

A National Quality Framework to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness



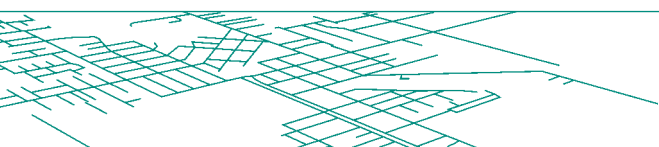
Options Paper

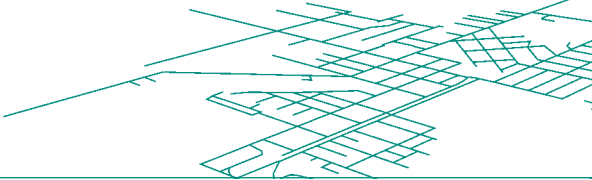


Photo disclaimer: photos use professional actors depicting homelessness.

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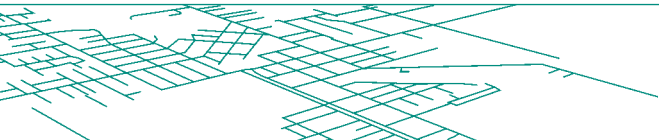
Overview of Paper

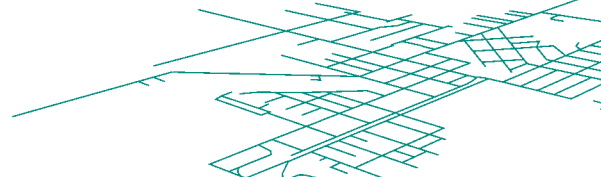
This paper has been prepared by the Homelessness Working Group of the Housing Ministers' Conference and is based on feedback received during the first stage of national consultations undertaken in February, March and April 2010.

The paper comprises four main sections.

1. The **Introduction** sets out the purpose of the paper and of the consultations in general – to develop a homelessness National Quality Framework (NQF). It describes the policy context within which the NQF is being developed, explains why it is being developed, identifies its scope and sets out the principles that will underpin its development and implementation. It provides a brief background, explaining how we have got to this point with its development and sketches the range of service providers to which it will apply.
2. **Building a National Quality Framework** sets out the quality activities already taking place and which will form the foundations for the NQF. It describes the three core building blocks of a NQF that will be constructed upon those foundations – a national homelessness charter, a nationally consistent approach to client complaint handling and national quality standards. It also lists four key processes for ensuring quality through assessment against standards. None, one, some or all of these assessment processes may be included in the NQF.
3. **Options for the National Quality Framework** sets out four potential models for a NQF, their implementation timelines, cost implications and some of their strengths and weaknesses.
4. **Implementation Issues** sets out how accreditation or assessment processes might work (if such processes are to be part of a NQF), examines how a NQF could recognise other quality systems and considers the kinds of support, including workforce development, which the sector may require to participate in a NQF.

The Options Paper also includes information on the consultation process and two Appendices; one is a glossary of terminology and the other is a matrix showing the current situation in each state and territory.





Section One: Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to outline possible options for the homelessness National Quality Framework (NQF), the transition issues associated with those options and the sector support that may be required to implement them. These options have been developed from feedback received during first stage national consultations undertaken in February, March and April this year.

This paper forms the basis of the second stage NQF consultations. We are seeking input from people experiencing homelessness, the organisations that deliver services to them and other interested parties on the ideas it puts forward. We need your input to develop and effectively implement a NQF that will improve the quality and integration of services delivered to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Why do we need a homelessness National Quality Framework?

The concept of a NQF is not new. Other sectors have quite mature systems that have been established for some time. A NQF will provide a level of consistency of minimum quality across Australia.

An important goal of many quality systems in mainstream and allied service sectors is to protect vulnerable client groups, for example aged care residents and children in child care are protected by quality systems. People experiencing homelessness are amongst the most vulnerable people in our society and deserve the highest quality of service delivery to achieve the best possible outcomes.

“When you’re homeless you’re so scared, when you get a place you’re so grateful, but then they give you the list of rules, you’re so scared you forget all your human rights.” (Client)

The objectives of the NQF are outlined below:

- » to empower clients using a strengths based approach;
- » to provide assurance for clients, funding bodies and the community about the consistency and quality of services;
- » to support service integration and collaboration; and
- » that mainstream services recognise and respond to the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Background

All governments are committed to improving outcomes for people who are homeless and reducing the number of homeless people. In February 2010, the Housing Ministers' Conference (which consists of Housing Ministers from all jurisdictions) released a discussion paper, *A national quality framework to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness*. They also agreed to a two-stage consultation process.

That discussion paper set out the vision of the NQF as follows:

“To maximise the outcomes and life opportunities for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness through a National Quality Framework that delivers ongoing improvement and better integration of services delivered by specialist homelessness and allied and mainstream organisations.”

Stage one consultations sought to obtain the views of people experiencing homelessness and the organisations that deliver services to them. Consultations focused on what quality service provision is, the mechanisms to support that quality and how to involve mainstream and allied services in a NQF. These consultations were undertaken in February, March and April 2010 and comprised:

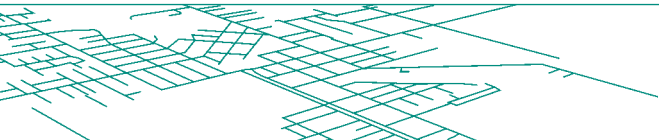
- » interviews with 78 people experiencing homelessness including a component specifically focused on Indigenous Australians;
- » 16 public consultation workshops in all states and territories with approximately 850 participants from mainstream, allied and specialist services;
- » 20 in-depth interviews with service providers that would have had difficulty attending the public consultation workshops; and
- » 37 written submissions.

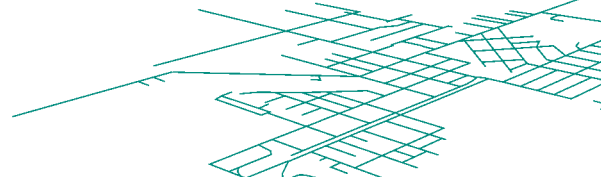
The findings from stage one consultations have guided the development of this Options Paper. Detailed findings from stage one are available on FaHCSIA's website: www.fahcsia.gov.au.

The policy context

In 2008, a national consultation culminated in the publication of the Australian Government's White Paper, *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*. The White Paper sets the agenda for tackling homelessness in Australia and establishes ambitious Commonwealth targets of halving overall homelessness and offering supported accommodation for all rough sleepers who seek it, by 2020. The White Paper contains a number of initiatives aimed at improving quality service provision.

The White Paper also proposes new homelessness legislation to replace the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*. This issue was referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, which made a series of recommendations on how legislation might set out values and principles to underpin high quality homelessness services. These recommendations have been considered by Housing Ministers but have not, by themselves, determined the nature and scope of the NQF options outlined in this paper.





In 2009, all governments signed the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) which provides \$6.2 billion nationally over five years and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth, states, territories and local government in the delivery of housing and homelessness services across the relevant sectors. Through the NAHA, Australian governments have committed to achieving several key outcomes, including that “people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion”.

All governments also signed the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) which provides a total of \$1.1 billion over five years for services to prevent and reduce homelessness. Each government then developed Implementation Plans that set out their approach to meeting the objectives of the NPAH. Under the NPAH, Australian governments signed up to several outcomes, including that “people at risk of or experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing”.

Australian governments have also committed to reducing life outcome inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians under the Closing the Gap initiative. Closing the Gap initiatives include the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing which commits \$5.5 billion over 10 years to build new houses and upgrade existing houses in remote Indigenous communities.

Over recent years, state and territory governments have continued to refine their strategic approaches to addressing homelessness by developing action plans and strategies. These approaches have been underpinned by commitments to address disadvantage and to improve health and wellbeing for marginalised community members.

States and territories also have in place systems to support quality service provision to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The systems range from performance-based contracting to mandatory accreditation and client or service charters including complaints management systems. An overview of these systems is at Appendix B.

The sector profile

Some 105,000 Australians experience homelessness on any given day. Many others are at risk of becoming homeless. People who are homeless or at risk are one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in our community.

People experiencing homelessness are also a very diverse group of people, many of whom have multiple and complex needs.

Services to address these needs are delivered by a variety of organisations across a range of sectors. Large agencies, church-based charities, small community-based organisations, local governments and state, territory and Commonwealth government departments and agencies all deliver services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Some of these organisations can be defined as specialist homelessness services – organisations that are funded to deliver services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Specialist homelessness services are critical to addressing the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Services can include crisis accommodation, supported accommodation, transitional support, crisis support, housing information and referral.

Often specialist homelessness services target a specific population group, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, youth, women and children escaping domestic violence and recently arrived migrants.

There are between 1500 and 1600 specialist homelessness services in Australia. The majority – around 75 per cent – are located in major cities and inner regional areas. Approximately 15 per cent are located in outer regional areas and the remainder are in remote or very remote areas.

The geographical distribution of specialist homelessness services varies between jurisdictions. Around 90 per cent of Victorian services are located in major cities or inner regional areas while almost half of the services in the Northern Territory are located in very remote areas.

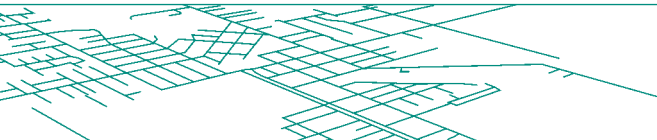
Mainstream and allied services also have a central role in addressing the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Mainstream and allied services are organisations that are not restricted to service delivery to people who are homeless, but whose clients might include people who are homeless. For example Centrelink provides income support and state and territory governments deliver housing outcomes through public and community housing. Hospitals, community health centres, mental health services and drug and alcohol clinics respond to the health needs of this client group.

