purpose** and the **target groups** to be assisted
- the **roles** of the signatory agencies and the **principles** that underpin the signatory agencies' approach to social housing and the provision of support services to current and future social housing clients, as well as to the development of cross-agency support services and the reduction of social disadvantage in the larger public housing estates
- the **governance** arrangements for the Accord, and a statement of the **commitments** of all signatory agencies about how they will work together to achieve the aims of the Accord

- the list of **signatory agencies**
- a set of detailed **schedules** which describe the existing and emerging agreements governed by this Accord. The Accord provides an overarching framework within which schedules will be progressively developed and updated as new partnerships and agreements are developed. New agreements will be signed-off by either the Human Services CEOs Group (and the CEO of the Department of Corrective Services, as appropriate) or the Senior Officers' Group of the signatory agencies.

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this Accord is to improve the planning, coordination and delivery of services to assist social housing tenants to sustain their tenancies, as well as to facilitate community building and to reduce social disadvantage in the larger public housing estates. The Accord supports the development of services that:

- assist low income people with the highest need to successfully establish and sustain a social housing tenancy
- increase social housing tenants' capacity, where feasible, to move from social housing to other forms of housing they can afford
- address systemic barriers associated with the level of social and economic disadvantage in large public housing estates which reinforce tenants' dependence on public housing
- provide continuity in housing and support services for the duration of a client's tenancy, where the agencies involved agree that these services are essential for sustaining the tenancy, unless a joint service review subsequently determines otherwise
- investigate new cross agency products, services and agreements to maximise benefits for mutual clients from within existing expenditure.

## 2. Target group

- 2.1 The NSW Government has agreed that public housing should assist people with the greatest need.
- 2.2 Social housing in NSW will concentrate on assisting low-income people who need supported housing and vulnerable households with housing affordability problems. It will provide affordable rental housing for the following low income groups: homeless people, the frail elderly, people with a disability, young people under 20 years without family supports, families with children, aged pensioners and unemployed or very low waged adult households.

## 3. Roles

- 3.1 For the purposes of this Accord, the signatory agencies will come together to perform the following roles for mutual clients in social housing:
- optimise the planning, coordination and delivery of services to assist mutual clients to establish or sustain social housing tenancies

- optimise the assistance eligible clients receive from other agencies in relation to support needs through the provision of social housing
- work to integrate housing and support services for those clients who require them to be closely coordinated to maintain their tenancy and
- reduce social disadvantage in the larger public housing estates.

**3.2** The Department of Housing provides housing assistance to the target group who are eligible for support.

**3.3** The Department funds or provides tenancy management for people living in social housing. It also focuses on reducing social disadvantage on the larger public housing estates and leads or participates in community building.

**3.4** Under this Accord it is the role of the Department of Housing to investigate new cross agency products, services and agreements to meet the above goals. The Department also reconfigures its assets and utilises its resources to meet the needs of clients more effectively, particularly on public housing estates.

**3.5** It is the role of each signatory agency to provide their core business services and responses to those within the target group, **mutually agreed** by the agency and the Department of Housing, who are eligible and approved for assistance. For example, NSW Health, the Department of Housing and participating non-government organisations (NGOs) providers jointly assist low-income mental health clients with enduring mental health problems through the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI). The Department of Housing provides suitable dwellings and tenancy and property management, disability support is provided by NGOs and clinical support is provided by Area Mental Health Services.

**3.6** It is the role of the signatory agencies to continue to provide their core business services and responses to eligible clients who leave social housing, if they continue to need and are eligible for these services.

**3.7** It is the role of all signatory agencies to investigate new cross agency products, services and agreements to maximise the benefits for mutual clients from existing and new expenditure. Signatory agencies also have a role in working collaboratively on funding matters with other relevant funding bodies such as the Commonwealth or local government.

## **4 Principles**

The following principles underpin the signatory agencies' approach to providing support services for current and future social housing clients, as well as the development of cross-agency support services and the reduction of social disadvantage in the larger public housing estates:

**4.1** Secure affordable housing assists clients of human service agencies by providing stability and the opportunity to build support networks. Stable housing and strong communities help maximise the outcomes for clients that receive services from other government agencies.

