



Australian Government

Department of Social Services

Families and Communities Programme

Families and Children Activity

Reconnect
Operational Guidelines
30 June 2017 to 1 July 2018

As at June 2017

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1. Introduction

The Reconnect Operational Guidelines 2017-2018 ('Guidelines') provide the operational framework for service providers in the implementation and administration of Reconnect.

Reconnect service providers were offered an additional 12 month funding extension from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 as part of the Australian Government's commitment in the early intervention and prevention of youth homelessness. The extension allows the Department of Social Services ('Department') to explore options with service providers and young people who access Reconnect services on how the early intervention and prevention aspects of the program can be strengthened.

These Guidelines provide the basis for the service delivery of Reconnect and should be read in conjunction with the contractual arrangements under which payments to deliver Reconnect services are made.

The Operational Guidelines include:

- The purpose of Reconnect;
- The Commonwealth Department of Social Services expectations of service providers including performance expectations; and
- Other relevant information pertinent to the successful delivery of Reconnect.

The Department reserves the right to amend these Guidelines from time to time by whatever means it may determine at its absolute discretion, provided the changes are not inconsistent with the Standing Funding Agreement, and will provide reasonable notice of these amendments.

The Department will ensure the most current version of the Guidelines is available on its website (www.dss.gov.au).

It is the responsibility of each Reconnect service provider to ensure they are familiar with the content and requirements of these Guidelines.

2. Organisational Environment of Reconnect

2.1 Overview of the Families and Communities Programme

The Department funds the Families and Communities Programme. This programme aims to strengthen relationships, support families, improve children's wellbeing and increase participation in community life to strengthen family and community functioning, and reduce the costs of family breakdown.

The following seven Activities make up the Programme and support the Commonwealth Government's priorities and responsibilities:

- Financial Wellbeing and Capability
- Families and Children
- Strengthening Communities
- Settlement Services
- Civil Society
- Families and Communities Service Improvement
- National Initiatives.

2.2 Overview of the Families and Children Activity

The Families and Children Activity is delivered under the Families and Communities Programme and provides support to families to improve the wellbeing of children and young people to enhance family and community functioning, as well as increasing the participation of vulnerable people in community life.

Organisations provide early intervention and prevention activities to improve the wellbeing of families and children, including after separation, enhance family functioning and economic engagement and strengthen communities.

Families and Children Activity provides integrated services for families to achieve improved child, youth, adult and family wellbeing, increased economic engagement and more cohesive communities. To achieve this objective, services must work collaboratively to provide an integrated suite of local services.

Reconnect is a sub-activity under the Families and Children Activity.

3. Reconnect

3.1 Overview of Reconnect

Following a two-year pilot Youth Homelessness Project, Reconnect was established in 1998 as a response to youth homelessness.

Reconnect is a community based early intervention and prevention activity for young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families (or 12 to 21 years in the case of newly arrived youth).

Reconnect uses early intervention strategies to help the young person stabilise their living situation, achieve family reconciliation (wherever practicable), and improve their level of engagement with work, education, training, employment and the community.

Reconnect services provide counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to the whole family, to help break the cycle of homelessness. Service providers also purchase other services to meet the individual needs of clients, such as specialised mental health services.

3.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of Reconnect is to prevent homelessness by intervening early with families and young people to stabilise and improve their housing situation and improve their level of engagement with family, work, education, training, employment and their local community. This is achieved through interventions such as counselling, mediation, group work and practical support in culturally and contextually appropriate services.

Reconnect objectives are achieved by working towards:

- family reconciliation, wherever practicable, between homeless young people, or those at risk of homelessness and their family. Family reconciliation outcomes include:
 - the young person returns home;
 - ongoing positive family relationships are created which provide the young person with emotional and physical support;
 - reconciling the young person with other family members e.g. grandparents or siblings;
 - both parent(s) and the young person accepting that independence is appropriate for the young person; or
 - establishing a viable support system for the independent young person that includes a member of their family.
- engagement with employment, education or training, and the community;
- innovative service delivery approaches through the application of good practice principles (see 10.2 for further information);
- improved coordination of services delivered by government and the community sector;
- building on the community's existing capacity to develop appropriate responses to their own needs; and
- participation of culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

3.3 Outcomes of Reconnect

Reconnect has been successfully delivered since 1998. The ongoing success of Reconnect has been achieved through a continued commitment to achieving the principal outcomes and indicators that have been a part of the previous success of the program.

The move by the Department to the Data Exchange (DEX), which replaces the Reconnect Online Data System (RODS), will lead to a reduction in the detail that can be captured. However, experience has shown that early intervention through contacting clients within the first 24 hours after referral remains a key program objective. This should be undertaken by service providers wherever possible.

In addition, the success of the program in achieving positive outcomes remains focused on formal needs assessment and goal setting for clients, improving youth homelessness outcomes, and ensuring a demonstrated positive benefit for young clients accessing this service remain integral. Performance of service providers should still focus on achieving improvement in these aspects of service delivery.