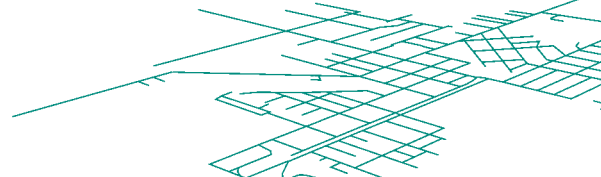
The scope of a National Quality Framework

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness receive services from a broad range of specialist and mainstream and allied organisations. If the NQF is to meet its objectives, it will need to include mechanisms to support improved quality and better integration of all services delivered to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, regardless of whether they are delivered by specialist or mainstream organisations.

However, the way a NQF will apply to mainstream and allied services will differ from the way it will apply to funded specialist homelessness services. It is expected that the NQF would cover funded specialist homelessness services but mainstream and allied service participation would largely be voluntary. Although the NQF will not be a compulsory requirement for mainstream and allied services it aims to drive cultural change in the way they respond to people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

There is also a valuable part of the specialist homelessness sector that does not receive funding from government. Participation in the NQF for this particular group will also be voluntary, with services encouraged to participate fully. The advantages of voluntary participation in the NQF for mainstream and allied and non government funded specialist services include recognition of good practice and the potential for favourable consideration by funding bodies such as philanthropic organisations.





Principles underpinning the development and implementation of a National Quality Framework

The discussion paper *A national quality framework to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness* outlined a number of principles that underpin the development and implementation of such a framework. Feedback from stage one consultations indicated strong support for these principles and they will continue to underpin the development and implementation of the NQF as work progresses.

Principle 1: Services and government will work together to develop the National Quality Framework and accept joint responsibility for quality service provision.

Reducing and preventing homelessness is a huge challenge and requires the commitment of everybody including government, the specialist homelessness and mainstream and allied service sectors and the broader community.

Principle 2: Minimising red tape will be a key consideration in the development of the National Quality Framework.

It is important that a NQF does not place an unreasonable administrative burden on services. Also many services already participate in other quality systems. This paper proposes a recognition framework that would result in minimal extra administrative burden on services.

Principle 3: The National Quality Framework will build on and add value to existing quality systems.

Many mainstream and specialist homelessness services already participate in some form of quality system. It will be important to understand what works well in current systems and build on this in the development of the NQF. The options that are outlined in this paper have used existing systems as a basis. For example the proposed approach to standards is similar to the NSW *Good Practice Guidelines*.

Principle 4: There will be a supportive and enabling approach to implementation.

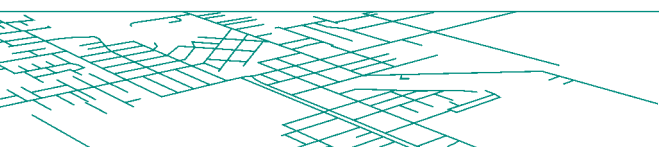
It will be important to adopt a supportive and enabling approach to implementing a NQF. Timeframes for implementation will need to take account of the starting position of the sector and differences across states and territories. Some jurisdictions may require longer transition times than others. Services may also require training to assist them in understanding their requirements under the NQF. Resources that explain and support the NQF will also need to be developed.

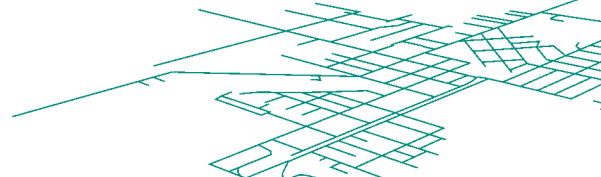
Section Two: Building a National Quality Framework

Foundations

A common theme emerging from first stage consultations was that a NQF should build on and complement existing activities, rather than replacing or duplicating what is already working on the ground. All options presented in this paper recognise that while approaches vary, all jurisdictions and services already undertake some form of quality activity. All the activities listed in the table below are taking place to some degree across the sector and across jurisdictions. These activities can form the foundations upon which a NQF is built, and can support its implementation.

Foundation	Link to quality
Program guidelines	Outline what is to be delivered and specify the roles and responsibilities of providers and funding bodies.
Workforce development	Stage one consultations found that a competent, trained workforce was viewed as critical to the implementation of the NQF. There was strong support for cross sector training and more professional development opportunities.
National policy framework	Sets the overarching direction for service provision and defines the roles of all parties.
Recognising good practice	Good practice examples highlight quality service provision so services can learn from each other.
Evidence base/research	Contributes to our knowledge about what delivers positive outcomes for clients.
Service integration	Approaches to service integration are being implemented across jurisdictions. Service integration provides seamless service delivery to clients across a number of organisations.
Minimum funding requirements	Requires services to demonstrate minimum level of quality against various criteria in order to receive funding. Includes performance based procurement.
Reporting on service performance and outcomes	Ensures that services continue to meet, on an ongoing basis, service performance and outcomes requirements as set out in funding agreements.





Although it is acknowledged that there are already activities occurring to support quality service delivery, the extent to which these activities are undertaken varies across jurisdictions. These activities will form the foundations of the NQF but will not on their own achieve its vision and objectives.

Core building blocks

Feedback from stage one consultations reflected a strong and consistent view about the need for three fundamental elements:

1. National Homelessness Charter;
2. a nationally consistent approach to dealing with client complaints including external complaints mechanisms; and
3. National Quality Standards.

It is proposed that these elements form the core building blocks of the NQF that will build on the foundations that are already in place.

Participants in the first stage consultations also identified mechanisms that support cross sector collaboration and integration, such as alliance models, as important to ensure service quality. It is proposed that cross sector integration be incorporated into the NQF through the National Quality Standards and the National Homelessness Charter.

Will the core building blocks assist in improving quality service delivery for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

Is there anything else that should be included as a core building block of a NQF?

1. National Homelessness Charter

Participants in the first stage consultations thought of client and service charters as ‘two sides of the same coin.’ They saw the value of explicitly stating the rights and responsibilities of people experiencing homelessness and those who provide services to them as a lever to increase awareness and accountabilities.

A National Homelessness Charter, disseminated amongst specialist mainstream and allied services, government and non-government, will promote the message that **homelessness is everyone’s business**. It will encourage all services to respond effectively to clients that are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The key purpose of the Charter will be to:

- » set out the rights and responsibilities of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and the organisations that provide services to them; and
- » set out the principles of quality service provision.

Mainstream and allied services in particular will be encouraged to adopt the Charter. The Charter will urge these services to:

- » review policies and procedures to ensure they don't present access barriers for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness;
- » develop mechanisms to identify people experiencing or at risk of homelessness amongst their clients; and
- » develop relationships with other services and protocols for referral to and from those services.

A National Homelessness Charter would not be legally enforceable but governments at all levels would be in a position to promote its adoption by their own services and the services they fund. A National Homelessness Charter would supplement and reinforce existing charters.

What should be in the National Homelessness Charter?

How can mainstream and allied organisations be encouraged to adopt the Charter?

2. A nationally consistent approach to client complaint handling

Clients that participated in the first stage consultation process often expressed that they had felt the desire to complain about a service but few did. Some criticisms of complaints mechanisms included complexity, length, inaccessibility and ineffectiveness. However the reason most cited for not following through with a complaint was a fear that access to a service may be compromised. Compromised access was voiced as an issue especially in relation to services in smaller communities.

Client participants in first stage consultations supported the introduction of complaints mechanisms that operated independently of the organisation with which they had a grievance.

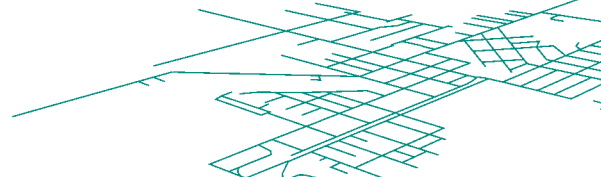
"It's always a challenge getting feedback because some clients are still of that mindset, that if we say something nasty they're going to reduce our services." (Service provider)

It is proposed that a nationally consistent approach for complaints be adopted and that all jurisdictions would have responsibility for its implementation. The key components of the proposed approach are:

- a. Clients would be encouraged to resolve issues directly with services in the first instance.
- b. Where complaints are not resolved or where a client does not feel comfortable complaining directly to the service, a complaints body independent from the service will be available to investigate the complaint.

Whilst the approach will be national it would be up to each jurisdiction to implement it in a way that is consistent across Australia. Each jurisdiction would ensure an alternative, external mechanism is available to clients and that this external mechanism is widely promoted and is also simple, accessible, timely and transparent.

It is important to note that external complaints mechanisms would not replace service based mechanisms but would provide clients with an alternative avenue for addressing concerns they felt uncomfortable raising with an individual service or that they felt had not been dealt with satisfactorily by that service.



Some jurisdictions already have external complaints processes in place and these could be used as possible models. In Victoria the primary external mechanism for complaints is the Homelessness Advocacy Service. Both South Australia and the Northern Territory have a Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner and in NSW the Ombudsman can hear complaints about government and non-government services.

It is acknowledged that in many jurisdictions, one body exists to deal with complaints about government services and a separate body deals with complaints about non-government services. This would not be an issue under the nationally consistent approach. Each jurisdiction would just need to ensure that there is a process that will facilitate a client's access to the external mechanism that is appropriate to their situation.

How do we ensure complaints mechanisms are accessible to clients regardless of their location and circumstances?

3. National Quality Standards

Participants in stage one consultations supported the concept of standards based on client outcomes, not service outputs. Standards were recognised as a means to ensure a minimum quality of service delivery. Participants also suggested that standards should be flexible enough so that they are meaningful to a broad range of services, but not so high level that they don't actually mean anything at all.

