

Caucus discussion – Key issues facing Aboriginal staff and services

1. Engagement and support for Aboriginal service users

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES

- The first point of call either by phone or in person makes or breaks a client
- Staff do not show compassion to clients who present with mental health issues
- Housing providers do not consistently engage with Aboriginal people who are already housed
- Sometimes staff do not help clients with alternate accommodation when the latter are barred from services (basically leaving them on the street)
- Some staff have limited communication skills in dealing with Aboriginal clients who have low literacy and numeracy skills, and knowledge in those areas
- Areas of access in services could have culturally appropriate flags and Aboriginal art

CLIENT SUPPORT

- Need more cultural programs to educate Aboriginal clients about sustaining a tenancy and their options for support/assistance, e.g. modify 'Rent It, Keep It' program
- Need to provide clients with a mobile phone; sometimes clients have no phone or address that services can access them by
- Clients lack some forms of ID or have no ID at all
- Need to provide an Aboriginal house for clients
- Need to provide funds for public/other transport for Aboriginal workers to meet with clients
- Need to provide food at events with clients

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

- Non-Aboriginal staff lacking cultural awareness or understanding, and thereby being unable to build cultural relationships with clients
- Non-Aboriginal staff lacking awareness of generational trauma
- Services need to provide ongoing cultural competency training that all staff, including executives, are required to attend
- Services need to provide cultural supervision for staff
- Need more culturally appropriate settings for client engagement
- Need more cultural safety for clients
- Non-Aboriginal staff lacking real estate knowledge about transience of Aboriginal people – lack of rental history
- Cultural safety issues can raise conflict of interest issues for some staff, who are not able to work with their own people
- Aboriginal services are not consulted with regards to cultural issues when dealing with Aboriginal clients
- Need to develop cultural frameworks that incorporate the rights of sovereignty principles

MORE ABORIGINAL WORKERS AND SERVICES

- There are limited identified Aboriginal workers; often NGOs do not provide more than one identified Aboriginal worker, especially in small communities
- Need to identify Aboriginal workers for Aboriginal clients
- Need to increase the number of Aboriginal case workers in large services

- Need more Aboriginal staff and coordinators in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations
- Need more Aboriginal services funded long term

FUNDING

- Need more funding for existing and new Aboriginal services
- Need more funding for outreach services, particularly in rural communities
- Need more funding for financial assistance for clients
- Need more brokerage funding, e.g. to maintain tenancies
- Need more funding to respond to the increase in Aboriginal homelessness

GAPS IN SERVICE/AGENCY COORDINATION

- There is a lack of communication between FaCS and Aboriginal services
- FaCS provides limited support for Aboriginal specialist services and then pressures them
- There are no Aboriginal FACS Community Program Officers for Aboriginal services
- Need to increase outreach programs for Aboriginal programs within the community
- Need a coordinated approach with all sectors based on a cultural accord – a strategy practice model
- Concerns about Housing NSW, regarding housing policy
- Some Aboriginal clients are unable to get approved by real estate agents, due to discrimination
- Need to prioritise rural family groups for housing

2. Support for Aboriginal staff and staff with Aboriginal service users

SUPPORT FOR WORKERS

- Need to build a network of Aboriginal workers which meets regularly and strategically
- Develop Aboriginal workers meetings, including interagency meetings
- Need increase in funding to increase wages
- Funding needs to be available for allocated work cars for identified Aboriginal workers, due to high volume issues with Aboriginal clients

MORE ABORIGINAL WORKERS AND SERVICES

- Need more Aboriginal staff and identified positions; at least 2 Aboriginal staff per service
- Need more Aboriginal staff in coordinator roles and managers to support the front-line staff
- Need more support for Aboriginal staff
- Need more Aboriginal specialist staff within FACs, Housing NSW and SHSs
- Need more Aboriginal SHS managed services
- Need more Aboriginal leadership programs
- Need increased funding for Aboriginal specialist services to reflect the increase in Aboriginal homelessness
- Need longer term funding for services

GAPS IN SERVICE/AGENCY COORDINATION

- Lack of communication between FACs and Aboriginal services regarding with working Aboriginal clients
- There is no support from FACs for Aboriginal specialist services – pushing SHS
- Allow input from NSW ALC/LALCs and AMO into the homelessness space
- There are not enough Aboriginal FACS Community Program Officers

CLIENT SUPPORT

- Start Safely (short to medium term rental subsidy for those who have experienced domestic or family violence) that makes people look for private rental does not work; need extra housing and support
- Need to provide case management for the whole family
- Funding should include families and outcomes
- Need more Aboriginal homes
- Increase all housing providers for Aboriginal housing programs
- Increase long term and stable housing for families; not for one year only
- More flexible housing options for Aboriginal applicants
- Need targeted support for Aboriginal clients

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

- Adopt First People principles to organisational change and reflect in policy and practice
- Workers need trauma education about elders and past events

3. Coordinated service system interventions to prevent homelessness of Aboriginal people

GAPS IN SERVICE/AGENCY COORDINATION

- Who makes government departments (as opposed to housing providers) accountable for responding to the increase in Aboriginal homelessness?
- Needs to be more work between land councils and service providers for a more coordinated approach to homelessness
- Needs to be more service networking
- Require all services to have a regional action plan (RAP) in place to operate
- Lack of communication between FACS and Aboriginal services regarding working with Aboriginal clients
- There are not enough Aboriginal FACS Community Program Officers
- Housing NSW takes advantage of people who are vulnerable
- Need a specific housing model for Aboriginal women who had children removed by FaCS

SHS SERVICES

- All social housing providers should be required to deliver a percentage in accommodating Aboriginal families long term housing (how much %?)
- More funding for organisations, more crisis beds, more transitional properties
- Mainstream organisations push Aboriginal clients towards Aboriginal organisations, even though the former have the funding
- Need support from FACS for Aboriginal specialist services in Sydney, rather than promoting mainstream services
- Lack of brokerage funding available and significant hoops workers and the client has to jump through
- Need increased funding for Aboriginal specialist services to reflect the increase in Aboriginal homelessness in Sydney
- Some housing providers are more helpful than others

- There are different procedures for all housing providers: 1. Age of children who can share a room, 2. Same gender can share a bedroom up until 18 years. 3. different genders can share up until the age of 10 years.

CLIENT SUPPORT AND HOUSING ISSUES

- Need to establish Aboriginal education and bonding camps
- Difficult to get housing for complex clients
- There is a gap in SHS funding for singles and families
- There is a lack of accommodation for single men
- Not enough housing for large families and extended families
- Need to increase the income limit for large Aboriginal families and extended families (e.g. grandparents or aunts and uncles with nieces, nephews in care)
- Social housing provided is not suitable – need bigger houses
- Need more Temporary Accommodation (TA) nights available, TA does not cater for families
- Need affordable sustainable housing (not TA)
- Broader socio-economic issues, lack of affordable housing plus rising rent cost are contributing to homelessness
- Need to have a database of Aboriginal workers and Aboriginal services for Aboriginal clients
- Need more funding for programs, living skills, Rent It Keep It program, etc
- Housing applications take too long for homeless people and the process is complicated for clients to understand
- Inappropriate policies and procedures in housing and too many barriers for clients to face

SUPPORT FOR WORKERS AND SERVICES

- Aboriginal support team meetings between Aboriginal service providers
- Need more Aboriginal workers in services
- Increase funding for all services committed to working with Aboriginal clients
- Housing workers need mental health and drug and alcohol training to help understanding
- Need identified Aboriginal positions within all social housing providers