

6 Agreements and governance arrangements for national data standards

The effective management of information requires good governance. Governance of the data sets is important because it provides a coordinated approach for developing and managing data standards and associated data sets. It is also the only way to minimise data redundancy and unnecessary costs associated with developing data that already exists.

National, state and local agencies need to develop appropriate governance arrangements around the ongoing development, management and maintenance of their data standards to ensure that the capacity to re-use and share information is strengthened.

In Australia, national information agreements provide a framework for national data infrastructure activities in the areas of health, community services and housing (including indigenous housing) assistance. The agreements that are currently in place include:

- National Health Information Agreement (NHIA)
- National Community Services Information Agreement (NCSIA)
- National Housing Data Agreement (NHDA)
- Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information (ANIHI)

The national information agreements are formal agreements that form the basis for collaboration and commitment to cooperate.

6.1 National Health Information Agreement (NHIA)

The National Health Information Agreement (NHIA) is an agreement between the Australian Government and state/territory government health authorities, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Medicare Australia and other key government agencies. The agreement was established to coordinate the development, collection and dissemination of health information in Australia, including the development, endorsement and maintenance of national data standards. It includes a commitment to cooperate through the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) agreed governance arrangements for information management and information technology.

AHMAC first endorsed the National Health Information Agreement in 1993. The current National Health Information Agreement 2004–2009, was signed by all parties and came into effect on 1 September 2004. It retains the main features and scope of the agreement developed in 1993, and incorporates amendments to reflect the significant changes to health information governance that were introduced in 2003. There is also increased emphasis on achieving consistency in data standards between the health, community services and housing assistance sectors in the current agreement.

Specifically, the objectives of the NHIA are to set out the basis on which all parties will collect, publish and use nationally consistent health information. It outlines agreed principles in relation to matters such as privacy, ownership and release of information, responsibility for the costs of developing and maintaining national health information collections and the processes for obtaining agreement on information collections, as well as the responsibilities of various parties.

The Agreement also sets out the responsibilities of the key national committees concerned with the obtaining agreement on aspects of national health information collections. These include the National Health Information Management Principal Committee (NHIMPC), the Statistical Information Management Committee (SIMC) and the Health Data Standards Committee (HDSC). Committees such as the National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data (NAGATSIHID) also have responsibility for advising the Principal Committee on information needs in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and population health respectively.

6.2 National health information governance arrangements

The NHIA is administered by the National Health Information Management Principal Committee (NHIMPC), previously known as the National Health Information Group (NHIG), a standing committee of AHMAC. The Health Data Standards Committee (HDSC) is a standing subcommittee of the Principal Committee. This committee has been in operation since 1994. Prior to 2003, the committee was known as the National Health Data Committee (NHDC). In September 2004, the new National e-Health Transmission Authority (NEHTA) was established and included within the AHMAC governance arrangements. On April 2006, new governance arrangements for health information management were approved comprising of six Principal Committees and specific-purpose sub-committees to support the work of the Principal Committees. Figure 5 depicts the current committee and working group structures that operate under the AHMAC governance arrangements and which came into effect on 27 April 2006.

Any data development that is intended for national implementation needs to go through the AHMAC agreed information management governance arrangements process. Figure 5 outlines the relationships of the groups involved to each other.

The primary role of the HDSC (replacing and expanding the responsibilities of the previous committee) is coordinating the development and endorsement of national data standards used for statistical analysis, research and administrative reporting in the health sector. The HDSC works closely with the National e-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA) on those data standards that are used both for point of care (clinical) and for research and reporting purposes.

The HDSC assesses health-related data definitions proposed by data development working groups for inclusion in the Institute's online metadata registry (METeOR) and the National Health Data Dictionary (NHDD). It submits recommendations to the NHIMPC on revisions and additions to national health data definitions. All data definitions to be included in the NHDD require endorsement by the NHIMPC. All proposals that affect the collection of data mandated under the NHIA must be reviewed and endorsed by the Statistical Information Management Committee (SIMC). Under the NHIA, the Dictionary is the authoritative source of national health data definitions and related documentation.