It is proposed that National Quality Standards be a core building block of a NQF to set out, at a national level, what is expected of services. Development of the standards will:

- » take into account feedback from the first stage of consultations about what constitutes quality service provision;
- » build on standards already in place;
- » consider interactions with other systems already in place (to inform a recognition framework); and
- » occur with close consultation with the sector and include client input.

Throughout first stage consultations there was broad sector agreement, consistent across jurisdictions, about what constituted quality and the areas in which quality was required to support positive outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The key themes that emerged were that:

- » quality service delivery is focused on client outcomes, is rights-based, flexible, responsive and culturally appropriate;
- » quality service provision is supported by collaborative partnerships within and between sectors; and
- » quality services are delivered by organisations with good governance and sound organisational processes and procedures.

This feedback has been used to form the overall structure of the proposed National Quality Standards. This approach is modelled on the *NSW Government's Good Practice Guidelines for DoCS-Funded Services Manual* with three areas focusing on different parts of an organisation's business. The proposed high level standards are:

1. Your Clients

- » Upholding and promoting rights
- » Client participation
- » Direct service delivery (including to specific groups)
- » Access and equity

2. Your Relationships

- » Building partnerships and integrated networks
- » Systems advocacy and community education
- » Integrated service delivery

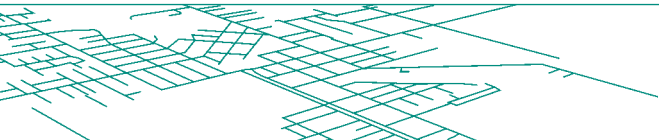
3. Your Organisation

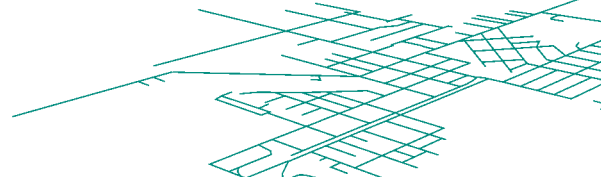
- » Systems management
- » Human resource management
- » Governance
- » Physical amenities

The table on the following page provides a brief description of the organisational areas that could be covered by the homelessness National Quality Standards. Your feedback on these proposed standards is important. The standards will be developed further in close consultation with the sector.

Do the proposed categories for standards cover all the areas they need to? If not what else needs to be included?

What area/s of the standards would your service need the most support to achieve?





National homelessness standards key organisational areas

1. Your Clients	2. Your Relationships	3. Your Organisation
<p>1.1 Upholding and promoting rights</p> <p>The organisation ensures that all aspects of its operations acknowledge, promote and uphold the human rights of its clients.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » rights-based approaches » client charters » privacy and confidentiality 	<p>2.1 Building partnerships and integrated networks</p> <p>The organisation links and collaborates with other organisations to achieve best outcomes for individuals, organisations and communities.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » forums » industry development » research and practice development » collaboration 	<p>3.1 Systems management</p> <p>There are effective management systems and strategies to ensure the organisation's goals are met.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » policy implementation » leadership » planning, evaluation and quality improvement » information management » administration systems » financial management » operational risk management
<p>1.2 Client participation</p> <p>The organisation ensures its practices and processes reflect a commitment to enabling clients to participate in the decision making process and supports them to make their own decisions and achieve goals. This includes both participation in decisions directly related to a client's case and also the operation of the organisation. Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » feedback/complaints mechanisms » decision making, planning » policies and procedures » constitution, value statements 	<p>2.2 Systems advocacy and community education</p> <p>The organisation works to build and sustain the community capacity and to foster constructive and respectful relationships among the members of the community.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » community and relationship » autonomy » participation » systems advocacy » social resources 	<p>3.2 Human resource management</p> <p>The organisation plans, develops and supports its workforce, both paid and voluntary, to ensure the effectiveness of its services.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » human resource planning » personnel management » orientation » training and development » occupational health and safety » equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination » competencies of staff
<p>1.3 Direct service delivery (including to specific groups)</p> <p>The design and review of services and programs focus on positive outcomes for clients/participants.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » case management » evidence-based practice » designing » client focus, assessment » review » integration » documentation » exit and transition 	<p>2.3 Integrated service delivery</p> <p>The organisation works closely with other organisations to address the multiple needs of clients to achieve best outcomes.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » communication between services » efficient referral systems » alliance models 	<p>3.3 Governance</p> <p>The governing entity defines clear goals and purposes for the organisation, develops strategies to achieve and monitor the organisation and is accountable for all its activities.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » accountability » strategic and business planning » strategic risk management » communication » regulatory environment » policy framework » organisation structure
<p>1.4 Access and equity</p> <p>The organisation provides fair and equitable access to its services and programs, actively identifying and removing barriers for eligible clients from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » equity of access » entry, exit and re-entry » referral » information » rights and responsibilities 		<p>3.4 Physical amenities</p> <p>The organisation's physical structures are safe and offer security and privacy for clients and staff.</p> <p>Key organisational areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » facilities management » adequacy of physical amenities » safety and security of facilities and equipment » client privacy

Ensuring quality

Standards set out the outcomes, processes and performance that represent quality service delivery. In effect, they describe what quality looks like. So by themselves, standards cannot ensure quality service delivery. To ensure quality, processes are required that allow organisations to use the standards as a guide against which to assess and improve their operations.

Set out below are four such processes that have been adapted from the disability interim quality framework. The first three represent assessment against standards from three different perspectives: the service provider, the client and an independent outsider. The fourth process – continuous quality improvement – drives an organisation to use such perspectives to continuously assess, analyse and improve the way they deliver services.

Most accreditation systems include all four of these processes, including for example, the Victorian Government's mandatory accreditation system under the Homelessness Assistance Service Standards.

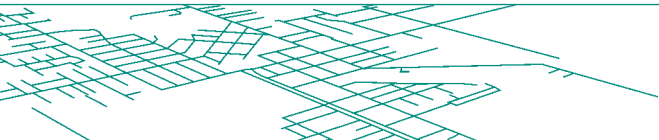
If these consultations lead to a preferred model of NQF that includes an accreditation system, it is proposed that all four processes would be implemented as part of that NQF.

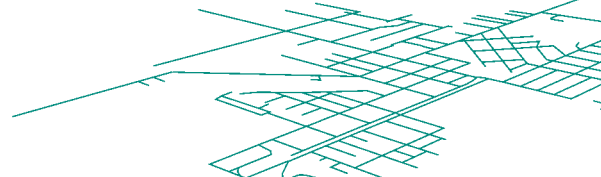
1. Self-assessment against the standards

An important part of quality management systems is self-assessment against the standards. This involves service providers implementing processes to internally assess, monitor and improve the quality of service provision against the quality standards.

Internal organisational assessment approaches:

- » are documented;
- » are planned and coordinated;
- » are evidence-based;
- » are cyclical;
- » support measurement against the standards;
- » have a focus on assessing the effectiveness of services in supporting improved outcomes for service users;
- » promote continuous quality improvement;
- » involve boards of management and staff from all levels of the organisation;
- » involve service users; and
- » include processes to collect and analyse data.





2. Client participation in assessment against the standards

Client participation in any quality assessment process was highlighted as an important component by participants at the first stage consultations. Most quality systems include client participation. In Victoria, clients are interviewed as part of the accreditation process to obtain their views on the service's performance against the standards. This is in addition to everyday client participation in decisions that impact them and how the service is run.

*"We need to give clients the opportunities to provide feedback about whether or not they think they've received a quality service and what was good about it, what could perhaps be improved because ultimately the client outcomes are how quality would be defined."
(Service provider)*

Client participation approaches:

- » treat feedback as an opportunity rather than a threat;
- » are documented;
- » are planned and coordinated;
- » where possible, are independently facilitated;
- » include the provision of accurate and accessible information regarding the standards and participation in the process;
- » have a focus on assessing the effectiveness of services in supporting improved outcomes for service users;
- » offer a variety of assessment methods that maximise the participation of clients; and
- » include processes to collect and analyse data.

3. Independent monitoring and assessment

Independent monitoring and assessment is important to ensure services are meeting standards. An independent perspective can identify issues – both shortcomings requiring improvement and strengths that can be better utilised – that may be too close for the service provider to recognise. This process may lead to accreditation or it may simply provide feedback to services for them to action.

"Reviews and accreditation. They are possibly the most important part. It's as simple as that. There has to be more time spent on doing it." (Client)

Independent monitoring approaches:

- » are documented;
- » are planned and coordinated;
- » are evidence-based;
- » are cyclical;
- » are undertaken independently of the service;

- » are undertaken independently of the funder;
- » set clear expectations for service;
- » involve service users and feedback from other organisations in the process;
- » support compliance against the standards;
- » where possible, are built on recognition or integration of other compliance requirements;
- » are applied consistently to government and community services;
- » promote continuous quality improvement;
- » have a focus on assessing the effectiveness of services in supporting improved outcomes for service users;
- » include processes to collect and analyse data;
- » include an appeals mechanism; and
- » include a link between the results of assessment and related actions for service improvement.

4. Continuous quality improvement

A continuous quality improvement approach was strongly supported during the first stage consultations. The continuous quality improvement focus of the Victorian accreditation system was highlighted as a positive aspect of that system.

"It's about embedding the whole idea within the organisation of continuously reflecting on your practice, reflecting on your systems and your standards and your processes, and continuously trying to improve those." (Service provider)

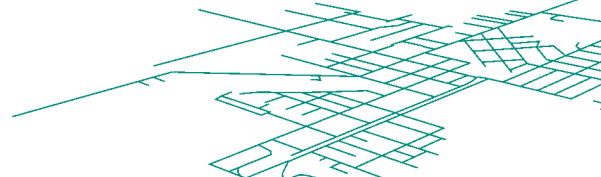
Continuous quality improvement approaches:

- » are documented;
- » are based on outcomes from organisational and client assessment against the standards;
- » involve staff at all levels;
- » include priority setting, strategies for improvement, responsibility for implementation and timeframes for completion;
- » include a schedule for monitoring and review;
- » are informed by data from other sources (e.g. complaints, incidents); and
- » include processes to collect and analyse data.

