

5 Testing the consumer feedback Instrument

While the key task of the consultancy was envisaged as the refinement and testing of the HACC National Service Standards Instrument, the Institute was also asked to provide preliminary advice on methodological issues regarding ways of obtaining valid and reliable consumer input. This task included examining the feasibility of directly incorporating consumer feedback as a quality measure within the Instrument. After discussion with the HACC Officials Standards Working Group, it was agreed that two methods of obtaining consumer feedback would be investigated: mailed surveys and telephone interviews. Other possible avenues, in particular face-to-face interviews, were excluded on the practical grounds of their resource implications. The costs associated with implementing a full-scale national quality appraisal process, which incorporated face-to-face interviews with consumers of all HACC agencies across Australia, were deemed to be prohibitive.

The characteristics of respondents of each survey method are examined to determine how representative respondents were of the HACC population. The response rate to the methods overall and to individual items within each method are examined. This has been done to assess how well the methods and survey tools used accurately represented consumer views. The problems that arose for consumers in responding to the mail survey are discussed. Finally, the extent to which consumer feedback and agency scores cross-validate one another is examined. Each question asked of respondents provided information directly related to a particular standard within the Instrument. The extent to which these replies match with agency and assessor ratings for these standards is examined and the issues affecting this match are discussed.

5.1 Profile of respondents

5.1.1 Telephone interviews

This section presents an overall profile of the 75 consumers responding to the telephone interview survey from the five South Australian agencies involved in this aspect of the pilot. Further details of the sample and survey procedures were reported in Chapter 2. In 53% of cases the respondents were service recipients, with the remainder being carers of service recipients. Seventy per cent of those interviewed were female. The age profile of respondents is shown in Table 5.1. The largest proportion of consumers responding to the survey were in the 75- to 84-years age group. Seven per cent of respondents were from a non-English-speaking background and none reported being of Aboriginal or

Torres Strait Islander descent. Seventeen per cent reported financial disadvantage. Five per cent lived in a rural or remote area. Thirty two per cent were caring for someone with dementia.

Table 5.1: Age of HACC telephone interview respondents

Age group	Number	Percentage
0–54	13	17.3
55–64	15	20.0
65–74	16	21.3
75–84	28	37.3
85+	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

5.1.2 Mailed surveys

This section presents an overall profile of the 431 consumers responding to the mailed survey from all 26 agencies involved in this aspect of the pilot. Further methodological details were provided in chapter 2.

In 76% of cases the services were provided to assist the person completing the questionnaire; for 10% of respondents services were provided to help the person the respondent was caring for; and, in the remaining cases, services were provided to assist the respondent as a carer. Seventy per cent of those responding were female. The age profile of respondents is shown in Table 5.2. As for the telephone interviews, the largest proportion of consumers responding to the survey was in the 75- to 84-years age group. Eight per cent of respondents were from a non-English speaking background and two respondents (0.5%) reported being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Thirteen per cent reported financial disadvantage. Sixteen per cent lived in a rural or remote area. Four per cent were caring for someone with dementia.

Table 5.2: Age of HACC mailed survey respondents

Age group	Number	Percentage
0–54	55	13.4
55–64	35	8.6
65–74	104	25.4
75–84	162	39.6
85+	53	13.0
Total	409	100.0

5.1.3 Evaluation of respondent profile

The age and sex of respondents to the mailed survey and telephone interviews can be compared to the national profile of HACC service users to verify that the samples were representative. This is particularly important for the mailed surveys since the response rate was low, and there may well be a number of important factors influencing ability or desire to respond. The age and sex profile of HACC clients nationally is presented in

Table 5.3.¹ The age and sex of telephone interviewees and mailed survey respondents are generally comparable with the national profiles of HACC service users, although there were fewer respondents to the telephone survey in the 85 years and over category than might have been expected on the basis of the HACC national client profile. This difference in age profiles is at least partially explained by the proportion of survey respondents who were neither HACC clients as a result of their own frailty nor HACC clients as a result of their caring role, but were responding as the carers of service recipients (47% of the telephone interviews and 10% of the mailed questionnaires).

Table 5.3: HACC service users by age and sex for the four-week sample period, 1993–94

Age	Females		Males		Total	
	Number	% of total sample	Number	% of total sample	Number	% of total sample
0–49	2,424	5.8	1,702	4.1	4,126	9.9
50–54	555	1.3	320	0.8	875	2.1
55–59	672	1.6	379	0.9	1,051	2.5
60–64	1,179	2.8	714	1.7	1,893	4.5
65–69	2,282	5.5	1,201	2.9	3,483	8.4
70–74	4,045	9.7	1,822	4.4	5,867	14.1
75–79	5,457	13.1	2,196	5.3	7,653	18.4
80–84	6,307	15.1	2,499	6.0	8,806	21.1
85–89	3,889	9.3	1,498	3.6	5,387	12.9
90+	1,844	4.4	668	1.6	2,512	6.0
All ages	28,654	68.8	12,999	31.2	41,653	100.0

Notes

1. Number of cases with missing data = 0
2. Data collected for one month between August 1993 and May 1994.

Nationally, there are 12% of HACC consumers from a non-English-speaking background and 3% of HACC consumers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. In both the telephone and mailed surveys, non-English-speaking background people are under represented. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not represented at all in the telephone survey and their representation in the mailed survey is close to none. The method of selecting agencies for the telephone survey (by volunteer) did not facilitate collecting a representative sample in this respect. Services specific to these consumers were also not selected to participate in the mailed survey, accounting for the lower than average representation of these groups. Financial status is measured nationally as the proportion of pension recipients and 93% of HACC clients nationally receive some form of pension. In the telephone and mailed surveys, 17% and 13% respectively describe themselves as having financial disadvantage. Data are not currently available to compare the survey samples with the national profiles for those living in rural or remote areas.

1. Extracted from Jenkins A 1996. Client profiles for aged care services in Australia. Welfare Division Working Paper (no. 11). Canberra: AIHW.

This comparison indicates that the surveys did not access a representative sample of HACC consumers. One reason for this is the small sample of consumers responding and agencies engaging in the consumer feedback component of this pilot. Moreover, the mailed survey was not prepared in languages other than English as this was a preliminary test of the consumer feedback tool.

Other characteristics of consumers, unmeasured by the survey, may have affected the response rate. These would include: the illness or disability of the respondent, including memory loss and confusion; illiteracy; lack of relevance of the questions if, for instance, a service was used only once; and suspicion about the purpose and use of the information, including its effect on the agency and themselves. Some consumers reported that the length of the mailed survey was problematic. This may have been a factor in the level of non-response.

5.2 Evaluation of missing data

5.2.1 Telephone interviews

The overall response rate to the telephone interviews was 94%; interview data was not obtained from only five consumers of the 80 selected.

