

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In 1988 HACC ministers agreed on the need for a strategy which would assure quality of care and consumer rights for consumers of HACC-funded services. A consultation process concerned with these issues commenced in 1989. Emerging from this were the Guidelines for the Home and Community Care Program National Service Standards, released by the relevant Commonwealth and State and Territory ministers in 1991. The National Service Standards were grouped around seven broad objectives: accessibility; information and consultation; efficiency and effectiveness; coordination, planning and reliable service delivery; privacy, confidentiality and access to personal information; complaints and disputes; and advocacy. A complete list of the 27 Service Standards is included later in the report (Box 3.1).

The responsibility for implementing these standards lay with the States and Territories and continued to be an issue of concern. In 1994, the Report on the Home and Community Care Program presented to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs indicated that while some States had made considerable progress in training service providers on the standards, others were still working out their implementation strategy (HRSCCA 1994). Tasmania was the first State to introduce a monitoring program for the standards. The Tasmanian Government, working with the Australian Community Health Association, had, by 1994, piloted a program for monitoring quality of HACC services using a service review model based on those used by the Community Health Accreditation Standards Project (CHASP).

Among the recommendations of the Efficiency and Effectiveness Review of the Home and Community Care Program (DHS 1995) was the need to ensure the accountability of service providers with regard to the quality of the services they provide. A particular focus was on outcomes for clients. To this end, the Standards Working Group was set up by HACC officials with objectives which included: developing outcome measures for the National Service Standards; developing a consistent national method for obtaining outcome measures on the standards; and considering methods for obtaining consumer input in the assessment of quality in HACC services.

From this group a subgroup was formed (the Outcomes Working Group) with the charter of further developing measurable outcomes. This group produced a draft Quality Measures Instrument for the measurement of quality outcomes in HACC-funded agencies. This Instrument was originally intended to be used by service providers for self-assessment. As it developed, however, it came to include consumer feedback (to be incorporated into assessment scores) and both quantitative and qualitative questions regarding service quality. As such, the Outcomes Working Group saw that it was necessary to involve a third party to score agencies against standards

according to the qualitative information and consumer input provided regarding the agency. This third party is referred to in this report as an assessor and may be a government project officer, a service provider from another agency, or an independent examiner with no previous involvement with HACC service providers in the region. To this point, the Quality Measures Instrument had not been trialled in agencies, and no method for either collecting the data required by the Instrument, or appraising the data, or scoring agencies against the standards had been developed.

## 1.2 Objectives of the project

In 1996, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare was asked by HACC officials to undertake further development and refinement of the HACC Quality Measures Instrument, referred to in this report as the HACC National Service Standards Instrument. In particular, the Institute was required to:

- produce a refined, quality measures Instrument based on pilot test results;
- provide advice on the use of the Instrument in terms of validity, accuracy and reliability, including advice on appropriate scoring and data collection;
- provide methodological advice on ways of obtaining valid and reliable consumer input and incorporating this into the Instrument; and
- undertake a comparison of the HACC National Service Standards Instrument with other existing methods of measuring service quality.

This report documents the process and findings of the pilot test of the HACC National Service Standards Instrument.

## 1.3 Preliminary work

Prior to commencing this pilot test, preliminary interviews were conducted with a range of service providers to test the quality of the original draft Instrument provided by the Outcomes Working Group. As a result of these pre-pilot interviews, the draft Instrument was divided into two parts. Information to be obtained from agency records and information to be obtained from consumer feedback were separated, creating two distinct documents for the collection of quality assessment information: one, an Instrument to be completed by agencies, and the other, a questionnaire to be completed by consumers. This report describes the testing of each of these distinct documents. Pre-pilot interviews assisted in identifying individual items that failed to elicit useful performance information and areas in which further data were needed. Modifications, deletions and additions were made to compensate for these items. This ensured that the versions trialled in the pilot were most likely to glean useful performance information against each of the standards.

