



14<sup>th</sup> August 2014

The Director  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

## **Submission - Inquiry into Service Coordination in Communities with High Social Needs**

### **About the Illawarra Forum**

The Illawarra Forum, established in 1990, is the peak body working for community services and organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. It supports community organisations, promotes expertise and innovation in community development, fosters industry development and provides advocacy for social justice. The Illawarra Forum is an independent organisation governed by a committee of management elected annually by the membership.

The Illawarra Forum represents the non-government community services industry in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, which consists of approximately 300 organisations which provide support to vulnerable people across the region including:

- Services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault
- Social housing providers
- Homelessness services
- Home and community care services
- People with disability
- Individuals and families with multiple layers of social and financial disadvantage
- Youth work programs
- Community health services, including mental health and drug/alcohol services
- Community legal centre services
- Community development and community capacity building programs.

This submission has been prepared following consultations with Illawarra Forum members.

### **General**

The Illawarra Forum welcomes any inquiry that improves services to communities with high social needs. We recommend the inquiry considers this on two levels – one in terms of individual clients and the other in terms of the community in general. Our members who participated in the consultations agreed that service coordination is important. As one member stated “I can’t do everything for my clients alone, I need the help of others.”

Throughout our consultation, one theme which consistently arose was that service coordination works best when there is a dedicated organisation, person or hub to take responsibility for the convening and ongoing implementation of service coordination.

***(A) The extent to which government and non-government service providers are identifying the needs of clients and providing a coordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside of their particular area of responsibility***

Our consultation revealed a strong feeling among participants that communities' power to identify needs has been somewhat taken away by current governments priorities. Participants felt that our funding bodies are working on the supply and demand model of identifying needs rather than acknowledging that each community has differing needs and therefore require different services.

The recent Federal Department of Social Services Grants round has highlighted issues which can occur when community needs are assessed remotely on the basis of data analysis. While we acknowledge that data can be useful in determining community needs, we strongly recommend that data not be used in isolation. Data analysis should be used in conjunction with in-depth community consultation in order to implement a person-centred, community based solution approach.

***(B) Barriers to the effective coordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy law***

Short term funding and competitive tendering emerged as significant barriers to effective coordination. Short term funding negates the long term commitment required for service coordination and sustained outcomes.

During our consultation, discussion also centred on whether service coordination represents value for money. Participants questioned whether service coordination is the best way to improve services to clients in high needs communities. Service coordination can be resource-intensive, as staff must attend meetings which may take away resources from clients. Service coordination must therefore not be seen as a magic bullet which enables government to get 'more bang for their funding buck'; but should be part of a service delivery toolkit which may be implemented only when it improves outcomes for clients.

One significant barrier to service coordination is that many high needs communities lack essential services such as sufficient affordable housing, transport, supported accommodation and mental health services. These important systemic issues must be addressed prior to implementing service coordination, or services will only provide band aid solutions to symptomatic issues rather than being able to address long-term ingrained community disadvantage.

Community service organisations also noted a trend for funding rounds to target 'innovative pilot projects'. Pilot projects often prove effective at addressing an issue, but they are by

definition short-term one-off projects. Once a pilot has been completed, even if evaluation proves its effectiveness, it is difficult to get long term funding as most departments will not fund a project which has been run before. This is short-sighted, and a waste of resources. It is important to capitalise on pilots which are proved to be successful, and focus on what works rather than compel constant innovation. The value-add from this approach is that organisations will build trust and will invest time and resources, not just in the project but also in the region.

Competitive tendering was widely regarded as the highest barrier to effective coordination. Competitive tendering places organisations and individuals in situations where they are cautious about sharing information or resources in case it affects them negatively in future rounds.

The 'output' model of funding also offers many restrictions and often there is a lack of flexibility in terms of what the funding can be used for.

The lack of coordination between Local, State and Federal government funding was also noted as a barrier to service coordination in high needs communities. This lack of communication and coordination at government level makes it difficult for service providers to meet community needs as their funding is tied to the different priorities of different government departments.

### ***(C) Consideration of initiatives such as the Dubbo Minister's Action Group and best practice models for the coordination of services***

It is important to have a district and regional overview when it comes to planning and service coordination, but any such overview must reflect the varying needs of individual communities within that region. Service coordination must be developed in consultation with communities to ensure a blanket approach is not taken. What works in one community may not in another.

The Illawarra Forum recently worked with service providers across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven to develop the "Roadmap for the Future of Community Services", an initiative which was supported by the then Minister for the Illawarra, Hon John Ajaka. During the development of the Roadmap, we identified 52 partnerships operating across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. While some of these partnerships are not focussed on the actual coordination of services, it is evidence that services understand the importance of working together. Indeed, the development of the Roadmap itself is an example of an initiative which demonstrated coordination, and an ongoing commitment to working together to improve outcomes for community services organisations, and the communities they serve. A copy of the Roadmap and report are attached.

Some best practice models in the Illawarra which were noted by our members during our consultations included:

- **Partners in Recovery (PIR)** – PIR workers are embedded in other services, enabling them to be at the forefront of service coordination and to add value to the host organisation by influencing an inclusive ethos.

- **NSW Family and Community Services (FACS) One Place Service Centre** – The three FACS service streams - Housing Services, Community Services and Ageing, Disability & Home Care- are working out of the same premises at Coniston, offering a 'one stop shop' option for clients. In addition, the Centre offers space for non-government organisations work out of the same office, increasing opportunities for communication and service coordination between government and non-government organisations. Clients benefit because they may come into the centre for one service and then be introduced to services they may not know about.
- **The Illawarra Regional Development Consortia, Inc. (IRDCI)** - Comprised of 17 Neighbourhood Centres from Helensburgh to Ulladulla plus not for profit organisations which operate on a community development approach including Coomaditchi Aboriginal Artist Co-op and the Wollongong Women's Centre. The IRDCI aims to strengthen Community and Neighbourhood Centres functions in the Illawarra region, to ensure that community development is valued and kept on the agenda and to provide a collective framework for funding. It was cited as a good vehicle by which to drive better service coordination in our communities. Many Neighbourhood Centres have operated in communities for a long time and have built social capital in terms of trust, relationships, inter-agency collaboration etc.
- **The Southern Suburbs Integrated Case Management (SS ICM) Project** - Excellent example of the value of providing integrated case management across NSW, Local and Australian Government and non-government human service agencies. The project used an integrated case management approach, facilitated by a Coordinator, to improve the well-being of families with multiple and/or complex needs who have exhausted other avenues of support. The project focussed on postcodes which exhibit significant concentrations of households with complex issues. The selection criteria focussed the project's efforts on families with significant and recurring issues of domestic violence, children at risk, housing insecurity and criminal justice issues.

Finally, we strongly recommend that a best practice service coordination approach would include a dedicated organisation, person or hub to take responsibility for the initiation and ongoing implementation of the coordination.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on service coordination in communities with high social needs. Please contact me for further information or clarification.

Yours faithfully,



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