Table 5.4 lists the proportion of missing data against questions asked in the telephone interviews. In the interview, 27 questions were asked of all consumers and 12 additional questions were asked on the condition that they were relevant to them (this was contingent on the consumer’s reply to a previous question). Non-response occurred only for questions where answers were not relevant. Only one of the participants of the 80 selected failed to complete the interview (believing the questions were irrelevant) and only two refused to participate at all. One consumer could not be contacted and one record was lost in the data transfer process. This exceptionally high response rate and the absence of missing data suggest that telephone interviews provide a very effective means of obtaining consumer feedback. These interviews had the advantage of allowing consumers to clarify the questions being asked of them, to clarify their answers to questions, and to discuss the reasons for their replies. The question as to whether very elderly consumers are less well represented than other age groups in a telephone survey is worthy of further investigation, as the size of the sample in this pilot test precludes any resolution of this issue.

Table 5.4: Proportion of missing data in the telephone consumer feedback survey

Outcome standards	Missing (%)
1.1 Consumer Outcome: Assessment occurs for each consumer.	
Did someone from the agency discuss your needs with you before they began providing services?	0
Did the agency take into account all the things you and your carer might need help with?	28
2.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.	
How were your rights and responsibilities explained to you? (This would include your right to access personal information, confidentiality and privacy issues.)	0

(continued)

Table 5.4 (continued): Proportion of missing data in the telephone consumer feedback survey

Outcome standards	Missing (%)
2.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of services available.	
How would you rate the agency in providing information about ALL of their services?	0
2.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the basis of service provision, including changes that may occur.	
Are you happy with the way your agency currently charges you for services?	0
Have you ever asked the agency for help and been refused?	0
Did they explain why they refused to help?	97
Were you satisfied with their response?	97
3.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from agencies that adhere to accountable management practices.	
Does the agency provide you with help in the way they said they would provide it?	0
Do you feel that you can voice your opinions to the agency about how it is being run?	0
Do you feel that you could gain access to documents about the way the agency is run, if you wanted to?	0
3.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from appropriately skilled staff.	
How satisfied are you with the level of performance of the staff at the agency?	0
Have you ever been concerned about your safety or security because of the actions of agency staff?	0
4.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer receives ongoing assessment (formal and informal) that takes all support needs into account.	
Does anyone from the agency discuss with you the need to change or increase the amount of help you receive?	0
How often does someone from the agency contact you to see how you are getting along?	0
4.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has a service delivery/care plan which is tailored to individual need and outlines the service he or she can expect to receive.	
Did the agency make a clear agreement with you about the services they would provide to you?	0
Did they tell you which services, how often you would get them, and for how long?	29
Did you agree with what they proposed?	29
If no, did you discuss this with them?	91
4.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers' cultural needs are addressed.	
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	52
4.4 Consumer Outcome: The needs of consumers with dementia, memory loss and similar disorders are addressed.	
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	52
4.5 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services which include appropriate coordination and referral processes.	
Do you receive more than one service from the agency?	0
Are the services provided in a coordinated fashion?	65

(continued)

Table 5.4 (continued): Proportion of missing data in the telephone consumer feedback survey

Outcome standards	Missing (%)
5.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the privacy and confidentiality procedures and understand their rights in relation to these procedures.	
Do you have any concerns with the way the agency deals with privacy and confidentiality?	0
5.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers have signed confidentiality release forms.	
Are you aware of any occasions when the agency may have passed on information about you without asking for your permission first?	0
5.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are able to gain access to their personal information.	
Do you have any concerns about the personal information the agency might keep about you?	0
Have you ever tried to get hold of the personal information that the agency has about you?	0
Did you get the information you wanted?	97
6.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of the complaints process.	
Has the agency informed you of what to do if you're not happy with the service you get?	0
Did the agency tell you that you can voice any concerns you have about them to outside authorities?	0
6.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer's complaint about a service, or access to a service, is dealt with fairly, promptly, confidentially and without retribution.	
Have you ever had any concerns about the help you receive from the agency?	0
Did you express your concerns with the agency staff?	97
Do you feel confident that the agency will listen to any concerns you have, and deal with them properly?	0
Do you think that things would go badly for you if you made a complaint about the agency?	0
6.3 Consumer Outcome: Services are modified as a result of 'upheld' complaints.	
Were you happy with the way the agency responded to your concerns?	97
7.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has access to an advocate of his or her choice.	
7.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know of their rights to use an advocate.	
7.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know about advocacy services where they are and how to use them.	
Did you receive any information from the agency about how you could obtain an advocate?	0
Do you feel confident that you could obtain an advocate of your choice if you needed to?	0
Has the agency provided you with any information about your right to have someone speak on your behalf (an advocate)?	0
7.4 Consumer Outcome: The agency involves advocates in respect to representing the interests of the consumer.	
Have you ever had someone speak on your behalf in relation to the services you received from the agency?	0

5.2.2 Mailed surveys

As described in Chapter 1, of 1261 consumer surveys sent out, responses were obtained from 431 consumers within the time frame of the study. This response rate of 34% suggests that the majority of consumers were unable or unwilling to complete the form. It should be noted, however, that mailed surveys traditionally have relatively low rates of return when compared to telephone and face-to-face interviews. Response rates to

mailed questionnaires are typically somewhat higher for forms which are comparatively brief and easily understood, but other factors are also important. These include whether the survey is perceived to be of some relevance or value to the respondent, and the extent to which follow-up letters are sent to the respondent reminding them to complete and return the survey form.

Some gains in the level of response may be possible as a result of a more abbreviated and refined questionnaire, and perhaps the use of a general follow-up letter sent to all respondents regardless of whether they had returned the questionnaire or not. As the Institute had no record of the individual consumers to whom questionnaires were sent, and the returns were anonymous (to protect individual privacy and confidentiality), the usual strategy of sending follow-up letters to those who failed to reply was not employed in the pilot. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that the response rate would be unlikely to increase substantially even with these modifications.

Table 5.5 lists the proportion of missing data against questions asked in the mailed consumer surveys. For questions where answers were contingent on the reply to the previous question, there occurred less missing data than in the telephone interviews. Some consumers answered these questions even where they were not relevant to them. Of the 27 questions that were relevant to all consumers, the proportion of missing data was, on average, 15%. The lowest proportion of missing data was 4% on a question concerned with assessment. The highest proportion of missing data was 30% for a question concerned with advocacy.

A substantial majority of consumers had difficulty answering questions on advocacy and on their involvement in and ability to gain information about the management of the service. Consumers indicated that they found some of these questions difficult to understand. Other consumer criticisms about this survey form were that it was too long and repetitive; that it was difficult to answer some questions as either 'yes' or 'no' or according to some of the other predefined categories; that it seemed to be trying to elicit only negative appraisals of the agency; that it was not relevant to some consumers who had used a service only once; and that it was not clear what the definition of 'financial disadvantage' was. Positive appraisals of this form were that it gave both the opportunity to express concerns about the agency and the opportunity to offer compliments to the agency (albeit in the comments section at the end of the form).

No replies were received from the consumers associated with the one transport agency included in the survey. It may have been that the questions in this survey were viewed by these consumers as irrelevant to the transport service.

