Working together to end homelessness

24,828 Victorians homeless every night

"more houses for people"

North and West Homelessness Networks

Terms of Reference 2022

Western Homelessness Network

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OVERVIEW

Vision: An end to homelessness

1. Aim
To work together to end homelessness.

2. Mission
We aim to achieve this vision by creating opportunities for all Specialist Homelessness Services in Melbourne's west to come together to:

- Develop an informed regional voice on homelessness

- Address the causes and impacts of homelessness

- Advocate for improved responses to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

- Build the capacity of the regional service system.

3. Objectives
To form a collaborative network of specialist homelessness service providers (and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing) that will:

- Continue to develop the coordinated service system response to addressing the support and housing needs of people who are homeless.

- Build on consistency and quality of service delivery practice amongst member agencies

- Establish structures to monitor and improve the integrated model of service delivery, including mechanisms to raise and resolve issues, capacity to respond to consumer feedback and opportunities for improvement

- Share information, skills and knowledge

- Capture, share and utilise intellectual capital, qualitative and quantitative data to support advocacy and service system development

- Create opportunities for consumers to participate in the ongoing development of the service system.

- Work together to create opportunities to advocate for the needs of individuals and households who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in Melbourne's west

- Continue to strengthen our collaborative and respectful relationship with the Western Division of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) [now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing - DFFH].

- Build the capacity of the divisional service system in collaboration with allied service systems, to improve responses to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

- Make evidence-based recommendations to the DFFH about responses to service gaps (changes in agency catchments/targets/allocation of funds/utilisation of funding).

4. Membership

The core (voting) membership of the Western Homelessness Network is funded Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) operating in Melbourne's west. The Western Homelessness Network meets regularly as the Western Homelessness Local Area Service Network (WLASN).

The Network includes an associate (non voting) membership, consisting of:

- DFFH representatives
- A representative of the Children's Resource Program
- A representative of the Western Integrated Family Violence Services
- The Western Homelessness Network Coordinator
- Other allied services.

Network members commit to:

- Participating in Network activities to achieve the goals and strategies outlined in the Strategic Plan
- Abide by Network decisions.

The Network is resourced by DFFH to undertake five key functions:

- Consultation
- Planning & Needs Identification
- Community education/advocacy
- Development and training
- Coordination and Linkages

And to meet the following deliverables:

- Two submission responses each year on specific issues
- Fortnightly editions of the Bulletin
- Six Steering Group meetings
- Four quarterly forums or special events
- Progressing two sector concerns per annum

(NB These deliverables related to the joint North and West Homelessness Network. DFFH has not yet advised whether these are the deliverable or whether the deliverables are halved.)

5. Resources

The Network uses its resources to employ a Network Coordinator to support the Network in achieving its deliverables and meeting its Strategic Plan. The Network Coordinator is auspiced by Wombat Housing and Support Service and is accountable to the Network Steering Group.

The Network Coordinator must submit an annual workplan and provide an update report at each Steering Group and LASN meeting.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND AUTHORISATION

6. Authorising context

Regional Networks are included in Part Five of the Homelessness Services Guidelines, updated May 2014, wherein the Networks are authorised within the current operational and funding regime as follows:

> "DHS provides resources for the maintenance of Regional Homelessness Networks. These networks provide an opportunity for all homelessness services to come together at the regional level to improve responses to homeless people in their local communities. All homelessness services are required to participate in these activities."

Network members, through the mechanism of the WLASN (see below), have the authority to discuss and make recommendations on all matters pertaining to the operation of the Network and its coordinated service system arrangements. Network members allocate authority to the WLASN as a whole to determine appropriate practice in relation to the operation of the coordinated homelessness service system and the achievement of the Network Strategic Plan.

7. Governance Structures

See also Appendix 1: Governance mechanisms and processes.

a) Local Area Service Network (LASN)

The LASN is the mechanism that the Network uses to make decisions, progress its workplan and share information.

The LASNs were established by DHHS in 2008 as a mechanism for the Homelessness Networks to undertake the following:

- develop, implement and maintain Opening Doors arrangements in their particular geographic catchments
- build on consistency and quality of service delivery practice amongst member agencies
- coordinate referrals with allied services and services in other areas
- undertake data monitoring and client satisfaction review for the purposes of identifying gaps and trends in service provision
- make evidence-based recommendations to DOFFH about responses to service gaps (changes in agency catchments/targets/allocation of funds/utilisation of funding).

Each voting member agency is asked to send a representative to the LASN who is authorised to make decisions on behalf of their agency. Member agencies abide by LASN decisions, where they are not in conflict with individual Funding and Service Agreements (FASA) with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

The LASN is convened by its membership and meets at least quarterly. The LASN Chairperson chairs LASN meetings.