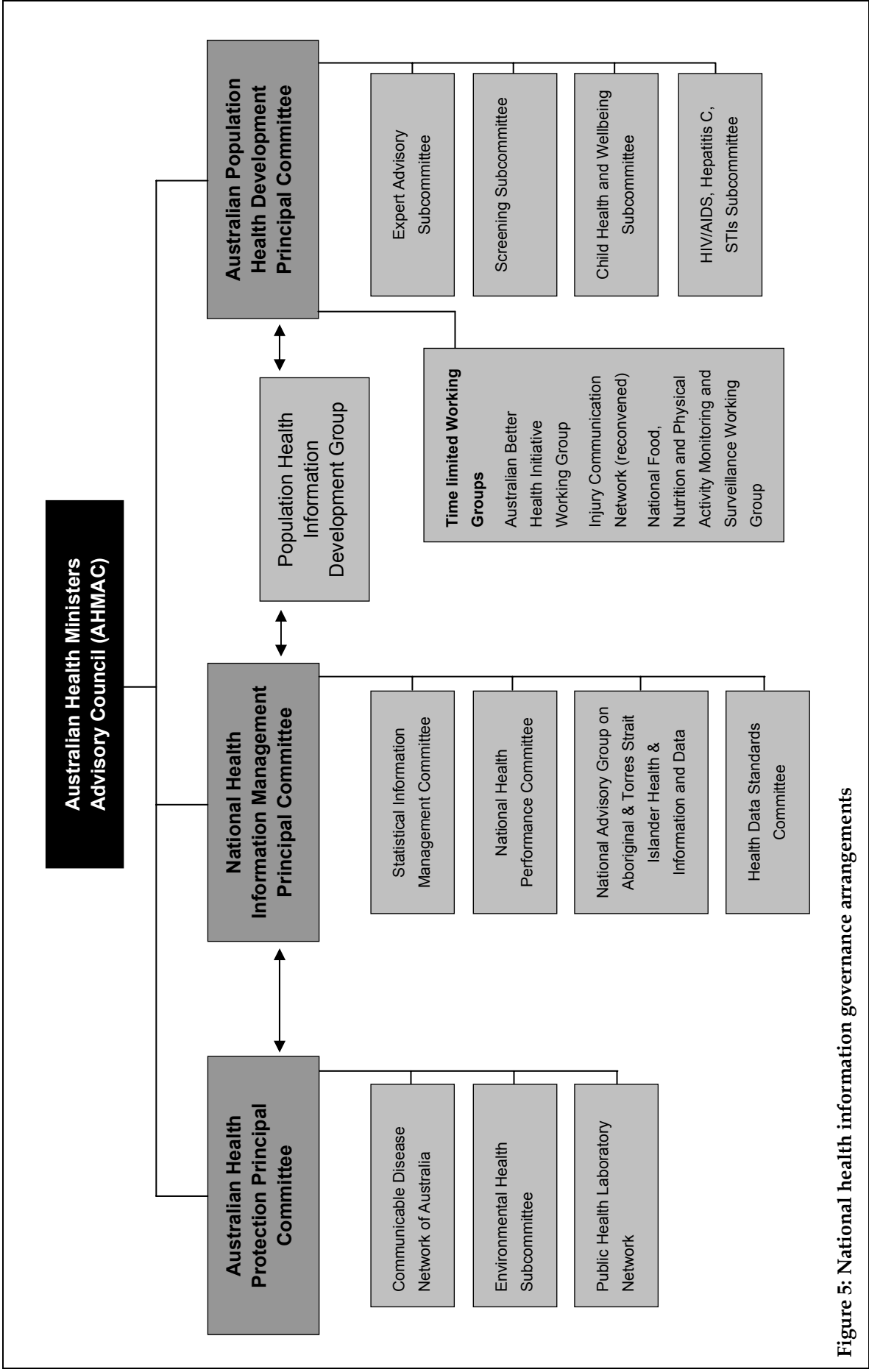


Figure 5: National health information governance arrangements

6.3 National Community Services Information Agreement (NCSIA)

The NCSIA is a multilateral agreement between the Australian Government, state and territory community services departments, Centrelink, the ABS and the AIHW to provide the framework for a cooperative approach to national, community services information development. The agreement operates under the auspices of the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC). The agreement was originally developed in 1997 and, after a major review of the agreement, it was revised and re-signed for a further 5 years in 2004.