- 4.2 The ability of people to live independently and improve their life opportunities is supported by provision of stable affordable housing linked to health, justice and community support services.
- 4.3 Support services addressing the needs of vulnerable households play a critical role in assisting clients of social housing. They assist clients to sustain their tenancies and they help maximise the benefit of other housing assistance provided to clients.
- 4.4 Collaboration between service agencies is essential for effective provision of services and support where the client has a range of needs involving activity by more than one service.
- 4.5 Joined up responses from relevant agencies are required to address the extent and interconnected nature of disadvantage and client needs in larger social estates.
- 4.6 NGO services are respected as critical partners with government in supporting clients in social housing.
- 4.7 Long-term improvements to neighbourhoods and the quality of life for residents are maximised by using partnerships and neighbourhood management strategies to build on the strengths and resources within the community.
- 4.8 The confidentiality and privacy of clients will be respected in accordance with applicable laws and the policies of all signatory agencies.
- 4.9 All people with a need for social housing should receive services that are sensitive to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and which recognise the importance of preserving significant networks and/or relationships.
- 4.10 Commitment to shared values, client focus and respect for client rights is essential.
- 4.11 Fair and transparent decision making processes are required in the operation of the Accord.
- 4.12 The changing demographics of people with support needs in NSW will require the periodic review of responses, products and services.

The Schedules and any related documents of this Accord shall be consistent with the above principles.

## 5 Governance

- 5.1 The NSW Department of Housing is responsible for the social housing system and is jointly responsible with community housing providers for fulfilling their obligations to social housing clients.
- 5.2 Other signatory agencies have separate responsibilities for social housing clients that fall within the groups of people to which those agencies have legislative obligations and corporate priorities. In some cases, these clients may already receive ongoing funded support. In other cases, these clients may receive occasional support or they may form part of a broad agency target group, which means they may receive support services at some future time based on need and eligibility.
- 5.3 Signatory agencies' non-government partners have a pivotal role to play in providing support to clients receiving housing assistance. Individual signatory agencies will be responsible for enabling their NGO partners to support this Accord through their contracted services. This may include formal arrangements between signatory agencies and their relevant NGO partners. The formal arrangements should clarify responsibilities for assisting mutual clients and align the NGO's funded activities to support the Accord and its schedules.
- 5.4 Peak NGOs will be consulted on the development of statewide Schedules where their services will be affected and participating NGO agencies will be signatories to relevant local level agreements under the Accord.
- 5.5 Individual signatory agencies are responsible for managing their responsibilities under the Accord by coordinating activity across their agencies, including across the decentralised business units within their administrative structures (for example, Area and Regional divisions). Depending on the local context, the involvement of individual NGOs with a particular agency may also be formalised through local agreements.
- 5.6 Under this Accord, there is no intention to shift responsibilities and duties of care between signatory agencies. Rather the focus is on shared responsibility so that all agencies better meet the needs of mutual clients in vulnerable low-income households. The Department of Housing will contribute its tenancy management resources and allocation of its properties while other signatory agencies contribute their specialist resources in working with clients with support needs.
- 5.7 The Department of Housing is responsible for coordinating accountability and governance arrangements under the Accord. Responsibilities for monitoring performance under Accord will be shared by the signatory agencies using key performance indicators agreed by the signatory agencies in relevant Schedules. The Department of Housing in collaboration with the other signatory agencies, and through the Senior Officers' Group of the signatory agencies where one exists, will review the Accord after an initial 12 months of operation and then on a three yearly cycle. NGO groups will be consulted during this review. The Human Services CEOs Group will have responsibility for considering the outcomes of the reviews of this Accord.

## 6 Commitments

This Accord commits:

- 6.1 All signatory agencies to work cooperatively to plan, coordinate and deliver services to assist clients with support needs to sustain social housing tenancies.
- 6.2 All signatory agencies to work cooperatively to target approaches more effectively, within their sphere of influence, to address the level of social disadvantage in larger public housing estates, particularly in relation to:
- more effectively supporting social housing residents in need and driving capacity building in primary locations. This could include promoting access to health and disability services, improved targeting of intensive preventative approaches in primary locations, and linking support services with broader community building strategies.
  - more effectively tackling the social determinants of health and well-being.
  - improving community safety, tackling the causes of anti-social behaviour, limiting opportunities for crime and engaging the local community in crime prevention.
  - where feasible, increasing the recreational use of physical space in rundown neighbourhoods, improving sport and recreational facilities and more effectively fostering involvement of residents in recreation.
  - improving resident participation and achievement in education and training and more effectively linking education and training to local employment and enterprise development.
  - ensuring consultation with the NGO sector in relation to the above actions.
- 6.3 All signatory agencies to maintain regular formal contact and communication for the purposes of:
- planning inter-agency aspects of statewide service systems for managing public housing enquiries; applications; eligibility assessments; placement on a housing register; offers and allocations; and tenancy management and reviews
  - coordinating implementation of statewide service systems at the regional, local and individual client level
  - raising, escalating and resolving issues related to systemic barriers or gaps identified during the implementation of these service systems
  - monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of housing related support services.
- 6.4 The Department of Housing and other signatory agencies (where appropriate) to give social housing clients ongoing input, through defined consultation mechanisms, into the development of housing related support service systems.
- 6.5 All signatory agencies to work together within the limits of their core activities, priority target groups and existing resources to:
- support clients with the greatest need for public housing to help them successfully establish and maintain a public housing tenancy

- provide ongoing assistance to clients living in social housing to support them in sustaining their tenancies
- work with clients living in public housing to increase their capacity, where feasible, to move from public housing to other forms of affordable housing
- address systemic barriers associated with the level of social disadvantage in larger public housing estates.