Will including these processes in the NQF help to ensure that organisations deliver quality services?

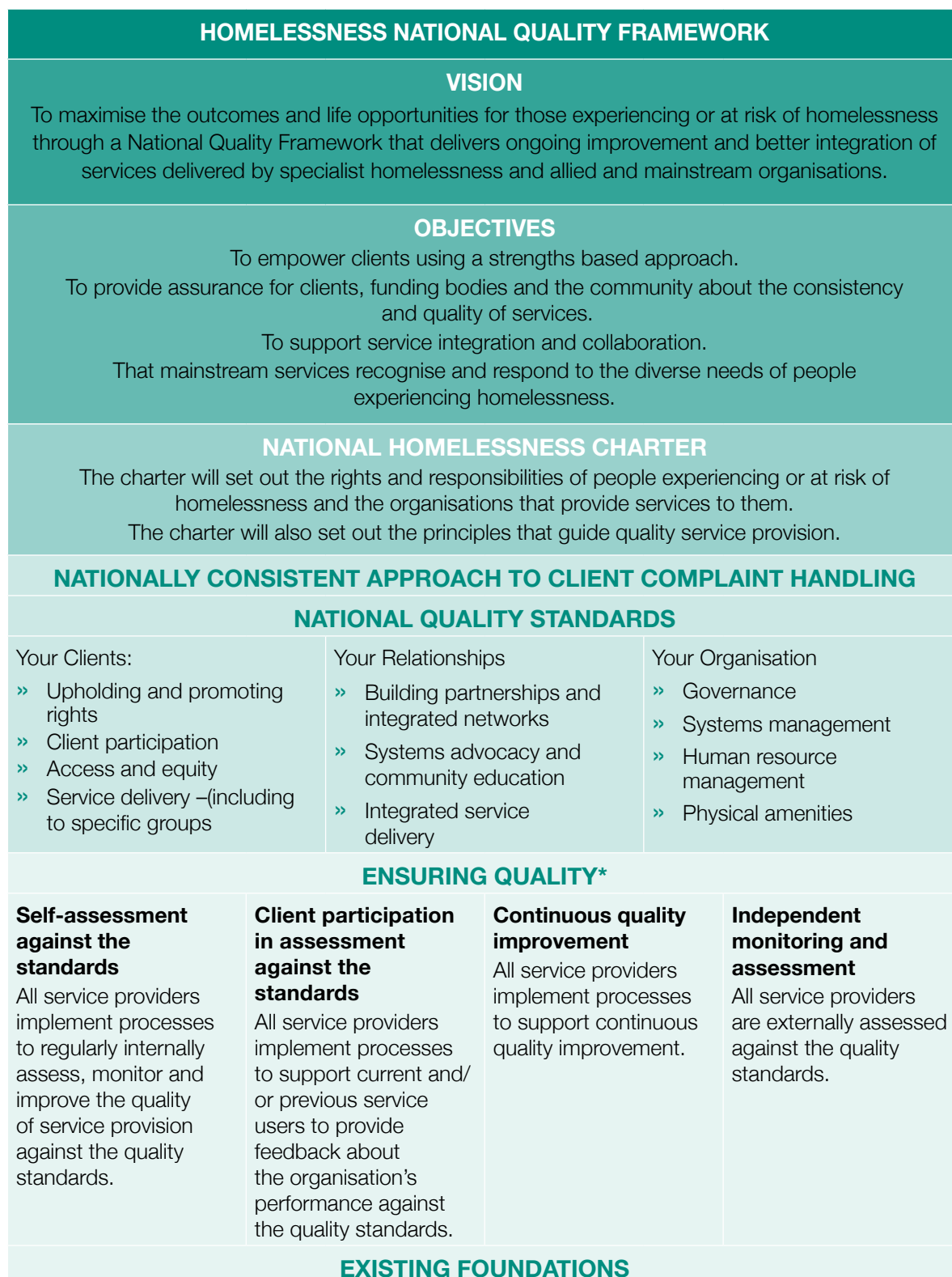
Should any of the above processes not be included in the NQF? If so, which ones and why not?

Are there any other processes for ensuring quality that should be part of the NQF?



A National Quality Framework

The following diagram provides a visual representation of a National Quality Framework.



*The extent to which these processes are present in the NQF will depend on the model selected.

Section Three: Options for the National Quality Framework

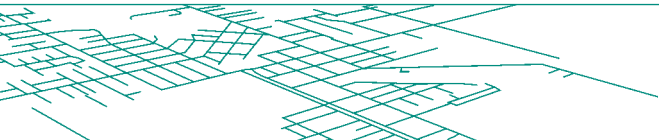
Approaches for ensuring the quality of services in line with the factors set out earlier in this paper, form the basis of the options set out in the following pages. They range from a minimalist approach to ensuring quality, to a compulsory accreditation system linked to funding, with two options in between.

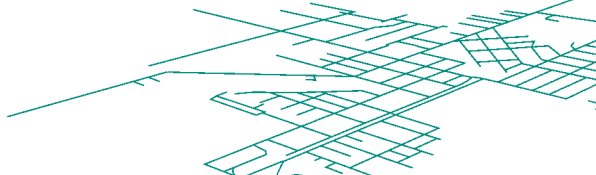
Each of the options builds on previous options and all options provide for a staged implementation.

- » Option one does not include a national approach for assessment against the standards and it would be up to jurisdictions as to how they incorporated the National Quality Standards into their own systems.
- » Option two includes the requirement for services to undertake a self assessment against the National Quality Standards and complete a Quality Improvement Plan on a regular basis.
- » Option three builds on this and includes external assessment against the standards. Services that meet the standards could become accredited and those that don't would need to demonstrate continuous improvement against the standards in order to continue to receive funding.
- » Option four takes option three a step further and requires all services to meet accreditation requirements in order to receive funding.

Under options three and four, mainstream and allied services could volunteer to be accredited under the homelessness NQF. A recognition framework would mean that mainstream and allied services participating satisfactorily in other recognised quality frameworks would only need to demonstrate meeting the standards that are unique to the homelessness sector in order to become accredited. The recognition framework would also apply to specialist homelessness services that participate in other quality systems.

It should be noted that all of the models represent minimum requirements. If jurisdictions have systems in place that are more rigorous than the national model ultimately selected, jurisdictions may elect to maintain the higher level. For example, Option 3 includes assessment against the standards but not a requirement for services to be accredited whereas Victoria already has mandatory accreditation linked to funding in place. Victoria's requirements are greater than the NQF option 3 and, if this option was selected, Victoria may elect to operate above the NQF requirements.





Option one – core building blocks plus current position

Option One acknowledges the current quality platform in states and territories and adds a set of National Quality Standards, a nationally consistent approach to client complaint handling and a National Homelessness Charter.

Core building blocks	National Quality Standards by 2012							
	Nationally consistent approach to client complaint handling by 2012							
Foundations	National Homelessness Charter by 2012							
	Program guidelines	Workforce development	National policy framework	Recognising good practice	Evidence base/ research	Service integration	Performance-based procurement	Reporting on service performance and outcomes

Under this option states and territories could choose to implement assessment processes against the National Quality Standards but it would be up to individual jurisdictions to decide whether or not to do this and what the assessment process would be.

Transition timeline: Implementation by 2012.

Cost implications: Low cost for governments and sector. Governments, in consultation with the sector will develop and disseminate standards and charter. Governments will develop and resource complaints mechanisms.

Pros:

- » quick to achieve
- » low regulatory burden
- » low administrative burden

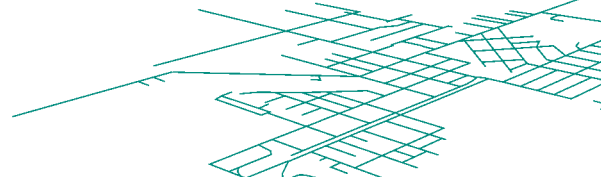
Cons:

- » does not reflect client feedback from national consultations
- » does not guarantee client participation
- » does not achieve national consistency in ensuring service quality
- » does not achieve the vision of NQF process
- » does not reflect contemporary practice

Option two – core building blocks plus self-review

Option two includes option one plus the additional requirement for services to undertake a self assessment against the National Quality Standards and, based on this review, develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

	Compulsory self assessment against the National Quality Standards and development of a Quality Improvement Plan by 2014							
Core building blocks	National Quality Standards by 2012							
	Nationally consistent approach to client complaint handling by 2012							
Foundations	National Homelessness Charter by 2012							
	Program guidelines	Workforce development	National policy framework	Recognising good practice	Evidence base/ research	Service integration	Minimum funding requirements	Reporting on service performance and outcomes



Option two

On a regular basis services will review existing practices against the National Quality Standards and identify areas for improvement. Services would be required to develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) which sets out what actions the services would undertake to improve quality in those areas. The QIP would be reviewed on a regular basis.

Transition Timeline: By 2014 all services would have completed their self-assessment against the standards and have a QIP in place.

