

Temporary Accommodation Program – A Review

April 2016

This paper provides a broad overview of the Temporary Accommodation Program (TA Program) and ways in which it could be improved. Its intention is to generate discussion and develop the evidence base around alternative options for delivering this service and to garner commitment from the Department of Family and Community Services to review and improve the TA Program. Homelessness NSW is aware that further work can be undertaken to identify a range of other issues related to the TA Program as well as to identify other innovative models of service provision and welcomes any information that Specialist Homelessness Services and other service providers may have on this.

1. Why undertake this work?

Demand for crisis homelessness services is increasing. Link2Home, the statewide homelessness information and referral service, receives on average 400 calls per day and has experienced three times the anticipated number of calls in the first 12 months of its operation. Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) providers are also reporting unprecedented demand for crisis accommodation services. The February 2016 City of Sydney Street Count identified 486 people experiencing homelessness on the street, whilst crisis accommodation services were 98% full. This is the highest street count since its inception in 2010.

The Temporary Accommodation (TA) program expends approximately \$14 million each year and is an important component of the homelessness crisis accommodation system in NSW. However, Homelessness NSW is not convinced that the current design and delivery of the program provides the optimal benefits for people who use the service. We felt that closer analysis of the TA program and consultation with SHS providers regarding the TA program would identify ways in which this funding and the program itself could be more effectively supporting people in need of crisis accommodation.

2. What is Temporary accommodation?

TA is a service provided through Housing Pathways within the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) Housing NSW under the 'Housing Act 2001' and supplements SHSs in providing short-term accommodation in "low cost motels or caravan parks" for clients to act as a 'bridge' by which clients may have somewhat secure accommodation while more permanent housing arrangements can be made. The most recent annual budget saw a \$13.98 million for 2014-2015, an apparent reduction from a previous \$28 million expenditure seen in previous years¹. The length of

¹ Minister Hazzard, Budget Estimates 2015-16 Family and Community Services, 31 August 2015
[http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/8e4522afb5ef2a59ca257eb2001ca1b5/\\$FILE/Transcript%20-%2031%20August%202015%20-%20CORRECTED%20-%20Family%20and%20Community%20Services%20Social%20Housing%20\(Hazzard\).pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/8e4522afb5ef2a59ca257eb2001ca1b5/$FILE/Transcript%20-%2031%20August%202015%20-%20CORRECTED%20-%20Family%20and%20Community%20Services%20Social%20Housing%20(Hazzard).pdf)

accommodation is limited to 28 days in a 12-month period except in exceptional circumstances with usual allocation limited to 3 night periods at a time.

According to the FACS 2014-15 Annual Report, in 2014/15 TA provided assistance to over 17,000 households².

Access to TA is arranged through making an application at the FACS District Housing Office, or via Link2Home, the statewide homelessness information and referral service provided by FACS. Applicants are required to demonstrate that they are searching for alternative forms of accommodation once placed in Temporary Accommodation in order to get an extension of TA and must return to the FACS Housing NSW office to apply for an extension.

As far as we are aware, there is no monitoring or reporting of housing outcomes for people accessing the TA Program and no monitoring or reporting on the support needs or reasons for homelessness of people accessing the TA Program.

3. Survey results

Homelessness NSW conducted a survey sent to SHS services and front-line workers across all NSW FACS districts. There were 187 respondents of which 160 made referrals to TA within their service. There were responses from across all FACS districts.

Outlined below is a snapshot of some of the issues identified via the TA survey.

Type of accommodation

According to the respondents accommodation used for TA includes motel accommodation (85%), caravan parks (40%) and pub accommodation (37%). Other forms of accommodation cited included refuges, hostels or backpacker lodges.

The appropriateness of this accommodation for the client group was identified as an issue by a majority of respondents (69%). Issues raised included safety for particular client groups such as women and children escaping domestic and family violence and young people; ability to prepare and store food and the location of the accommodation in terms of transport and access to community and other support services.