Each voting member organisation nominates a LASN member and a proxy member. The responsibilities of the LASN member include:

- Familiarity with all Network documents

- Regularly attend WLASN meetings

- Participate in Network activities, such as the annual Consumer Survey

- Consult within their agency to inform an agency position on WLASN agenda items

- Present an agency perspective on WLASN agenda items

- Ensure staff within the organisation are kept up to date on Network activities and LASN decisions

- Ensure that the organisation adheres to WLASN decisions and is operating in accordance with Network guidelines.

b) Steering Group
The Network nominates between 8 and 12 representatives to sit on its Steering Group. (See page 13.) The Steering Group is authorised by the Network to:

- develop and monitor the Network Strategic Plan

- manage the Network Coordinator

- guide the operational priorities and key tasks of the Network

- plan LASN meetings and progress LASN decisions

- ensure that the Network deliverables are achieved

- develop policy responses as required

- represent the Network as required.

c) Victorian Homelessness Network
The Western Homelessness Network is a member of the Victorian Homelessness Network (VHN).

The VHN provides a mechanism for strategically progressing issues of common concern across all Regional Homelessness Networks, with a focus on operational issues relating to management of a statewide homelessness service system. This work includes:

- Identifying and responding to shared statewide strategic themes and priorities for action across the Regional Homelessness Networks.

- Identifying and responding to statewide issues arising in relation to the operation of a coordinated Statewide Homelessness Service System; including identifying the stakeholders and mechanisms relevant to progressing resolution of statewide issues.

- Identifying strategies for the further development of the Homelessness Service System's capacity to respond to those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness and/or experiencing family violence.

- Assisting Regional Homelessness Networks to align their business planning cycles and other key functions in order to increase the effective functioning of the homelessness service system.

- Provision of expert advice to key stakeholders, including the key peak bodies (Council to Homeless Persons, Domestic Violence Victoria and the Community Housing Federation of Victoria) and DHHS.

- Coordinate the progression of shared strategic priorities with the key Peak bodies.

d) Working Groups

There are five key Working Groups that undertake work on specific areas on behalf of the Network. Four of these Working Groups are convened in conjunction with the Northern Homelessness Network, are accountable to the WLASN and provide an update at each WLASN meeting:

Consumer Participation Working Group

The Consumer Participation Working Group exists to:

- Investigate, develop and make recommendations about coordinated methods for the inclusion and participation of consumers of the LASNs.

- Positively influence and embed a culture of consumer participation in the North and West homelessness service system.

- Develop a homelessness system inclusive of and responsive to consumers to continually improve the system.

The Group brings together select representatives of LASN member agencies to:

- Develop mechanisms to channel consumer feedback into LASN developmental work and to develop the sector's capacity to hear and incorporate consumer feedback into organisational and regional development

- Test the effectiveness of sector reform through consumer participation

- Model good practice in relation to consumer feedback and participation practices

- Assist services with continuous quality improvement

Access Point/THM meeting

The Access Point/ Transitional Housing Management (THM) working group meetings are convened to:

- Provide a forum for discussion of strategic issues in relation to the operation of (THM) and Access Point services.

- Provide advice and feedback to the Department Health and Human Services (DHHS) about the operation of THM and Access Point services.

- Discuss operational issues related to the Access Point role with a view to developing increasingly consistent approached and understandings across Access Point services in the North and West Metropolitan Regions.

- Make recommendations to the North and West LASNs on matters pertaining to the operation of Access Points in the Regions and;

- Discuss operational issues related to the Transitional Housing Management role in the Region.

- Assist services to collect consistent data, collate and interpret data findings

Youth Working Group

The Youth Working Group meets to consider issues of common interest to provision of youth homelessness services and to make recommendations to the WLASN on matters relating to provision of assistance for young people.

Advocacy Working Group

Assists the LASN to prepare for Homelessness Week and Youth Homelessness Matters Day.

Crisis in Crisis Working Group

Implements and oversee the LASNs' advocacy work in relation to the crisis in emergency accommodation and oversees the LASNs' implementation of the Crisis Accommodation Options Project report recommendations.

e) Link with the Northern Homelessness Network

The Northern and Western Homelessness Networks operated for many years as one Network. When the DHHS restructure created the Northern and Western Divisions, the Network nominated to split and follow the new Divisional boundaries.

However, many services operate across both Melbourne's north and west and Northern and Western homelessness agencies have established a strongly collegiate relationship. Consequently, where possible, the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks work together for shared outcomes. Forums and Working Groups are often convened across both Networks.