The scope of the NCSIA includes aged care, disability services, children services, child protection and adoption, family support services, juvenile justice, gambling, homelessness services (including the supported accommodation assistance program), concessions and emergency relief services. The agreement provides a framework to support the national infrastructure and decision-making processes needed to integrate, plan and coordinate the development of consistent national community services information.

Specific objectives of the NCSIA are to ensure access to nationally consistent quality data on community services essential for policy and program development, accountability requirements and improvements in quality, efficiency and effectiveness of community services.

Core activities covered by the agreement include:

- developing and maintaining a National Community Services Data Dictionary (NCSDD) (now incorporated within METeOR) used by all data developers and collections.
- developing community services data classifications and standards.
- endorsing national minimum data sets consistent with agreed dictionary definitions and classifications.
- integrating and harmonising community services, health, housing assistance and income support data definitions, classifications and standards where possible.
- providing data linkage across community service and other sectors.
- disseminating national information.

6.4 Community services information governance arrangements

The complexity of the community services sector is reflected in the range of committees and working groups that have some influence on the development of community services information. While the two central committees established under the NCSIA are the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) and the National Community Services Data Committee (NCSDC), a range of other committees focused on particular types of community services are also represented.

Figure 6 highlights and summarises the relationship and linkages between the NCSIMG and other organisations and groups in the national community services sector.

The NCSDC is responsible for developing and maintaining the National Community Services Data Dictionary (NCSDD) and promoting national data consistency in the community services sector. The NCSIMG is the endorsing body for the data definitions and standards recommended by the NCSDC.