17% of providers noted that TA providers did not allow service users to prepare their own food. While others noted clients placed in TA are isolated from other support services making it difficult for their support needs to be addressed.

For example, one respondent noted a need for more consideration of location that may need to be “elevated above cost...to ‘contain’ homelessness within a community” especially where children were involved as well as a noted issue for young mothers and families having to travel with many belongings between HNSW and TA therefore end up giving up essential items they cannot store or transport. The distance between services and HNSW office or providers’ office and accommodation was a repeated concern.

² FACS Annual Report 2014/15 p31

Demand for TA

Seventy percent of respondents believe that there were not enough TA providers to meet the demand for crisis accommodation in their District. The vast majority of respondents noted their service was attempting to meet this need (84%) above and beyond the existing crisis accommodation provided by SHSs. Many services use a combination of brokerage (69%), SHS funds (49%) and other accommodation (42%) or refuges and crisis housing as alternative accommodation (25%) to fill this void. 32% of respondents stated that demand for TA had increased since the Going Home Staying Home reforms.

Access to TA

Currently, people are referred to TA if there is no crisis accommodation available in their District. There is no process of identifying which clients might be better suited to which type of accommodation according to their support needs.

We attempted to ascertain which groups of clients miss out on TA provision, with data suggesting clients with alcohol and substance abuse and mental health issues being groups that miss out. One Hunter New England District respondent cited specific incidences “where Link2Home [told] clients that they cannot help them because they are mentally unwell”. Other groups noted to be missing out included non-residents and immigrants (23%) as well as clients who have had previous issues with behaviour and aggression while in TA (14%).

A Western Sydney respondent noted that “clients don’t seem to be offered [TA] unless a worker has specifically asked for it” leading to clients being unassisted and ‘couch surfing for months’ before being assisted.

Exiting TA

While most respondents referred to TA services, eighty per cent stated that there were no assessment protocols set up for clients outside of an initial Link2Home assessment and so the support needs of clients weren’t identified or followed up and no exit planning was undertaken.

A respondent noted instances where clients who had used their quota of TA nights were being “dropped off at Belmore park because they did not have any other options” and many other clients faced similar situations due to a lack of exit strategy protocols within the TA service provision or general assessment tool via Link2Home.

TA application processes and rules

Centralisation of the service was also seen as a negative. A Hunter New England service stated “in the past workers had relationships with TA staff and could plead a client’s case; since it has become call centre based workers [the service] will not accept referrals from workers and often some clients are not able to call themselves”. A lack of capacity of Link2home to meet individual needs was also a regular comment.

The number of days allocated to clients at a time (63% of respondents identified this as an issue) and the limit per year (60% of respondents identified this as an issue) were major issues in assisting clients. One Hunter New England service noted “I have had times where I have secured accommodation for a future date (i.e. 8 days away); it would be extremely beneficial if approval to extend past 4 days could be granted immediately... it is a waste of our time and HNSW and Link2home time and productivity to have to call back and re-advocate after a few days”.

Almost half of respondents (41%) believe that service and provision of TA had worsened while 39% believe it has not improved since the GSHS reforms.

In summary services are well aware of the shortcomings of the current system and believe that it is inhibiting their capacity to work with vulnerable clients.

4. What else is happening?

Throughout the state various organisations have adapted the TA program to ensure that individuals receive more than a bed – they also receive the support required. Below are some summaries of projects either currently operating or that have operated in the recent past. This summary is by no means comprehensive, but instead provides a snapshot of different approaches.

Mission Australia - Michael's Intensive Supported Housing Accord (MISHA) and Michaels Project 2007-2010

The project aimed to provide homeless men with wrap-around support services and case management within accommodation services in order to support clients to enter more permanent housing around the Parramatta, Fairlight and Liverpool area. Wrap-around services were tailored to individual client needs ranging from health, mental, social or vocational. Michaels project state ‘with appropriate and timely support, some of the most marginalised people in our community can dramatically improve their lives’ and stability through temporary accommodation and community environment that Michaels project provided, enables people to access and benefit from services and support.