Cost implications:

- » low cost for governments and sector
- » governments incur costs associated with option one plus provide template and tools to assist services complete the QIP
- » services must commit time and effort to self-review

Pros:

- » achieves some cultural change
- » contributes to client participation and supports a focus on client rights
- » implements concepts of quality standards and continuous quality improvement
- » positions all services to progress to more advanced models if such progression is supported

Cons:

- » does not reflect client feedback from national consultations
- » does not achieve vision of NQF process
- » does not reflect contemporary practice
- » change management requires some resourcing and support for the sector
- » does not guarantee consistent minimum quality across sector either within jurisdictions or nationally
- » does not guarantee accountability
- » does not encourage mainstream organisations to assess their service delivery against national homelessness standards

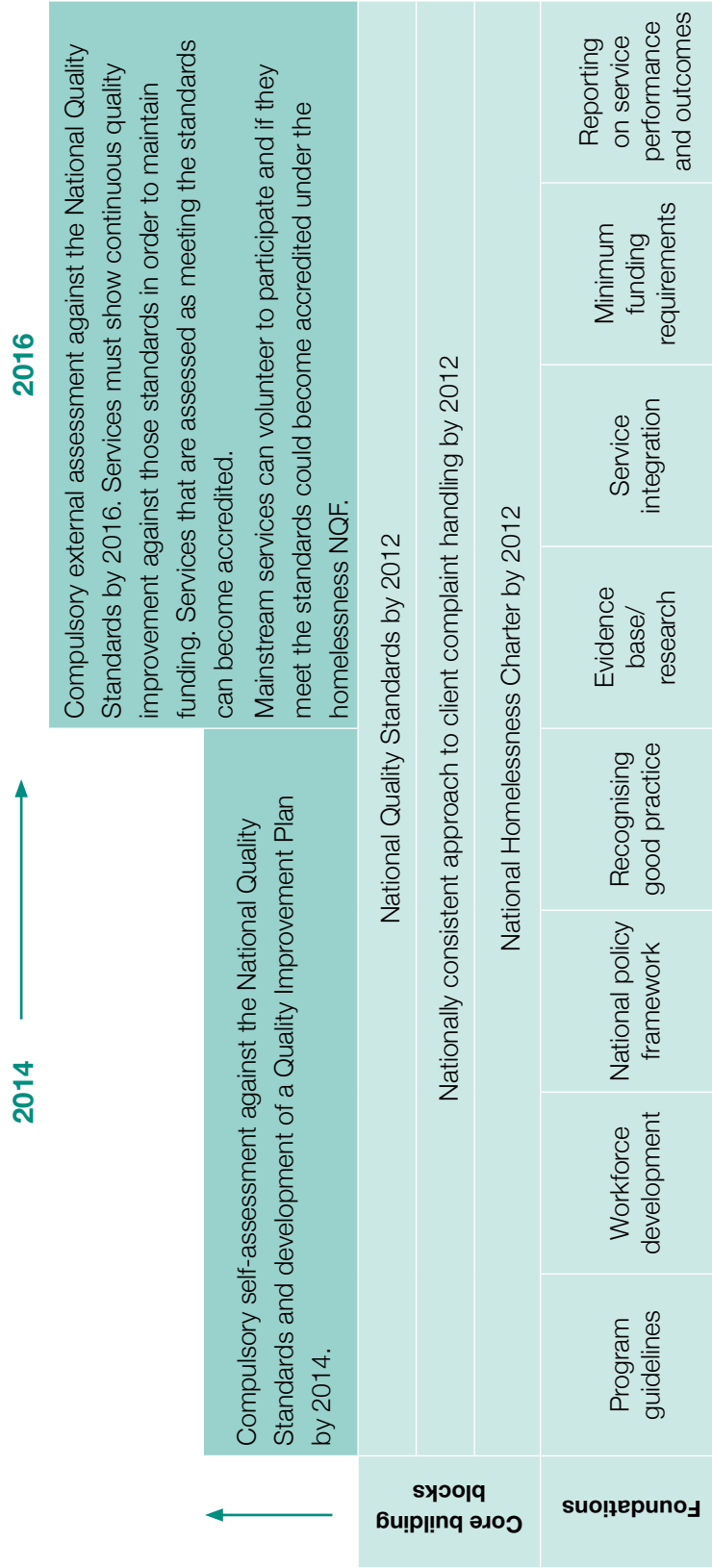
Other comments:

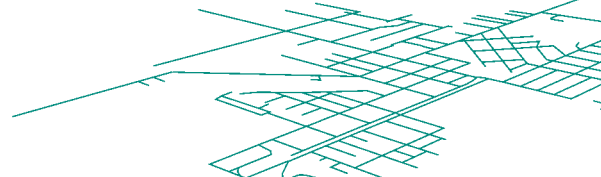
There are a number of different ways in which this option could be implemented. These primarily centre on what happens to the QIP once complete.

At one end of the scale services could be required to complete the QIP and keep it on file. Services may be asked to provide a copy to funding bodies when they are undertaking site visits or if they have received complaints or have other concerns about the services. There would be no formal assessment of the QIP.

Alternatively, services could be required to send the completed QIP to the funding body for assessment. Services would be advised if their plan is satisfactory and if not, would be required to take action to improve it. The cost implications of this option, particularly to government, would vary depending on what approach was adopted.

Option three – compulsory external assessment against the National Quality Standards and demonstration of continuous quality improvement





Option three

Option three builds on option two and adds an external assessment process in which all services would be required to participate as a condition of ongoing funding. Services would be assessed against the National Quality Standards by an external agency. Services that were assessed to have met the standards could become accredited. Services that are assessed as not meeting the standards would need to demonstrate continuous quality improvement against the standards in order to continue to receive funding.

Transition timeline: Implementation by 2016

Cost implications:

- » significant cost for governments and sector
- » governments incur costs associated with models one and two as well as costs associated with implementation and administration of an external assessment system, sector support activities and material.
- » cost to sector in terms of time spent meeting the requirements of the assessment process.

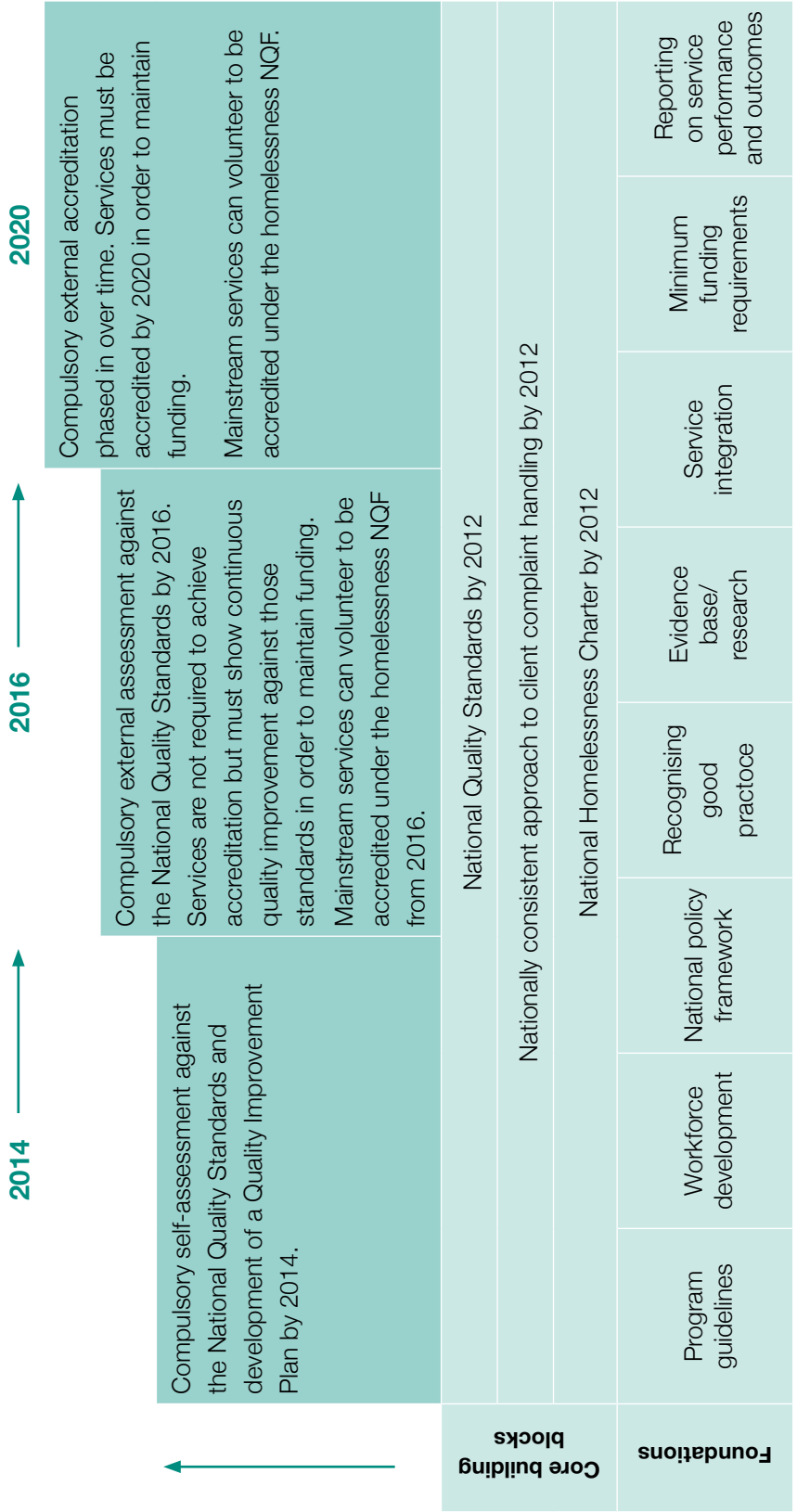
Pros:

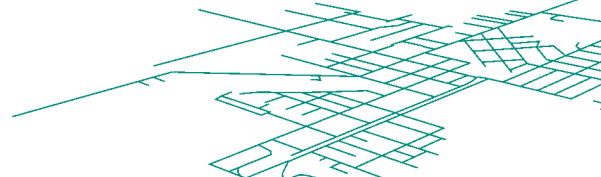
- » formally embeds client participation
- » achieves cultural change
- » implements a consistent and measurable level of minimum quality across Australia
- » implements a continuous quality improvement approach
- » achieves accountability to clients, funding bodies and the broader community
- » raises the credibility of the sector amongst the mainstream service sector
- » gives services the opportunity to progressively realise accreditation requirements so is inclusive and supports participation of all agencies regardless of size, location and service type
- » enables mainstream services to participate

Cons:

- » increased regulatory burden
- » requires significant input of resources by governments and the sector
- » requires significant cultural shift and consequent change management
- » does not include lever to ensure services meet all standards

Option four – compulsory accreditation linked to funding





Option four

Option four builds on option three and adds the requirement for all services to be accredited against the National Quality Standards by 2020 in order to continue to receive funding.

