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Number 4

Developing quality measures for home and community care

Prepared for the HACC Officials Standards Working Group

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**Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra**

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The project was also made possible by the assistance of government officers from each of the participating States and Territories: the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. In addition to the large task of liaising between the Institute team and the participating service providers, those who acted as assessors contributed many hours of their time: familiarising themselves with the Instrument and assessment process; conducting assessment interviews; and participating in debriefing sessions with Institute staff. The validity of the study has been strengthened by their willingness to share their knowledge of regional services and circumstances and their experience in using the HACC Service Standards Instrument.

This project has also been enriched by those representatives of consumer and community groups and services providers who joined together with representatives of local, State and Commonwealth government offices, to participate in editorial and discussion groups in New South Wales, South Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory.

We are grateful to HACC consumers, over 500 of whom generously gave their time to provide feedback about the services they received. The development of a more effective consumer feedback survey was the result of their patience and willingness to share their experiences.

We would like to acknowledge the members of the HACC Officials Standards Working Group (listed in appendix E), under whose auspices this project was undertaken and the sub-working group (the Outcomes Working Group) which developed the first draft of the Instrument. We thank them for their assistance and cooperation throughout.

Disclaimer

In the presentation of its findings, this report compiles the views of HACC consumers, service providers, and local, State and Commonwealth government officers. The sources of reported opinions are clearly referenced within the report. As such, not all of the individual opinions expressed within the report reflect the views of the Institute, Standards Working Group or the official views of the participating Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments.

Project team

This project required the combined skills of a number of people to bring it to a successful conclusion. In part, this has been a reflection of the multitude of varied skills required by the complex task of testing and refining both Instruments and processes for the implementation of a national system of quality appraisal for HACC agencies. In part, too, it has been a reflection of the more pragmatic fact of staff turnover that characterises any research project of a reasonable duration. The following members of the research team, listed in alphabetical order, have made significant contributions to the project:

Elizabeth Butkus was responsible for the comparison of the HACC Service Standards with other systems of quality appraisal (CHASP, ACHS etc.). She was a key member of the project team for much of the life of the project, being involved in project administration, fieldwork management, desk audits, training, debriefing sessions and Instrument testing. Elizabeth left the Institute in July 1997 to take up a position in the Aged and Community Care Division of the Department of Health and Family Services.

Diane Gibson provided management support, advice and supervision on all aspects of the project, and was particularly involved in the design of the project methodology. She was also responsible for project management during Anne Jenkins' leave of absence in early 1997 (to complete her PhD). She is Head of the Aged Care Unit, the base from which the HACC National Service Standards Project was conducted.

Bella Holmes provided administrative, editorial and research assistance. She was also involved in project fieldwork.

Anne Jenkins was the Project Manager for the HACC Service Standards Project and, as such, was responsible for overall project coordination. She was heavily involved in the fieldwork stage of the project (testing, training and debriefing) and the revision of both the Instrument and the consumer questionnaire. She was responsible for the statistical design work and associated project methodology. Anne also undertook the bulk of the statistical analyses and interpretation, as well as the preparation of this report.

Sushma Mathur assisted with statistical analyses and field testing of the Instrument.

Kalya Ryan provided administrative and research assistance and, in particular, was responsible for the qualitative analyses of the Service Provider Survey, the Consumer Survey, the Assessment of Review Process Survey, and the material recorded during the assessment debriefings.

Patricia Ryan provided advice and management support for a period in her capacity as Acting Head of the Aged Care Unit (during Diane Gibson's leave of absence in late 1997).

Sam Mattila provided administrative and research assistance, with particular responsibility for the pre-pilot testing of the consumer questionnaire.

List of abbreviations

ACHA	Australian Community Health Association
ACHS	Australian Council of Healthcare Standards
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CHASP	Community Health Accreditation and Standards Program
CIARR	Client Information, Assessment and Referral Record
COA	Commonwealth of Australia
DCS	Department of Community Services
DHSH	Department of Human Services and Health
DSS	Disability Service Standards
HACC	Home and Community Care
HRSCCA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs

Executive summary

Objectives

The objectives of the project were:

- to produce a refined quality assessment instrument for use in appraising community care agencies against the HACC National Service Standards;
- to provide advice on the use of the Instrument in terms of validity, accuracy and reliability;
- to provide advice on the use of the Instrument concerning appropriate scoring;
- to provide advice on the use of the Instrument with regard to data collection;
- to advise on methods for obtaining valid and reliable consumer input and its incorporation into the Instrument; and
- to undertake a comparison of the Instrument with other existing service appraisal methods that HACC-funded agencies may have completed.