The initial project was broken up into three parts: Temporary accommodation (typically up to three months) or outreach support, assertive case management and guaranteed access to a range of specialist services and supports. Supports ranged from counselling and psychology services, dental services, barber services, computer literacy training and literacy and numeracy training among others within and around the Parramatta community. Outcomes seen from the longitudinal research conducted from the project as a result of access to services and assertive case management included lower cases of substance use and dependence, lower levels of social isolation for clients, higher self-efficacy and higher levels of quality of life within the psychological, social and environmental elements for clients. Some clients continued treatment and service access past closure of their ‘case’ due to the service being made readily available.

Edward Eager Lodge – Tenancy Facilitated Temporary Accommodation

Wesley Missions tenancy facilitated program through Edward Eager Lodge within the inner city area provides women and men individually lockable rooms in conjunction with a comprehensive support programs to clients as well as the wider community. Working on a wrap-around service model, the accommodation provides case-management, recovery groups, self-development and life skills support, counselling, church services, recreation, mental health and interagency support. On site,

the facility also employs a housing assessment worker in order to help “people make suitable choices regarding their housing”³. This project outline provides clients with appropriate support to make exit strategies as well as move onto more transitional housing. Intensive on-site support means clients are less likely to cycle back through the homelessness system and intervention and support can occur before potentially difficult and complex issues arise.

Vincentian House Temporary Accommodation Project and model

The Vincentian House TA project offers tenancy-facilitated temporary accommodation for a variety of different family types, offering a site comprising of 21 self-contained ‘family units’ and wrap-around services to support clients to “transition to suitable accommodation upon exit from the program”⁴. The project philosophy saw the point at which TA assistance is accessed is a crucial time for early intervention and engagement as it was noted long-term clients gain a complexity of issues over the course of their homelessness. The model was found to be on average cheaper nightly compared to other inner-city TA sites though the average length of stay was much longer and long-term benefits included slowing or stopping the cycle of clients between TA provisions by addressing issues within the first stages of homelessness. Tenancy facilitator Mignon Chapel noted the current model provides saving to FaCs and Housing NSW as the service implements links to support services, informs clients of the housing process and takes strain away from FaCs offices.

The project was tailored to the needs of family with children or other ‘family complements’ and offered on-site services such as case-management, advocacy for extension on behalf of the clients, referrals to support services, child and adult learning facilities, financial counselling, relationship counselling and parenting and budgeting classes. It was noted “While a limited number of local offices have a Private Rental Brokerage Specialist who some TA clients may be referred to, most clients are not provided with any tools, resources or support to assist them in their accommodation support”⁵

SWHA 2011 – Pathways Support Trial 1

Sydney Women’s Homelessness Alliance (SWHA) trialled a support pathway for women accessing TA through Housing NSW in order to combat issues in regards to a lack of provision in support networks or connection to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). The goal of the project was to reflect the success of other tenancy-facilitated inner city lodges such as ‘Edward Eagar Lodge’ in catering for a women and family demographic. Four SWHA member groups (Mathew Talbot Homeless Services, Women’s & Girls Emergency Centre Inc., Wesley Mission’s Inner West Case Management Team and Mission Australia) provided some outreach service support to clients while receiving TA assistance in the form of a one-off outreach appointment to conduct an assessment of needs in order to connect clients with SHS to access in the future if necessary. The SWHA members also collaborated together to develop a model of service, delivery protocols and capture data on clients supported and subsequent outcomes utilizing collaborative ethos of ‘Going home, Staying home’ to create relationships and stronger connection in recommendations to access SHS in the future. Information gained from outreach services meant that clients were better able to support themselves outside of assistance, improved relationships between services provided better service results through the building of relationships between SHS and even partnerships. Through this approach, the services as

³ [Wesley Mission Edward Eagar Lodge](#)

⁴ VHTAP *ibid.* (2013), p. 4

⁵ VHTAP *ibid.* (2013), p. 6

well were able to target a variety of different groups of clients with diverse needs including those who usually when presented to a crisis service would not receive service e.g. transgender⁶.