Table 5.5: Proportion of missing data in the mailout consumer feedback survey

Outcome standards	Missing (%)
1.1 Consumer Outcome: Assessment occurs for each consumer.	
Did someone from the agency discuss your needs with you before they began providing services?	4
Did the agency take into account all the things you and your carer might need help with?	9
2.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.	
How were your rights and responsibilities explained to you? (This would include your right to access personal information, confidentiality and privacy issues.)	18

(continued)

Table 5.5 (continued): Proportion of missing data in the mailout consumer feedback survey

Outcome standards	Missing (%)
2.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of services available.	
How would you rate the agency in providing information about ALL of their services?	6
2.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the basis of service provision, including changes that may occur.	
Are you happy with the way your agency currently charges you for services?	12
Have you ever asked the agency for help and been refused?	7
Did they explain why they refused to help?	89
Were you satisfied with their response?	84
3.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from agencies that adhere to accountable management practices.	
Does the agency provide you with help in the way they said they would provide it?	9
Do you feel that you can voice your opinions to the agency about how it is being run?	29
Do you feel that you could gain access to documents about the way the agency is run, if you wanted to?	20
3.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from appropriately skilled staff.	
How satisfied are you with the level of performance of the staff at the agency?	7
Have you ever been concerned about your safety or security because of the actions of agency staff?	8
4.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer receives ongoing assessment (formal and informal) that takes all support needs into account.	
Does anyone from the agency discuss with you the need to change or increase the amount of help you receive?	10
How often does someone from the agency contact you to see how you are getting along?	20
4.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has a service delivery/care plan which is tailored to individual need and outlines the service he or she can expect to receive.	
Did the agency make a clear agreement with you about the services they would provide to you?	5
Did they tell you which services, how often you would get them, and for how long?	6
Did you agree with what they proposed? If no, did you discuss this with them?	78
4.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers' cultural needs are addressed.	
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	48
4.4 Consumer Outcome: The needs of consumers with dementia, memory loss and similar disorders are addressed.	
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	48
4.5 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services which include appropriate coordination and referral processes.	
Do you receive more than one service from the agency?	8
Are the services provided in a coordinated fashion?	52
5.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the privacy and confidentiality procedures and understand their rights in relation to these procedures.	
Do you have any concerns with the way the agency deals with privacy and confidentiality?	11

(continued)

Table 5.5 (continued): Proportion of missing data in the mailout consumer feedback survey

Outcome standards	Missing (%)
5.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers have signed confidentiality release forms.	
Are you aware of any occasions when the agency may have passed on information about you without asking for your permission first?	9
5.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are able to gain access to their personal information.	
Do you have any concerns about the personal information the agency might keep about you?	1
Have you ever tried to get hold of the personal information that the agency has about you?	9
Did you get the information you wanted?	89
6.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of the complaints process.	
Has the agency informed you of what to do if you're not happy with the service you get?	27
Did the agency tell you that you can voice any concerns you have about them to outside authorities?	29
6.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer's complaint about a service, or access to a service, is dealt with fairly, promptly, confidentially and without retribution.	
Have you ever had any concerns about the help you receive from the agency?	14
Did you express your concerns with the agency staff?	81
Do you feel confident that the agency will listen to any concerns you have, and deal with them properly?	13
Do you think that things would go badly for you if you made a complaint about the agency?	17
6.3 Consumer Outcome: Services are modified as a result of 'upheld' complaints.	
Were you happy with the way the agency responded to your concerns?	76
7.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has access to an advocate of his or her choice.	
7.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know of their rights to use an advocate.	
7.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know about advocacy services, where they are, and how to use them.	
Did you receive any information from the agency about how you could obtain an advocate?	30
Do you feel confident that you could obtain an advocate of your choice if you needed to?	24
Has the agency provided you with any information about your right to have someone speak on your behalf (an advocate)?	27
7.4 Consumer Outcome: The agency involves advocates in respect to representing the interests of the consumer.	
Have you ever had someone speak on your behalf in relation to the services you received from the agency?	24

5.2.3 Evaluation of survey and item response rates

The mailed survey is clearly a less reliable source of consumer feedback. The overall response rate is relatively low and, of those surveys returned, some consumers are unable to answer all questions or answer questions not appropriate to them. In some cases, agencies indicated that consumers had asked them for help in completing the survey. In these cases, consumers would be less likely to be able to freely express their

complaints about the agency and its staff. Telephone interviews allowed consumers to discuss the questions and answers with a person not directly connected with the agency. Answers were thus more complete and more likely to be unconstrained by concerns over the agency's reaction.

Agencies providing services such as transport may be better assessed by consumer feedback items designed specifically for that service type.

5.3 Consumer feedback as a quality measure

The purpose of developing a consumer survey was to incorporate consumer feedback into the Instrument and use it as a source of performance information against particular standards. The first way to address validity of this is to determine that the method of feedback captures a representative sample of HACC consumers. The first section of this chapter indicates that this may not be the case for the methods trialled, although it should be remembered that the telephone interviews were conducted only with consumers from a small number of agencies (five agencies in total). A second issue concerns the accuracy of the consumer survey in eliciting consumers' views about agencies. How appropriate and clear the questions within the survey are to consumers has a bearing on this. The previous section indicated that consumers were better able to answer the questions put to them in a telephone interview than in a mailed survey. Telephone interviews provided the opportunity for further explanation about the interviewer's questions and greater opportunity for explanation of the respondent's answers.

A third approach is to determine if consumer views of the agencies correspond to the ratings given to agencies by assessors and whether they correspond to the agencies' own ratings. In this way the concurrent validity of the consumer feedback tool is established. Concurrent validity is established when a measure correlates with other measures of the same concept taken at the same point in time.

The first draft of the Instrument received by the project team contained questions regarding the proportions of consumers who indicated that they had experienced certain quality conditions (depending on the standard in question). This assumed that the more consumers agreed that the agency was providing quality service with respect to a certain aspect of their care, the stronger the evidence that the agency was performing well against the standard. Building on this assumption, if both the consumer survey tool and the standards ratings are measuring the same thing, that is, quality of service in HACC agencies, then the measures should be correlated. This assumption will be tested in the section that follows, although later it will be argued that it may be more appropriate to consider that a small number of consumer complaints should have as much significance for some standards as if all consumers had complained.

The section that follows examines the correlations between consumer responses to individual survey items and the ratings against the standards that these items were designed to inform. This analysis is undertaken for the telephone and consumer surveys separately and a comparison of the results of both follows.

5.3.1 Telephone interviews

Relationship of consumer items with ratings against standards

In Table 5.6, items from the telephone survey are listed under the standard to which they relate. The right hand columns of this table show the correlation between the consumers' responses and agency and assessor ratings against the standards. (Note that these correlations should be interpreted with caution as a result of the small sample size. There were only 75 consumers, and only five agency and assessors' scores to correlate against. The degree of error in the estimate of association is thus very high.) The correlations in Table 5.6 which are above 0.25 are highlighted. In social research, correlations of around 0.3 and above are often considered to be an indication of important association. A number of correlations could not be calculated. This was due to the small sample size of the telephone survey and the lack of variability in the data. For instance, where all agencies in the sample scored a 'met' for a standard a correlation could not be calculated. A more rigorous study of the association between consumer feedback and agency performance against the standards would require a larger sample, both of agencies and consumers.