Pre-pilot interviews also confirmed the need to involve assessors in the process of scoring agency performance against the standards. From the information provided by agencies regarding their activities, goals, policies and objectives, a decision was to be made on whether the agency 'met', 'partly met', or had 'not met' the standards. The

diverse nature of HACC-funded agencies precluded the development of detailed and prescriptive guidelines for scoring all agencies in this manner. In providing a fair judgment of agency performance against the standards it was often necessary to take into account the service type, clientele or other individual circumstances of the agency. Overly prescriptive guidelines would have negated the assessor's ability to be flexible in this way. Without this flexibility, judgments of the quality of services provided in some agencies were at risk of being invalid and unreliable: the more specific the guidelines to assess an agency's standards, the less generalisable the guidelines were across different agency types. In addition, providing greater detail ran the risk of reducing the relevance of the guidelines over time, as agencies' practices and clientele change and evolve.

With this in mind, guidelines for assessors were developed that could be applied to the greatest range of HACC-funded agencies but which did not provide detailed and prescriptive checklists of things to look for to make rating decisions against the standards. A similar approach, employed in the nursing home and hostel outcome standards monitoring program operative in Australia from 1987 to 1997, proved, in a large scale international evaluation, to generate ratings with a high degree of both validity and reliability (Braithwaite et al. 1991; Braithwaite & Braithwaite 1995). The training of assessors was integral to the assessment process. This training stressed the need for assessors to allow agencies to explain their circumstances. It encouraged assessors to use their judgment in interpreting the guidelines, applying their knowledge of a specific agency's conditions. In this way the reliability and validity of the Instrument was supported by the communication between the agency and the assessor and by the assessor's experience and knowledge. A generalisable Instrument and scoring guidelines could thus be generated with informed assessors facilitating the specific interpretation of the meaning of standards and scores for individual agencies.

## 1.4 Report overview

Data of both a qualitative and quantitative nature were employed in meeting the requirements of this consultancy. In testing and refining the Instrument three approaches were taken:

- service providers and government officers involved in assessment in each of the participating States and Territories were asked to comment on the Instrument. Unstructured interviews and structured questionnaires were used to elicit this information.
- a quantitative study of the reliability of the Instrument was undertaken by comparing the scores given to agencies by their own managers or coordinators, by an assessing government officer (or peer in South Australia), and by an independent assessor.
- statistical analyses of the interrelationships between scores against standards were used to identify the reliability with which items in the Instrument measure quality as a whole in HACC-funded services as well as identifiable aspects of quality as defined by the objectives.

In investigating the best method for the collection of Instrument data several assessment approaches were trialled and subjected to comparison by both qualitative and quantitative means. These assessment approaches entailed different levels of involvement by assessors during the assessment process. Assessors were drawn from different sources: a small number of assessors were HACC service providers, some were officers based in the central office of the State Government, and the majority were drawn from the regional offices of the State Government in the service providers' local areas.

The comparison of methods of assessment involved:

- a statistical comparison of agency versus assessor Instrument Scores;
- a statistical comparison of the inter-rater reliability of each method; and
- qualitative analysis of service provider and assessor opinion of the assessment methods.

Each of the items of the consumer feedback questionnaire were designed to be incorporated into agency assessments against particular standards. It was possible to evaluate the viability of incorporating this feedback into the scoring of the Instrument by examining the quality and consistency of responses to the questionnaire and by statistically comparing consumer feedback with scores on the Instrument as determined by the agency and by the assessor. The consumer feedback questionnaire was trialled by telephone interviews and mailed surveys.

The relative value of each of these methods was evaluated in the following ways:

- by comparison of the response rates and the representativeness of the sample of respondents for each method;
- by consumer and service provider comment on the process; and
- by comparison of the relative statistical convergence of consumer appraisals (measured in each of the two methods) with scores on the Instrument.

The comparison of the HACC National Service Standards Instrument with other existing methods of measuring service quality was undertaken by a qualitative content analysis of each method under examination.

As a result of the extensive field testing and detailed qualitative and quantitative analyses described in this report, and in consultation with members of the HACC Officials Standards Working Group, a revised HACC Service Standards Instrument has been developed for use in appraising HACC agencies against the National Service Standards. It is included in appendix A. On the basis of more preliminary testing and analyses, a revised consumer feedback questionnaire was also constructed; this Instrument is included in appendix B.