Housing Pathways

Framework for No Wrong Door Protocol (Paper 1)
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1 Introduction

The Housing Pathways access system is designed to provide clients with coordinated access to social housing. Under these arrangements, participating social housing providers receive social housing applications on a common form, undertake assessments and make offers of accommodation to those on the common housing register. Housing Pathways Stage 1 will ‘go-live’ in April 2010 and will be supported by No Wrong Door service delivery arrangements that require collaboration between public and community housing providers in order to provide integrated responses for presenting clients.

This Protocol is designed to assist public and community housing managers and staff in access roles to establish the No Wrong Door service delivery approach. The development of the protocol is an acknowledgement that integrated service delivery is challenging and can only be achieved if front line workers are supported with clear guidance and opportunities to build effective inter-agency relationships. The audience for the Protocol is public and community housing service delivery staff including Area Directors, Team Leaders, Access & Demand CSO’s, CEOs, housing managers and other access staff of community housing organisations.

Development of the Protocol was facilitated by a consultant engaged by Housing NSW working in conjunction with the Common Access Strategy Policy Team. The protocol was informed by Housing Pathways policies and procedures, lessons from recent collaborative pilot projects and consultation with policy and program managers as well as service delivery staff from public and community housing. The Housing Pathways Project Control Group provided oversight of the project and feedback on draft documents. A full day workshop was held on 10 December 2009 to capture stakeholder views and expertise. The workshop was attended by approximately 20 people and comprised public and community housing practitioners from across NSW and head office staff from Community Housing Division, Housing Services Division and Housing Assistance Policy. Participants included people who have been closely involved in ICAS, Whole of Area Transfers and the Housing Pathways Community Housing Provider Reference Group as well as people who had limited prior knowledge of Housing Pathways.

The Protocol outlines the aims, principles and state-wide policies underpinning the No Wrong Door approach, guidance for service delivery staff on how the interactions between providers are expected to operate. It is intended as a flexible guide that enables local discretion in implementation within the state-wide policy parameters for Housing Pathways.

2 Aims of the No Wrong Door Approach

Under Housing Pathways, participating community housing and public housing (Housing NSW) providers will have responsibility for coordinating access to housing solutions for presenting clients. All participating providers share responsibility for finding appropriate housing assistance for clients presenting at any entry point. However, the provider at first point of contact has the prime responsibility for coordinating the initial response.

This shared responsibility will be guided by a No Wrong Door approach and protocols to guide relationships between providers. The concept of No Wrong Door is a tool to guide service delivery rather than a guarantee that all client needs can be met through
any entry point. The intent is that clients will receive a consistent standard of housing advice and streamlined access to social housing and other housing assistance.

Whilst participating community housing providers will not approve all housing assistance products (e.g. private rental assistance or Temporary Assistance), they will facilitate a client’s access to those products. Housing providers will also actively assist vulnerable clients to link with support services they require to sustain their accommodation.

The Protocol will inform local client service delivery from the first point of contact to the allocation stage and is intended to be implemented flexibly in response to local conditions.

For Housing Pathways Stage 1 the Protocol is intended to:

- provide a state-wide framework for participating providers delivering common access services from initial client contact to resolution of the housing need
- provide guidance for providers when contacting and communicating with other providers and when working together to support clients with high, complex or urgent needs
- align with and support the new application, assessment and offer processes, procedures and systems under Housing Pathways Stage 1. Protocol arrangements provide sufficient flexibility to adapt to changes in these arrangements over time
- apply to Housing NSW and all housing associations as well as other community housing providers that manage social housing delivered through the National Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBESP).

The Protocol is supported by agreed principles and local governance structures. These are discussed in more detail below. The following access stages are addressed by the Protocol:

- Finding Out About Services and Making Contact
- Information and Advice
- Application, Assessment and Prioritisation
- Waiting on the Register
- Allocation
- Transfer

The protocol will be subject to implementation review to ensure that lessons can be identified and the protocol revised over time to improve service delivery and respond to changes in the policy and service delivery environment.