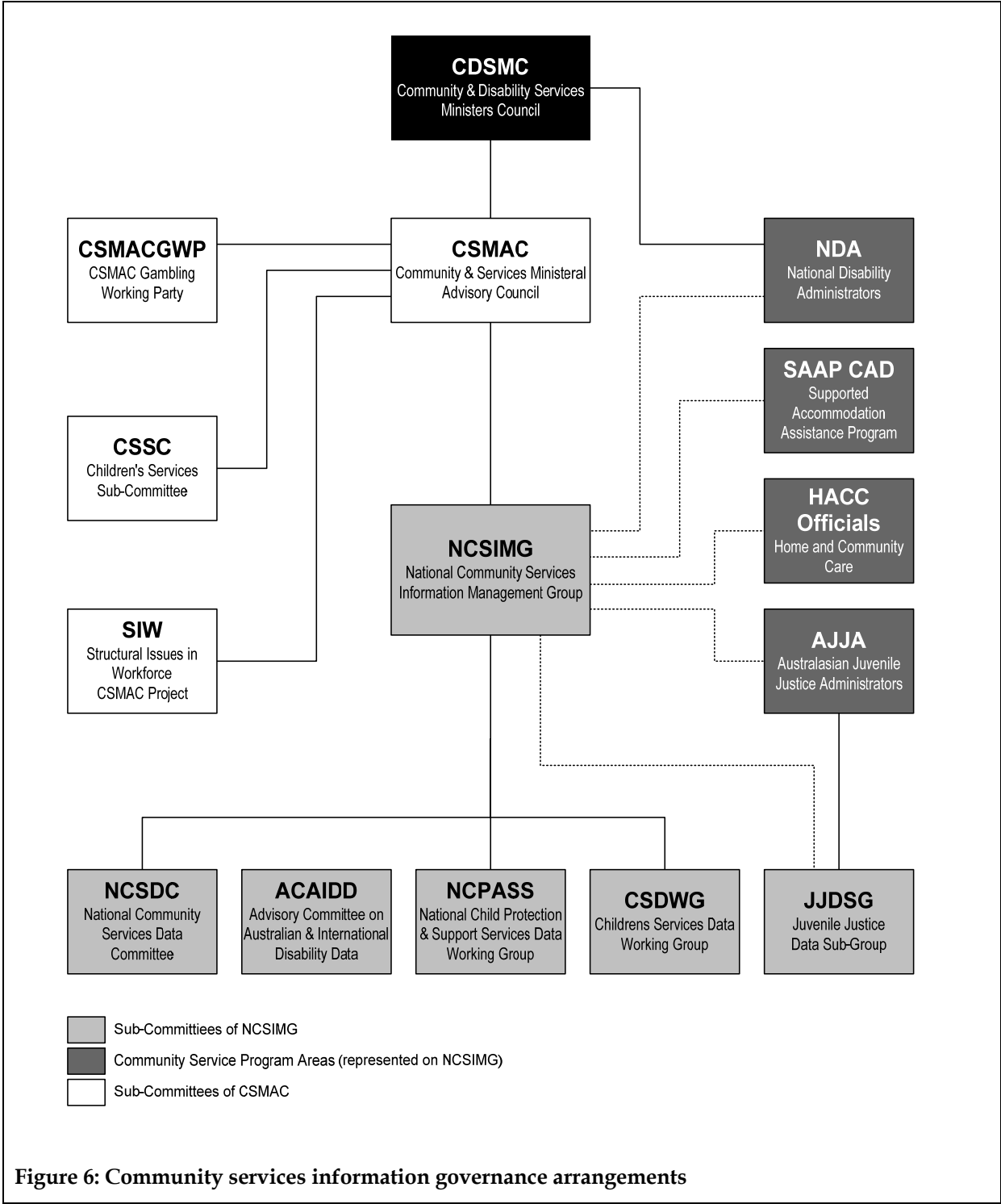


Figure 6: Community services information governance arrangements

6.5 National Housing Data Agreement (NHDA)

Parties to the NHDA are the ABS, the AIHW, the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, Department of Health and Human Services (TAS), Department of Housing (NSW), Department of Housing (NT), Department of Housing (QLD), Department of Human Services (SA), Department of Human Services (VIC), Department of Urban Services (ACT), Ministry of Housing (WA) and the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office. The Agreement provides the framework for a cooperative approach to national housing information development. The long-term goal of this Agreement is not only to have a workable means of obtaining nationally compatible housing data, but also to do so in a way that is compatible and consistent with other information initiatives in Australia, such as the NCSIA and the NHIA. This enables the sourcing of nationally relevant data from locally useful data and reduces the respondent burden on data collectors. The broad objectives of this agreement are to:

- develop and improve the quality of, and access to, national housing data
- reduce duplication of data development and data collections
- ensure the availability and use of compatible national data among agencies across state, territory and Commonwealth authorities and with other community and human service sectors including health.

6.6 Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information (ANIHI)

The Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information (ANIHI) recognises the need for consistent, accurate, reliable and timely information about housing for Indigenous Australians. The ANIHI came into effect in December 1999.

Parties to the Agreement are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Aboriginal Housing Office (NSW), the ABS, the AIHW, the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, and relevant state and territory housing departments.

The goal of the Agreement is not only to have a workable means of obtaining nationally relevant Indigenous housing data, but also to do so in a way that is compatible and consistent with other information initiatives in Australia that cover other housing data and other relevant health and community services data.

6.7 Housing information governance arrangements

Figure 7 shows the relationships between the various groups involved in the governance arrangements under the NHDA and the ANIHI.

The National Committee for Housing Information (NCHI) is a national housing data committee established by the Housing Minister's Advisory Council (HMAC). It is responsible for the development and management of the national mainstream and Indigenous housing data, as outlined in the National Housing Data Agreement (NHDA) and the Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information (ANIHI).

The Policy Research Working Group (PRWG) and the Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing (SCIH) are responsible for the allocation of housing information budget provided through HMAC. The NCHI develops and oversees the implementation of the HMAC endorsed work plan and is directly accountable to the PRWG. The NCHI has a role in the development, implementation and endorsement of national data definitions and standards for the national housing assistance data. These data standards are included in the Institute’s online metadata registry (METeOR) and the National Housing Assistance Data Dictionary (NHADD). The NCHI is also responsible for overseeing the national housing assistance data collections and national housing minimum data sets.