The correlations between assessors' ratings and consumer items are generally higher than between agency ratings and consumer items (the average correlation was $r = 0.18$, compared to $r = 0.13$). In other words, consumers agree less with the agency's opinion than with the assessors' opinion about how well the agency is doing. This suggests that assessors' ratings may be painting a more accurate picture of agency service quality than the agency is. This result is a caution against relying solely on agency self-ratings as measures of quality outcomes for consumers. The case is particularly strong for these data, since the assessors' ratings for this sample were those considered to have the lowest reliability and perhaps the most questionable validity of all the methods of assessment. The assessors for agencies participating in the telephone survey conducted paper reviews: an assessment method noted in Chapter 3 to have the lowest reliability and noted in Chapter 4 to result in the greatest difference between agency and assessor ratings.

Table 5.6: Correlations between telephone consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
1.1 Consumer Outcome: Assessment occurs for each consumer.		
Did someone from the agency discuss your needs with you before they began providing services?	*	*
Did the agency take into account all the things you and your carer might need help with?	*	*
2.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.		
How were your rights and responsibilities explained to you? (This would include your right to access personal information, confidentiality and privacy issues.)	0.00	-0.20

(continued)

Table 5.6 (continued): Correlations between telephone consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
2.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of services available.		
How would you rate the agency in providing information about ALL of their services?	0.06	0.14
2.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the basis of service provision, including changes that may occur.		
Are you happy with the way your agency currently charges you for services?	*	0.14
Have you ever asked the agency for help and been refused?	*	-0.12
Did they explain why they refused to help?	*	*
Were you satisfied with their response?	*	*
3.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from agencies that adhere to accountable management practices.		
Does the agency provide you with help in the way they said they would provide it?	0.07	0.07
Do you feel that you can voice your opinions to the agency about how it is being run?	-0.07	-0.07
Do you feel that you could gain access to documents about the way the agency is run, if you wanted to?	-0.21	-0.21
3.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from appropriately skilled staff.		
How satisfied are you with the level of performance of the staff at the agency?	*	0.01
Have you ever been concerned about your safety or security because of the actions of agency staff?	*	-0.08
4.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer receives ongoing assessment (formal and informal) that takes all support needs into account.		
Does anyone from the agency discuss with you the need to change or increase the amount of help you receive?	-0.15	-0.24
How often does someone from the agency contact you to see how you are getting along?	-0.29	-0.30
4.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has a service delivery/care plan which is tailored to individual need and outlines the service he or she can expect to receive.		
Did the agency make a clear agreement with you about the services they would provide to you?	0.15	0.11
Did they tell you which services, how often you would get them, and for how long?	-0.15	-0.17
Did you agree with what they proposed?	0.10	0.11
If no, did you discuss this with them?	0.35	0.35
4.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers' cultural needs are addressed.		
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	0.07	-0.18
4.4 Consumer Outcome: The needs of consumers with dementia, memory loss and similar disorders are addressed.		
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	-0.26	-0.11

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Table 5.6 (continued): Correlations between telephone consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
4.5 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services which include appropriate coordination and referral processes.		
Do you receive more than one service from the agency ?	*	0.00
Are the services provided in a coordinated fashion?	*	0.16
5.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the privacy and confidentiality procedures and understand their rights in relation to these procedures.		
Do you have any concerns with the way the agency deals with privacy and confidentiality?	*	-0.24
5.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers have signed confidentiality release forms.		
Are you aware of any occasions when the agency may have passed on information about you without asking for your permission first?	0.09	-0.07
5.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are able to gain access to their personal information.		
Do you have any concerns about the personal information the agency might keep about you?	*	*
Have you ever tried to get hold of the personal information that the agency has about you?	-0.17	-0.11
Did you get the information you wanted?	*	*
6.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of the complaints process.		
Has the agency informed you of what to do if you're not happy with the service you get?	-0.10	-0.33
Did the agency tell you that you can voice any concerns you have about them to outside authorities?	-0.18	-0.35
6.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer's complaint about a service, or access to a service, is dealt with fairly, promptly, confidentially and without retribution.		
Have you ever had any concerns about the help you receive from the agency?	-0.13	0.06
Did you express your concerns with the agency staff?		
Do you feel confident that the agency will listen to any concerns you have, and deal with them properly?	0.02	-0.25
Do you think that things would go badly for you if you made a complaint about the agency?	-0.16	0.26
6.3 Consumer Outcome: Services are modified as a result of 'upheld' complaints.		
Were you happy with the way the agency responded to your concerns?	*	*
7.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has access to an advocate of his or her choice.		
7.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know of their rights to use an advocate.		

(continued)

Table 5.6 (continued): Correlations between telephone consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
7.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know about advocacy services, where they are, and how to use them.		
Did you receive any information from the agency about how you could obtain an advocate?	-0.04	-0.28
Do you feel confident that you could obtain an advocate of your choice if you needed to?	0.09	-0.17
Has the agency provided you with any information about your right to have someone speak on your behalf (an advocate)?	0.11	0.07
7.4 Consumer Outcome: The agency involves advocates in respect to representing the interests of the consumer.		
Have you ever had someone speak on your behalf in relation to the services you received from the agency?	0.06	0.01

*Coefficient could not be calculated due to insufficient variance in scores.

Note: Consumer survey items are coded as described in the pilot telephone interview consumer survey form, included in the *Developing Quality Measures for Home and Community Care: Technical Appendixes*. Positive and negative correlations reflect these coding patterns. In general, an answer in the affirmative was scored low and an answer in the negative was scored high.

Some categories within items were recoded to appropriately assign missing data (where respondents could not remember or the item was irrelevant) or to better approximate a graduated interval scale.

Seven interview questions were found to be associated with the ratings, given by assessors, against the standards they were intended to inform. Generally, the more frequently consumers indicated that the agency contacted them to see how they were getting along, the more likely the agency was to score well against Standard 4.1 (Each consumer receives ongoing assessment that takes all support needs into account). Responses to this consumer item should not, however, be considered to be directly associated with agency quality of service; some agencies can present legitimate reasons why reassessment should occur infrequently; and, in some cases, consumers may not wish the agency to contact them frequently. The appropriate frequency of agency contact should be judged on a case by case basis. Nevertheless, this consumer item appears to work as well as any other to predict the performance of agencies overall in this domain.

A question regarding whether consumers discussed their disagreement about their service delivery or care plan was negatively correlated with the assessors rating for Standard 4.2 (Each consumer has a service delivery/care plan which is tailored to individual need and outlines the service he or she can expect to receive). This result is not surprising since it indicated that, if respondents discussed their disagreement, the agency was also likely to have scored well as tailoring service delivery/care plans to individual needs. It appears that consumers did not feel free to discuss their disagreements with agencies which did not negotiate on service provision.

