

Outer Southern Metropolitan Region Homelessness Service System Development Project

C.H.A.P. Common Homelessness Access Points

Model Overview & Policies and Procedures
July 2006

Acknowledgments

The development of these policies has involved significant contributions from Hanover SECAS, WAYSS, Salvation Army PYFS and DHS SMR. In particular the following individual contributors should be acknowledged.

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OSHSSD Project Steering Committee

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Introduction

The SAAP funded services in the Outer Southern Metropolitan Region, comprising the local government areas of Casey, Cardinia, Greater Dandenong, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, engaged in a substantial process in 2004 that led to the development of the Front Doors and Outposts model. This process took place within the framework of the Homelessness Service System Development Project funding that was provided by the Department of Human Services, Office of Housing.

The implementation of this model will see a significant change in the way that people enter the homelessness service system and the pathways they follow after entry. The emphasis as always, is on assisting people at the first point of contact so that entry to the homelessness service system is not always necessary.

The accompanying policies and procedures have been developed to guide the implementation of a new model for gaining access to homelessness assistance across the Outer SMR, such that service users will have a consistent experience, regardless of the entry point.

The policies and procedures also outline any interagency actions that are required as part of the establishment of a single service system that is built on a commitment to a collaborative approach to meeting the needs of those requiring homelessness assistance.

Section One of this manual provides an overview of the new model that is to be implemented whilst the policies and procedures are located in Section Two.

Outer Southern Metropolitan Region Homelessness Service System Development Project

C.H.A.P. Common Homelessness Access Points

Model Overview

Front Doors & Outposts Model

The Outer SMR Common Homelessness Access Points (CHAP) model that has been developed by the members of the Outer South Homelessness Service System Development (OSHSSD) Project Steering Committee has its foundation in the model that was outlined in “A Vision for Outer South East Homelessness Services Development”, 2001, developed by Hanover Welfare Services, The Salvation Army Peninsula Youth & Family Services (PYFS) and WAYSS Ltd.

This section provides a summary of the CHAP model for the Outer SMR and the model is represented in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Principles

The following key principles were identified as underpinning the development of the CHAP model for the sub region.

An effective model that provides the best outcomes for clients should include:

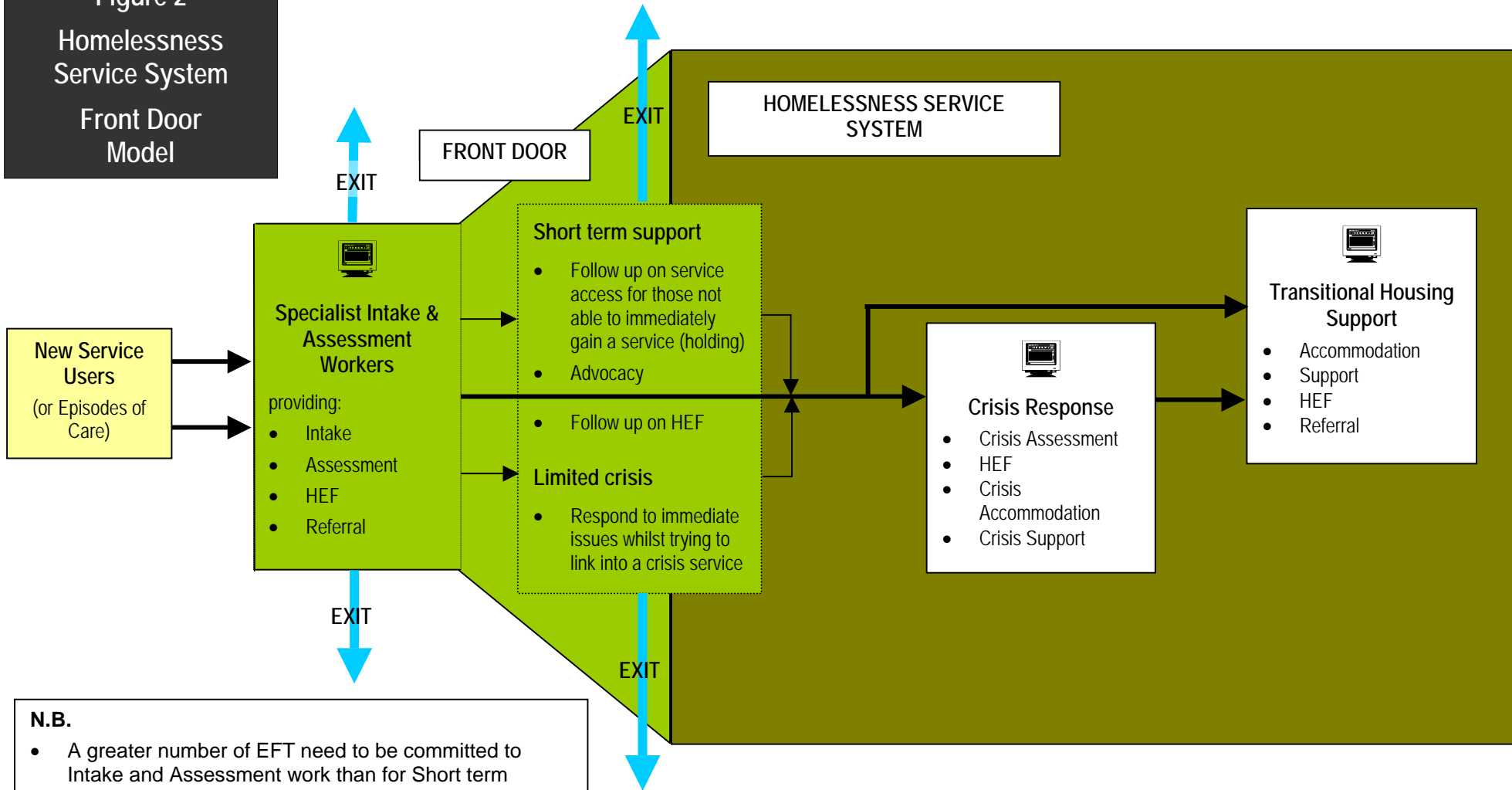
- The contribution of all homelessness services to one united and coordinated service system, regardless of funding level or target group;
- A capacity to respond on a 24-hour a day basis;
- A consistent set of minimum standards that apply to all agencies and that increase service system accessibility. The following Standards and Acts apply to this model -
 - National Community Housing Assistance Standards
 - Homelessness Assistance Service Standards, Victoria, Jan. 2005
 - Consumer Charter for people accessing homelessness assistance and social housing services
 - [Information Privacy Act 2000](#) [No. 98/2000]
 - [Health Records Act 2001](#) [No. 2/2001]
 - [Supported Accommodation Assistance Act](#) [No. 162/1994]
- A variety of accommodation and support options as necessary components of a responsive service system;
- A service continuum that includes access to SAAP, THM and associated services such as Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol, Child Protection and other important sectors;
- An integrated and accessible service system that provides coordinated entry points where resources are allocated to those most in need of assistance;
- A common assessment approach and tool (which includes entry screening and initial needs identification, as well as assessment for on-going support, referral and planning) across both the SAAP and THM programs to assist in providing a more coordinated service response;
- Functional links between agencies that are supported by clear inter-agency agreements; and
- All people that present at the Front Door will be provided with a response.

Key Features

In summary the key features are as follows:

- Promoted, Integrated 'Front Doors' & 'Outposts' as entry points;
- Telephone contact will be via a 1800 number
- Specialist intake & assessment practitioners who operate within common standards;
- Clearly defined pathways & linkages within the homelessness sector and to other service systems;
- An online common assessment tool
- A Community Education Strategy to be undertaken prior to implementation