3.4 Reconnect Target Group

Reconnect service providers are funded to deliver services to young people aged 12 to 18 years (or 12-21 years for newly arrived youth) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families.

If the local situation requires Reconnect services to be provided to a different target group, it must be agreed in writing with the Department. Any change on previously agreed target groups/specialist approach (e.g. Indigenous, Newly Arrived Youth or Leaving Detention) must be advised in writing to the Department.

Up to 10 per cent of a service provider's participant caseload can be out of scope clients who are either outside the target group, including age range or who live outside of the funded geographic area, provided that expanding the scope of service in this way will not disadvantage eligible participants from accessing Reconnect services.

As soon as out of scope clients number more than 10 per cent of the participant caseload, the service provider should detail the rationale for focusing on this additional target group to their Grant Agreement Manager and obtain written approval from the Department to exceed the 10 per cent flexibility.

4. Funding within the Program

4.1 Annual Budget

The Department may, at its discretion, require service providers to submit a detailed budget.

4.2 Brokerage/Client Costs

Brokerage is intended to enable service providers to 'sub contract' additional support services they do not have the capacity to provide that are needed in an immediate crisis or in the short to medium term. As a guide, five per cent of annual funding should be reserved for brokerage.

It can be used to purchase a range of services or items including, but not limited to:

- educational / vocational related items and / or costs associated with facilitating engagement or re-engagement in education, training or work
- health-related services which cannot be accessed within a reasonable time-frame from the public health system, including mental health services
- legal services and
- specific services to assist young people and their families in practical ways, such as transport, meals, private psychological assessments, counselling and mediation, accommodation assistance (including respite), and translating services.

Note: Brokerage/client costs are not intended to replace emergency relief or other crisis / cash assistance from other sources. Rather, the intention is to provide services with the flexibility to purchase assistance for clients that would not otherwise be available as part of achieving outcomes in client case plans.

The organisation must ensure all staff are aware of the amount of brokerage funds available in order to use them effectively to provide support to participants.

4.3 Service and Management Fees

Service providers cannot charge fees to Reconnect participants. However, sometimes a minimal charge may be needed to enable an activity to take place. In this event, service providers must ensure that Reconnect participants are not excluded because of their inability to pay.

A service management fee may be charged by an auspice body for the overall management of Reconnect being conducted within their organisation. The fee is usually charged as an administrative expense, as a percentage of the total funding received and must be easily identified in the financial acquittal report submitted to the Department.

Should an auspice body consider charging a service management fee, they must negotiate with the Department to determine whether the fee is appropriate and the appropriate percentage rate to apply. When deciding if a management fee is appropriate, the impact on service delivery and the participant must be carefully considered before a fee is set.

5. Operation of the Program

5.1 Referrals

Participants may be self-referred or referred to Reconnect from a range of sources, including:

- schools, education and training organisations;
- family, friends and caregivers;
- non-government community agencies;
- Centrelink;

- juvenile justice agencies;
- police or legal units;
- child protection agencies;
- youth refuge, youth housing or accommodation services;
- medical services;
- mental health services;
- other government departments; or
- within your organisation.

This list is not exhaustive and Reconnect services can accept referrals from any source.

Reconnect services should maintain effective linkages with appropriate agencies in their local community to assist with making appropriate and effective referrals.

As an early intervention and prevention program, it is important that contact with referred clients is attempted within 24 hours of referral being made.

5.2 Non-Engagement Clients (NEC)

Reconnect aims to improve collaboration between services to ensure people who are homeless or vulnerable to homelessness can access appropriate assistance from multiple entry points to services.

As part of the homelessness services system, Reconnect providers are expected to work collaboratively with other service providers to increase the early intervention capacity of the service system and make sure all clients presenting or referred to the program either receive assistance or are directed to more appropriate services.

In recognition of the additional work Reconnect providers conduct in line with the 'No Wrong Doors' policy with clients who are *not eligible* Reconnect clients, the Department has created the category of 'Non-Engagement Client' and the means to record all work conducted with these 'clients'.

Non-Engagement Clients are people who do not fit the Reconnect target group, that is they are not within the age bracket for the program and/or they are not homeless or at risk of homelessness and/or outside of the geographical coverage for the service. They may also be identified as primary caregivers where for example a parent is supported by a service yet the young person does not engage.

It must be noted the reporting of Non-Engagement Clients is voluntary and is not a requirement of the Reconnect Funding Agreement. While this is voluntary, the collection of this type of data by Organisations informs the Department on 'unmet' need.

5.3 Group Work

While individual case work is the core requirement of the Program, Reconnect services are able to work with clients and potential clients through group work. It must be noted that community information sessions, such as providing information about your service to a school group, do not fall into this category as Group Work is recognised therapeutic intervention.

