



Northern Homelessness Network

Governance Document

Working together to end
Homelessness

February 2019

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Vision

An end to homelessness.

Aim

To work together to end homelessness.

Mission

We aim to achieve this vision by creating opportunities for all Specialist Homelessness Services in Melbourne's north 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.

Objectives

To form a collaborative network of specialist homelessness service providers (and the Department of Health and Human Services) 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)
- 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 DHHS about responses to service gaps (changes in agency catchments/targets/allocation of funds/utilisation of funding).

Membership

The core membership of the Northern Homelessness Network is funded Specialist Homelessness and Housing Services operating in Melbourne's north. Each organisation has one formal position on the Network. Representatives of each homelessness/housing program within that organisation can attend Network meetings.

The Network includes an associate membership, consisting of:

- DHHS representatives
- A representative of the Children's Resource Program
- A representative of the Northern Integrated Family Violence Services
- The Northern Homelessness Network Coordinator

Network members commit to:

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

Resources

The Network is resourced by the Department of Families Fairness Housing (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
- Four Reference 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.)

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 Launch Housing and Support Service and is accountable to the Network Reference Group.

The Network Coordinator must submit an annual Workplan and provide an update report at each Reference Group meeting.

Governance Structure and Authorisation

Authorising context

Regional Networks are included in Part Five of the Homelessness Services Guidelines, updated May 2014, wherein the Networks are authorized 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 LASN (see below), have the authority to discuss and make recommendations on all matters pertaining to the operation of the Network and its service system. Network members allocate authority to the LASN as a whole to determine appropriate practice in relation to the operation of the homelessness service system and the achievement of the Network Strategic Plan.

Governance Structures

See Appendix 1 for a more detailed description of Governance mechanisms and processes.

Local Area Service Network (LASN)

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

The LASN is convened by its membership and meets at least quarterly. LASN meetings are chaired by the Network Chairperson.

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

- Being familiar with all Network documents
- Regularly attend LASN meetings
- Participate in Network activities
- Consult within their agency to inform an agency position on LASN agenda items
- Present an agency perspective on LASN agenda items
- Ensure staff within the organisation are kept up to date on Network activities and LASN decisions
- Ensure that the organisation adheres to LASN decisions and is operating in accordance with Network guidelines.

Reference Group

The Network nominates up to 10 representatives to sit on its Reference Group. Given the strategic role of the Reference Group members of the Reference Group are required to be at management level.

The Reference 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.

Victorian Homelessness Network

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.

Working Groups

There are a range of working groups that undertake work on specific areas on behalf of the Network. These Working Groups are accountable to the LASN and provide an update at each LASN meeting:

Current Working Groups include:

Statewide working groups

SHIP Champions/Data Working Group

Homelessness workers from around the State who are interested in promoting improvements in SHIP use, learning about data interpretation and participating in Departmental and Infochange consultation about homelessness data.

NDIS Working Group

A working group, convened by the Council to Homeless Persons, bringing together homelessness service providers and representatives of the NDIA and Local Area Coordination services to discuss improved access to the NDIS for people experiencing homelessness.

Northern and Western Working Groups

Consumer Participation Working Group: Members of Northern and Western LASN agencies interested in progressing consumer participation in the homelessness sector. The Working Group prepares and reports on an annual consumer survey for the LASNs.

First meeting for 2022 is being held on Monday 7th February, from 10am – 12pm.

The Crisis in Crisis Working Group has developed a workplan to implement the recommendations from the Crisis Accommodation Options Report. One of these actions is to re-visit the 2017 consumer survey on emergency accommodation and to run a similar survey in the first half of 2022. The Crisis in Crisis Working Group will have some recommendations to forward to the Consumer Participation Working Group by early February.

It would be wonderful to get some additional members for the Working Group. Please promote it amongst your colleagues. We also have funds to reimburse two more consumers for participating in the Working Group so let Meredith and I know if you know of any other consumers who would like to participate.

Advocacy Working group: Representatives of Northern and Western LASN services interesting in leading homelessness week and other advocacy activities. Meetings are held as needed. It is expected that this working group will lead the state and federal election campaign. We plan to work in closely with CHP and organise an “adopt” a State and Federal MP in the lead up to elections.

AP/THM Working Group: Representatives of access point and transitional housing management services meeting 6 weekly to share information and strategies.

Crisis in Crisis Working Group: Northern and Western LASN members interested in continuing the LASN work on the ‘crisis in crisis’ and monitoring/guiding the LASNs’ implementation of the Crisis Accommodation Options Project report recommendations.

Lodjbra: Representatives from Northern and Western ACCOs and mainstream SHS services interested in Indigenous specific homelessness issues and sharing of housing and homelessness information. Plan to meet at least twice in 2022.