8. Planning Cycle

The Network develops an annual Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan is informed by an annual survey of members. Each member organisation provides one response to the survey. From this survey the Steering Group identifies key priorities for the next year and prepares a draft Strategic Plan for LASN comment and then sign off.

The Strategic Plan is developed in line with direction from the Victorian Homelessness Network on consistency of approach across all the Networks and reflects statewide, as well as local, priorities.

The Steering Group is responsible for enacting and monitoring the Strategic Plan.

9. Guidelines

All Specialist Homelessness Services work in accordance with Opening Doors Framework: Copies of key documents guiding practice can be found at: http://www.nwhn.net.au/Resources-for-homelessness-workers/Guiding-documents-for-homelessness-services.aspx

The Framework has been applied to the Western Homelessness Network through the North and West Homelessness Networks Service System Practice Manual (2012). Any changes to practice that varies from those outlined in the Practice Manual is referred to the LASN. The LASN is responsible for approving any variations to coordinated service system arrangements. Any variation will be updated in the Practice Manual.

10. Grievances

Grievances may arise between members of the Network. In the spirit of the values of the Network, Network members will, in the first instance, attempt to resolve grievances with each other. If the grievance relates to a structural matter, it should be directed to the Network Chairperson, who will make a decision about a way forward.

If the Steering Group becomes aware that a LASN agency has not effectively implemented a LASN decision or is not working in accordance with the shared coordinated homelessness service system arrangements, the Steering Group will take the following actions:

1. The Steering Group will notify the agency's LASN representative of the concerns about their agency's adherence to a LASN decision.

2. If the matter cannot be resolve at this point, or the LASN member needs assistance in managing implementation of the decision within their agency, the Steering Group will contact the CEO of the agency to advise of the concerns.

3. If the Steering Group does not receive a response from the CEO or continues to hold concerns about the agency response, the Steering Group will address this with the CEO and then refer the matter to DFFH.

Discussion of concerns about LASN agency adherence to LASN decisions will focus, in the first instance, on ascertaining how the Steering Group can support an agency to effectively implement

a LASN decision.

11. Managing coordinated service system arrangements: Issues and improvements

WLASN members are responsible for maintaining and developing the coordinated homelessness service system arrangements. Working Groups have a role in developing these coordinated arrangements.

WLASN members forward ideas or concerns, either individually or through working groups, about systemic improvements these arrangements to the Western Homelessness Networker. The Networker and WLASN Chair will investigate concerns or suggestions in relation to:

- Practice improvement
- Operating proposals that vary from the documented homelessness service system arrangements.

The Chair will nominate another Steering Group member to investigate any issues raised that may be a conflict of interest for the Chair. If issues/suggestions investigated require any further action, the Chair will forward them to the WLASN for discussion. The issue may first be tabled at the Steering Group so that the Steering Group can shape an effective LASN discussion.

If consumers approach LASN member agencies with identified issues for consideration by the LASN, they can be directed to the Network Coordinator so that they can formally log their issues. Homelessness Support workers who are assisting a consumer can help them to log an item. Consumers can also be referred to the Homelessness Advocacy Service for assistance in logging items.

If external stakeholders approach LASN member agencies with identified issues for consideration by the LASN, they can be directed to the Network Coordinator to discuss their issue/suggestion.

Any issues tabled by consumers or external stakeholders will be investigated and addressed by the Chairperson and Network Coordinator.

APPENDIX 1: GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

1. LASN processes

a) Notice of meetings

A meeting will be deemed to be appropriately constituted if four weeks' notice of the meeting has been provided to members. Therefore, meetings will go ahead regardless of the number of member agencies in attendance.

b) Quorum

A quorum of 60% of LASN members is required in order to make decisions at LASN meetings. If quorum is not achieved, recommendations can be made in response to proposals, but formal decision will be required by email vote after the meeting.

c) Decision making

Wherever possible the LASN operates with a Consensus decision making framework1, with one 'position' lodged per organisation. Associate members can provide a perspective on LASN agenda items but do not participate in decision making.

If consensus decision making is not possible, an issue will go to the vote with 60% of those member agencies present required to carry a vote2.

If a meeting is deemed to be appropriately constituted, then decisions made at the meeting will stand. Member organisations unable to attend an appropriately constituted meeting can forward a written position to the Chairperson, or participate in the meeting via telephone or video conferencing.

Urgent decisions can be made via email between meetings. Each member organisation will have five working days to respond to an issue. A decision can only be taken on an issue if consensus is reached by all member organisations within the five days. Emails requiring a LASN decision will be entitled "LASN decision required" and responding members will 'reply all'.