Transition timeline: Implementation by 2020

Cost implications: Significant cost for governments and sector - as model three

Pros

- » better outcomes for similar level of investment as model three
- » ensures all clients seeking assistance from funded organisations will receive quality services
- » ensures all providers receiving funding are providing quality services
- » enables mainstream organisations to participate
- » staged implementation that builds capacity, professionalism and robustness of the sector and the National Quality Framework
- » increases profile and integrity of specialist homelessness sector and aligns it with other specialist sectors
- » implements a consistent and measurable national accreditation system that provides funding bodies, clients and the community with confidence that public funds are delivering quality and achieving value for money
- » organisations can cross-refer with confidence
- » implements and objectively measures and reports on continuous quality improvement

Cons

- » Increased regulatory burden
- » Potential that some services may not meet standards without support
- » The longer term benefits will require resources to be diverted from service delivery in the short term
- » Requires significant cultural shift and consequent change management

Which of the four options best achieves the vision and objectives of the NQF?

Are the transition timelines for each option realistic and achievable?

How frequently should services be required to complete a Quality Improvement Plan?

Mainstream and allied services

Feedback from first stage consultations demonstrated widespread agreement that mainstream and allied services are critical to improving outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and that a homelessness NQF should therefore involve such services.

The proposed options allow for this involvement in a number of ways.

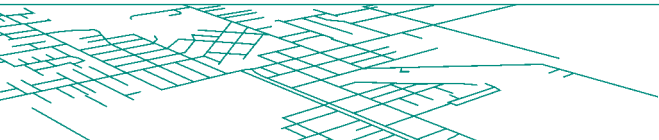
Firstly, the National Homelessness Charter will outline the rights and responsibilities of people experiencing homelessness and the organisations that deliver services to them, including mainstream and allied services. It is proposed that government agencies will take the lead in adopting the Charter but other non-government organisations would also be encouraged to adopt it, or at a minimum embed the principles in their own existing charters.

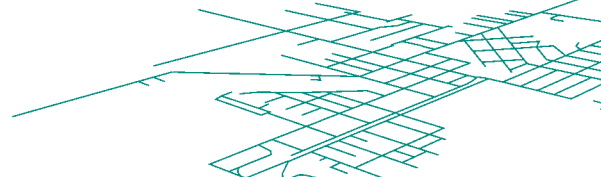
The Charter will support and encourage mainstream and allied services to better understand and fulfil their role in delivering services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It will be a key document in driving cultural change in mainstream and allied services.

Options three and four allow mainstream and allied services to seek accreditation under the NQF. Most mainstream and allied services would already participate in other quality systems. It is proposed that where this is the case their participation in other systems would be recognised and they would only need to meet a core set of homelessness specific standards in order to gain accreditation. Another option where mainstream and allied services participate in their own sector-specific quality systems is to influence those existing systems to incorporate a focus on the needs of homeless clients.

A key component of the feedback received from stage one consultations was the importance of alliance models that supported services to work together. The proposed standards include a component on integrated service delivery. Specialist homelessness services will be expected to develop relationships with mainstream and allied services in order to meet the standards.

"I believe you can't operate in isolation, you've gotta do the best thing for your client, you have to be able to work with other services in the area to a very high level." (Service provider)





Section Four: Implementation Issues

How would an assessment/accreditation system work?

Options three or four will require the development and implementation of an assessment system through which services can be accredited against the National Quality Standards.

Accreditation could be described as a systems-based approach to continuous quality improvement. It involves assessment against a pre-determined set of standards, recognition of achievement of those standards and the conferring of accreditation by a qualified body.

"I know a piece of paper doesn't make a good service or a good worker, but I really think it's important. It proves that those systems are working, because it's been through that to get to that stage."
(Service provider)

Independent assessment

Feedback from stage one consultations indicated that if accreditation was to be implemented, the preference was that assessment should be undertaken by an external agency at arm's length from funding bodies and the sector.

There are different approaches available to assessment and these will be explored subject to the option endorsed. These include using existing assessment and accreditation organisations or establishing a new organisation.

Small services and the impost of accreditation

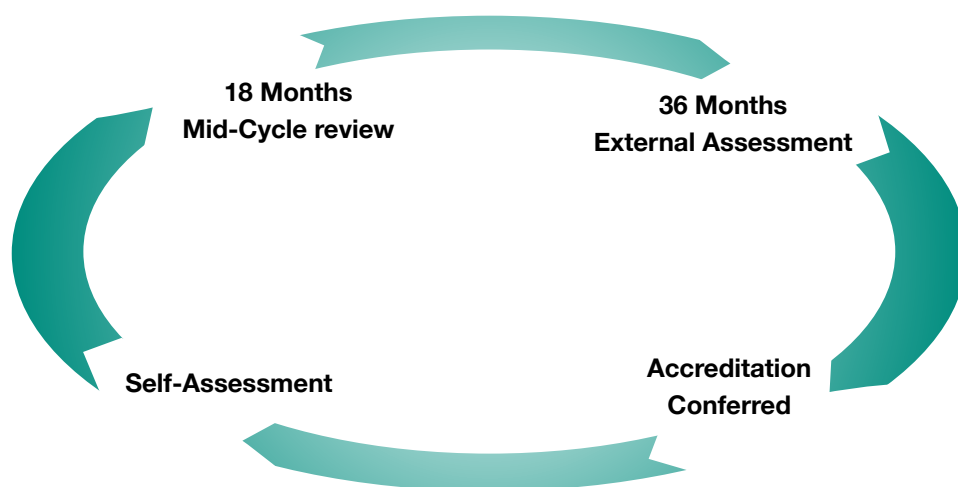
A recurring theme emerging from first stage consultations was concern about the potential administrative burden that accreditation could place on small services. It is also one of the key principles underpinning the development of the NQF that a quality framework should "not place an unreasonable administrative burden on services."

In line with the consultation feedback and this implementation principle, it is suggested that the complexity of accreditation requirements of a NQF should reflect the complexity of a service's operations. Small organisations would still be expected to deliver the same level of quality to achieve accreditation but the work and the evidence required for a small service to demonstrate that quality to achieve accreditation would be less than that required for a large organisation. Evidence guides, evidence requirements and minimum benchmarks could be developed in a way that addresses this issue.

Accreditation cycle

The precise interval between assessments would have to be determined but the accreditation cycle could include external assessments every three or four years. The accreditation cycle could also include mid-cycle reviews to support organisations to improve their quality in areas of need they have identified through self-assessment. The diagram below shows what a three year cycle including a mid-cycle review would look like, with each arrow indicating ongoing improvement.

Three year accreditation cycle with mid-cycle review



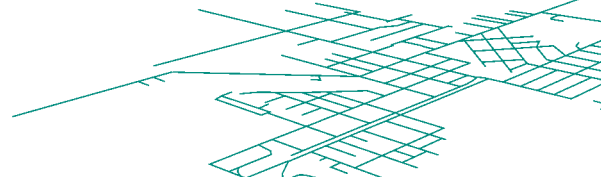
Tools to support assessment

Options two, three and four all require a process of assessment against the National Quality Standards. Model two requires a self-assessment process only and models three and four require external assessment as well as self-assessment processes.

A number of tools and templates will need to be developed to support these two types of assessment processes. It is important that these tools and templates are consistent across jurisdictions and that the tools and approach used for self-assessment are consistent with the tools and approach used for external assessment.

In the first instance, a very simple self-assessment tool could be developed to support services to understand the application of national standards to their work and provide a simple measure of their performance against them. This would support multi-program funded services to undertake a preliminary assessment against national homelessness standards prior to incorporating them within existing quality frameworks.

In addition, guides that set out evidence requirements and minimum benchmarks will need to be developed to clearly articulate what a service needs to demonstrate in an external assessment process.



These tools should be consistent across jurisdictions but will need to address jurisdiction-specific issues such as legislation and codes of practice as well as the different level of requirements a NQF will place on small services.

A key component of these consultations is to seek feedback from service providers on the kind of support that they will need to operate under a NQF and the most effective approaches to delivering that support.

How long should the review cycle be?

Would a mid-cycle review be useful?

Recognition process

"Yes it's great to have a national framework but if you impose another level of accreditation onto organisations they're not going to be happy, you need to be able to align it with accreditation processes that are already occurring." (Service provider)

"The HASS accreditation was less painful for us because it was very QICSA driven. We ticked probably 75% of the boxes already." (Service provider)

An effective recognition process will allow agencies that already meet a set of accepted standards in one quality system to claim recognition and consequently not repeat assessment against these standards for a different accreditation system.

The homelessness NQF could incorporate a recognition process to connect with and be responsive to other national quality frameworks as well as linking back to individual jurisdictional approaches. Ensuring the homelessness NQF is sympathetic and responsive to other human services' quality frameworks will reduce regulatory burden on multi program funded services and potentially enhance service integration.

Other national quality frameworks that meet some of the requirements of homelessness national accreditation could be endorsed as suitable for recognition. For example, the Mental Health Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services (PDRSS) quality framework might be endorsed as meeting all the NQF standards under 'Your Relationships' and 'Your Organisation'. In practice this would mean that any organisation accredited under the PDRSS framework would only need to undertake assessment against the NQF standards relating to 'Your Clients' to seek accreditation under the NQF.

