



## The University of Sydney

Faculties of Health Sciences and Architecture

Home Modification & Maintenance:  
Information Clearing House Project

### Advisory Committee Minutes

## Meeting of the HMM Information Clearinghouse Advisory Group

Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 2002

At 3.00 p.m.

J108, Lidcombe Campus,  
The Faculty of Health Sciences,  
the University of Sydney

### Present

Ms Jane Bringolf (Independent Living Centre of NSW)  
Mr Mark Flynn (Dept of Ageing Disability & Home Care)  
Ms Phillipa Brennan (Dept of Ageing Disability & Home Care)  
Ms Susanne Pierce (Manager Policy Innovation, Dept of Ageing Disability & Home Care)  
Mr Mark Nutting (Housing Policy NSW)  
Mr Neil Tucker (Council On The Ageing)  
Mr Alan Meldrum (NSW Statewide Home Modification Service)  
Ms Rebecca Rodgers (Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs NSW State Office)  
Dr Robert Champion (Health & Community Care Branch, Health Department of NSW)  
Ms Anne Reeve (Illawarra HMMS)  
Mr Ian Maxwell (Orange HMMS)  
Ms Christine Regan (NCOSS NSW Council Of Social Service)  
Assoc Prof Peter Phibbs (Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney)

### Apologies

### Chair

### Note taker

Ms Catherine (Katy) Bridge (School of OLS, Faculty Of Health Sciences, University of Sydney)  
Ms Kamala Jegaraj (School of OLS, Faculty Of Health Sciences, University of Sydney)

### Notes

### Actions

#### 1 Welcome, introduction & apologies

Katy welcomed everyone to the meeting. Ian Maxwell represented the Level 2 service providers and Ann Reeve the Level 1's. Peter Phibbs was overseas and Christine Regan has taken extended family leave so sent their apologies.

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### 2 Minutes from the last meeting

Everyone agreed that the content was an accurate record of the proceedings of the last meeting.

### 3 Home Maintenance and Modification Service Provider Needs Assessment paper

Katy reported that the interviewees who decided to participate in the program were from a good cross-section of coordinators working on rural, urban and metropolitan schemes, including the two schemes that service aboriginal clients. The bulk of the coordinators were administrators, one had a building background, and another was an occupational therapist. The problems perceived by informants in the interviews related mostly to specific projects. It was apparent that the coordinators that were most disadvantaged were the ones in the rural areas receiving \$6,000 or less a year. They are either part-time coordinators or staff with a very small budget who are in a very isolated area and covering large distances. The majority of the schemes received funding from a different number of sources and many depended on client contribution to survive. Both Ann and Ian commented on the enormous variance in the way the schemes are operated and Katy pointed out this was an issue.

All committee members to provide written feedback prior to the next meeting, where it will be signed off.

Katy outlined the issues perceived by the informants as problem areas across the following topics:

#### 3.1 Spatial requirements

It was apparent that the spatial information role is an OT role. A number of services were concerned that there was no standardised assessment format for information that would be needed for decision-making. Different schemes had their own format. Katy suggested that a single format be introduced with standardised policies and procedures. Many of the schemes were complaining about not having access to an occupational therapist or having inadequate number of hours. Ian added that they have difficulty filling occupational therapist positions particularly in the country areas where the occupational therapist's are normally new graduates who leave after a short period of time to get married and have a family. Alan commented that Statewide has budgeted to buy a private OT if necessary. Jane was concerned that some of the occupational therapist's did not have the necessary skills to assess complex jobs, specifically in home modifications. She added that the OT Association NSW is now

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developing a project for competency-based training. Alan pointed out that when there was no OT available some home modification services would go ahead and do the job. This was a safety issue and open to litigation. A lively discussion on the shortage of occupational therapist's followed. Katy suggested that it would be helpful to organize a workshop within a risk management framework and invite key people to discuss these safety issues. Alan was keen to take it on board at the Level 1 & 2 coordinators conference next year.

### 3.2 Carer requirements

The key issue revolved round the home as a workplace. In some cases, there have been problems with providing peer assistance until home modifications are done. The informants also stated that there was no systematic data collection on carer requirements.

### 3.3 Product requirements

A number of informants indicated that there was no channel available through which they could share product information, innovations and problem solving solutions and so they reinvent the wheel. Ian suggested that we expand the roles and expertise levels of our RTO's so that the services can come to them for advice. Katy explained that some areas have no RTO's and added that some schemes felt that they did not have equal and equitable access to RTO's. Ann said that many builders and coordinators follow old habit practices instead of being proactive and finding something new. There was discussion about making it easier for services to select the right product for the job and that a cross-checking system be put in place.

### 3.4 Requirements for community inclusion

Almost no services had funds set aside for translating brochures and instructions into languages other than English. Katy suggested that if we had a generic brochure then it could be translated into different languages.

### **3.5 Requirements for meeting standards of care**

Services wanted guidelines and specifications to give contractors. Their main concern was the time it took to write and maintain them and so they wanted these resources shared.

Ian said that this was not an issue with home modification builders because they supervise the sub-contractors. Ann suggested that we use RTO's to sign off home modification work.