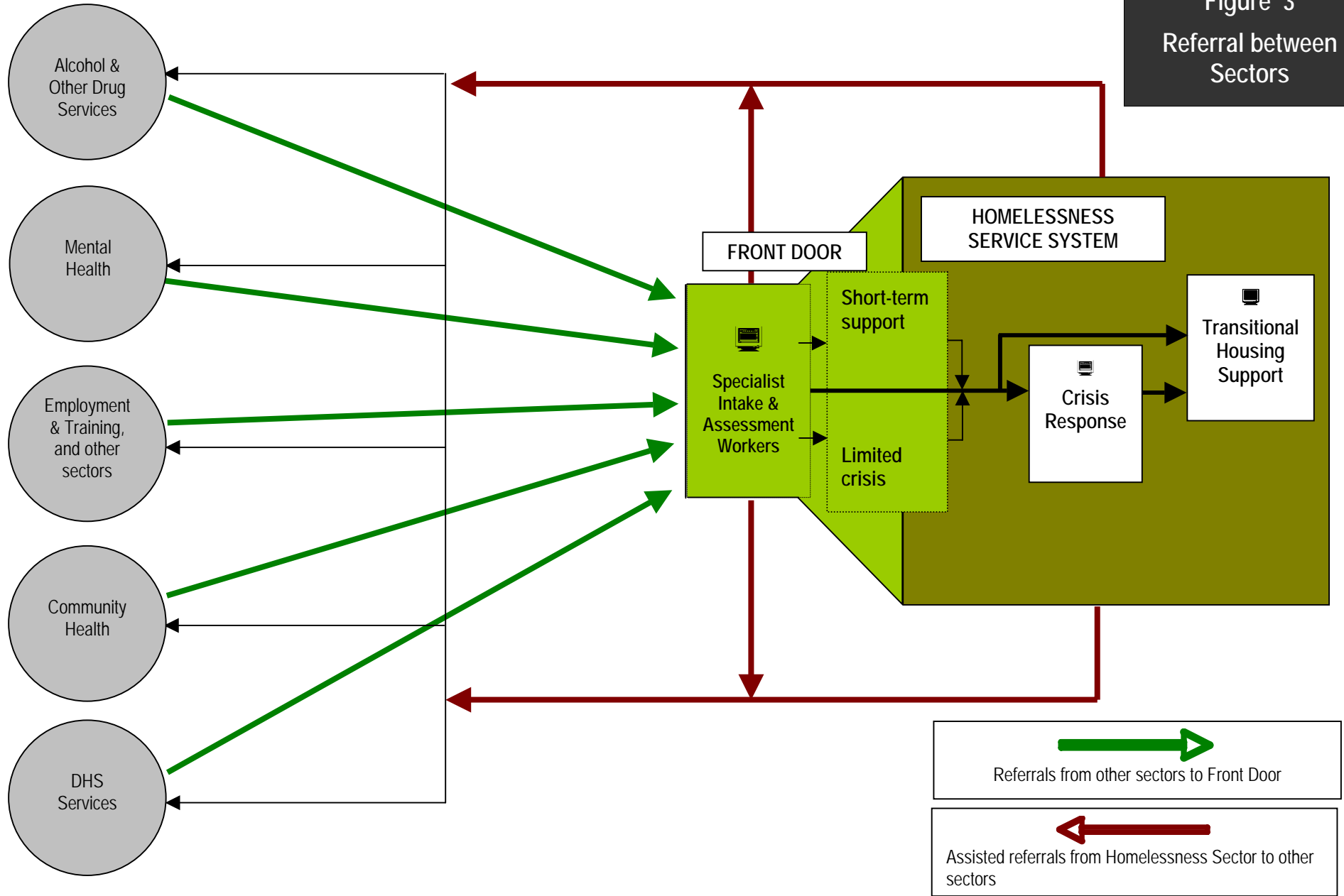
Figure 2
Homelessness Service System
Front Door Model



N.B.

- A greater number of EFT need to be committed to Intake and Assessment work than for Short term support/Limited crisis work. It is possible that some staff will perform both types of work
- Some of the short term support/limited crisis work might be provided at locations other than the front door
- A number of people will not need to enter the homelessness service system after being attended to at the Front Door and so will exit at this point

Figure 3
Referral between Sectors



Front Door locations

The two Front Door entry points will be located in Frankston and Dandenong, the two largest communities in the Outer South and the focal points for public transport in the catchment area. The Dandenong Front Door will be coordinated by WAYSS and the Frankston Front Door will be coordinated by PYFS. The Front Doors will be accessed either by a 1800 phone number that will operate 24/7 or in person.

Hours of operation

Ideally both the Front Doors would be accessible across 7 days a week 24 hours per day, however given the constraint of current resources; the two Front Doors will operate across Monday to Friday from 8.30am-5.30pm.

Robinson St Crisis Accommodation Service to be operated by Hanover South East, will provide back up for the two Front Doors outside of these hours, with the 1800 phone number diverting to Robinson St at 5.30 pm each Wednesday and reconnecting to each Front Door at 8.30 am the next business day. Some clients from the Frankston-Mornington area might find the St Kilda Crisis Centre more accessible and so these clients would be given information about both these options. It was agreed by the Steering Committee (SC) that demand for after hours servicing would need to be monitored over time by the SC and SMR DHS.