Overall findings

The principal findings of the consultancy were as follows:

- that the Instrument could be reliably and validly applied to the assessment of performance against the HACC National Service Standards for a wide range of HACC-funded agencies;
- that, provided an effective method of assessment is applied, and incorporates the refinements to the Instrument recommended in this report, the Instrument is of sufficient reliability and validity to obtain scores against the HACC National Service Standards for compliance and comparison purposes; and
- that, notwithstanding the need to shorten the Instrument, service providers generally responded favourably to the Instrument.

Main findings of quality measures Instrument

Effectiveness of the Instrument

There was a very high level of agreement among service providers that all of the standards and their performance information were clear, practical, desirable and appropriate. On average:

- standards were considered clear by 95% of service providers;
- standards were considered practical by 91% of service providers;
- standards were considered desirable by 99% of service providers; and

- standards were considered appropriate by 94% of service providers.

Many service providers indicated that the Instrument was unnecessarily long and repetitive. The changes to the Instrument recommended in this report reduce its length by deleting repetitive requests for performance information.

On average, agencies participating in the pilot rated well against the standards. Agency performance against the standards was highest for Objective 1 (Access to services) and Objective 4 (Coordinated, planned and reliable service delivery). Agencies performed least well against the standards under Objective 5 (Privacy, confidentiality and access to personal information) and Objective 7 (Advocacy).

The best method for the collection of Instrument data

Overall, of the assessment approaches tested (see below), the approaches that included a visit to the agency had the highest reliability.

The methods of assessment trialled in the pilot were:

- joint assessment*, in which agencies and assessors (who were regional government HACC officers) completed the Instrument and ratings against the standards together during an assessment interview;
- self-assessment with verification*, in which the agency completed the Instrument and ratings, and assessors (regional government HACC officers) later visited the agency to verify those ratings;
- self-assessment*, in which agencies completed the Instrument and ratings on their own and were randomly selected for a verification visit by an assessor, who was a regional government HACC officer, after submission of the Instrument;
- independent/external assessor assessment*, in which verification visits or joint assessments were carried out by assessors who were external to and independent of the HACC government or service provider system; and
- peer review*, in which assessments were carried out by assessors who were HACC service provider peers. For the most part, peer review assessments relied on the completed Instrument and accompanying documentation and did not include a visit to the agency as part of the assessment.

Other key findings from the pilot testing of the Instrument are listed below:

- the joint assessment method was seen as particularly beneficial to new or small agencies;
- for the self-assessment with verification method, receiving the agency's completed documentation prior to the visit would have benefited assessors;
- while independent or external assessors had the advantage of lending greater objectivity to the assessment process, it was also felt to be the case that regional government project officers brought to the assessment process the benefits of familiarity with services and their environments; and
- the peer review process was seen to have great potential benefit to agencies by encouraging closer service provider networking and information sharing, particularly if assessments were to include an agency visit. It was, however, considered to require substantial resource commitments by participants.

Implementation issues

Training

Training prior to the implementation of the HACC National Service Standards Instrument, for both agencies and assessors, is recommended. Training for service providers would assist them in completing the Instrument and would reduce the time required of assessors for assessments. Training for assessors would assist in improving the consistency with which different assessors apply the Instrument to agencies. Ongoing training is also recommended to provide a venue in which quality assessment challenges across the range of HACC-funded agencies could continue to be addressed.

Agency capacity for self-assessment

The ability of an agency to complete the Instrument adequately on their own should be taken into account in determining whether the agency should be assessed by the joint assessment method or by the self-assessment with verification method.

Recommendations for further work

The Instrument does not specifically address the characteristics of agencies providing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, particularly in more remote regions where Indigenous culture strongly affects service provision. It is recommended that further work on this be considered.

Conclusions

The choice of assessment method should take into account the needs and resources of the agency. Nevertheless, the inclusion of an agency visit by an assessor during the assessment process is highly recommended for the following reasons:

- service providers were more likely to find the standards or performance information appropriate to their agency when the assessment method involved service providers completing the Instrument with the assistance of an assessor;
- agreement on ratings between agencies and assessors was highest when assessment was a joint process between the agency and the assessor; and
- inter-rater reliability was highest when the Instrument was rated by assessors who undertook a visit to the agency (joint assessments or self-assessment with verification).