Group work may:

- be all that some young people need
- be a less threatening, 'soft' entry point to support;
- allow young people to attend with their peers or siblings and assist 'break the cycle' of negative behaviour or influence;
- provide support to young people in realising 'they are not alone' in dealing with certain issues;
- offer a support network outside of the group;
- develop opportunity for young people formerly engaged in the service to act as peer support and/or mentors;
- empower attendees through support of people of their own age and experience;
- involve a number of support services participating over the course of time, particularly if the group is multi-session;
- be effective in engaging young people if a waiting list exists at the time of referral and one-to-one work is not possible initially;
- be an effective way to provide service in an outreach location where ongoing one-to-one support is not readily available;
- provide a network for other groups including parents and other care-givers;
- provide opportunities for social and fun activities through numbers;
- bring together young people of the same gender or ethno-specific group; and
- be a cost-effective way of managing larger groups of clients.

5.4 Reconnect Good Practice Principles

In delivering Reconnect, service providers are required to comply with the following seven Good Practice Principles. These principles are integral in achieving outcomes for young people and families.

- Accessibility of Services
- Client Driven Service Delivery
- Holistic Approaches to Service Delivery
- Working Collaboratively
- Culturally and Contextually Appropriate Service Delivery
- Review and Evaluation
- Sustainability.

Strategies for implementing each of the seven Good Practice Principles are contained in the Appendices of this document (10.2).

5.5 Reconnect Forums

Reconnect services are also required to participate in any Department sponsored provider forums, which aim to improve the capacity of services and the program to deliver effective early intervention strategies through the adoption of evidence-based good practice. Reconnect forums are designed to share good practice, and provide opportunities to learn from shared experiences.

5.6 Links and Working with Other Agencies

An important characteristic of delivering a quality service is the capacity to establish and maintain links with other agencies. Key stakeholders are integral to providing a holistic and quality service and can provide valuable information on issues including referral processes, client needs, local issues, community feedback and approaches or gaps in service delivery.

Active involvement of key stakeholders can strengthen collaboration between services within communities and act as a pathway for improved service delivery. It also assists the service provider to incorporate community feedback into their planning and review processes.

Key stakeholders are those with whom the service provider interacts during service delivery and the agencies providing incoming and outgoing referrals. Service providers should establish good working relationships with other agencies, including:

- schools;
- Centrelink;
- youth services;
- accommodation and/or refuge services;
- charitable organisations;
- state/territory youth and welfare departments and other government departments;
- police, juvenile justice and legal services;
- counselling services;
- cultural, recreational and/or sporting groups; and
- community elders, young people, families etc.

When working with Centrelink, service providers should provide Centrelink with a detailed written and/or oral report if requested:

- where a homeless young person is a current Reconnect client and is currently in receipt of income support (due to it being unreasonable for them to live at home) and that support is shortly to be reviewed; or
- where a homeless young person is a current Reconnect client and is applying for Australian Government income support.

It is recommended that Reconnect service providers prioritise working relationships with organisations delivering similar programs to avoid duplication of effort, develop strong referral pathways, enable collaborative case work strategies, and to build effective sector capacity to support the target group.

Service providers must acknowledge that the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* may apply to the use and disclosure of reports. The Department or Centrelink may also require service providers to sign declarations of privacy and confidentiality when receiving personal and other information.

5.7 Community Collaboration

Service providers can assist young people, by networking, developing collaborative partnerships and providing leadership in early intervention issues. This can be done through:

- collaborating on support for individuals;
- integrating service delivery; and
- networking with existing agencies (or building new networks) to identify issues and address gaps and barriers in local service delivery.

Effective community collaboration includes the opportunity to:

- participate in inter-agency groups, committees and forums to work on issues of common concern;
- collaborate in joint ventures with agencies working with the same target group or issues of concern;
- collaborate in local community gatherings or state based forums;
- develop positive working relationships with government agencies; and;
- exchange ideas and knowledge.

5.8 Community Capacity Building

In addition to supporting young people and families through service delivery, providers are encouraged to contribute to building the capacity of their community.

Strengthening community capacity can be defined as enhancing the ability of individuals, organisations and communities to manage their own affairs and to work collaboratively to encourage and sustain positive change. The aim of community capacity building in Reconnect is to assist communities to identify risk factors or early signs of young people's homelessness, to know about available resources and people, and strategies to have the issues dealt with.

Building community capacity involves developing skills and knowledge among parents and community members in order to increase their capacity to support their families' needs.

Reconnect services vary in the extent to which they initiate, or are a part of, Community Capacity Building projects aimed at bringing about broader change

within a community. Examples of Community Capacity Building projects may include, but are not limited to:

- Working with relevant community stakeholders and agencies to address issues arising from Reconnect service delivery (e.g. developing a holistic community response to cyber bullying).
- Identifying needs or gaps and establishing a new service or working to change the way current services respond to address the need. For instance, a Reconnect service might work with other agencies to establish a mentoring service by seeking funding to allow the service to operate; or a Reconnect service might work with other services to run weekend camps that connect young people with culture.
- Developing/providing training to increase skills of other services to work more effectively with young people and families, especially in early intervention.
- Developing a product or publication such as a youth access card; booklet for parents of young people who are same-sex identified; a play or video with young people; or a common assessment form between services.
- Increasing participation and skill of community members (including young people and families in addressing needs within the community (for instance working with businesses to expand work opportunities; training community members as mediators; training young people in action research and getting them to research some aspect of need).