Mechanisms to assist in consensus decision making:

- All attempts will be made to ensure that decision making is participatory and transparent.
- Information is provide within sufficient time to enable participants to read material
- Sufficient time is given at meetings for questions to be asked and for consensus to be developed without coercion
- Members have the option of abstaining from participation in a decision but will provide a reason for abstention and will agree to abide by the decision made.

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2 The Network Coordinator will keep a list of voting members of the Network.

- Where time allows, decisions pending will be listed on a whiteboard and voted on at a later point in the meeting – to provide participants with time for reflection.

d) Consultation

Network Forums and special meetings will be used as a consultation mechanism to identify views about particular actions or development and/or consider issues of relevance to the Network. Proposals made at Forums will be referred to the LASN for consideration and progression.

The Network will undertake one survey of its members each year to review the Network activities for that year and consult about priorities to inform the Strategic Plan for the next year. From time to time the Network may conduct surveys of its members to inform Network submissions on key issues.

e) Agendering an item for LASN discussion

The Network Coordinator will forward LASN meeting agendas to members at least one week prior to a LASN meeting.

Any LASN member may forward an agenda item to the Chairperson for inclusion in a LASN agenda. The Steering Group will make recommendations to the Chair about the tabling of agenda items in order to ensure that LASN meetings operate as effectively as possible.

Ideally, LASN agenda items will be written up as a discussion paper and circulated one week prior to the LASN meeting.

2. Steering Group processes

a) Role of the Steering Group

It is the role of the Steering Group to be responsible for managing the strategic directions of the Western Homelessness Network (WHN) by:

- Taking a leadership role in the Network, at LASN meetings and in supporting the participation of other Network agencies in LASN activities
- Facilitating the development of a Network Strategic Plan
- Facilitating the identification of operational priorities and key tasks
- Developing and monitoring the Network Strategic Plan against identified outcomes (and Key Performance Indicators), including an annual timeline attached to a Work Plan
- Coordinating implementation of the Strategic Plan including delegating responsibility
- Monitoring the Networker's workplan against the Strategic Plan
- Providing sign off for Network submissions, correspondence and other reports, on behalf of the Network
- Receiving and responding to Networker requests for feedback and assistance in carrying out activities relating to the WHN and its Strategic Plan
- Facilitating policy responses as required for endorsement by the WHN membership
- Providing formal representation of the WHN as required
- Being accountable to the WHN membership
- Reporting against the Strategic Plan annually
- Responding to issues as they arise in between Steering Group/WLASN meeting cycle
- Represent Steering Group discussions at the LASN
- Representing the WHN as required
- Being accountable to the WHN membership, by assisting in the facilitation of forums, providing a contact for members and reporting against the Strategic Plan annually
- Being available to provide advice to the Networker.

b) Authority of the Steering Group

This Group is authorised by the LASN to make decisions about the management and implementation of the annual WHN Strategic/Work Plan, in addition to the strategic directions of the LASN.

The Steering Group plans LASN meetings, LASN projects and other LASN activities and communicates with external stakeholders on behalf of the LASN.

The Steering Group can make operational decisions on behalf of the Network, including finalising submissions, correspondence and other reports, on behalf of the Network.

c) Membership

Membership of the Steering Group is formed from: elected members of the Western LASN, the Network auspice agency and non-voting representation from the NW Children's Resource Program, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Networker.

The maximum number of representatives on the Steering Group is 12. The aim is to achieve representation of the membership, reflecting regional geography, service types and target groups.

Voting members (7- 9 members)

At a minimum the Steering Group will include representation from:

- the auspice agency
- both Access Point Services
- Homelessness Support Services (1-3 positions, representing a cross section of cohorts),
- Family Violence Services (minimum of one),
- both Transitional Housing Management Program services.

Non voting members (3 members)

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) is invited to nominate a representative for the Steering Group, at the discretion of the Steering Group.

The Children's Resource Coordinator, DFFH representative and Western Homelessness Networker all participate in the Steering Group as non voting members.

d) Expectations of Steering Group members

Voting members of the Steering Group are elected by the LASN.

Member agencies are limited to one nomination only (with the exception of access point and transitional housing management services).

To uphold the independence of the Network, members shall attend with a focus on the Network and its activities, rather than operating as representatives of their organisation. It is understood that agency interests and knowledge will inform the perspective of Steering Group members but, when on the Steering Group, members will consider regional imperatives rather than pursue individual agency interests.

It is expected that Steering Group members will attend both Steering Group meetings and LASN meetings (both are held every six weeks) and will participate actively in both meetings. Steering Group members may present agenda items on behalf of the Group in LASN meetings. Steering Group members provide input into and feedback on LASN documents from time to time and may occasionally attend additional meetings to progress LASN work.