3 No Wrong Door Principles

Frontline workers face many challenges working collaboratively across organisational boundaries to improve services and outcomes for clients. The No Wrong Door principles provide the foundation for a shared vision for access services that housing providers are jointly working towards. The underpinning Principles of the No Wrong Door approach are:
➢ A client can seek housing advice and assistance through any of the designated “service delivery” doors of a participating social housing provider and will receive an integrated service.

➢ Clients should have equality in access to information and advice about the housing assistance they are eligible for and that assists them to make informed choices about available products and services that best meet their individual needs.

➢ Participating providers have responsibility to respond to the range of client needs and act as the ‘primary contact service’ for clients who apply for assistance through their service unless or until another provider assumes that role.

➢ Participating providers will provide a proactive service that facilitates the client applying for assistance or accessing services from another provider regardless of whether the original provider delivers the specific housing services required by a presenting client.

➢ Participating housing providers will work collaboratively to achieve responsive and streamlined access services and cooperate to use available resources to achieve the best possible housing outcomes for clients, particularly for those with high, complex or urgent needs.

4 Definitions

4.1 Participating Provider

Participating providers for Housing Pathways Stage 1 include Housing NSW, all housing associations as well as any other community housing providers that manage social housing delivered through the National Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBESP).

Each participating provider will identify designated “service delivery” doors which provide access services under the Housing Pathways banner.

4.2 Integrated Service

Integrated service is the experience, by clients, of being able to obtain a range of services that may involve more than one program or service provider without having to duplicate the provision of information, complete multiple applications or receive conflicting information or advice. Where possible, the arrangements will seek to reduce the need for the client to move between participating providers to receive a service.

4.3 Proactive Service

Proactive service occurs when the housing provider offers to assist clients to obtain services they have not specifically requested. This may include information about products or services the client is unaware of, advice about how to navigate the service system or a managed referral to another housing or support provider.

4.4 Working Collaboratively

Working collaboratively within the No Wrong Door approach entails all providers focussing on the best possible outcome for clients and working cooperatively with other providers to achieve agreed outcomes. This mutual responsibility for client outcomes...
can be challenging, especially when resources are constrained and individual providers need to work within organisational policies. Working collaboratively therefore requires participating providers to identify and actively seek to address unnecessary barriers to integrated service.

4.5 Primary Contact Service

A ‘Primary Contact Service’ is the housing provider service outlet that receives the initial application from a client. This service has responsibility to communicate with and assist the applicant through all stages of access from application and assessment processes until they are allocated social housing or other assistance that meets their needs. The ‘primary contact service’ responsibility may move to another provider either at the instigation of the applicant or by mutual agreement between the two housing providers and the applicant.

5 No Wrong Door in Practice

Collaboration and integrated service delivery does not just happen. It needs to be built on shared understanding of purpose, effective relationships and clearly understood policies, systems and procedures for working together. This section provides a summary of the how the key stages of the access process will operate and the implications for how public and community housing providers will work together under No Wrong Door.

5.1 Finding Out About Services and Making Contact

Information to potential clients about housing service entry points is fundamental to providing equitable and streamlined access. With the introduction of Housing Pathways, there is a need for clear entry points and pathways that are supported by information for clients, their support providers and other referral agencies about service system access arrangements. Housing NSW is establishing a Housing Pathways website that will provide public information about participating providers and how to contact them as well as password access by providers to more detailed information.

Centrally, Housing NSW will be responsible for managing the Housing Pathways website and other publicly available information to ensure that it reflects and supports the new common access arrangements. Locally, individual participating providers will have responsibility for ensuring information that they provide is regularly reviewed and updated. This may require amending information about:

- the housing products and services provided by individual providers, including areas of operation, such as the type and number of social housing dwellings in a specific allocations zone
- provider contact details for designated offices such as location, opening hours, phone, email and website details
- how to apply for housing assistance including links to the Housing Pathways website and electronic application information.