Consumers who indicated that the agency had informed them of what to do if they were not happy with the services they received were more likely to receive service from an agency scoring well against Standard 6.1 (Consumers are aware of the complaints process). Consumers who indicated that the agency had informed them that they could voice their concerns to outside authorities were also more likely to receive service from

an agency scoring well against Standard 6.1. Consumers who indicated that the agency had informed them of how to obtain an advocate were more likely to receive service from an agency scoring well against Standards 7.1 to 7.3. These results are contrary to assertions that consumer information about these standards would be too unreliable. In pre-pilot interviews, some agencies had argued that consumers would not remember these details, or that they only tended to pay attention to them when they needed to. While this may be the case in some instances, the trends that emerge from a sample of consumers provide an indication of whether an agency is indeed making an effort in these areas.

Consumers were asked if they felt that things would go badly for them if they made a complaint. This question asks for a subjective judgment and is phrased negatively. There was some criticism from consumers that the survey seemed to be trying to elicit a negative response. It could also be argued that consumers would be unlikely to express such fears. Yet this item showed itself to be a useful predictor of agency performance against Standard 6.2 (Each consumer's complaint about a service, or access to a service, is dealt with fairly, promptly, confidentially and without retribution). Agency performance against this standard was also predicted by the consumer responses to the question concerning consumer confidence that the agency would listen to concerns and deal with them properly.

One item was associated with agency ratings for the relevant standard but not assessor ratings. This was an item asking consumers if the agency was responsive to their needs as a member of a special group. It was associated with the agency score against Standard 4.4 (The needs of consumers with dementia, memory loss and similar disorders are addressed). This consumer question was relevant to a large proportion of the telephone interviewees who were caring for someone with dementia. That assessor ratings did not match consumer assessments but agency ratings did suggest that assessors should receive consumer input to rate this standard.

Relationship of consumer items with objective scores

Table 5.7 shows the correlation between each telephone consumer survey item and the objective to which it relates. Scores for objectives were calculated by taking the mean rating across each of the standards under the objective; the column on the far right shows the correlation between the average assessor score for standards under the objective and the consumer survey item, and the column to the left of this shows the correlation between the average agency score for standards under the objective and the consumer survey item.

Ten items were moderately associated with the objectives they were designed to inform. Seven of these were the same items found to be predictive of individual standards in the previous analysis, although the associations were generally somewhat weaker between consumer items and objective scores than between consumer items and individual standard scores.

Three items showing substantial relationship with the objective were more strongly related to the objective than the individual standard they were intended measure. The consumer item: 'Does anyone from the agency discuss with you the need to change or increase the amount of help you receive?' is associated with agency scores for

Objective 4 (Coordinated, planned, and reliable service delivery) ($r=0.43$). This suggests that, while this item provides information about the occurrence of ongoing assessment (see Table 5.6), it is also a strong indicator of service delivery quality generally. Similarly, in relation to consumers receiving more than one service, the question: 'Are the services provided in a coordinated fashion?' was more strongly associated with general service delivery quality (Objective 4) than it was to the specific standard related to coordination and referral processes (see Table 5.6).

The consumer item: 'Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?' is also associated with agency scores for Objective 4. Consumer responses to this question were more consistently related to general service delivery quality than to ratings agencies received for the relevant individual standards. A possible explanation for this is that the consumer item relates to a number of special needs groups, including: those of non-English-speaking background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, the financially disadvantaged, those living in a rural or remote location, or those caring for someone with dementia. In contrast, the standards relate to specific groups within the special needs category. The lack of direct association between this consumer item and individual standards may have been caused by the broad domain covered by the consumer item.

Table 5.7: Correlations between telephone survey items and scores against objectives according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Objective/Consumer Survey Item	Agency scores	Assessor scores
Objective 1: Access to services		
Did someone from the agency discuss your needs with you before they began providing services?	0.05	0.06
Did the agency take into account all the things you and your carer might need help with?	-0.22	-0.23
Objective 2: Information and consultation		
How were your rights and responsibilities explained to you? (This would include your right to access personal information, confidentiality and privacy issues.)	0.03	-0.15
How would you rate the agency in providing information about ALL of their services?	0.09	0.14
Are you happy with the way your agency currently charges you for services?	0.02	0.16
Have you ever asked the agency for help and been refused?	0.00	-0.09
Did they explain why they refused to help?	*	*
Were you satisfied with their response?	*	*
Objective 3: Efficient and effective management		
Does the agency provide you with help in the way they said they would provide it?	0.13	0.09
Do you feel that you can voice your opinions to the agency about how it is being run?	0.09	-0.15
Do you feel that you could gain access to documents about the way the agency is run, if you wanted to?	0.06	-0.23

(continued)

Table 5.7 (continued): Correlations between telephone survey items and scores against objectives according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Objective/Consumer Survey Item	Agency scores	Assessor scores
How satisfied are you with the level of performance of the staff at the agency?	0.06	0.08
Have you ever been concerned about your safety or security because of the actions of agency staff?	0.02	-0.07
Objective 4: Coordinated, planned, and reliable service delivery		
Does anyone from the agency discuss with you the need to change or increase the amount of help you receive?	-0.11	-0.43
How often does someone from the agency contact you to see how you are getting along?	0.25	-0.25
Did the agency make a clear agreement with you about the services they would provide to you?	0.24	-0.07
Did they tell you which services, how often you would get them, and for how long?	-0.08	-0.18
Did you agree with what they proposed?	0.18	-0.03
If no, did you discuss this with them?	0.75	0.35
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	-0.19	-0.25
Do you receive more than one service from the agency?	0.17	0.09
Are the services provided in a coordinated fashion?	-0.33	-0.25
Objective 5: Privacy, confidentiality, and access to personal information		
Do you have any concerns with the way the agency deals with privacy and confidentiality?	0.16	0.15
Are you aware of any occasions when the agency may have passed on information about you without asking for your permission first?	0.05	-0.04
Do you have any concerns about the personal information the agency might keep about you?	*	*
Have you ever tried to get hold of the personal information that the agency has about you?	-0.17	-0.04
Did you get the information you wanted?	*	*
Objective 6: Complaints and disputes		
Has the agency informed you of what to do if you're not happy with the service you get?	-0.26	-0.29
Did the agency tell you that you can voice any concerns you have about them to outside authorities?	-0.30	-0.30
Have you ever had any concerns about the help you receive from the agency?	-0.12	0.00
Did you express your concerns with the agency staff?	*	*
Were you happy with the way the agency responded to your concerns?		
Do you feel confident that the agency will listen to any concerns you have, and deal with them properly?	-0.06	-0.27
Do you think that things would go badly for you if you made a complaint about the agency?	-0.02	0.30

(continued)

Table 5.7 (continued): Correlations between telephone survey items and scores against objectives according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Objective/Consumer Survey Item	Agency scores	Assessor scores
Objective 7: Advocacy		
Did you receive any information from the agency about how you could obtain an advocate?	-0.12	-0.25
Do you feel confident that you could obtain an advocate of your choice if you needed to?	-0.03	-0.09
Has the agency provided you with any information about your right to have someone speak on your behalf (an advocate)?	0.10	0.12
Have you ever had someone speak on your behalf in relation to the services you received from the agency?	0.06	0.01

* Coefficient could not be calculated due to insufficient variance in scores.

