



2009

GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION

to the

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Report No 3 of 2009

Management of Respite Care Services

Introduction/Background

The Auditor-General's Report on the Performance Audit into "Management of Respite Care Services" in the ACT was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 19 May 2009.

The objective of the Audit, as detailed in the Report, was to provide an independent report to the Legislative Assembly on the provision of respite care services to the ACT community.

The Audit focused on whether the:

- access to respite care services was on the basis of relative need;
- quality of services provided met the national standards through effective quality assurance processes;
- service delivery was effective and efficient compared to other States, Territory and national averages, as well as other performance indicators;
- accountability and governance framework supported the effective management of the respite services; and
- needs or demands for disability services were reliably measured and managed.

The Audit did not review the respite care services provided by non-government organisations under service funding agreement with the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS). The Audit briefly reviewed the effectiveness of the quality assurance systems and processes managed by DHCS.

The Audit Opinion, formed against the audit objectives, is that overall the service and support provided by the Government respite houses managed by the DHCS met clients' basic needs for safety and respite care. It is also noted that access to services was reasonable and most respite services were provided to those people with the greatest need.

However, the Audit noted scope for significant improvements to provide assurance that clients receive quality of respite services, and on an equitable basis. In particular, actions need to be taken to address the following:

- A lack of documented procedures to assist staff in assessing individuals' eligibility and prioritising people to receive respite care.
- Deficiencies in supporting systems and operational practices in the government respite houses led to inadequate management of high-risk clients.
- DHCS did not have sound and robust processes to assess future support needs and was unable to provide support for all those requesting it due to increasing demand and limited funding.
- Accountability was lacking in that records management, client information systems, risk management and quality performance management were inadequate.
- Complaints and feedback processes need to be improved.

The ACT Government is committed to the delivery of quality respite services for clients and families and has welcomed the Auditor-General's Report and 14 recommendations for improvements to Government-provided respite care services.

The ACT Government has consistently increased funding to disability services from GPO budget of \$41.5m in 2002-03 to \$68.6m in 2009-10 or an increase of approximately 65%. In 2007-2008 the ACT Government increased funding to disability services by \$15.8m over four years. This was matched by the Commonwealth Government as part of the negotiations for the new National Disability Agreement. Significantly, this increased funding has been provided directly into more services. Over the period 2002-2003 to 2009-2010 output targets in disability services will have risen by 31% in accommodation places; by 55% in community support places; and by 70% in the number of community access hours. In the provision of respite services the additional funding will result in an 11% increase in the number of centre based respite nights and a rise of 96% in the number of flexible respite hours.

In addition to increases in funding from both the ACT and Commonwealth Governments, there has over recent years been a significant change in the way services are delivered to people with disability in the ACT. This change has been to instil a person-centred, collaborative and whole of community response that enables people with disability to minimise the impact of their disability and maximise personal outcomes. This is in line with the vision that the ACT Government developed in consultation with people with disability, their families and carers and the broad community that:

All people with disabilities achieve what they want to achieve, live how they choose to live, and are valued as full and equal members of the ACT community.

In relation to Government-provided respite services the changes implemented over recent years have been to provide continuity between the support the person receives at home and that which is provided by the formal respite service, with the overall aim to continually enhance the quality outcomes of the respite effect to individuals and their families.

Work is already underway in the Department on many of the Auditor-General's recommendations, with significant activity being highlighted on a number of projects during the Audit itself. The Auditor-General's Report provides support to these activities and to the continuous quality improvement of our services to deliver the best possible outcomes for people with disability in the ACT. The majority of the actions to be undertaken relate to changes to Disability ACT's internal systems and processes. A team of people within Disability ACT has been established to implement the recommendations. This team is under the direction of the Director Disability ACT. Regular communication will be made with families and staff about the actions and progress.

Government Response to the Auditor-General's Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (Chapter 3)

To enhance accountability and comply with industry standards, Disability ACT should

- clearly reference the service standards for people with a disability to the National Standards;
- ensure that the service standards are applicable to the programs and services provided by the ACT Government and non-government service providers; and
- make its documented policies and procedures available to the community.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, establishes its policies and procedures within legislative obligations. The policies and procedures on service provision for people with disability reflect both the National Disability Service Standards and the vision and values set in consultation with the ACT community. Service Funding Agreements between the Government and non-government service agencies are also aligned with the National Disability Services Standards.

