



NSW Department of
Community Services

NSW Department of Community Services *Good Practice Guidelines for DoCS Funded Services*

Questions and Answers

1. Why has DoCS developed *Good Practice Guidelines*?

The *Good Practice Guidelines for DoCS Funded Services* (*Good Practice Guidelines*) is one of the key initiatives outlined in the DoCS Funding Policy, aiming to guide and support organisations in service development. The *Good Practice Guidelines* can be viewed at:

www.community.nsw.gov.au/documents/good_practice_guidelines.pdf

The *Good Practice Guidelines* are based on the Human Service Organisations Generic Quality Framework Project commissioned by the Mental Health Coordinating Council in 2003 and funded by NSW Health. The aim of the Generic Quality Framework Project was to introduce a consistent approach to service standards for funded services that could be potentially applied across a range of NSW Departments. The framework developed for the Generic Quality Framework Project forms the foundation for the *Good Practice Guidelines for DoCS Funded Services*.

As stated in the DoCS Funding Policy the *Good Practice Guidelines* form the basis of the quality improvement component of the DoCS Performance Monitoring Framework.

Service standards are a key component of performance management and are often the first step in developing any quality improvement system. Currently, only some of the Department's funding programs have service standards and this gap needs to be addressed.

Rather than developing different practice standards or guidelines for each funding program, DoCS took the approach of developing a common set of guidelines that can potentially be applied across programs. This approach will promote consistency and will streamline the administrative and reporting

requirements of organisations funded by more than one DoCS funding program.

2. To which services do the *Good Practice Guidelines* apply?

The Guidelines will be introduced for the first time under the Early Intervention Program as an attachment to the EIP Service Specifications. In the first instance the Guidelines will be implemented with: CSGP, SAAP, EIP and DoCS-funded Families First Services. These services are invited to begin now to familiarise themselves with the *Good Practice Guidelines* and to think about how practices within their own service compare. The Guidelines are a resource that will be made available to all DoCS funded services.

3. How Children's Services and Out-of-Home Care will be affected?

For Children's Services and Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) the quality assurance approaches already in place will remain. This is through the Office of the Children's Guardian accreditation process for OOHC and the regulation and licensing system for Children's Services. DoCS has commenced discussion with the Office of the Children's Guardian with a view to bringing the NSW Out-of-Home Care Standards and the *Good Practice Guidelines* into closer alignment.

4. How do we implement the *Good Practice Guidelines*?

To assist with this process, DoCS will be following up the *Good Practice Guidelines* with a comprehensive set of tools to assist funded organisations to assess their service against the Guidelines, and to plan to make improvements where needed. A series of briefing sessions is being planned to orient DoCS staff and funded services through 2006 to the *Good Practice Guidelines* and associated support and implementation tools.

5. What is in the *Good Practice Guidelines*?

The Guidelines set out what DoCS expects of organisations which it funds. Each guideline is written with an outcomes focus so that the end result of implementing the guideline is clear.

There are nine guidelines which are grouped into three broad sections:

- Your Organisation
- Your Activities
- Your Resources

The nine guidelines relate to the major areas of work of human service organisations. These are:

- Governance
- Systems Management
- Human Resource Management
- Access
- Services and Programs Design
- Implementation
- Community Development
- Networks
- Funding Partnerships and Contracts

The *Good Practice Guidelines* document also provides additional context to each guideline in the form of:

- of a summary of what addressing each Guideline involves
- key organisational areas covered by each Guideline
- Attributes of Good Practice associated with each Guideline

6. How can a generic set of guidelines be applicable to different types of services and organisations?

Although organisations can be of different sizes and structures and provide different types of services, they face some common issues. Human service organizations, regardless of the types of services they provide, all need effective governance mechanisms, all have relationships that they need to manage, all have to decide how to address access and equity issues, and so on. The *Good Practice Guidelines* were carefully drafted to ensure they are inclusive of the range of organisations and services that they will be applied to. The support tools being developed to assist services to implement the Guidelines will contain practice examples that demonstrate how the Guidelines apply to different service types.

7. How do the Guidelines fit within the Performance Monitoring Framework being developed by DoCS?

A number of elements of continuous quality improvement are already in place informally or formally at the local level. Many organisations and DoCS regional funding staff engage in processes to improve the strength and viability of the service system as a whole and the performance of individual organisations. Examples of good practice are documented and shared in interagency forums. Both SAAP and CSGP now have Service Frameworks, Service Specifications and standardised Reports on Achievement. Service Agreements are in place across all programs.

The performance monitoring framework will standardise and pull together all of these different elements into a streamlined and co-ordinated approach to quality improvement. The *Good Practice Guidelines* will be one plank in a broader platform of monitoring and evaluation.

8. Who was involved in the development of the Guidelines?

The project is managed by the Policy Development and Service Planning Unit of the Service Funding Strategy Directorate within DoCS. As stated above, QMS was appointed by DoCS to develop the Guidelines. A Steering Committee provided advice on the project content as well as issues such as communication and consultation with non-government community services. The Steering Committee membership included representatives from:

DoCS (Chair)
QMS
Youth Accommodation Association (YAA)
Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA)
Supported Accommodation Advisory Council (SAAC)
NSW Council on Social Services (NCOSS)
SAAC
Women's Refuge Resource Centre (WRRC)
NSW Family Services
Local Community Services Association (LCSA)
Mission Australia
DoCS

The Guidelines were tested (as the DoCS Quality Service Standards) in September 2004 with focus groups, which included DPPs from across the State, and were piloted with a cross-section of 30 DoCS funded services (from SAAP, CSGP and Families First) in November 2004.

9. What happens if an organisation does not meet the Guidelines?

Not all services will be expected to meet the Guidelines immediately. Services will, however, be expected to use their best efforts to implement the Guidelines, as a matter of good practice. As part of the performance monitoring process, services will be assisted to assess their current practice against those expectations specified by the *Good Practice Guidelines*. Identified gaps in current practices will become the basis for a service improvement plan. The plan will need to be documented with clearly identified time frames.

10. Will organisations be 'de-funded' if they do not meet the Guidelines?

Continuation of funding will not be dependent on meeting the Guidelines. The focus of the Guidelines is ongoing quality improvement. This means that organisations need to demonstrate they are using their best efforts to implement the Guidelines over time and to put in place agreed actions to

achieve this objective. Demonstrating these commitments will be a factor in maintaining eligibility for funding.

11. Next Steps

One of the first things to do is have a look at the *Good Practice Guidelines* for DoCS Funded Services, to begin to get a feel for what the Guidelines encompass. It is suggested that you begin to incorporate discussion about the *Good Practice Guidelines* and potential implications for your service into your regular meetings within your service and service networks.

A series of briefing sessions is being planned to orient DoCS staff and funded services through 2006 to the *Good Practice Guidelines* and the associated support tools.

A series of updates and information sheets on DoCS funding reform is planned for publication on the DoCS website and DoCS intranet (CPOnet) during 2006. You are invited to visit the website regularly to gain updates as they become available at www.community.nsw.gov.au and also to refer to future editions of *Inside Out*.

12. Further information

Further information on the *Good Practice Guidelines* for DoCS Funded Services may be obtained from the following DoCS officers:

Claire Crook
Claire.Crook@community.nsw.gov.au

Tamara Stojanovic
tamara.stojanovic@community.nsw.gov.au

Service Funding Strategy
Department of Community Services
February 2006