



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness

Response to the Exposure Draft of the Employment Services
2009-2012 Purchasing Arrangements

Contact:
Simon Smith
Executive Officer
02 6247 7744
0418 452 830



Introduction

Homelessness Australia is the national peak body for the homelessness sector. We represent more than 1,000 agencies as well as individuals and others who work with people experiencing homelessness. Our policy work is guided by three reference groups which provide advice about key issues and represent diverse parts of the homelessness sector.

They are the:

- Women's Services Network (WESNET)
- National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) and
- Council to Homeless Persons Australia (CHPA)

We are taking this opportunity to provide feedback on the Exposure Draft of the New Employment Services 2009-12 Purchasing Arrangements.

Homelessness Australia is supportive of the positive changes in the new Employment Services System. The inclusion of the Employment Pathways Fund for Clients in Stream 4 is also a welcome change from the lack of a brokerage fund under the Personal Support Program (PSP) and the Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) Program. We are highly supportive of the inclusion of social outcomes for clients in Stream 4 of the New Employment Services System. We welcome the ability of specialist providers to be able to tender for a specific target group. We look forward to the extra work with regards to homelessness being undertaken as part of the white paper as mentioned in the Exposure Draft.

There are a number of changes that we believe can be made that will further enhance the role that the employment services system can play in responding to homelessness. These are set out in the recommendations below.



Recommendations:

- Clients eligible for Stream 4 of the New Employment Services System, and who have already completed their initial 12 or 18 months of servicing, should not be delegated to work experience for the remainder of the contract or servicing period. Alternative forms of continued support or participation may be preferable to work experience for those clients that have already been found to possess serious barriers to workforce participation.
- Allow sufficient time for feedback and communication regarding the performance management system and social outcomes that may be decided upon for clients in Stream 4.
- Homelessness Australia, as the national peak body for the homeless sector, should be involved in a review of the New Employment Services System. This will ensure a smooth transition and offer constructive advice to ensure the successful transition of the Personal Support Program (PSP) and Job Placement and Training (JPET) Program into the New Employment Services contract.



Stream 4 and Indefinite Work Experience

Homelessness Australia recently attended the Canberra consultation session for the Exposure Draft of the New Employment Services 2009-12 Purchasing Arrangements.

At the consultation session, an issue was raised dealing with clients eligible for services in Stream 4 of the New Employment Services, which would include people experiencing homelessness.

According to the documentation received for the Exposure Draft, “these clients will have complex or multiple non-vocational barriers that prevent them from obtaining and sustaining employment or undertaking further skills development”.

These may include, but are not limited to, mental illness, social problems, addictions, torture or trauma and homelessness or unstable accommodation.

After undergoing 12 to 18 months of intensive assistance, clients in stream four are expected to move into the work experience phase of servicing.

At the consultations we asked what would happen at the end of the initial 12 to 18 months of intensive assistance, and similarly, what was planned after the work experience phase of servicing.

The response stated that clients at the end of their intense servicing in Stream 4 will be placed indefinitely into the work experience phase of servicing, potentially until they find and maintain employment or until the end of the contract.

Homelessness Australia believes this is an inadequate arrangement for clients in Stream 4. These clients have multiple or complex barriers to participation and would not necessarily be able to benefit or fully participate in an indefinite period of work experience. If those barriers remain, they may find themselves unable to participate and may be at risk of having their income payments removed under the compliance system.

Every client in Stream 4 is required to undergo a Job Capacity Assessment to establish the presence of multiple or complex barriers. Because it has already been established that barriers to participation exist, it is unrealistic to then expect clients from Stream 4 to participate indefinitely in a work experience component.

Further flexible or long term support arrangements would be preferable to an indefinite period of work experience, though clients should be able to participate in work experience if they choose to do so.



Performance Management and Social Outcomes

The Exposure Draft of the New Employment Services 2009-12 Purchasing Arrangements state that the performance management system, as well as potential social outcomes for clients in Streams 3 and 4, are currently before an expert panel and are yet to be decided upon.

Because they have not been developed, there was limited opportunity to discuss these proposed changes to Employment Services in the Exposure Draft itself or at any of the consultation sessions held by DEEWR around Australia.

Homelessness Australia believes it is in the interests of a quality Employment Services system that there will be opportunity for stakeholders to be presented with the proposed performance management and social outcomes and offer feedback and consultation in a timely manner before implementation into Employment Services.

For example, PSP clients have been found to have an extensive range of 'non-vocational' barriers to finding employment. A study in 2007 found that PSP clients had an average of 8.5 barriers.¹ This means that there are a broad range of indicators that could conceivably be included under 'social outcomes'. There would need to be an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss what indicators were included and how to measure the contribution of Employment Services providers to achieving social outcomes.

¹ Perkins, D, 2007, *Making It Work: Promoting Participation of Job Seekers with multiple barriers through the Personal Support Programme*, Summary, p.1



National Peak Involved in Review of the New Employment Services System

As the national peak body for the homeless sector, many people experiencing homelessness have had contact with Employment Services. This has mainly been through two particular programs

- the Personal Support Program (PSP), which is designed for people with 'non-vocational' barriers, including homelessness, and
- the Job, Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET), which up until now has been the main government program targeting the young homeless through the Employment Services System.

Both of these will be discontinued as discreet programs under the new Employment Services contract.

As the New Employment Services System becomes operational, we would like the opportunity to be part of the ongoing review of the new system, to offer advice on implementation and how its operation is affecting people experiencing homelessness.

In particular, we are concerned that the new arrangements do not lead to a loss of specialist providers. We welcome the ability of specialist providers to tender for services. However, we have received feedback from current providers of PSP and JPET that there are a number of structural issues that would make it difficult for them to tender for streams 1-4.

By working together in this way, we can ensure smoother transitioning into the New System, and a more efficient and equitable operation of the New Employment Services System once it is in place and operational.