Note: Consumer survey items are coded as described in the pilot telephone interview consumer survey form, included in the *Developing Quality Measures for Home and Community Care: Technical Appendixes*. Some categories within items were recoded to appropriately assign missing data (where respondents could not remember or the item was irrelevant) or to better approximate a graduated interval scale.

5.3.2 Mailed surveys

Relationship of consumer items with ratings against standards

In Table 5.8, items from the mailed survey are listed under the standard to which they relate. The right hand columns of this table show the correlation between the consumers' responses and agency and assessor ratings against the standards. Overall, both of these sets of correlations were low, indicating that mailed surveys provide poor concurrent validation of either agency or assessor ratings (the average correlation of consumer items with assessor ratings was $r = 0.09$, compared with $r = 0.10$ for the correlation between consumer items and agency ratings).

Only two items showed a correlation of substantial size. Consumers who indicated that the agency explained why they had refused service were more likely to have received service from an agency which was rated as 'met' by an assessor for Standard 2.3 (Consumers are informed of the basis of service provision, including changes that may occur).

Table 5.8: Correlations between mailout consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
1.1 Consumer Outcome: Assessment occurs for each consumer.		
Did someone from the agency discuss your needs with you before they began providing services?	*	-0.16
Did the agency take into account all the things you and your carer might need help with?	*	-0.16

(continued)

Table 5.8 (continued): Correlations between mailout consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
2.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.		
How were your rights and responsibilities explained to you? (This would include your right to access personal information, confidentiality and privacy issues.)	-0.13	-0.20
2.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of services available.		
How would you rate the agency in providing information about ALL of their services?	0.08	0.01
2.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the basis of service provision, including changes that may occur.		
Are you happy with the way your agency currently charges you for services?	0.07	0.01
Have you ever asked the agency for help and been refused?	0.11	0.12
Did they explain why they refused to help?	0.18	-0.37
Were you satisfied with their response?	0.20	0.18
3.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from agencies that adhere to accountable management practices.		
Does the agency provide you with help in the way they said they would provide it?	0.03	-0.02
Do you feel that you can voice your opinions to the agency about how it is being run?	-0.11	-0.10
Do you feel that you could gain access to documents about the way the agency is run, if you wanted to?	0.07	0.12
3.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services from appropriately skilled staff.		
How satisfied are you with the level of performance of the staff at the agency?	0.01	-0.04
Have you ever been concerned about your safety or security because of the actions of agency staff?	-0.06	-0.05
4.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer receives ongoing assessment (formal and informal) that takes all support needs into account.		
Does anyone from the agency discuss with you the need to change or increase the amount of help you receive?	-0.09	-0.18
How often does someone from the agency contact you to see how you are getting along?	-0.06	-0.02
4.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has a service delivery/care plan which is tailored to individual need and outlines the service he or she can expect to receive.		
Did the agency make a clear agreement with you about the services they would provide to you?	0.02	-0.25
Did they tell you which services, how often you would get them, and for how long?	-0.10	-0.11
Did you agree with what they proposed?	0.00	-0.05
If no, did you discuss this with them?	-0.16	-0.13
4.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers' cultural needs are addressed.		
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	-0.09	0.08

(continued)

Table 5.8 (continued): Correlations between mailout consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
4.4 Consumer Outcome: The needs of consumers with dementia, memory loss and similar disorders are addressed.		
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	0.14	0.14
4.5 Consumer Outcome: Consumers receive services which include appropriate coordination and referral processes.		
Do you receive more than one service from the agency?	0.03	-0.08
Are the services provided in a coordinated fashion?	0.11	-0.04
5.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are informed of the privacy and confidentiality procedures and understand their rights in relation to these procedures.		
Do you have any concerns with the way the agency deals with privacy and confidentiality?	0.01	0.00
5.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers have signed confidentiality release forms.		
Are you aware of any occasions when the agency may have passed on information about you without asking for your permission first?	0.14	-0.01
5.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are able to gain access to their personal information.		
Do you have any concerns about the personal information the agency might keep about you?	0.13	0.09
Have you ever tried to get hold of the personal information that the agency has about you?	0.15	0.05
Did you get the information you wanted?	0.22	0.04
6.1 Consumer Outcome: Consumers are aware of the complaints process.		
Has the agency informed you of what to do if you're not happy with the service you get?	0.07	-0.02
Did the agency tell you that you can voice any concerns you have about them to outside authorities?	-0.07	0.04
6.2 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer's complaint about a service, or access to a service, is dealt with fairly, promptly, confidentially and without retribution.		
Have you ever had any concerns about the help you receive from the agency?	0.04	-0.02
Did you express your concerns with the agency staff?	0.17	-0.10
Do you feel confident that the agency will listen to any concerns you have, and deal with them properly?	0.06	-0.07
Do you think that things would go badly for you if you made a complaint about the agency?	-0.18	-0.09
6.3 Consumer Outcome: Services are modified as a result of 'upheld' complaints.		
Were you happy with the way the agency responded to your concerns?	-0.22	-0.02

(continued)

Table 5.8 (continued): Correlations between mailout consumer survey items and scores against the standards according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Outcome standards/Consumer interview questions	Agency scores	Assessor scores
7.1 Consumer Outcome: Each consumer has access to an advocate of his or her choice.		
7.2 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know of their rights to use an advocate.		
7.3 Consumer Outcome: Consumers know about advocacy services where they are and how to use them.		
Did you receive any information from the agency about how you could obtain an advocate?	-0.07	-0.11
Do you feel confident that you could obtain an advocate of your choice if you needed to?	-0.10	-0.09
Has the agency provided you with any information about your right to have someone speak on your behalf (an advocate)?	-0.03	-0.03
7.4 Consumer Outcome: The agency involves advocates in respect to representing the interests of the consumer.		
Have you ever had someone speak on your behalf in relation to the services you received from the agency?	-0.13	0.16

* Coefficient could not be calculated due to insufficient variance in scores.

Note: Consumer survey items are coded as described in the pilot telephone interview consumer survey form, included in the *Developing Quality Measures for Home and Community Care: Technical Appendixes*. Some categories within items were recoded to appropriately assign missing data (where respondents could not remember or the item was irrelevant) or to better approximate a graduated interval scale.

Consumers who indicated that the agency had made a clear agreement with them about the services they would provide were more likely to have received service from an agency which was rated as 'met' by an assessor for Standard 4.2 (Each consumer has a service delivery/ care plan which is tailored to individual need and outlines the service he or she can expect to receive).

Relationship of consumer items with objective scores

Table 5.9 shows the correlation between each mailout consumer survey item and the objective to which it relates. Correlations with both agency ratings and assessor ratings are shown.

