



QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAMS

NATIONAL POLICY POSITION

MARCH 2002

The Current Approach to Quality Assurance

The existing quality assurance approach to community care is based on the current program and funding structure. Each funding program operates under different, although largely compatible, standards. Organisations are often providing a full range of services and have to report on a number of different sets of standards. This requires services to provide separate reports to each Program, which is a duplication of time, effort and resources. The existence of different, but similar, standards does nothing to improve the quality of care for clients and in fact can divert resources away from direct client care.

Currently, there is no official accreditation requirement for community care.

Providing Quality Services

All ACSA members strive to provide high quality community services. Monitoring and continuous improvement ensure that quality is maintained and enhanced.

Maintenance and improvement of service quality can occur in a number of ways including:

- I. **Quality Assurance.** A quality assurance program enables organisations to know how well services are being delivered and make continuous improvement to operations. It generally has a focus on the whole operation of an organisation and is not based on funding programs. An organisation can develop its own system or use a product developed for this purpose.
- II. **Service Standards.** Most Government programs have minimum standards organisations are required to meet to receive funding. The organisation and the funding body monitor adherence to the standards.
- III. **Accreditation.** This is a formalised approach to ensuring a certain quality of service delivery and/or operation. There are a range of different agencies (eg International Standards Organisation {ISO}, Australian Council of Health Standards {ACHS}) that accredit organisations and they have developed products that can be used. A benefit of accreditation is that organisations have formal and independent recognition of their quality. Some funding programs require services to be accredited by a particular agency and/or product (eg Hospitals – EQUIP).

All of these approaches to quality require organisations to commit both financial and human resources. Many organisations voluntarily undertake quality assurance or accreditation processes to ensure the quality of their services and operations.

ACSA Position on Quality Assurance for Community Care Programs

ACSA believes that all community care services should have an effective quality assurance process in place that ensures high quality, flexible services for clients and provides flexibility and choice for providers. The way quality assurance is undertaken should reflect the nature and complexity of the service provided and/or the organisation providing it.

Service Standards

Where the Government imposes Service Standards that must be met in order to receive funding, ACSA believes that Government must bear both the implementation and associated ongoing costs. Funding to organisations would need to be increased to take account of these costs.

There should be a single set of community care standards. These standards would cover all funding programs irrespective of the level of government involved. There may be some specialist components that apply to a particular service or program but they would be added on to the set only when that service or program is provided.

This would streamline the administration required to meet the standards and could free resources for direct client care.

Accreditation

ACSA recommends that organisations with a capacity to do so undergo an external accreditation process. This provides an independent validation of the organisation's quality.

ACSA believes that Government should recognise a range of accreditation models and agencies. Organisations would choose the model they wished to use and the accrediting agency to undertake their accreditation. Government would accept the report and decision from these accreditation bodies.

Where accreditation becomes a requirement of Government funding or Government determines a particular model and accrediting agency it should bear both the implementation and associated ongoing costs. Funding to organisations would need to be increased to take account of these costs.