Area Directors and Community Housing CEOs (or the CEOs’ delegates) are responsible for cooperating in leading the development and implementation of local communication strategies including:

- providing other housing, support and referral agencies within the local service network with information about the new access arrangements
ensuring their staff understand the new access arrangements and have accurate information and training about other participating housing providers and the products and services they deliver

Playing an active role in promoting Housing Pathways to potential applicants.

5.2 Information and Advice about Products and Services

Accurate and timely information and informed advice about housing assistance options is critical to achieving the Housing Pathways objectives of streamlining access and assisting clients to obtain the most appropriate housing assistance to meet their needs. The No Wrong Door approach is based on the idea that clients will obtain similar information about the full range of housing assistance options no matter which service outlet they approach.

The introduction of Housing Pathways and No Wrong Door service approach is based on clients making informed decisions about products and services for which they may be eligible. This requires staff to have at a minimum, a basic knowledge of the full range of available housing assistance products and services and referral points for more detailed information. Providers and clients will have access to common product and process information on the Housing Pathways website. In addition training on program guidelines, eligibility and application procedures as well as fact sheets will be readily available to relevant frontline staff.

5.3 Application, Assessment and Prioritisation

Moving to a common application form and process is one of the most significant Housing Pathways changes. The new application form and assessment process will require practice changes by both public and community housing workers.

A consistent approach to documenting client information is essential so that the new NSW Housing Register database has all relevant and necessary information for any provider to respond to client queries and for any housing provider to make appropriate and well informed allocation decisions.

Under Housing Pathways, all participating providers will undertake assessment of client eligibility for social housing and priority and other providers will rely on such assessments when allocating from the new NSW Housing Register. This requires a standardised approach to assessment and documentation so that clients and all participating providers have confidence in the assessment process and the information available on the shared information systems.

Assessments may also identify additional needs such as for emergency accommodation, support services or for rental assistance. The provider undertaking the assessment is responsible for assisting the client in applying for such assistance, for example by providing advice on eligibility, assistance with completing applications or by making referrals and sharing information with other housing and support providers with the consent of the client.

The new common assessment process may have workload implications for both public and community housing and Area Directors and community CEOs (or the CEOs’ delegates) are responsible for managing workload impacts for their organisations. It is expected that, where possible, any significant service delivery changes (e.g. changes in opening hours or staffing structures) will be discussed between relevant managers to minimise the workload impacts on other local providers.
5.4 Waiting on the new NSW Housing Register

Many clients will wait extended periods for social housing and their circumstances, needs and preferences may change considerably during this time. Priority clients may have needs that are not easy to address and may have extended waits. This protocol aims to clarify roles and responsibilities during this stage of the access process.

Housing NSW (through the Housing Services Division) will be responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of the new NSW Housing Register. This includes responsibility for the information technology system and databases, the overall integrity of the data and to capture changes of circumstance information from applicants, update details and delete inactive applications.

Participating public and community housing providers are responsible for the direct relationship with clients, both applicants and tenants seeking to transfer. They will process any amendments to information on the Register resulting from change of circumstances or change of preference notified to them by the applicant. Housing providers should take care to ensure that client data held on the system is accurate and up-to-date by uploading complete and accurate information and making corrections where they identify incomplete or inaccurate details.

Providers are also responsible for monitoring the progress of clients with special needs or who have been approved for priority allocation and for whom they are the Primary Contact Service. This may involve a proactive approach to collaborating with other providers in order to achieve a timely and appropriate allocation, for example by identifying appropriate properties, arranging modifications or liaising with support providers. Matching clients with appropriate and sustainable social housing may involve close cooperation, or transfer of prime responsibility with another housing provider where that provider is best placed to meet the housing needs of the applicant. This may involve working with providers in different areas where clients have listed for those locations.