Table 5.9: Correlations between mailout consumer survey items and scores against the objectives according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Objective/Consumer Survey Item	Agency scores	Assessor scores
Objective 1: Access to services		
Did someone from the agency discuss your needs with you before they began providing services?	0.01	-0.15
Did the agency take into account all the things you and your carer might need help with?	-0.08	-0.11

(continued)

Table 5.9 (continued): Correlations between mailout consumer survey items and scores against the objectives according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Objective/Consumer Survey Item	Agency scores	Assessor scores
Objective 2: Information and consultation		
How were your rights and responsibilities explained to you? (This would include your right to access personal information, confidentiality and privacy issues.)	-0.12	-0.13
How would you rate the agency in providing information about ALL of their services?	0.01	-0.05
Are you happy with the way your agency currently charges you for services?	0.09	0.04
Have you ever asked the agency for help and been refused?	0.06	0.04
Did they explain why they refused to help?	0.28	-0.48
Were you satisfied with their response?	0.00	0.12
Objective 3: Efficient and effective management		
Does the agency provide you with help in the way they said they would provide it?	-0.05	-0.09
Do you feel that you can voice your opinions to the agency about how it is being run?	-0.15	-0.10
Do you feel that you could gain access to documents about the way the agency is run, if you wanted to?	0.06	0.06
How satisfied are you with the level of performance of the staff at the agency?	-0.05	-0.06
Have you ever been concerned about your safety or security because of the actions of agency staff?	-0.09	-0.07
Objective 4: Coordinated, planned, and reliable service delivery		
Does anyone from the agency discuss with you the need to change or increase the amount of help you receive?	-0.11	-0.13
How often does someone from the agency contact you to see how you are getting along?	-0.12	0.01
Did the agency make a clear agreement with you about the services they would provide to you?	-0.04	-0.18
Did they tell you which services, how often you would get them, and for how long?	-0.06	0.00
Did you agree with what they proposed?	-0.01	-0.01
If no, did you discuss this with them?	-0.23	-0.26
Is the agency sensitive and responsive to your different requirements as a member of one of these groups?	-0.01	0.01
Do you receive more than one service from the agency?	0.04	-0.11
Are the services provided in a coordinated fashion?	-0.04	0.01
Objective 5: Privacy, confidentiality, and access to personal information		
Do you have any concerns with the way the agency deals with privacy and confidentiality?	0.10	0.06
Are you aware of any occasions when the agency may have passed on information about you without asking for your permission first?	0.12	0.05
Do you have any concerns about the personal information the agency might keep about you?	0.06	0.05

(continued)

Table 5.9 (continued): Correlations between mailout consumer survey items and scores against the objectives according to agency ratings and assessor ratings

Objective/Consumer Survey Item	Agency scores	Assessor scores
Have you ever tried to get hold of the personal information that the agency has about you?	0.03	0.11
Did you get the information you wanted?	0.27	0.08
Objective 6: Complaints and disputes		
Has the agency informed you of what to do if you're not happy with the service you get?	0.10	0.00
Did the agency tell you that you can voice any concerns you have about them to outside authorities?	0.02	-0.02
Have you ever had any concerns about the help you receive from the agency?	0.03	-0.05
Did you express your concerns with the agency staff?	0.15	-0.17
Do you feel confident that the agency will listen to any concerns you have, and deal with them properly?	0.10	-0.01
Do you think that things would go badly for you if you made a complaint about the agency?	-0.19	-0.10
Were you happy with the way the agency responded to your concerns?	-0.09	0.03
Objective 7: Advocacy		
Did you receive any information from the agency about how you could obtain an advocate?	-0.05	-0.07
Do you feel confident that you could obtain an advocate of your choice if you needed to?	-0.16	-0.05
Has the agency provided you with any information about your right to have someone speak on your behalf (an advocate)?	-0.06	-0.03
Have you ever had someone speak on your behalf in relation to the services you received from the agency?	-0.13	0.16

Note: Consumer survey items are coded as described in the pilot telephone interview consumer survey form, included in the *Developing Quality Measures for Home and Community Care: Technical Appendixes*. Some categories within items were recoded to appropriately assign missing data (where respondents could not remember or the item was irrelevant) or to better approximate a graduated interval scale.

Two items were moderately associated with the assessor ratings for the objectives they were designed to inform. One of these was the same item found to be predictive of an individual standard in the previous analysis. This item: 'Did they explain why they refused to help?', referring to a refusal of service, was more strongly related to Objective 2 (Information and Consultation) ($r = -0.48$) than it was to Standard 2.3 (Consumers are informed of the basis of service provision, including changes that may occur) ($r = -0.37$). This indicates that this item is a strong predictor of agency performance against Objective 2 (A relationship is also evident between agency ratings and the consumer item).

Regarding consumer agreement with the agency's proposed care plan, the consumer survey item: 'Did you discuss this with them?' predicted performance against Objective 4 (Coordinated, planned and reliable service delivery) ($r = -0.26$) but was not strongly associated with the standard relating to service delivery/care plans tailored to individual need (see Table 5.8).

The consumer item: 'Did you get the information you wanted?', regarding gaining access to personal information, was associated with agency scores against Objective 5 (Privacy, confidentiality, and access to personal information); it was not associated with assessor scores against this objective. Table 5.7 shows this item to better predict agency ratings against Standard 5.3 (Consumers are able to gain access to personal information). It may be that agencies are better judges of their performance against this standard than assessors, since their assessments concur best with consumer opinion.

5.3.3 Comparative validity

Of the two methods trialled, the telephone interview was the more effective method of obtaining consumer feedback that provided concurrent validity with the ratings obtained by agencies. Of the 39 questions analysed from telephone interviews, six demonstrated a modest but noteworthy association with the appraisal of the agency given by an assessor against the relevant standard. For the mailed survey, of the 39 analysed, only two questions to consumers showed a modest association with the assessor's appraisal of the agency against the standard.

The correlations between the telephone consumer interview items and the assessor ratings confirm that both of these methods are measuring the same phenomenon, in this case, quality of service in HACC agencies. The noteworthy correlations that occur between standards and telephone interview questions are not so strong, however, that one could be used to predict the other. For example, the item: 'Has the agency informed you of what to do if you are not happy with the service you get?' has a correlation with assessor scores for Standard 6.1 of -0.33 . This means that the answers to this questionnaire item account for only 11% of the variability in ratings against Standard 6.1. The questionnaire item does predict agency performance against the standard, but only part of the time.

There are a number of reasons why questions to consumers, that should be good predictors of agency performance, show only modest association with the standards' ratings. Firstly, the agency or assessor ratings may be inaccurate; indeed, the rater reliability study (Chapter 3) and the level of agreement between agencies and assessors (Chapter 4) indicate that there is a margin of disagreement about ratings. Other reasons are those associated with the consumer. Poor agency performance against a standard may only negatively affect a portion of their consumers. We rely, then, on this affected portion of consumers being selected to participate in consumer feedback. We then rely on this portion being able to respond – a factor which may be limited by their physical condition or their circumstances. We then rely on their desire to respond and to discuss the issue that negatively affects them. Some consumers may feel that their services will be removed if they complain; others are simply too grateful for what they receive to want to criticise it in any way. Others may simply not be bothered. What consumers see as problematic and unfair may be different to what the Instrument describes in this way. All of these factors, and perhaps numerous others, act to diminish the direct statistical relationship between consumer responses and an agency performance indicator.