The Department will ensure all policies are clearly referenced within the relevant governance frameworks such as the National Disability Services Standards. Relevant policies will be promoted on the agency's website.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 2 (Chapter 4)

Disability ACT should

- update records related to registration of interest in a timely manner; and
- review the information maintained on the database and determine what and how information will be used to assist effective management of the registration of interest process and disability support services.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT has commenced instituting measures to support effective management of the information collected. Information collected in the Registration of Interest process is also used to plan future service provision.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 3 (Chapter 4)

Disability ACT should formalise its procedures and guidelines to ensure that the process to determine eligibility for access to specialist disability services is consistent, transparent and accountable.

ACT Government Position

Agreed in part.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, will continue to use the definition of disability set out in the National Disability Agreement as the broader eligibility criteria for specialist disability services. The Department will review its documentation to ensure that all standards, procedures and decision making processes are consistent, publicly available, remain transparent and are reviewed annually to ensure they continue to match the ACT Government and Commonwealth key priority areas.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 4 (Chapter 4)

To enhance the effective management of the clients' services and comply with the Territory Records Management Policy and Practices, Disability ACT should:

- enhance and maintain a consistent management information system to provide relevant clients' information, such as medical history, services provided, funding status and risk assessment; and
- comply with the Territory records management practices in managing its clients' records and files.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, will scope initiatives on the development of a single client information management system. Information on record management provided to staff will be enhanced to cover a broader

range of records management procedures. The Department will review existing recordkeeping practices and develop measures to ensure the consistent application by staff of systems and procedures to practice within the disability service delivery setting.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion on the first stage scoping and recommendations due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 5 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should:

- update and review the clients' Individual Respite Care Plans on a regular basis;
- check that the Plans are reviewed and signed by appropriate delegates; and
- update and monitor assessments of the clients' needs as an integral effective part of the service delivery process.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, has a policy and procedures for recording and updating Individual Respite Care Plans. This policy includes an annual renewal. The Department will review existing practice and develop a more enhanced mechanism for ensuring an effective and consistent approach in the development and maintenance of Individual Respite Care Plans by staff in the service delivery setting.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 6 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should review and standardise its record management and practices to clarify the requirements for reporting clients' activities and progress during their stays in government respite houses, and maintain appropriate records and documents.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The ACT Government, through the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services and Disability ACT, acknowledges the vital need for consistent record management practice to enable service accountability and risk identification and management. The Department will enhance and formalise its record management practices to ensure consistent application of the reporting of client visits to respite.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 7 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should:

- manage respite clients' risks effectively, in accordance with its Risk Management Framework and related policies and procedures;
- perform a formal Staff Facilitated Risk Assessment for all respite clients to identify clients' risks (physical health, injury and safety and emotional health) and mitigate those risks; and
- conduct a more detailed risk assessment for those respite clients when their risks have been identified as high or extreme.

ACT Government Position

Noted.

The ACT Government notes that the Audit comments that mitigating strategies to minimise the risks associated with clients' safety are outlined in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services' Risk Management Profile 2008 and are sound. The Department has a risk management framework and uses Riskman as the incident reporting tool. All staff are trained in the use and application of the Riskman system.

Disability ACT's Individual Support Plan policy in the Accommodation Support area includes a holistic assessment of capability, clinical and therapeutic needs and outcomes for each client. This policy will be adapted for respite services to include the identification of risk and mitigation of risk through the Individual Respite Care plan. Significant action has occurred to address this recommendation.

This recommendation will be finalised by the end of 2009.

Recommendation 8 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should:

- improve the timeliness and completeness of reporting of incidents through Riskman. In particular, all incidents recorded in clients' files and daily progress notes should be recorded in Riskman; and
- maintain proper records of all senior management group meetings so that the outcomes and the status of actions for all high risk clients can be regularly reviewed and monitored as a standing agenda at subsequent meetings.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, will implement a mechanism for ensuring the risk management framework and use of Riskman as the incident reporting tool is applied to practice within the service delivery setting.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 9 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should enhance its staff training and development systems and processes by:

- clearly defining and regularly reviewing individual staff training requirements;
- regularly monitoring attendance at mandatory specialised and competency based training and annual refresher courses; and
- updating staff training records in a timely manner.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, has a mechanism in place for reviewing staff training including mandatory training. The Department provides a very extensive range of competency based training through a series of modules.