Joint PL team – oversea allocation of vacancies across the NMR, progressing the rollout of VMS in the NMR.

Potential new groups:

HEF Guidelines: A group that may form to meet once or twice to make recommendations about areas of the HEF Guidelines that could be improved.

Local Government Working Group: Representatives from NMR LGAs and LASN members interested in leading working together to address homelessness responses at the LGA level.

Link with the Western 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.

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 Reference Group identifies key priorities for the next year and prepares a draft Strategic Plan for LASN comment and then sign off.

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

Guidelines

All Specialist Homelessness Services work in accordance with *Opening Doors Framework: The Framework has been applied to the Western Homelessness Network through the North and West Homelessness Networks Service System Practice Manual (2012)*.

The PAG has responsibility for updating Network documents. Key proposed changes to Network practice, as outlined in the documents, is forwarded to the LASN for consideration and a decision.

See Appendix 3 for a full list of documents guiding Network practice.

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.

Issues and improvements

The LASNs have developed an Improvement Log pro forma for recording (see Appendix 2):

- systemic issues in the functioning of the homelessness service system, and
- recommendations about new practice approaches that could improve the function of the homelessness service system.

Improvement Log items are forwarded through the Northern and Western Homelessness Network Coordinators to the Practice Advisory Group (PAG). The PAG will progress or resolve issues received by: making recommendations to the LASNs about changes in practice or process, calling a meeting of a sub group of LASN members, clarifying a procedure, updating the guidelines and/or the framework. The PAG will also advise on mechanisms to promote innovation and practice development across the homelessness service system.

Governance processes

LASN processes

Decision making

Wherever possible the LASN operates with a Consensus decision making framework¹, with one 'position' lodged per organisation². 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 present required to carry a vote.

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 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 provided 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.

Consultation

Network Forums 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.

¹ Definition of consensus decision making:

Consensus decision-making is a group decision-making process that seeks the consent of all participants. Consensus may be defined professionally as an acceptable resolution, one that can be supported, even if not the "favourite" of each individual. Consensus is defined by Merriam-Webster as, first, general agreement, and second, group solidarity of belief or sentiment. It has its origin in the Latin word *cōnsēnsus* (agreement), which is from *cōnsentiō* meaning literally feel together¹. It is used to describe both the decision and the process of reaching a decision. Consensus decision-making is thus concerned with the process of deliberating and finalizing a decision, and the social and political effects of using this process.

² If more than one representative of an organisation is present at a meeting (ie. Representatives attend from each of the organisation's program), then those in attendance must agree on one organisational position to be jointly presented.

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.

Notice of Meetings

A meeting will be deemed to be appropriately constituted if four weeks' notice of the meeting and associated documentation has been provided to members. Therefore meetings will go ahead regardless of the number of participating Networks. See also mechanisms for urgent decision making above.

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 Reference 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.

Reference Group processes

Membership

Reference Group members are nominated from the Network membership bi-annually. The Auspice organisation for the Network is automatically a member of the Reference Group.

The maximum number of representatives on the Reference Group is 10. The aim is to achieve representation at management level from the membership. The Reference Group should reflect regional geography, service types and target groups. At a minimum the Reference Group should include representation from: Access Point Services, Homelessness Support Services, Family Violence Services and the Children's Resource Program. Ideally representation will include those working with single men, single women, families and young people.

Election

Members of LASN agencies can self nominate for positions on the Reference Group. A call for nominations is made annually. If more than 10 people nominate to be on the Reference Group, an election is held at the LASN. Priority is given to new members. Members may elect a proxy from within their organisation or from another Network organisation.

Member agencies are limited to one nomination only. 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.

Chairperson

The Reference Group will nominate a chairperson from amongst its membership for a term of at least one year. The Chairperson will:

- chair Reference Group and LASN meetings
- be the principal liaison with the auspice
- be the key public contact for the Network
- represent the Network as required.

Meetings

If the Reference 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.

Attendance

If a Reference Group member is unable to attend three meetings in any year, they will relinquish their position.

The Chairperson is responsible for monitoring attendance.

Auspice

Launch Housing Manager will:

- Be responsible for the Network Funding and Service Agreement (FASA)
- Manage the DHHS funded resources of the Network
- Advise the Reference 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 Reference Group.

Victorian Homelessness Network processes

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 DHHS CHP, CHFV, DV Vic 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:
 - To promote and support innovation, knowledge sharing and expertise in the best interests of consumers who are experiencing homelessness;
 - To foster relationships and collaboration between service providers to ensure timely, coordinated and effective responses;
 - 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.

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.

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.

Practice Advisory Group processes

Network members are encouraged to utilise the Northern and Western Homelessness LASNs' Improvement Log to identify current issues and improvements in homelessness practice that have broader systemic applicability with a view to sharing skills, knowledge and promoting good practice.