There is a further problem with using all consumer responses to verify agency ratings. In some cases, poor agency practice with regard to a standard may have affected only one or two consumers. For example, if staff have not been advised on confidentiality

issues this may not result in *all* staff engaging in breaches of confidentiality, but perhaps only one (and possibly then only in regard to one or two consumers). If these one or two consumers were to indicate a problem, the many other consumers who expressed no difficulty with the agency in this regard might overshadow their responses. Yet there is a case to argue that the breach of confidentiality should be considered as seriously if it occurred for one consumer as if it occurred for all consumers. Clearly, some consumer items should continue to be asked, whether or not they have been shown in this analysis to be associated with agency quality.

Collapsing ratings against standards down to objective scores did not give the mailout consumer survey items or the telephone interview questions greater power in predicting agency performance. It does, however, identify consumer items that are indicative of agency performance against an objective as a whole rather than just an individual standard.

5.4 Uses of consumer feedback

How should consumer feedback be built into an agency appraisal process? Two factors may be considered. Firstly, that correlations between standards ratings and consumer items and between objectives and consumer items were only modest, and, secondly, that for some issues a single consumer complaint should have as much significance as if all consumers had complained. It is not reasonable therefore to propose that consumer items be directly incorporated into the Instrument in such a way that proportions of responses contribute to the agency rating against a standard or objective in some fixed way. Rather, it may be more informative for an assessor to view consumer feedback for an agency before undertaking a verification or joint assessment. In Chapter 2 it was noted that assessors found it difficult to make an accurate assessment of the standards under Objectives 2, 6, and 7 without consumer feedback. Consumer feedback, considered in the context of agency characteristics, such as what service it provides, where it operates and how capable its consumers are of responding, may fill this information gap for assessors.

At a broader level, consumer feedback may provide a means of identifying agencies that require verification visits. For some consumer items these agencies may be identified by the number of consumers indicating a problem; for other items, these agencies may be identified if a single consumer indicates a problem. Consumer items which may fall into this latter category are listed in Box 5.1.

What proportion of negative consumer responses should identify an agency for verification? In general, this proportion might be one set by the available resources in the program to conduct verification visits. Ideally, all cases of negative comment against an agency would be investigated. Failing this, however, a proportion may be set at a level that it is feasible for the program to support in resource terms. The limited size of the pilot work reported here does preclude, however, any indication of what such a level might be; additional testing with a larger sample of both agencies and consumers would constitute a more informed input into such policy decisions.

5.5 The revised consumer survey form

A revised consumer survey should include the items listed in Box 5.1 (described as those items that indicate that the agency should receive attention if only one consumer indicates a problem) and all items from the telephone interviews and mailed surveys which produced correlations with objectives higher than 0.20. It should also include all items from the telephone interviews which produced correlations with assessor scores for the standards higher than 0.20. As was stated earlier, the small sample size of the consumers taking part in telephone interviews meant that some correlations could not be calculated. In the larger sample of the mailed survey, these correlations were able to be calculated. Where there are correlations of 0.15 or greater between consumer mail survey items and assessor scores for the standards, these items could also be included in the revised consumer survey.² This is proposed on the assumption that, had the telephone survey been conducted using a larger sample, these items would have produced more valid results. In any case, given the limitations of the consumer feedback methods tested in this study, it seems premature to dismiss these items without further testing. Including open ended questions and questions that lead into another, the revised consumer survey thus contains 35 items. Each of the objectives is covered by at least one question asked of consumers. The revised consumer survey items are included in Appendix B.

Box 5.1 Consumer items indicating that attention to the agency is required if a single consumer provides a negative response

Does the agency provide you with help in the way they said they would?

Have you ever been concerned about your safety or security because of the actions of agency staff?

Do you have any concerns with the way the agency deals with privacy and confidentiality?

Are you aware of any occasions when the agency may have passed on information about you without asking for your permission first?

Do you think that things would go badly for you if you made a complaint about the agency?

Do you have any concerns about the personal information the agency might keep about you?

-
2. One item with a correlation of 0.16 was not included. The item ('Have you ever had someone speak on your behalf in relation to the services you receive from the agency?') was negatively correlated with the standard, indicating that consumers who had never used an advocate received service from agencies that scored well against the standard relating to involving encouraging the involvement of advocates. It appears that the involvement of advocates is more likely to be associated with poor agency performance than good agency performance. The contradictory implications of answers to this item suggest it is better left out.

5.6 Summary

5.6.1 Findings

- The telephone interviews and mailed surveys were reasonably representative of the national profile of HACC consumers with regard to age (with the possible exception of those aged 85 years and over for telephone interviews) and sex – but not with regard to the proportions from non-English-speaking backgrounds and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. This may, however, have been affected by the nature of the agencies selected for this small pilot test.
- The response rate to the telephone interviews was far higher than that of the mailed survey, both in terms of overall consumer participation and responses to individual items.
- Some consumers indicated that they had difficulty understanding some questions. These were able to be clarified in the telephone interviews. In the mailed survey this may have been responsible for the high proportion of missing cases on some questions, such as those related to advocacy. In addition, responses to items on the mailed survey were sometimes given where the items should have been irrelevant. This indicates that the validity of consumer responses to the mailed survey may have been compromised to an unknown degree.
- The finding that agency ratings were validated by modest correlations with some consumer items indicated that informative consumer input can be obtained, provided an effective method is used to obtain this input.
- Telephone interviews were more effective than mailed surveys in eliciting consumer feedback that validated agency assessments.
- The correlations between agency performance and consumer feedback items are relatively low. This is not unexpected, given that an adverse experience for a relatively small number of consumers may be indicative of poor actual performance against the standards, and yet be ‘swamped’ in the overall pattern of responses generated by the consumer survey. Thus, negative consumer responses may be best employed not as irrefutable evidence of consistently poor agency performance but rather as indicators of possible problem areas.

5.6.2 Recommendations

The size and scope of the pilot work undertaken on the generation of consumer input into the quality appraisal process was limited by resource constraints. The following preliminary recommendations are put forward, while recognising the need for further developmental work in this area.

- Specific approaches should be devised to incorporate the feedback of consumers from a non-English-speaking background and those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.
- Telephone interviews, rather than mailout surveys, are recommended for use in obtaining consumer feedback.

- Consumer feedback surveys should be developed to address the quality issues specific to clients of transport agencies, meals agencies and home maintenance agencies. Many items in the current survey are not relevant to these clients and others may be more appropriate.
- In performance appraisal based on consumer feedback, the same importance may be placed on negative comment from *one consumer only* as from many consumers. These items should remain in the survey despite the absence of a substantial association with performance appraisals.
- Consumer feedback information should not be incorporated into a scoring system for agencies against standards but rather used as a means of identifying problems to be addressed. Consumer feedback could be used to identify agencies that may be performing poorly against some consumer outcomes, and it could be usefully applied to informing assessors, prior to an agency visit, of potential problems in service provision.
- It is recommended that selected consumer feedback items be tested further with a larger sample of consumers and a larger sample of agencies, using telephone interviews. In this way, it may be possible to further establish the appropriateness, validity and reliability of items that could not be tested adequately given the budgetary and time constraints on the present study.