If a Steering Group member is unable to attend three meetings in any year, without notice, they will relinquish their position.

e) Election of Steering Group members

A call for nominations is made annually for half the voting positions on the Steering Group.

Staff from Network agencies can self-nominate for positions on the Steering Group, but each nomination must be supported by another LASN member and nominating members must be authorised by their agency to participate in the Steering Group.

If more people nominate to be on the Steering Group than there are available positions, an election is held at the LASN. Priority is given to new members and to members representing cohort groups not already represented on the Steering Group.

The tenure for a position on the Steering Group is for two years. Members can re-nominate at the end of their term.

Member agencies are limited to one nomination only (with the exception of access point and THM services). To uphold the independence of the Network, members shall attend with a focus on the Network and its activities, rather than operating as representatives of their organisation.

f)   Chairperson

The Steering Group will nominate a chairperson from amongst its membership for a term of at least one year. The Chair is elected by the Steering Group following the Steering Group election each year.

The Chairperson will:

- chair Steering Group and LASN meetings
- be the principal liaison with the auspice
- be the key public contact for the Network
- represent the Network as required
- sign Network reports and correspondence
- support the auspice to address any concerns relating to performance of the Network Coordinator.

g)   Meetings

The Steering Group will meet every six weeks.

If the Steering Group membership has had at least two weeks' notice of a meeting, the meeting will be deemed to be fully constituted and the attending members will have capacity to make decisions.

h)   Decision making and quorum

Quorum is achieved if half plus one of all Steering Group members are present at a meeting.

Decision making is generally by consensus but items will go to a vote if necessary.

i)   Attendance

If a Steering Group member is unable to attend three meetings in any year, without notice, they will relinquish their position.

The Chairperson is responsible for monitoring attendance.

j)   Role of the Auspice

The Wombat Housing and Support Service Executive Officer will:

- Be responsible for the Network Funding and Service Agreement (FASA)
- Manage the DFFH funded resources of the Network
- Advise the Steering Group on the parameters of the FASA and budget
- Ensure supervision and support is provided to the Network Coordinator
- Develop and monitor the Network Coordinator workplan in line with the Network Strategic Plan

- Provide budget updates to the Steering Group.

3. Victorian Homelessness Network processes

The Western Homelessness Network is a member of the Victorian Homelessness Network (VHN).

a) Objectives of the VHN

The VHN will:

- Facilitate information sharing across the Regional Homelessness Networks and with key stakeholders.

- Progress shared statewide strategic themes and priorities for action across the Regional Homelessness Networks.

- Propose solutions to statewide issues arising in relation to the operation of a coordinated Statewide Homelessness Service System.

- Identify strategies for the further development of the Homelessness Service System's capacity to respond to those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness and/or experiencing family violence.

- Intersect strategically with DFFH, CHIA Vic, Safe and Equal and other Stakeholders.

- Consider the consumer experience of the operation of the coordinated Statewide Homelessness Service System.

- Design and implement the annual survey of Network members across the State to measure the Networks' effectiveness in achieving the objectives outlined in the Statewide Governance Framework and to determine key strategic priorities for Network activities in the following year.

- Undertake activities that support the objectives of the Regional Homelessness Networks:
  - o To promote and support innovation, knowledge sharing and expertise in the best interests of consumers who are experiencing homelessness;
  - o To foster relationships and collaboration between service providers to ensure timely, coordinated and effective responses;
  - o To act as a conduit between the Department of Health and Human Services and the regional service sector on homelessness related data, issues and trends to inform policy.

a) Authorisation

The Victorian Homelessness Network is authorised by its member Networks to:

- Draw out key statewide themes and strategic priorities from across the Regional Network strategic plans and circulate these priorities and themes across Regional Networks and to key stakeholders (such as the key peak bodies and DHHS).

- Represent the shared concerns of the Regional Networks in discussions with key stakeholders.

- Make recommendations back to LASNs/Networks about mechanisms to improve the Homelessness Service System.

- Make recommendations to DHHS and other key stakeholders about mechanisms to improve the Homelessness Service System.

- Develop and respond to the annual Network survey of the effectiveness of the Networks in achieving their objectives.

- Develop a complimentary business planning cycle and process for all Regional Networks.

- Initiate joint projects and partnerships and establish Statewide Working Groups.

Individual VHN members are authorised to represent the endorsed positions of their Regional Network, not of their agencies, and to participate in decision making on behalf of their Regional Network.

4. Working Groups processes

All Working Groups report back at each LASN meeting, take directions from the LASN and refer any major decisions to the LASN.