Community Capacity Building projects may take a long time to complete and may result in a range of outcomes. A project may be initiated and developed over a few years with smaller projects occurring as spin-offs to the main project. If a service is undertaking a project that includes as one element, running a training group, it would be recorded as 'Group Work' on the system, as well as recording the broader project to capture the larger scope of the work.

The everyday work of Reconnect services to maintain partnership arrangements, build service relations, build interagency relationships, and contribute to one-off community events, should not generally be recorded as Community Capacity Building projects unless they are part of a larger Community Capacity Building activity.

It must be noted the reporting of Community Capacity Building projects is voluntary and is not a requirement of the Reconnect Funding Agreement.

6. Data Collection

Data collection provides the information required by the Department to monitor and evaluate the Department's programs. Continued funding of programs relies heavily on the ability of the Department to provide observable and objective measures of performance.

The Department undertakes to:

- request data for legitimate business needs, i.e. policy development, planning, accountability and program management;
- make data collection consistent with other program areas working with similar target groups;
- provide services with the tools to have input to the development and review of data collection;
- collect data for program and/or service-level evaluation; and
- enable service providers to review their data and track performance against benchmarks.

6.1 Information Technology Requirements

There are no prerequisites or browser requirements for the Data Exchange (DEX) web-based portal. It has been tested to work with multiple browser types and versions.

However there are requirements and exceptions for running AUSKey, which is the government authentication system that providers require to access DEX.

Information on browser compatibility is available from the Australian Business Register website <https://abr.gov.au>.

6.2 Data Collection

Service providers are required to participate in Reconnect data collection as specified in the DEX requirements, available at <https://dex.dss.gov.au/> and the Funding Agreement. From 1 July 2016, Reconnect users are required to use DEX as the Reconnect Online Data System has been decommissioned.

The data requirements of DEX are divided into two parts: a small set of priority requirements that all service providers must report, and a voluntary extended data set that providers can choose to share with the Department, known as the partnership approach. This new approach to data collection is a streamlined way of gathering evidence that, in practice, represents a significant reduction on reporting effort for Reconnect providers.

The partnership approach is intended to be a genuine collaboration between Government and the sector to exchange knowledge and share resources to inform service delivery. This approach is geared towards building the evidence base about the effectiveness of the Department's programs and sharing this knowledge back with providers to inform best practice approaches to service delivery. The small set of extended data requirements is focused on outcomes, and relates to client needs and circumstances, and client outcomes.

Although participation in the partnership approach is entirely voluntary, the Department encourages a commitment to the partnership approach to ensure high standards of performance and positive outcomes for clients can continue to be measured and achieved.

Outcome information captured under the partnership approach uses the SCORE domains. For the purposes of recording client outcomes under Reconnect, the most important categories that should be focused on are:

- Housing;
- Employment, education and training; and
- Family functioning.

6.3 Service Stocktake

Data collection will be complemented by a service stocktake. Service providers are required to annually take part in a service stocktake, which is a short set of broad questions about the conditions surrounding delivery of Reconnect services in that year.

Questions allow service providers to identify any successes or challenges encountered, any context around the delivery of services by the provider, and providing an indication that conditions of the Funding Agreement have been met.

7. Specified Personnel

7.1 Personal Qualities

Service providers are expected to employ Reconnect workers with a range of backgrounds, qualifications, skills and knowledge, relevant to working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

All Reconnect workers should have the following attributes, personal skills and knowledge:

- compassion, patience and ability to empathise;
- genuine commitment to helping young people and their families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, a capacity to relate to them with dignity and respect;
- ability to think and act calmly and deal sensitively with distress and unpredictable behaviour;
- ability to promote the rights, responsibilities of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families
- effective listening and communication;
- non-judgmental;
- knowledge of when to seek help in supervision and how to work in a team environment;
- creative approach to problem solving;
- promotion of ethical behaviour and anti-discriminatory practice that treats consumers, family and staff with dignity and respect, and balances the right to privacy and confidentiality with duty of care.
- cultural competence;

- ability to work safely; and
- knowledge of local community resources.

7.2 Case Worker Role

The role of the Reconnect worker is focused on developing a relationship with the young person, and use early intervention strategies to assist the young person stabilise their living situation and improve their levels of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community.

Reconnect workers utilise a range of interventions and strategies with a young person and their whole family to help break the cycle of homelessness. Examples of approaches typically used by Reconnect workers include:

- assessment and goal setting
- case management
- referral
- advocacy
- counselling (individual and family)
- mediation
- group work
- outreach
- practical support
- brokerage
- therapies (individual and family)
- collaboration with other services and specialists
- collaboration with community stakeholders and networks.