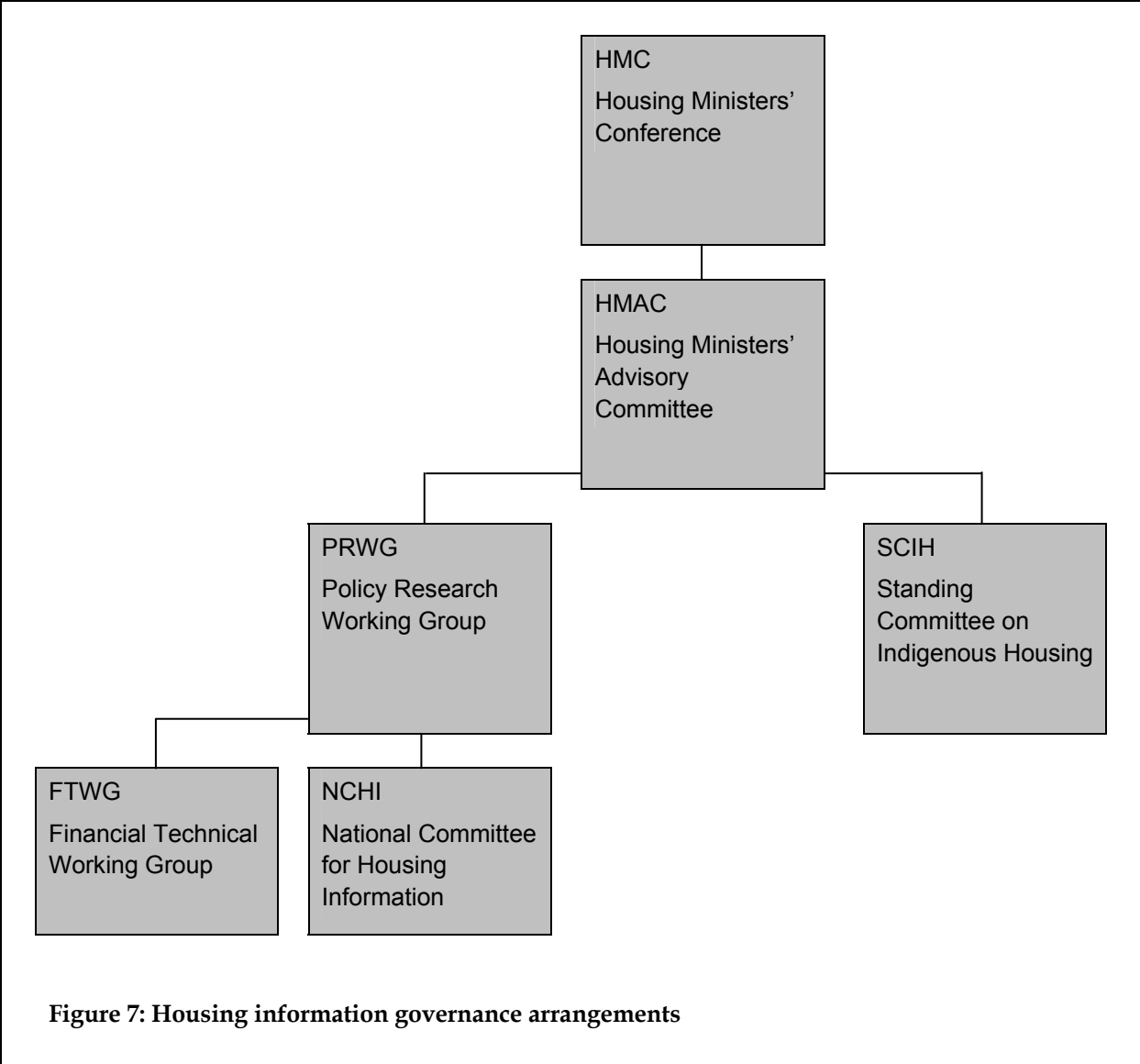


Figure 7: Housing information governance arrangements

6.8 States and territory governance arrangements

Data collections or data standards intended for use within the State or territory health service would need to be approved policy and procedures defined by the particular jurisdiction.

Many State and Territory health departments have guidelines for the development and/or implementation of data collections and information systems. This includes guidelines for developing data elements/standards and review and approval process for the development and maintenance of corporate data standards.