The development of partnerships between HNSW and SHS provided the client a level of emotional and practical support while allowing for practical and streamlined support and referral to a suitable service while they were in TA. An evaluation into the pathways support found the approach is more economically viable than the existing TA frame work as it was hoped that the client would only go into TA on one occasion while there needs are resolved as opposed to multiple occasions. Therefore Housing NSW would be paying for one occasion of TA. Outcomes for client were on par for more medium and transitional housing outcomes and ranged from brokerage support to leases with a community housing provider or accommodation within a boarding house.

Temporary Accommodation Triage project – Liverpool, Fairfield and Bankstown

The early intervention and tenancy support services operates as a partnership between Mission Australia South Western Sydney and the HNSW Liverpool, Bankstown and Fairfield offices. The project aims to support ‘first-time’ homeless clients in a timely manner with case management support and sustainable levels of support services in order to maintain and transition to longer term accommodation. As noted within the project aims, TA is often the first contact clients will have with the homelessness service system and currently, TA through HNSW does not offer support services holistically, therefore clients are mostly not linked to support in order to help them transition to more sustainable housing.

Services centred on individual needs based on an assessment and case management support allows for appropriate referrals to be made to a network of other services such as counselling, legal advice, family support and financial counselling. In just over one year, 270 referrals were made and office allocation times extended to help clients move away from the cycle of homelessness and step into the TA service with support underneath them.

5. Other ideas?

During discussions with SHS across the state many services advised of innovative programs they were interested in pursuing.

On the mid-North Coast two services are in discussion with a community housing provider about the possibility of head leasing a 5 bedroom property. Two rooms would be allocated to each service with the other room to be used as an office. Each service would ‘temporarily’ house clients and using existing resources provide drop in support to develop case plans and ensure that the clients proactively searched for alternate accommodation. It has been estimated that nearly 1,460 nights of accommodation could be provided (with support) for the same cost of 152 nights of TA (with no support).

In the New England eleven services are in discussion with the aim to develop a model that would enable clients to receive a case plan and management along with additional nights of accommodation (provided they are taking action to secure alternative accommodation). The client

⁶ SWHA Pathways support trial evaluation, (2011)

must also actively work with Specialist Homelessness Service that will support the client to identify and address the issues that led them to becoming homeless in the first place.

Services are interested in discussing local solutions, using local resources and understanding to develop models of TA that are more cost effective, deliver better outcomes and support services to become more sustainable.

6. Recommendations

Homelessness NSW believes that the TA program can and should be a vital service to ensure that people who become homeless exit homelessness as soon as possible. We know that FACS Districts are currently operating modified programs that allow them to meet clients' needs. We also know that demand for these services outstrips supply. From this we make these four recommendations.

1. That each FACS District do an audit of all TA and other similar programs to ascertain how each District is currently managing the TA scheme with a view to adapting successful approaches statewide.
2. That FACS Districts discuss ideas and proposals for customising delivery of TA on a regional basis to deliver both accommodation and support; these would include a collaboration of SHS, Community Housing Providers and FACS Housing NSW.
3. That TA have a dedicated budget, with each FACS District allocated an amount to adequately meet demand.
4. That a TA Program outcomes framework with reporting on the reasons for homelessness and housing accessed after using TA is developed and implemented.

Homelessness NSW will continue to gather information around successful local options for providing TA as well as consult with the sector on alternative ways to provide support through the TA program and use this information to support FACS to make positive changes to the TA program.

To discuss this paper or to provide further information on the TA program please contact Digby Hughes, Homelessness NSW, 9331 2004 or digby@homelessnessnsw.org.au