8. Complaints

8.1 Complaints – Service Provider

The Department has a 'complaints management process' to capture complaints about any of its programs or those delivered by funded service providers. Service providers can lodge a complaint with the Department Feedback Coordination Team by:

Phone: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: complaints@dss.gov.au

Online complaints form available on the Department's website (www.dss.gov.au)

Post: Department of Social Services Feedback

GPO Box 9820

Canberra ACT 2601

For the purposes of the Department's complaints management process, a 'complaint' does not include:

- ministerial correspondence;
- freedom of information requests; or
- complaints made to service providers, as these will be covered by their own complaints mechanisms required under Funding Agreements.

If the service provider is dissatisfied at any time with the Department's handling of their complaint, they can also contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman (www.ombudsman.gov.au)

8.2 Complaints – Client/Service Type Participant

All service providers are required to have mechanisms in place to address complaints from clients and stakeholders and make this available to the Department if requested.

Complaint handling mechanisms should be easily identifiable, accessible and solution oriented. They should be sensitive to the issues all clients and stakeholders, face, be responsive to their needs as consumers and ensure confidentiality, natural justice and procedural fairness.

Service providers are required to maintain a formal register of complaints received and provide the register to the Department if requested.

In some circumstances, Reconnect clients may not wish to discuss their complaint with the service provider or may simply wish to deal directly with the Department. In these cases, Reconnect clients should lodge a formal complaint by contacting the Department Feedback Coordination Team on:

Phone: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: complaints@dss.gov.au

Online complaints form available on the Department's website (www.dss.gov.au)

Post: Department of Social Services Feedback

GPO Box 9820

Canberra ACT 2601

Any documents provided or created by the Department in the investigation and resolution of a complaint may be subject to release under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

9. Contact Information

9.1 Grant Agreement Managers

Grant Agreement Managers are the first point of contact with the Department. They will provide assistance with queries relating to planning, data and reporting, or any new issues that arise in the implementation or administration of the Reconnect program.

9.2 Department's State/Territory Offices

Australian Capital Territory/New South Wales

Level 9
280 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Tel: 1300 653 227

GPO Box 9820
Sydney NSW 2001

Northern Territory

Level 7
39 – 41 Woods Street
Darwin NT 0800
Tel: 1300 653 227

GPO Box 9820
Darwin NT 0801

Queensland

100 Creek Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
Tel: 1300 653 227

GPO Box 9820
Brisbane QLD 4001

South Australia

Level 17 – ATO Building
26 Franklin Street
Adelaide SA 5000
Tel: 1300 653 227

GPO Box 9820
Adelaide SA 5001

Tasmania

Level 1
199 Collins Street
Hobart TAS 7000
Tel: 1300 653 227

GPO Box 9820
Hobart TAS 7001

Victoria

Level 3
2 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Tel: 1300 653 227

GPO Box 9820
Melbourne VIC 3001

Western Australia

Level 2
226 Adelaide Terrace
Perth WA 6000
Tel: 1300 653 227

GPO Box 9820
Perth WA 6001

9.3 Department's National Office

Department of Social Services
Reconnect National Manager
GPO Box 9820
Canberra ACT 2601

Reconnect Helpdesk email reconnect.policy@dss.gov.au

Data Exchange (DEX) Helpdesk email dssdataexchange.helpdesk@dss.gov.au

10. Appendices

10.1 Definitions

(for the purposes of the Reconnect program)

Homelessness and At Risk of Homelessness

A person is considered homeless if he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure accommodation. The following definitions of Homelessness and At Risk of Homelessness are based on the categories used by Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie in their studies of homelessness for the Australian Bureau of Statistics.¹

Homeless

A person should be considered homeless if their living situation falls within the following definitions:

Primary homelessness - this includes all people without conventional shelter who are considered to be 'roofless' or 'sleeping rough' such as those:

- living on the streets;
- sleeping in parks;
- squatting in derelict buildings;
- using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter; or
- residing in other improvised shelter.

Secondary homelessness – this includes all people in temporary accommodation who may move between arrangements frequently, such as those:

- in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under Supported Accommodation Assistance Program;
- in hostels, refuges or overnight shelters;
- staying temporarily with friends or relatives ('couch surfing'); or
- residing in a boarding house temporarily (less than 12 weeks).²

Culturally, it must be recognised that for some groups living with relatives or extended family members can be considered a stable and appropriate housing

¹ Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie, *Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Analytic Program: Counting the Homeless 2006*, (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

² Ibid, pp. 3-4.

option. Although these arrangements are considered secondary homelessness by the above definitions, services engaging with these young people should consider the stability and ongoing nature of the housing when determining whether or not the young person is homeless. Where the living situation is considered permanent or semi-permanent (i.e. likely to remain stable for 3 months or more), then recognition of their status as 'At Risk of Homelessness' may be more appropriate.

Tertiary homelessness – this refers to occupants of boarding houses and other single room establishments where individuals live there on a long term basis (more than 3 months) but do not have access to the minimum cultural standard of accommodation, meaning there are shared amenities and no security of tenure in the form of a lease.³

Marginally Housed – this refers to people who have housing situations close to the minimum cultural standard. These standards also take into account the stability of that housing as a key factor.