Consideration will need to be given as to how specific jurisdictional approaches could be included in the recognition process. For instance, the Queensland Department of Communities is streamlining quality systems across the human services sector and testing common standards. In the event Queensland implements a common standards approach, their standards, assessment methodology and process could be mapped against those of the NQF to determine whether it met all or part of the NQF's requirements.

The development of the NQF is occurring in tandem with the development of other systems such as the regulation of the not-for-profit housing sector. Connectedness to other systems will be explored as they are developed to ensure linkages are made and that the systems work together.

Does your service participate in other quality systems that you think should be recognised by a NQF? If so, what are they?

Sector support

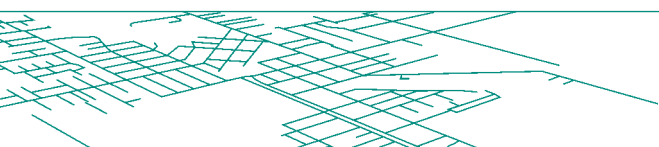
One of the key principles underpinning the development of the NQF states that “there will be a supportive and enabling approach to implementation.”

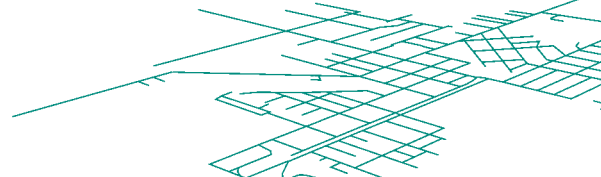
Jurisdictions are already providing support of various kinds to enable the sector to maintain and improve the quality of service delivery and to meet quality requirements. In the Northern Territory for example, training is delivered directly to service providers by departmental officers and resources are made available to fund external trainers to deliver training programs. Victoria has implemented a comprehensive learning and development program that supports workers to meet professional learning and current practice requirements under the Homelessness Assistance Service Standards (HASS) system. The Commonwealth funds services that deliver the Reconnect Program to attend forums to share innovative ideas and good practices.

The implementation of the NQF will require support for the sector. The level and type of that support will depend, not only on the model of NQF implemented, but also on the size, type and location of the service to which it applies. A small, remotely located Indigenous service in Western Australia or the Northern Territory will, for example, require a more intensive level of support delivered in a different way than that required by a large, urban Victorian service (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that is already accredited under HASS.

There are a range of sector support initiatives that have been successfully implemented in various jurisdictions including:

- » training and workshops on continuous quality improvement, self-assessment and action planning;
- » training and workshops in service delivery such as case-management, client participation and working with specific groups;
- » training and workshops for managers, committee and board members in governance, risk management, strategic planning and legislative compliance;
- » resources to support the development of local area networks;
- » funded regional networker positions to assist services build relationships and share knowledge and good practice;
- » funding for individual services or joint projects between like services to develop and disseminate resources such as templates, policies, procedures and protocols;
- » funded resource worker positions to work with services to develop policies, procedures and protocols to meet standards;





- » funded forums to share innovative ideas and good practice;
- » website resource clearing houses and e-links to sector peers and mentors; and
- » on-site intensive support for small and/or remote services.

A staged approach to implementation as proposed in all of the options would allow the identification of areas where training resources should be directed. This is already happening in jurisdictions that have assessment processes in place. For example, in Tasmania training programs can be targeted based on performance of services against the standards. This means that if many services are identified as having difficulty meeting a particular area of the standards the training can focus on that.

Cost of implementing the NQF

When considering the options and the sector support required for each option, it is important to keep in mind that there is a cost to both services and government. When deciding on a preferred option for the NQF, governments will need to consider a range of factors including which approach would provide the best outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, the cost of the options and the available funds. This Options Paper is presented on a no commitment basis where all options can be explored but final decisions will take into account a range of factors including the cost implications and community views.

Workforce development

The need for workforce development in the homelessness service sector was raised at many of the public consultation sessions. A pertinent theme was that in order for clients to receive the highest quality services they need to be delivered by highly skilled, experienced and qualified staff.

Both training and professional development were raised as key issues that, if addressed, would support the implementation of the NQF.

Training was raised as one of the factors that will contribute to improved service provision and consistency across services. The need for sector-wide and also provider-specific training systems and procedures was recognised. Some of the potential systems and procedures that were suggested at the workshops included:

- » a system that informs staff about training and development opportunities;
- » minimum qualifications for service providers; and
- » cross-sector training between mainstream, allied and specialist services.

There was broad support for sector and organisational commitment to professional development of staff. It was recognised that provision of greater levels of professional support, coaching and mentoring are required.

We are interested in your views on the type of training and professional development activities that could support a NQF.

What kinds of training would assist your organisation achieve the aim and vision of the NQF?

What kinds of sector support currently operate effectively in your jurisdiction?

How could existing sector support initiatives be used to support the implementation of the NQF?

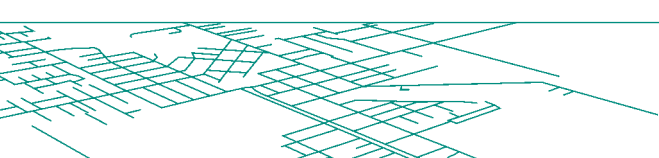
What resources would support you in meeting the requirements of each option?

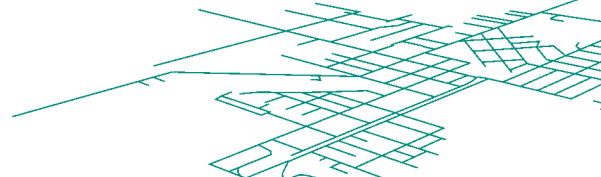
Legislation

The White Paper on Homelessness committed to new homelessness legislation to ensure that people who are homeless receive quality services and adequate support. The issue of new homelessness legislation was referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth in June 2009.

In its final report released in November 2009, the Committee recommended that the high level principles that would underpin a quality framework be included in legislation but that the prescriptive elements of the framework – for example standards, accreditation and national service charter – “should be expressed in complementary non legislative agreements with state and territory governments and, through them, with service providers.”

Quality systems do not necessarily need legislation to be effective. For example, the compulsory accreditation system in Victoria is mandated through funding agreements. This approach could continue across all jurisdictions with the implementation of a NQF. Non-legislative approaches provide greater flexibility for standards to be adapted, which could be important in the early stages of NQF implementation.





Consultation Process

There are a number of ways you can provide feedback on the NQF options.

Public consultations

Public consultation sessions will be held in all states and territories. Individuals and organisations with an interest in the NQF are encouraged to attend. A schedule with dates and venues of the consultation sessions will be available at www.fahcsia.gov.au or you can call us on 1800 300 125 to obtain details of the sessions in your state or territory. There will also be targeted consultation with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Written submissions

Written submissions will be accepted until Friday 13 May 2011 and should be sent to:

homelessness.quality@fahcsia.gov.au

or

Sean Innis
Chair, Homelessness Working Group
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 7576
Canberra Business Centre
ACT 2610

All submissions will be treated as public documents, unless the author of the submission clearly indicates the contrary by marking all or part of the submission as 'confidential'. Public submissions may be published in full on the website, including any personal information of any third party individuals. Please indicate in your submission if they have not consented to the publication of their information.

Online survey

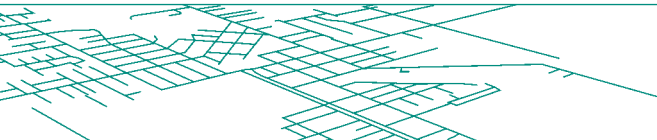
There will also be an online survey available for stage two consultations via the FaHCSIA website. The survey seeks feedback from people currently experiencing or who have previously experienced homelessness, as well as input from the organisations that deliver services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The surveys are aimed at, but not limited to, these audiences.

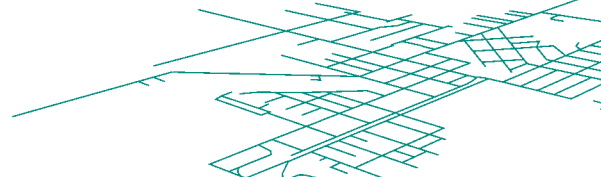
Next Steps

Feedback from this consultation process will be made available at www.fahcsia.gov.au by Friday 29 July 2011.

The feedback collected in this consultation process will be used by Housing Ministers from all jurisdictions to decide on a preferred option for a NQF.

The National Quality Standards and National Homelessness Charter will be developed in consultation with the sector and clients.





Appendix A

Glossary

Accreditation is a quality measurement framework. Accreditation is a standards based recognition system that can use a quality assurance and/or a continuous quality improvement approach. It involves assessment against set standards and formal acknowledgement of achievement against those standards.

Alliance models involve a commitment between different organisations (including mainstream, allied and specialist services) to communicating regularly and working together for the benefit of vulnerable clients.

A **client** is a person that is experiencing or at risk of homelessness and is accessing a specialist, allied or mainstream service.

A **complaint** is where a client is unhappy with the way the service is provided and raises this with either the service provider directly or an external complaints body.

A **complaints mechanism** will assess, manage and respond to a client's complaint.

Continuous quality improvement is an approach to quality that builds on traditional quality assurance methods by focussing on organisations and systems. It emphasises the organisation and its systems and is an ongoing cyclical process of self assessment, performance improvement and review.

Homelessness: This discussion paper uses the cultural definition of homelessness, which defines homelessness across three levels:

Primary homelessness, which refers to people who are sleeping rough or living in improvised dwellings.

Secondary homelessness, which refers to people with no usual address who are moving between various forms of temporary shelter such as staying with friends and family or specialist homelessness services.

Tertiary homelessness, which includes people who are living in boarding houses or caravan parks with no secure lease and no private facilities.

A person who is **at risk of homelessness** is someone whose housing, health, employment, personal, financial or other circumstances puts them at a heightened risk of becoming homeless.

A **Homelessness Charter** sets out the rights and responsibilities of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and the organisations that deliver services to them. A charter could also set out principles to guide quality service delivery.