Summary of findings for obtaining reliable and valid consumer input

Of the two methods of collecting consumer feedback trialled in the pilot, telephone interviews, rather than mailout surveys, were found to be a more effective means of obtaining valid consumer feedback. Findings in support of this were as follows:

- the overall consumer participation rate for the telephone interviews (94%) was far higher than that of the mailed survey (34%);

- the response rate to individual items was superior for the telephone interviews compared to the mailed surveys. Averaging over items, missing data occurred in 15% of cases for the mailed surveys but there was no missing data for the telephone interview items;
- some consumers indicated that they had difficulty understanding some questions. These questions could be answered immediately in the telephone interviews. In the mailed survey this may have been responsible for the high proportion of missing data. Moreover, responses were sometimes given to items on the mailed survey which were irrelevant, suggesting some compromise in the validity of consumer responses; and
- the telephone interviews were considered more effective than mailed surveys in eliciting consumer feedback that concurred with agency assessments.

Consumer feedback information should not be incorporated into a scoring system for agencies against standards at this stage, but rather used as a means of identifying problems to be addressed. Consumer feedback is an important aspect of service quality assessment. It can be used both to identify agencies that may be performing poorly against some standards, and to inform assessors, prior to an agency visit, of potential problems in service quality.

The telephone interviews and mailed surveys were representative of the national profile of HACC consumers with regard to the proportions in each category of age and sex but not with regard to proportions from non-English-speaking background and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

Recommendations for further work

In the pilot, a relatively small sample of consumers (75) participated in telephone interviews. Despite the finding that this was the most effective method of obtaining consumer feedback trialled, a number of key questions regarding service quality did not show a relationship with assessors' ratings of agencies. This may have been because of weaknesses in the consumer survey method or consumer survey items in eliciting accurate information on consumer viewpoints. However, it should be recognised that consumer feedback may be important input to agency assessment even where negative comments come from only one or two consumers. Therefore, items that do not show a substantial association with assessment results obtained using the Instrument should remain in the survey. They provide an alternative perspective and, in particular, one that allows for input by a minority of clients.

It is recommended that the consumer feedback instrument be subject to further testing with a larger sample of consumers using telephone interviews. In this way, it may be possible to develop a strategy for obtaining important service information from consumers on key aspects of quality.

Summary of findings for the comparison of standards to other quality appraisal approaches

As part of the project, a detailed study was undertaken comparing the HACC Service Standards with Community Health Accreditation and Standards Program standards (CHASP), Australian Council of Healthcare Standards (ACHS), and Disability Service

Standards (DSS) (Butkus 1997). This comparison focused on the content of the standards and did not attempt to review or compare their processes of implementation. It was found that while there were areas of overlap, there were also a number of areas in which the standards of these other quality appraisal systems did not adequately address the HACC Service Standards. The DSS were most compatible with the HACC Service Standards in terms of content, and the least compatible were the ACHS.

The findings of the comparison of HACC standards with CHASP and DSS revealed that, despite their similarity, no meaningful comparative score could be obtained. While there was some overlap in the areas of service quality measured by these methods, it would be necessary for agencies to address additional issues of quality not raised in either CHASP or DSS if they were to be fully appraised against the HACC standards.

The findings of the comparison of HACC standards with ACHS revealed that no meaningful comparative score could be obtained, and that none of the HACC objectives were completely covered by the ACHS standards. Agencies that had undertaken an ACHS review would need to address issues of quality under each of the HACC objectives, precluding the use of an abridged Instrument for these agencies.

For agencies that have undergone a review under another scheme, it is recommended that they fully complete the HACC National Service Standards Instrument at their first review, referring to other appraisal method results as appropriate. This would allow the performance of these agencies to be compared to other HACC agencies completing the Instrument. Subsequent reviews or reassessments may draw more heavily on the results of other appraisal methods.

Products of the HACC National Service Standards Instrument Pilot Project

As a result of the work undertaken for the HACC National Service Standards Instrument Pilot Project (described in this report), the HACC National Service Standards Instrument and the Consumer Survey were extensively revised. This resulted in the production of:

- a shortened and refined HACC National Service Standards Instrument for use in quality assessment of HACC agencies against the HACC National Service Standards. The refined Instrument contains 25 performance information requests pertaining to 27 standards (down from 31 in the original Instrument) and can be found in appendix A;
- a method for scoring agencies against the HACC National Service Standards to produce an overall Instrument Score that summarises agency performance, ranging from 0 (the poorest performance) to 20 (the highest performance);
- a method for calculating a compliance score that gives a summary rating of agency performance against each of the seven major objectives around which the HACC National Service Standards are organised, ranging from 0 (poorest performance) to 2 (highest performance); and
- a shortened and refined version of the consumer feedback questionnaire which generates information that can be mapped to the HACC National Service Standards. A copy of the final version of the consumer questionnaire is found in appendix B.