At Risk (of homelessness)

In daily practice, Reconnect workers make judgements about 'risk' by taking into account a complex body of qualitative information about a young person's circumstances. Central to this, is the evidence of escalating family conflict or dysfunction and reduced tolerance. Other factors that need to be considered include deteriorating academic performance, truancy, personality changes, mood changes, acting out and risk taking behaviours, inappropriate peer groups and substance abuse.

Young people can also be at risk of homelessness if their living situation conforms to the marginally housed category above, or if their current living situation places them in danger of physical or mental harm.

Early Intervention and Prevention

In the literature around youth homelessness, a number of concepts are generally well accepted. These include:

The notion of the 'career trajectory': at risk > tentative break > in and out > permanent break > involvement in homelessness sub-culture\transition to chronicity > acceptance of homelessness as a way of life.

The concept of homelessness as a process: that there is a process where young people become, remain and exit homelessness. This is coupled with the idea of homelessness as a 'lived experience'.

The concepts of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness (as above) where primary homelessness refers to people without shelter, secondary homelessness refers to people living in insecure accommodation such as emergency

³ Chamberlain and MacKenzie *Australian Bureau of Statistics Counting the Homeless 2006*, p. 4.

accommodation and couch surfing, and tertiary homelessness refers to people living in hostel type accommodation.

The concepts of primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary prevention strategies: where primary prevention strategies deal with social, economic and political causes of homelessness; secondary Reconnect focuses on prevention strategies that identify young people perceptibly at risk of homelessness and strengthening their protective factors to enable them to remain engaged with school, community etc. For some specialist services they may also apply prevention strategies aimed at young people experiencing homelessness to prevent their transition to chronicity.

Early intervention refers to measures taken to assist individual young people as soon as possible after the young person has become homeless. Early intervention is assistance to young people either in the early stages of a homeless career, or with those young people perceptibly at risk of becoming homeless.

Prevention strategies, on the other hand, are not necessarily targeted at specific individuals. Prevention strategies in the Reconnect context are aimed at preventing young people making a transition to chronic homelessness and may cover mainly secondary and tertiary prevention strategies outlined above.

It needs to be understood that even with these definitions there are grey areas for particular cases where prevention blurs with early intervention and vice versa.

Refugee

Young people can be defined as a refugee if:

- they were born overseas; and
- they have entered Australia under the Humanitarian Program; and
- are experiencing multiple barriers.

If someone has entered Australia under the Humanitarian Program they will have been granted one of the following visas under the offshore resettlement program or the onshore protection program:

Refugee and Humanitarian Visas

- Off Shore Resettlement
 - Refugee Visa (subclass 200)
 - In-Country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201)
 - Global Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 202)
 - Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203)
 - Women at Risk visa (subclass 204)
- On Shore Resettlement
 - Protection visa (Class XA) (subclass 866)

Resolution of Status (RoS) visa (subclass 851) Young asylum seekers living in the community under a community release Program are not eligible for Reconnect as they remain officially 'in detention' even though in a community setting, and have not been granted appropriate visas.

Reconnect providers should contact the Department of Immigration and Border Protection if there is any question about the type of visa held by the young person, or the services they are able to access.

10.2 Good Practice Principles Strategies

Accessibility of Services

Maximising accessibility to parents, other family members and young people is an important element of good practice. Key features of accessibility include effective promotion, immediacy of response and outreach.

Promotion

- promotional materials need to use simple language, either plain English or in relevant community languages;
- there is no universal form of promotion – services may need to be promoted differently to each target group;
- the use of language is important, as people do not like to be perceived as 'problem subjects' – there is a need to universalise the issues being faced; and
- promotional materials should be distributed widely in the community, rather than just relying on perceived 'first to know agencies'.

Immediacy of Response

When a parent or young person makes contact, a quick response is extremely important. The capacity of a Reconnect worker (rather than the intake officer of a service) to respond within 24 hours appears to decrease the possibility of young people leaving or being expelled from the family home.

Outreach

Outreach can reduce the stigma people may feel about accessing a 'welfare' service. Outreach can be provided at venues where young people (and in some cases, their parents) feel comfortable, such as at homes, schools, parks, cafes and community or youth centres.

Client Driven Service Delivery

Flexible services that can adapt to the needs of both young people and families are important and can be achieved by:

- providing young people with formal needs assessment and goal setting early, where they identify issues and are assisted with strategies to address them;
- recognising the different stages families and young people may go through after seeking assistance, e.g. families may want more active, practical assistance in the short-term before being moved to explore underlying issues;

- using different models of intervention. Within the Reconnect pilot projects, it was found families and young people reacted well to solution-focused approaches that provided skills to deal with situations at the time and in the future; and
- linking participants with a range of supports and ensuring they are referred to appropriate services. Brokerage funds, incorporated in the budget, may enable a service to respond creatively by purchasing specific services.