In addition to working cooperatively to meet the needs of individual clients, housing providers may agree to undertake joint reviews of the waiting lists for their locality. This provides an opportunity for coordinated portfolio management planning, opportunities to use existing stock effectively and to identify priorities for new acquisitions, redevelopment and upgrade/modifications.

5.5 Allocation

Under Housing Pathways, allocations will be made to eligible applicants on the NSW Housing Register. Individual providers are responsible for allocating the properties they manage according to their own policies. For some properties, community housing providers may have specific targeting or nomination commitments with Housing NSW or support providers. Likewise, Housing NSW has commitments under agreements with other government agencies and support providers. All these existing targeting and nominations agreements will continue to be honoured.

Under this protocol, there is an expectation that providers accept shared responsibility and collaborate on the most appropriate allocation for priority clients who have specific requirements or are difficult to house appropriately. This may include households with specific locational requirement, those who require specialist modifications or where household members have conditions or exhibit behaviours that require specialist housing solutions. In some situations providers may need to work together to coordinate
the provision of a number of housing assistance products to a client that are delivered by
more than one provider (for instance, priority housing, special assistance subsidy,
private rental assistance). This might also extend to discussions about identifying a
suitable long term housing solution and forward planning an appropriate allocation.

5.6 Tenant Transfers

Under Housing Pathways, tenants may seek cross provider transfers by type of provider
(for example from public to community housing but not to an individual community
housing provider). Tenants may apply to transfer to any participating social housing
provider, or only to the community housing providers or only to public housing, in their
nominated area. Tenants must apply for transfers through their landlord and that
provider is responsible for assessing the application. If approved for transfer, the details
will be added to the NSW Housing Register and offers may be made by any participating
provider under that provider's allocations/transfer policy and in accordance with the
applicant's preference.

Management-initiated transfers will generally be provided by the relevant housing
provider, although they may seek agreement from other providers to assist with
relocations where no suitable alternative is available within the originating provider's
housing portfolio.

If a transferring tenant approaches another participating provider to the one currently
housing him or her, the provider will receive the transfer application and advise that, in
order to expedite the assessment process, the transfer application will be forwarded to
the applicant's current provider for assessment.

Arrangements for transitioning existing transfer applications to the common housing
register are under consideration and providers will be advised when they are finalised.

6 Governance

The No Wrong Door approach is dependent on new ways of working that replace
fragmented approaches to client access and aims to facilitate a network of providers
working together to provide a more seamless service experience for clients. This idea of
an access 'network' means that providers maintain their identity as separate entities but
work cooperatively to deliver integrated client access services. Such networks require a
shared vision and goals, effective working relationships and clear ground rules to guide
their interactions and respective roles and responsibilities. These things do not occur
without structures and resources being applied to the task of coordination and change
management.

6.1 State-wide and Local Governance

State-wide governance of Housing Pathways will operate through a Housing Pathways
Advisory Council with membership from both public and community housing providers.
State-wide management of Housing Pathways will be the responsibility of the Manager,
Housing Pathways and specific administrative tasks, such as ongoing administration of
the common register and the Housing Pathways website will be the responsibility of
Housing NSW. State-wide implementation of Housing Pathways, including the No Wrong
Door protocol, will be guided by policies, procedures and systems that all participating
service providers are expected to adhere to. In recognition of the diverse housing sub-
markets and social housing service delivery arrangements that operate across NSW,
there is flexibility, however, for implementation to accommodate local and regional differences.

Local governance and overall responsibility for leading local implementation within state-wide guidelines generally sits with the Housing NSW Area Director/s. Leadership of the change process will be the joint responsibility of Area Directors and the CEOs of community housing associations (or the CEOs’ delegates). These designated local leaders will jointly plan for and manage the local implementation of Housing Pathways, drive the introduction of the No Wrong Door service response and facilitate local service delivery networking relationships. An Operational Protocol will be developed in consultation with access staff to document agreed local implementation strategies.