Mainstream and allied services are organisations that are not restricted to service delivery to people who are homeless, but whose clients might include people who are homeless. Such organisations might deliver services to the general community or to a designated client group. Mainstream and allied services could include Centrelink, hospitals, community health centres, alcohol and drug services, mental health, disability services, children and family services, training and employment and many others.

A **National Quality Framework (NQF)** is a multi-layered structure that incorporates a broad range of systems and processes that contribute to establishing and maintaining high level service provision across Australia for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. A NQF provides a systems perspective for understanding performance and identifying areas in need of improvement. It supports an ongoing process of change towards evidence-based good practice.

Quality is defined by Standards Australia as “the totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs”. In the context of an individual service provider, quality relates to the characteristics of an organisation that determine its ability to respond effectively to the needs of its clients. In the context of a Homelessness NQF, quality relates to the characteristics of the broader service system that determine the system’s ability to respond effectively to the multiple and complex needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

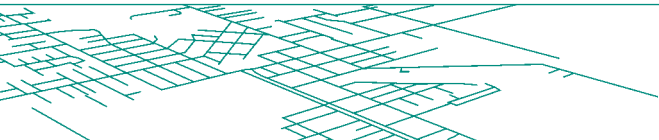
A **recognition process** will allow agencies that already meet a set of accepted standards in one quality system to claim recognition and consequently not repeat assessment against these standards for a different accreditation system.

Standards describe the expected outcome, processes and performance and can clarify expectations around service delivery. Standards can cover different aspects of an organisation’s business and generally cover service delivery as well as organisational management and governance practices.

Service integration and collaboration are two distinct but related concepts. “Service integration is characterized by features such as common intake and ‘seamless’ service delivery, where the client may receive a range of services from different programs without repeated registration procedures, waiting periods, or other administrative barriers.” In contrast, service collaboration is about services working together “but clients may have to visit different locations and re-register for each program to obtain services”. (Pindus, Nancy, Robin Koralek, Karin, Martinson, and John Trutko, “Coordination and Integration of Welfare and Workforce Development Systems,” Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2000, p. 4. www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/coordination_FR.pdf (PDF file))

A **specialist homelessness service** is an organisation that is funded to deliver services specifically to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Specialist homelessness services deliver services that include crisis or supported accommodation, transitional support, crisis support, housing information and referral, etc. Specialised legal, employment or advocacy services may be considered a specialist homelessness service if that service (or that component of their business) is specifically funded for the provision of services to homeless clients or those at risk of homelessness.

A **strengths based approach** to service delivery focuses on clients’ strengths and empowers clients to be active participants in achieving outcomes.

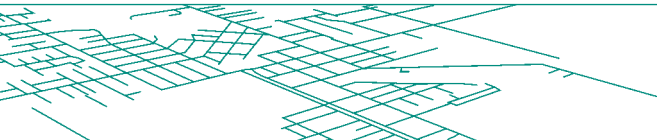


Appendix B

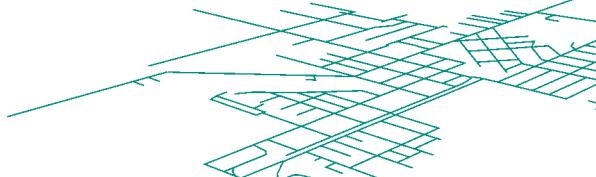
Current quality systems in jurisdictions and how they compare to proposed models of NQF

	Quality Standards	Quality assessment process	Supporting quality services	Complaints system	Service charter	Equivalent NQF option
ACT	<i>Good Practice Standards (2002) Raising the Standard – A guide to continuous improvement in community services.</i> Supported by a <i>Raising the Standard</i> manual and linked to the service guarantee, covering self assessment of quality planning.	Self-assessment.	Funding provided for delivering Raising the Standard Training, Working with Children, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander skills, awareness and knowledge. Agencies have capacity for training programs including external and internal training.	Service Guarantee ensures access to service complaints procedures.	Homelessness Charter and Service Guarantee.	Two.
NSW	<i>SAAP Program Guidelines (2007)</i> <i>Good Practice Guidelines (2006)</i> covers all services funded by the Department of Community Services (DoCS). Compliance with service agreement for SAAP services using performance framework for continuous quality improvement using self assessment and development of quality work plans.	Self-assessment.	Services with satisfactory performance offered three year funding agreements. Quality services are more competitive.	<i>Good Practice Guidelines</i> require all DoCS-funded services to have complaints policies and procedures. Also general provisions, including: ombudsman, community services, complaints framework.	No.	Two.
NT	<i>NT SAAP service standards (2002)</i> covers equity, access, support, user rights, management practice and environment, governance and service delivery.	Quality service provision is monitored through performance reporting.	Free departmental training available to services as well as funding for external training.	General provision through Health and Community Services Commissioner and Ombudsman.	No.	One.

	Quality Standards	Quality assessment process	Supporting quality services	Complaints system	Service charter	Equivalent NQF option
QLD	<p><i>Standards for Community Services</i> (2007) linked to Funding Agreements. Also covered by the <i>Community Services Regulation (2007)</i>, which sets requirements around a minimal number of governance and service delivery issues.</p>	<p>Quality is monitored by regional departmental officers on the basis of each organisation's self-assessment and improvement plan which is a requirement of their Service Agreements.</p>	<p>Funding provided for workforce development under the Integrated Skills Development Strategy (ISDS) and the Community Services Skilling Plan (CSSP). Funding also provided to support the development of a state-wide network of homelessness services.</p>	<p>Community Service Standards include a feedback and complaints standard.</p>	<p>No.</p>	<p>Two.</p>
SA	<p><i>Preferred Support Providers</i> (PSPs) system for specialist housing services. To be a PSP, services have to satisfy certain requirements relating to skills, governance and knowledge. From July 2010, only PSPs are entitled to tender for funding under the National Affordable Housing Agreement or the National Partnership on Homelessness.</p>	<p>Assessment undertaken by panel comprising internal departmental officers as well as representatives from external agencies. Services are assessed against 7 standards - governance, financial viability, leadership and human resources, service delivery, case management systems, case work systems and culturally appropriate services. Agencies are also required to demonstrate their capacity to deliver services in particular regions. Agencies require accreditation against three specialty standards - Domestic and Family Violence; Youth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - to deliver certain programs.</p>	<p>Funding provided for a training and accreditation program to support the sector including 3FTE to design, deliver and manage training. Funding for development of ICT system for all homelessness services. Key functions of the system will be to register all service users; provide a standardised best practice case management tool; permit information sharing and co-case management; streamline internal and external reporting requirements. Also development of regional support networks managed by 1FTE government officer. Dedicated support programs to build capacity of sector to deliver specialty services (e.g. children).</p>	<p>Funding Agreements require internal service complaints mechanism. Also provision for complaints to be referred to Health and Community Services Commissioner and Ombudsman.</p>	<p>No.</p>	<p>Four.</p>



	Quality Standards	Quality assessment process	Supporting quality services	Complaints system	Service charter	Equivalent NQF option
TAS	The Quality Improvement Council (QIC) Health and Community Services Standards which comprised three sections focused on governance, quality services, external relationships and the standards relating to SAAP.	Independent voluntary review of services quality development program managed by Quality Management Services (QMS).	QMS are engaged to support services to address issues through their workbook. Best Practice forums will commence in 2010 where services share information and lessons learnt. Training is also provided to services in identified areas.	Service standards require service grievance procedures.	No.	Three.
VIC	<i>Victorian Homelessness Assistance Service</i> Standards (HASS) Extends to homelessness services and covers service integration, rights, access to support, case managed support & support to specific client groups, working with community & management practice. Based on self assessment with third party review. Requirement for ongoing funding.	Quality Improvement and Community Services Accreditation Inc (La Trobe University) manages independent review & confers formal accreditation against HASS standards plus generic management standards.	Comprehensive learning & development program that supports workers to meet professional learning, and current practice development.	Three tiered integrated complaints system. Primary mechanism for homeless clients is the independent Homelessness Advocacy Service (funded NGO).	Client Charter of Rights & Responsibilities.	Four.



Quality Standards	Quality assessment process	Supporting quality services	Complaints system	Service charter	Equivalent NQF option
<p>WA</p> <p>A Preferred Service Provider (PSP) approach for specialist homelessness services reduces the need for an open RFP tender process and consequently reduces the costs and service disruption involved in an RFP process. PSPs are renewed every three years.</p> <p>WA SAAP service standards (2002) cover compliance with federal and state law, health and safety standards, criminal record keeping, and child well being response protocols.</p>	<p>PSP status is determined through an assessment that the service provider satisfactorily meets the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » continuing to meet the identified need; » meeting the agreed service specifications, contractual requirements and set standards of delivery; » operating efficiently and effectively; and » actively engaging with the Department in continuously improving its services to provide the best possible service for clients. <p>Services must demonstrate they are working towards WA SAAP service standards to be offered PSP status. This assessment conducted by Department Contract Managers at regular service reviews. Service Reviews required under the funding agreements to be conducted a minimum of twice in a three year funding period.</p>	<p>A sample policy and procedures Manual is available to assist specialist homelessness services develop policies and procedures, forms and handbooks in accordance with the requirements of the SAAP Service Standards and to reflect principles of good practice.</p> <p>The Department Contract Manager role includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » providing specialist advice and support to address significant service delivery issues; and » ensuring co-ordinated responses, effective linkages and collaborative practice with other relevant services and enhancing sector capacity and sustainability. <p>Free departmental training available to services including subsidies for travel and relief staff.</p> <p>Funding for the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services Inc to provide workforce development for workers in domestic violence homelessness accommodation and support services.</p>	<p>Funding Agreements require internal service complaints mechanism.</p>	<p>No.</p>	<p>Two.</p>