Holistic Approaches to Service Delivery

Services need to work from an understanding that problems are not isolated from other aspects of a participant's life. This means:

- viewing a person's situation in the context of employment, education, family and community participation;
- working with families rather than just individuals;
- improving housing outcomes; and
- experienced case managers with a 'tool box' of interventions such as counselling, group work, mediation, family meetings and practical assistance.

Working Collaboratively

This involves working with a range of core services in the early intervention network including:

- schools, community agencies, (such as family support agencies and generalist and specialist youth services), income support agencies, and state/territory community service departments; and
- specialist services such as cultural-specific and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, drug, alcohol and health services including community and mental health.

Service providers are required to devote a proportion of their time to networking and developing effective working relationships with other agencies. Working together can extend to case coordination and the integrated case management of individuals and families where multiple providers are involved.

Four key features of good practice in engaging other agencies in collaborative early intervention work have been identified:

- a clearly defined task or issue that needs to be addressed;
- mutual benefit to be gained;
- organisational commitment to working together; and
- good relationships with individuals in other agencies.

Culturally and Contextually Appropriate Service Delivery

Flexibility in responding to the different needs of different communities is good practice. Promoting a service, assessing needs and issues and providing support, require a sensitive approach to cultural and contextual differences.

Contextual considerations may include:

- geographical location (urban, rural or regional);
- distances to be travelled; and
- key issues affecting families in the community being served.

Cultural considerations may include:

- language issues (potentially requiring bilingual staff, translation and interpreters);
- the effects of migration on families;
- the different values within diverse cultural groups and in particular, the difference in the culture of the country of origin and the new culture (conflict between parent and young person); and
- differences in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and between generations.

Review and Evaluation

Ongoing review and evaluation is important in ensuring that early intervention services are effective and responsive to the needs of participants. Evaluation methods such as Participatory Action Research assist service providers to provide flexible services. Building in regular feedback from participants and other agencies should enable adjustments to service delivery and have additional positive benefits, such as improvement of young people's situations.

Sustainability

Building sustainability is an important principle of good practice because it recognises the importance of ensuring continuity of support for individuals and families, e.g. by identifying gaps and barriers in services over the medium to long term. It also means working in a way that empowers individuals and communities by developing their knowledge and skills so they can sustain their own change processes.

In addition to these principles, there are several important partners with which a specialist early intervention service needs to work; these include:

- schools;
- state/territory agencies responsible for the care and protection of young people;
- income support agencies; and
- other government and non-government community agencies.

11. Budget Line Items

11.1 Staffing Costs

Direct service delivery staffing costs, including:

- Staff salaries and on-costs / staff accruals;
- Professional development;

- Staff supervision costs;
- Training and conference expenses;
- Workers compensation;
- Superannuation; and
- Job advertising.

11.2 Operational Costs

Costs associated with direct service delivery to program participants and divided as a proportion of all the funding received by the organisation:

- Service delivery expenses;
- Insurance premiums;
- Activities expenses;
- Consultancies for the purposes of service activities;
- Community education;
- Delivery of training to clients;
- Information sessions, marketing / promotion and advertising;
- Support activities and other program development costs;
- Translation and interpreter services; and
- Travel costs including travel expenses, cost associated with staff travel and motor vehicle leases for those vehicles used for direct service delivery.

11.3 Administration Costs

Administrative costs related to in delivering a service as a proportion of all funding received by the organisation:

- Management Service Fee;
- Electricity and gas expenses;
- Telephone;
- Postage, printing, photocopying, stationery;
- Office equipment;
- Depreciation, maintenance and repairs of office equipment;
- Stores and other admin / operating costs;
- Computer software;
- Meeting costs;
- Equipment insurance;
- Legal expenses;
- Amenities;
- Library;
- External audit and accounting services;
- Finance costs, bank charges and interest paid on overdraft;
- Organisational memberships and levies including that of peak bodies and other social services organisations and other operational expenses;

- Property costs: those costs associated with accommodation, rent, building insurance, cleaning, maintenance and repairs of buildings and grounds, rates and taxes, depreciation (property); and other property expenses; and
- Insurance.

11.4 Establishment Costs for New Services

- Establishment costs are intended for new services or services that have minimal infrastructure and are provided at DSS's discretion.

12. Glossary

Access

Australian Government policy is aimed at ensuring that government services:

- are available to everyone who is entitled to them;
- are free of discrimination and irrespective of a person's country of birth, language, gender, disability, culture, race or religion; and
- take into account the needs and differences of Program participants.

At Risk Groups

Groups or individuals identified as possibly having, or potentially developing, a problem (physical, mental or social) requiring further evaluation or intervention.

At Risk (of Homelessness)

See section 10.1 Definitions.

Audit

An examination and verification of the accounts, records, procedures etc, of a Service provider and conducted by a registered independent auditor, accountant, or official.

Auspice Body

A non-government organisation that manages government funded Programs and is legally responsible for implementation and reporting requirements.

Brokerage

When a service provider pays for the services or goods of another organisation to assist a Program participant with particular needs.

Capacity Building

The process of developing knowledge and skills to enhance a community's ability to meet challenges. This may involve committed leadership, consultative decision making, networking and the effective use of economic, environmental and social resources.