Specific commitments of resources made by signatory agencies will be articulated in the Schedules, this includes any additional expenditure. Nothing in this Accord, however, commits agencies to additional expenditure.

- 6.6 Signatory agencies commit to establishing arrangements that provide continuity of housing and support services for the duration of a client's tenancy or until a joint service review, for services that are jointly identified by the service providers as essential for sustaining that client's tenancy.
- 6.7 Where service arrangements need to change or be withdrawn, support service reviews will inform the client and their social housing provider that this will occur. Similarly social housing providers will not seek to terminate housing assistance without providing notice to the client and their key support contact.
- 6.8 The Department of Housing will commit resources from those available for a range of forms of housing assistance including responsive tenancy management, community regeneration, and financial assistance to take up accommodation in the private rental market.
- 6.9 The Department of Housing will provide social housing that is:
- safe, secure, affordable and appropriate
  - respectful of an individual's right to quiet enjoyment.
- 6.10 The Department of Housing, in consultation with the other signatory agencies, will establish clear accountability and performance requirements for the monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of the Accord and its schedules.
- 6.11 The signatory agencies will work to establish practices that encourage the exchange of relevant information and data to improve coordinated service delivery, subject to the application of appropriate privacy protections for clients.

## **7 Signatories**

- 7.1 The Accord shall continue indefinitely. It may only be terminated, in writing, by mutual agreement of each of the signatory agencies.
- 7.2 Any agency to the Accord, however, may withdraw from the Accord by giving three months written notice to all other signatory agencies.
- 7.3 The Accord shall be reviewed after one year from the date of its commencement. Thereafter, it shall be reviewed every three years. The review itself shall not terminate the Accord and the Accord shall continue throughout any review or review period.

7.4 Unless the Accord is terminated in accordance with paragraph 7.1, it shall continue unless superseded by the development and commencement of a replacement agreement at any time.

## **8 Schedules**

8.1 The Accord provides an overarching framework within which Schedules will be progressively developed and updated as new partnerships and agreements are developed. New agreements will be signed-off by either the Human Service CEOs (and the CEO of the Department of Corrective Services, as appropriate) or the Senior Officers' Group of the signatory agencies.

8.2 All schedules must be consistent with the principles and commitments in this Accord. When signatory agencies are negotiating arrangements that will form a schedule to this Accord with other parties that are not a signatory to the Accord (such as Commonwealth agencies, other state agencies or local government) the signatory agencies are responsible for adhering to the Accord's principles and commitments.

8.3 All schedules must specify the following:

- governance mechanisms
- designated service boundaries used by the participating agencies
- details of the roles of NGO partners in service delivery
- resources to be contributed by each agency (cash, staff or in-kind)
- how dispute resolution will occur at the local, regional and central levels
- central and regional agency contacts, and
- evaluation mechanisms.

8.4 The schedules will not be varied to include additional commitments, or to exclude current commitments, whether implicitly and explicitly, without obtaining CEO sign-off from all agencies that are party to that schedule. Any agency party to a schedule of the Accord may withdraw from or vary that schedule by mutual agreement and/or by written notice to the Department of Housing.

8.5 Schedules currently include:

- *The Joint Guarantee of Service for People with Mental Health Problems and Disorders.*

8.6 This Accord will be made available on the websites of all signatory agencies, with the Department of Housing including all further schedules as they are approved. Relevant schedules must also appear on the website of each participating signatory agency.

**List of Signatory Agencies:**

- Aboriginal Housing Office
- Attorney General's Department
- Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care
- Department of Community Services
- Department of Corrective Services
- Department of Education and Training
- Department of Housing
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- NSW Health
- NSW Police

APPENDIX 1 - Schedules under development (not currently part of the Accord)

- The Shared Access System
- Community Regeneration Cross Agency Agreement
- Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative
- Performance and accountability framework for monitoring the Accord
- Memorandum of Understanding Compulsory Drug Treatment Correctional Centre
- Primary regional signatory agency contact officers and their contact details