Figure 8 shows the approval processes that exist within Queensland Health and is an example of the data development governance process used by a State and Territory.

6.9 Local governance arrangements

Some sectors, regions or agencies may also have local arrangements for the development, approval and maintenance of data collections and data standards through metadata.

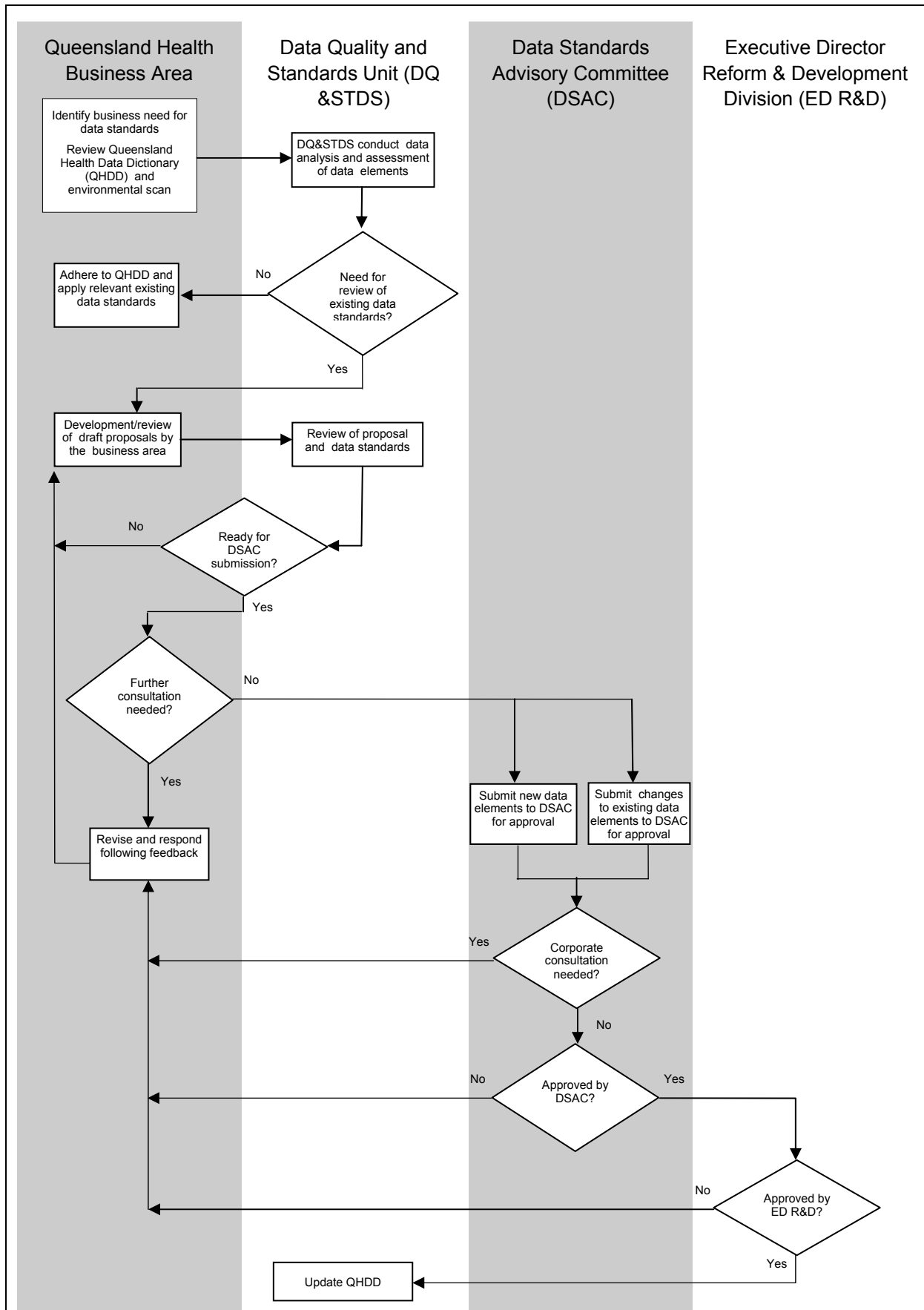


Figure 8: Queensland Health data development flowchart