Case

Captures one or more instances or episodes of when a service is received by a client (or grouping of clients) for an in-scope program activity that is expected to lead to a distinct outcome.

Communities

A social unit with common rights or interests within a larger society; they are not only defined geographically.

Community Capacity

A community's commitment, resources and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities.

Community Collaboration

Being involved in community based collective action and community development activities to improve community well-being.

Community Development

Process by which communities and outside agencies plan, organise or implement improvements to community resources, facilities, economic conditions etc.

Community Strength

The extent to which resources and processes within a community maintain and enhance individual and collective well-being in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, fulfilment of needs, self-reliance and social responsibility.

Consent Obtained

A Reconnect client provides consent to the collection of data relating to their personal demographics and circumstances.

Data

Information collected for a specific purpose.

DEX

DEX (Data Exchange) is the performance reporting solution developed by the Department in consultation with service providers and clients, in response to the Australian Government's commitment to empower civil society organisations.

Disadvantage

A social relationship in which the position of one person is worse because the position of another person is relatively better. People may be disadvantaged in many ways; in relation to poverty, the term refers to resources, opportunities and distribution of power.

Early Intervention

See section 10.1 Definitions.

Department

The Australian Government Department of Social Services.

Department Grant Agreement Manager

The Department's State/Territory Office staff member who liaises with service providers on Funding Agreement requirements and monitors service performance.

Family

Two or more people related by blood, marriage, adoption or fostering, who may or may not live together. For some cultures, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, family may also include those classified as 'extended family'.

Financial Year

The twelve-month period from 1 July to 30 June.

First-to-Know Agencies

Agencies likely to be the first to identify young people or families having difficulties.

Freedom of Information

The principle that government activities are open to public scrutiny, as far as is reasonably possible, and permits public access to information held by the government.

Funding

Public money given to a service provider delivering the service outlined in the Funding Agreement and includes interest earned on the money.

Funding Agreement

The legal contract between the Department and the auspice body/service provider that outlines service delivery, accountability and reporting requirements.

Good Practice Principles

The processes or procedures that contribute to achieving the outcomes of a Program/Service Type.

Holistic Service Delivery

Approaches to service delivery that recognise the range of factors affecting the lives of young people and their families.

Homeless

See section 10.1 Definitions.

Indigenous Person

A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live.

Newly Arrived

A person who has been in Australia less than five years.

Non-Engagement Client

An '*Non-engagement*' client is a person who requests to engage with a Reconnect service and does not meet the program definitions of a target client. Additional information regarding this can be found in the 'Non Engagement Clients (NEC) Guide'.

Not for Profit

An organisation where any profits generated are returned to further the work of the organisation, and not paid out to individuals or shareholders.

Organisation

Legal entity in the non-government sector.

Parent

A natural, step, adoptive or foster mother or father.

Partnership Approach

The partnership approach is an optional extended data set that providers can choose to share with the Department, intended as a genuine collaboration between government and the sector to exchange knowledge and share resources to inform service delivery.

Performance

The extent to which objectives or targets are achieved, the efficiency with which resources are allocated and the probity, equity and fairness with which outcomes are achieved.

Performance Indicators

A set of measurements designed to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of a service in meeting objectives, producing outputs and achieving outcomes. In the Department's accrual accounting framework, performance indicators are made up of price, quantity, quality and, depending on delivery, funding criteria.

Prevention

The implementation of activities to assist and support young people, families and/or communities before problems arise.

Probity

Conformity with standards of ethics, integrity, honesty, and propriety.

Program

Refers to Reconnect.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation of the process, effectiveness, cost benefit, or impact of programs, projects or services.

Program Funding

The funding received from the Australian Government to provide the Program.

Reconnect client

Recipient of the Reconnect Program or Reconnect service delivered by a Reconnect service provider.

Refugee

See section 10.1 Definitions.

Risk

The chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives and is measured in terms of consequences and likelihood.

Service Delivery

The activities undertaken by a service provider.

Service Provider

The organisation (local government, community based, not-for-profit or for profit) funded by the Australian Government to provide a service to young people in accordance with a Funding Agreement.

Service Stocktake

This complements data collected through DEX. The service stocktake is a short set of broad questions about the conditions surrounding delivery of Reconnect services in that year

Service Type

The type of service delivered under the Program, i.e. counselling.

Stakeholders

Individuals, organisations or networks that have, or potentially have, a relationship or interest in the work undertaken by service providers.

Target Group

A target group is a group of people with a particular characteristic or set of characteristics which a Program or service seeks to assist.

13. Version Control

Version	Changes	Approved by
May 2016	Updated to reflect move from Reconnect Online Data System to Data Exchange (DEX) Minor changes made throughout document.	Helen Board Branch Manager Housing and Homelessness Programmes and Disability Employment Services Assurance
June 2017	Updated to reflect funding extension from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. Minor changes made throughout document.	Paul Hardcastle A/g Branch Manager Housing Programs and Homelessness