



Towards Mutual Recognition: Reducing red tape for NGOs by sharing information

NSW Government human services agencies are working together to streamline reporting requirements for funded non government organisations (NGOs), particularly those funded by more than one NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) agency.

To enable NGOs to put their resources towards service delivery rather than multiple reporting requirements, FACS agencies will now be able to share high-level information about providers so that they are aware of who else is working with them.

Information sharing will have benefits for all stakeholders including NGOs, service users, their families and carers, and government agencies.

For NGOs especially, information sharing may mean a reduction in duplicate requests for information about funding, and over time, information about reporting and performance as well. This will contribute to a more efficient funding environment and a greater focus on service delivery and improving outcomes for people receiving services.

The rules about how human services agencies will share information are set out in the *Towards Mutual Recognition: Information Sharing Protocol* (Protocol). The Protocol will initially apply to Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) and Community Services as these agencies jointly fund the largest number of NGOs.

The *NGO Red Tape Reduction* report (2009) indicates that 179 NGOs receive funding from both ADHC and CS, which accounted for approximately 40% of the total ADHC and Community Services funding pool.

There are two main steps for ADHC and Community Services to fully implement the Protocol. The first step involves sharing information. The second step is a longer term project for recognising the external quality systems that NGOs might already be using.

This fact sheet summarises the key features of the first step of the Protocol, and explains what it means for the NGO sector.

1. What is the background to mutual recognition?

The Protocol is one of a number of recent government initiatives to reduce red tape and streamline reporting requirements for funded NGOs.

It draws from the *NGO Red Tape Reduction* report (2009), which identified mutual recognition as a way to streamline administrative requirements and reduce the red tape burden on NGOs.

It is also consistent with the National Disability Services report *NSW Disability Services Sector - Directions for Industry Development* (2010). This report raised the need for NSW Government agencies to recognise different monitoring systems and reduce duplication of effort in NGO reporting.

2. What information can be shared?

Any information shared should be current, evidence based and related to the funding or service agreement between the NGO and FACS agency.

This will include high-level information about the types of services for which a NGO is funded and where these are located. Information may also be shared if ADHC or Community Services identifies a disruption or likely disruption to service delivery and this focus on risk reduction will allow agencies to support NGOs to manage and resolve risks.

3. What information cannot be shared?

The Protocol adheres to the privacy requirements set out in the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* and the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. This means that there are limits to the type of information that can be shared.

First, information that identifies individual clients cannot be shared unless it is de-identified and relates to service delivery and/or outcomes.

Second, there may be limits to the information that can be shared relating to corruption, fraud or other illegal activity if it is subject to legal restrictions or is being investigated by an oversight agency, like the Independent Commission Against Corruption or NSW Ombudsman.

Finally, commercial-in-confidence information provided by an NGO or contained in the Schedule to an NGO's funding agreement will not be shared unless there is an overriding public interest.

4. How is information shared?

ADHC and Community Services will use their existing ways of working together to implement the Protocol. Implementation will also be supported by the regional executive directors who have been appointed to help create better integration of services across FACS agencies.

5. Where can further information be obtained?

Further information on the Protocol is available on ADHC website:

http://www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/sp/monitoring_and_quality/quality

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