Concurrent to the Audit, the Department has been undertaking a review of all learning and development areas across its business areas. As part of this exercise, systems and processes will be developed to manage the effective delivery of training needs to all staff, including the streamlining and centralisation of training records management.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 10 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should improve its complaint management systems and processes by:

- maintaining a complete and accurate register of complaints;
- following up complaints effectively and documenting the action that has been taken and agreed with clients; and
- analysing all complaints received through DHCS, Disability ACT Information Service, the Minister's Office and Human Rights Commission to provide useful information for improving service delivery.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Disability ACT Client Feedback System has been developed as a component of Riskman. The system has been formally rolled out and will capture all client related feedback. The system contains a complaint register, identifies timeframes for action, assigns action officers and enables (thorough monitoring and recording) follow up action. Training of staff in the application of the system has commenced.

The Client Feedback System will have a reporting capability that is linked to its quality management processes to enable systemic issues to be identified and actioned under a framework of continuous quality improvement.

Information in relation to the process for providing client feedback will detail other avenues of complaint address mechanism such as Human Rights Commission

This recommendation has been substantially completed.

Recommendation 11 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should:

- conduct independent review of service providers' performance and quality of service based on risks, i.e. selection of high risk service providers for independent review;
- effectively manage the annual self-assessment process conducted by service providers to ensure that any non-compliance with industry standards, and areas for improvements have been properly reviewed and followed up with regular feedback to service providers; and
- undertake a review of services that it provides directly (such as respite care) to ensure they comply with industry standards or the NDSS.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The ACT Government acknowledges that all disability services are required to comply with industry standards and a process of review is a key performance indicator in a quality management framework.

Concurrently to the Audit the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, has been working with service providers to enhance the application of its quality management processes across both government and non-government services. This has included processes for both self assessment and the independent review of service providers' performance. This initiative is also consistent with the reforms being undertaken across jurisdictions under the new National Disability Agreement that came into effect on 1 January 2009.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 12 (Chapter 5)

Disability ACT should develop and implement a Quality Management Framework and Quality Improvement System designed to provide assurance that:

- there will be continual improvement of performance and effectiveness in service delivery;
- quality of service meets the industry standards; and
- there will be compliance with standards and performance measurement processes and complaints and grievances procedures.

ACT Government Position

Agreed.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, does have a number of established quality management processes, developed from work undertaken by the Disability Reform Quality Improvement Working Group following the 2000 Inquiry into Disability Services.

These established processes will be brought together under an overarching Quality Management Framework and Quality Improvement System based on National Disability Service Standards. The Department has been working with service providers to enhance both the processes and their application.

The Disability ACT Client Feedback System will operate as the complaints and grievance process for clients and their families in relation to government provided and funded services.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.

Recommendation 13 (Chapter 6)

Disability ACT should revise the process of conducting client satisfaction surveys in order to improve the response rate and hence overall validity of the data.

ACT Government Position

Noted.

The ACT Government notes that the overall satisfaction level at 85% is a good result. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, has revised its process for conducting client satisfaction surveys to include mechanisms to increase the response rate. This process has been used in the development of the 2009 Client Satisfaction Survey.

The ACT Government also notes that the introduction of the Disability ACT Client Feedback System will provide a secondary mechanism for capturing client feedback about areas of service improvement on a continual basis.

This recommendation has been substantially completed.

Recommendation 14

Disability ACT should:

- review its funding model and develop a new model to estimate its future unmet needs for disability services; and
- develop strategies and policies to manage the unmet needs

ACT Government Position

Noted.

The Disability ACT funding model was published in 2006 and aims to provide forward assessment of current and future demand for formal disability services. As such it has an integral role in the ongoing planning and delivery of future services and supports for people with disability. The ACT Government notes that the underlying information contained in the model is updated each year by Disability ACT as new data (such as population growth, trends, increase to the disability portfolio etc) comes to hand.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, commenced a robust update of the funding model earlier this year as part of a five-year review. A particular focus of this update will be the inclusion of specific data on the needs of children and young people within the model to reflect the recently developed ACT Government Policy Framework for Children and Young People with Disability and the incorporation into the disability services of support to people with degenerative conditions.

This recommendation is being actioned with completion due by end of 2009.