### **3.6 Disability access components**

Two issues that needed to be addressed concerned disability related product information. Firstly, private service providers do not know where to go for disability related information. They were aware of the Independent Living Centre but very few used it because of problems with indexing and requiring outside help to use the database. Secondly, HMM coordinators wanted some consumer information on how to manage the products in their homes, for example caring for non-slip floors. Jane said that the Independent Living Centre does receive many calls and statistics show that most of calls relate to wheelchairs, building and design, fixtures and fittings, and lounge chairs. The Centre not only provides information but also advice on selecting products. The clients are advised to get an idea of what they want from the database and then ring the centre for advice on selection. Susanne said she has had problems deciphering the information on the Independent Living Centre database to find the right product to meet project needs and added that if you are not an occupational therapist it would be difficult to make the right choice. Jane replied that this was why the ILC was committed to having the information telephone line service.

### **3.7 Funding policy**

The services wanted to know about alternate funding sources for projects that were not part of the schemes. They also wanted some guidelines on how to write good applications for funding and wanted to look at some samples of ones that had been funded. Sharing this information would make it easier for them to apply to DADHC for funding.

### **3.8 Building and land regulation**

There were issues relating to standards, building codes, lodging an application for local council etc.

### **3.9 Natural environment**

An issue of concern was on making a home modification recommendation. The informants also felt that if they could get access to basic information about floods and weather patterns they could do a better job.

### **3.10 Built environment**

The issues related to maintenance budget in country areas in particular where you have a larger proportion of homes of a non-standard nature. The services wanted general housing information relating to maintenance, pest control and building health, for example, they needed to know when a building should be condemned. Ian said that due to local politics this was often very difficult.

### **3.11 Occupational health and safety requirements**

The informants indicated that there are differences in the home modifications and maintenance services in remote and rural areas in terms of travelling time and scarcity of resources in particular with health and safety requirements. Alan said that they are just about to release a draft covering the whole gamut of HMM including contractors and he would send. Another issue that came up related to the New South Wales legislation that does not permit installation of water lifts, unlike in Queensland. Did not take into account of the impact on individual people's homes. Ian the point is at what point do clients take responsibility cost wise for the service. There was discussion of the cost and safety implications of water lifts. Rebecca indicated that DVA was supplying less of these as older Veterans numbers were declining.

### 3.12 Modification follow up and maintenance

Follow ups depended on levels. Level 1's have no follow ups, it is the occupational therapist's responsibility. The issue here is that because there are no follow-ups unless the problem occurs, there is no way of knowing whether the modification is actually working and has improved quality of life. Katy suggested that we have a long term sampling system in place so that we can do some functional assessment have some idea of whether the modification has improved the consumer's quality of life. Ian reported that the hospital occupational therapist's had talked to him about follow-ups. At present with a Level 1 job, they would go in, do what the OT recommended, and send a feed back sheet to the OT with the modifications that have been completed. It stops there. There is no follow up to see if the modification has actually improved the quality of life or is working. Moreover the clients' needs and conditions could change quickly too within the target group. Jane believed that they could end up with a worse case scenario costing the public purse more.

### 3.13 Experience with and attitude to electronic data

The findings showed that although most services have access to a computer and use email, the majority do not use the internet as an information-gathering tool. Katy thought that if they had a good site that was easy to use and had useful information in it then that would encourage them to use it. Another issue raised was the issue of going public. The concern was that consumers would go online, read the procedures and guidelines, and make their own interpretations. So having an unprotected website would be problematic. Katy requested the advisory committee to submit comments on how we could overcome this problem so that we have a product that will work for everyone.

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### 3.14 Summary of findings

Katy summarized the main issues:

- The lack of comprehensive and unilateral assessment, design and consumer information guidelines.
- Most of the interviewees stated that they had difficulties locating new or unusual products and wanted to share product information and have good links with the Independent Living Centre.
- All of them wanted more guidelines developed.
- They were looking for more policy advice particularly in relation to funding.

### 4 Implications for the web-based clearinghouse

There are very high expectations from the services regarding the website and Katy felt that we will not be able to meet these expectations in the first year of operation. More work needs to go into promoting existing services like the Independent Living Centre. If we are going to offer any product information, it is important that that is married with what we are already offering. It is also clear that the services would welcome and value list serves, best practice guidelines, consumer information and links to other governmental and international resources.

There needs to be some useability testing of the website to make sure that the links work and people interpret the information on the website correctly. Katy asked the Committee for dates that will work for people who want to come along and test the site. She advised that would be better to have a range of users - consumers, HACC service people, low level people. Ann commented that the builders and contractors would like the information presented to them in plain English. She added that many of them are learning how to use computers. Katy distributed copies of the HMM Information Clearing House web page and invited feedback. She briefly explained how the websites that would appear on the Clearinghouse site would be evaluated so that users would have some idea of their usefulness and coverage before accessing them. Katy said that she had developed a disclaimer since there are major issues with copyright, privacy and acceptable use. She distributed copies of it and also copies of the draft "About HMMInfo" brochure and requested feedback from the committee. Katy suggested it would be nice to have a public launch of the Clearinghouse website at Parliament House next year.

Usability testing to commence in 2003. Usability testing for the advisory committee; Any committee member wanting to participate to book prior to the next meeting.

## Notes

**Note:** In discussion with DADHC following the meeting it was proposed that the Launch be scheduled post-election so that it can be officiated at by the Minister..

### 5 Expert Panel Formation

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

### 6 Any other business

Next Advisory Committee meeting date

Next Working Group Meeting date

Meeting closed at 5:10p.m.

## Actions

3.00 pm the 20 of  
February 2003 at  
the Faculty of  
Architecture, City  
Road Sydney.