Agency representatives are expected to attempt to address the issues directly with other agency(ies) involved with the issue before logging an Improvement Log Item.

Issues/ideas that are systemic/structural issues should be recorded on the Improvement Log pro forma and forwarded either to the Northern Homelessness Network Coordinator (meredithg@homeground.org.au) or the Western Homelessness Network Coordinator (sarah@wombat.org.au). The pro forma requires inclusion of a proposed outcome to the issue under consideration.

If consumers approach LASN member agencies with identified issues for consideration by the LASN, they can be directed to the Network Coordinators or given a copy of the document and the Improvement Log pro forma so that they can formally log their issues. Homelessness Support worker 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 Coordinators or given a copy of the document and the Improvement Log pro forma so that they can formally log their issues.

Process for responding to issues and promoting innovation:

The Homelessness Network Coordinators will refer all Improvement Log items to the LASNs' Practice Advisory Group (PAG) for progression or resolution.

PAG will progress or resolve issues received by: making recommendations to the LASNs about changes in practice or process, calling a meeting of a sub group of LASN members, clarifying a procedure, updating the guidelines and/or the framework. The PAG will also advise on mechanisms to promote innovation and practice development across the homelessness service system.

PAG will report regularly to the Northern Reference Group and the Western Steering Group.

Northern and Western Homelessness LASNs'

Improvement Log Pro forma

The following suggestions/issues have been raised by (LASN member)
from (AgencyProgram)

and emailed to meredithq@homeground.org.au or sarah@wombat.org.au on (Date).

Date	Issue or Innovation	Suggested Outcome	Outcome [to be completed by the Practice Advisory Group

Appendix 2

Documents guiding Homelessness Service System Practice

North and West specific documents

North West Metropolitan Homelessness Network: Service System Practice Manual

This Manual guides the coordinated practice of homelessness services in the Northern and Western Homelessness LASNs (Local Area Service Networks):

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/Final%20LASN%20Manual%20Version%203%201212.pdf>

Housing and Support Partnership Agreement

This Agreement outlines the responsibilities of Transitional Housing Management Services and Support Services in support individuals and households in transitional housing:

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/NWMR%20Housing%20and%20Support%20Partnership%20Agreement%20Nov%202011.pdf>

What is transitional housing?

Pamphlet for individuals and households who are likely to be accommodated in transitional housing

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/Final%20tenant%20information%20pamphlet%20Aug%202012.pdf>

What Happens Next?

Pamphlet for people presenting to Homelessness Access Point Services, describing what happens after an initial assessment:

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/What%20Happens%20Next%20Pamphlet.pdf>

Cared for Enough to Be Involved: Consumer Participation Guide

Booklet developed by the LASN Consumer Participation Working Group that draws on consumer consultations to provide ideas and strategies to assist homelessness services to increase consumer feedback and participation in service development.

http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/Client%20Participation%20Guide_1329808697989.pdf

Statewide Documents

Guidelines for Cross Regional Referrals

This document outlines the process for referring people who are homeless to other entry points and homelessness programs around the State.

http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/Cross%20Regional%20Guidelines%20March%202011_1423011957967.pdf

Prison Exits Protocol

http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/Final%20Prison%20Exit%20Protocol%20June%2010_1424218150425.pdf

HSS/Youth Justice Protocols

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/YJ-HSS%20Access%20Protocol-new%20template%20020215.pdf>

Opening Doors Framework and Supporting Documents

These three documents describe the management of LASNs and the practice approach for the homelessness service system.

Opening Doors Framework

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content101/c6/Opening%20Doors%20Framework.pdf>

Opening Doors Practice Guide

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content101/c6/Opening%20Doors%20Practice%20Guide.pdf>

Opening Doors Service Coordination Guide

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content101/c6/Opening%20Doors%20Service%20Coordination%20Guide.pdf>

Homelessness Services Guidelines and Conditions of Funding, May 2014

These Guidelines describe the way that services receiving homelessness funding must operate, utilising that funding.

<http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/Homelessness-Services-Guidelines-and-Conditions-of-Funding-May-2014.pdf>

SAAP Case Management Resource Kit

Resource kit to assist homelessness support agencies with assistance and guidance in developing a case management approach to delivering services to clients. Case Management is a process of working with clients that focusses on their needs and goals and the development of strategies to assist the achievement of these goals. The kit provides examples from a range of homelessness service delivery types.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/publications-articles/homelessness-general/saap-evaluation-and-research-publications/saap-case-management-resource-kit>

DHHS Standards

The **Department of Human Services Standards** (the Standards) represent a single set of service quality standards for department funded service providers and department-managed services. The Standards comprise the department's four service delivery standards and the governance and management standards of a department endorsed independent review body.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/departments-of-human-services-standards>