The designated local leaders will agree on structures, strategies and procedures to operationalise this Protocol, identify, and escalate issues to the Manager, Housing Pathways that require state-wide responses. Depending on local conditions, governance structures may have a broader role than oversight of Housing Pathways and No Wrong Door and may be existing structures that are broadened or adapted to accommodate common access issues. It may be necessary to review and restructure these local structures once Housing Pathways has gone live.

6.2 Local Service Networks

The diverse nature of settlement patterns and social housing provision across NSW means that it is not possible to have a ‘one size fits all’ approach to establishing the local service networks. A local network might operate as a discrete area (e.g. based around Housing NSW area boundaries) or a larger region (e.g. based around a number of areas and community housing providers). More than one network may operate within an area or joint arrangements may be negotiated to apply across multiple areas. In some locations, especially where community housing providers operate across a number of Housing NSW areas or divisional boundaries region-wide implementation strategies may be established. For example, in metropolitan areas, two or more Area Directors may work jointly with two or more community housing CEOs (or the CEOs’ delegates). Decisions about the boundaries for local networks will be determined through discussion between Area Directors, community housing CEOs (or the CEOs’ delegates) and Divisional Service Improvement Managers.

7 Implementation

The implementation of the No Wrong Door approach is integrally linked to the introduction of Housing Pathways. Each component of Housing Pathways has specific implementation strategies and this Protocol is not intended to duplicate them. Rather it aims to guide the local working relationships between service providers and their interactions with clients. This section outlines the key tasks associated with local implementation of the Protocol.

7.1 Local governance structures

Local implementation of the No Wrong Door Protocol and ongoing delivery of integrated access services will be driven by Area Directors of Housing NSW and CEOs of community housing providers (or the CEOs’ delegates). Area Directors and CEOs (or the CEOs’ delegates) are responsible for determining and implementing the most appropriate local arrangements to support integrated access services and effective inter-agency relationships. Depending on local conditions, existing structures such as social
housing inter-agency networks or Local Facilitation Groups could be adapted and utilised or new structures could be agreed between Area Directors and CEOs (or the CEOs’ delegates).

Area Directors are directly accountable to Housing NSW for local implementation and are expected to apply staff and other resources to achieve the intended outcomes. Community housing providers are contractually accountable to Housing NSW (through Community Division) to actively support the successful implementation of Housing Pathways and the No Wrong Door service approach.

7.2 Operational Protocols

Local working relationships and coordinated implementation will underpin achievement of Housing Pathways objectives and No Wrong Door principles. Operational Protocols are the key tools to support effective working relationships and smooth and successful implementation within the parameters of Housing Pathways guidelines and the No Wrong Door Protocol. The Operational Protocol documents local arrangements so that all providers are clear about roles and responsibilities and to ensure continuity when key personnel change. These agreements should be simple documents and may include the following items:

- details of the geographical area and participating providers
- priority issues and strategies for cooperative action
- local protocols for communication between providers
- relationships with adjoining areas
- problem solving and dispute resolution processes
- processes for monitoring and negotiating changes to the agreement.

7.3 State-wide Accountabilities

The local implementation of Housing Pathways and the No Wrong Door service delivery approach are components of, and contribute to, broader state-wide and systemic reforms to social housing service delivery and access arrangements. The No Wrong Door approach will primarily operate at the local level but also applies where clients need to move across area or regional boundaries, requiring the relevant housing providers to work collaboratively over distance. State-wide policies, tools and processes such as the Housing Pathways website, common procedures and this protocol are designed to enable such access.

Local service providers are required to comply with state-wide Housing Pathways policies and this Protocol and are accountable for outcomes through the Manager, Housing Pathways and the Housing Pathways Advisory Council. However, there is considerable flexibility for local service providers to implement Housing Pathways and design local No Wrong Door service approaches in response to the needs of clients and local opportunities and constraints. Successful implementation is dependant on effective communication between local and state-wide stakeholders, regular review and adaptation to address emerging issues and changing conditions.