Coordination of Front Doors

Coordination of the Front Doors would entail responsibility for day-to-day operations including movement through the Front Doors as well as the provision of appropriate facilities on behalf of the Homelessness Service System. WAYSS and PYFS will be responsible for ensuring that employees working at the Front Doors (in Dandenong and Frankston respectively) fulfil their duties and responsibilities under the agreed protocols and procedures. If other services have employees who are co-located at the Front Doors these staff will be managed by their respective employing agencies, although primacy is to be given to the provision of a coordinated response to service users.

Functions

A number of key functions and duties are to be performed by the Front Doors. The range of duties are listed below in two groups. The first group lists tasks that directly involve work with a client, the second group refers to activities that are primarily administrative in nature:

Client

- Initial Contact
- Information provision (about housing service system)
- Intake (collect client details) & assessment of client needs
- Information provision (options potentially available to meet identified needs)
- Identification of appropriate, available, pathways & assistance
- Informed client consent
- *Advocacy (limited)
- **HEF distribution
- Referral (supportive & otherwise) to appropriate homelessness services including making appointments

- ***Information about and assisted referral to appropriate services outside of the homelessness service system
- Limited follow up and support to clients who have not been able to gain an accommodation vacancy
- Allocation of other small amounts of funds (train tickets, food vouchers etc)

Note

** It is expected that staff at the Front Door will advocate on behalf of their clients for access into homelessness services or other relevant services. However in many cases it will be more appropriate to refer on to specific and trained advocates eg Tenancy Advice workers.*

*** A client can return to a designated worker at the Front Door to complete a HEF application without needing to be re-assessed for up to 1 month from initial assessment.*

**** From time to time it will be necessary to assist clients whose primary need is to gain access to other service systems rather than the homelessness service system. This could include making a referral to an appropriate agency, setting up appointments, assisting with transport or arranging for another service to come to the Front Door.*

Administration

- Case notes
- Data collection and entry
- Participation in:
 - Team & staff meetings
 - Supervision
 - Specialist training & regional induction
 - Staff professional development
 - Key sector meetings
- Access interpreter services
- Wait list management including daily updates of the accommodation & support vacancy register.
- Maintain the currency of information about the Outer Southern homelessness service system and other service systems
- Update each Front Doors list of available motels, caravan parks and rooming houses on a regular basis
- *Front Door promotion

Note

** Responsibility for promotion of the Front Door will rest primarily with the Manager responsible for the Front Door, however it is anticipated that all homelessness agencies will jointly participate in a shared communications strategy to inform stakeholders of the homelessness service system and access pathways in the catchment area and also play a role in this through their interactions with other sectors.*

Positions at the Front Door

Manager

Each Front Door will be overseen by a manager.

Specialist Intake & Assessment

Staff positions allocated to perform these functions at the Front Door will include a number of dedicated specialist intake and assessment workers that are able to undertake homelessness assessments and then respond in a range of ways

including the provision of a HEF allocation, information and referral. Each day the majority of the staff at the Front Door will fulfil this role.

Limited client follow up & support

Those clients for whom there is no apparent vacancy in either the crisis or supported accommodation services will be provided with some follow up and limited support including assistance in identifying alternate accommodation options.

Management at WAYSS and PYFS (and/or other organisations providing staff at the Front Doors) will determine the number of positions to be allocated to the provision of specialist intake & assessment and those for short-term follow up & limited crisis support. There are a number of important considerations that will be weighed, when determining the configuration of staff, including service throughput, availability of crisis and other accommodation, maintaining continuity of staff contact with a given client and fluctuations in demand on a daily basis. However it is anticipated that it will be necessary to have a majority of workers undertaking intake and assessment at each of the Front Doors.

More detail is provided on the recommended staffing levels for each of the Front Doors later in this document.

Referral between sectors

Strong relationships will be developed with other key sectors to ensure that people accessing the homelessness service system will have their needs addressed in a well-coordinated and timely manner. The consultations that were undertaken with other sectors have ascertained their willingness to find more effective ways of referring and working between sectors. Further work is required to finalise these arrangements.

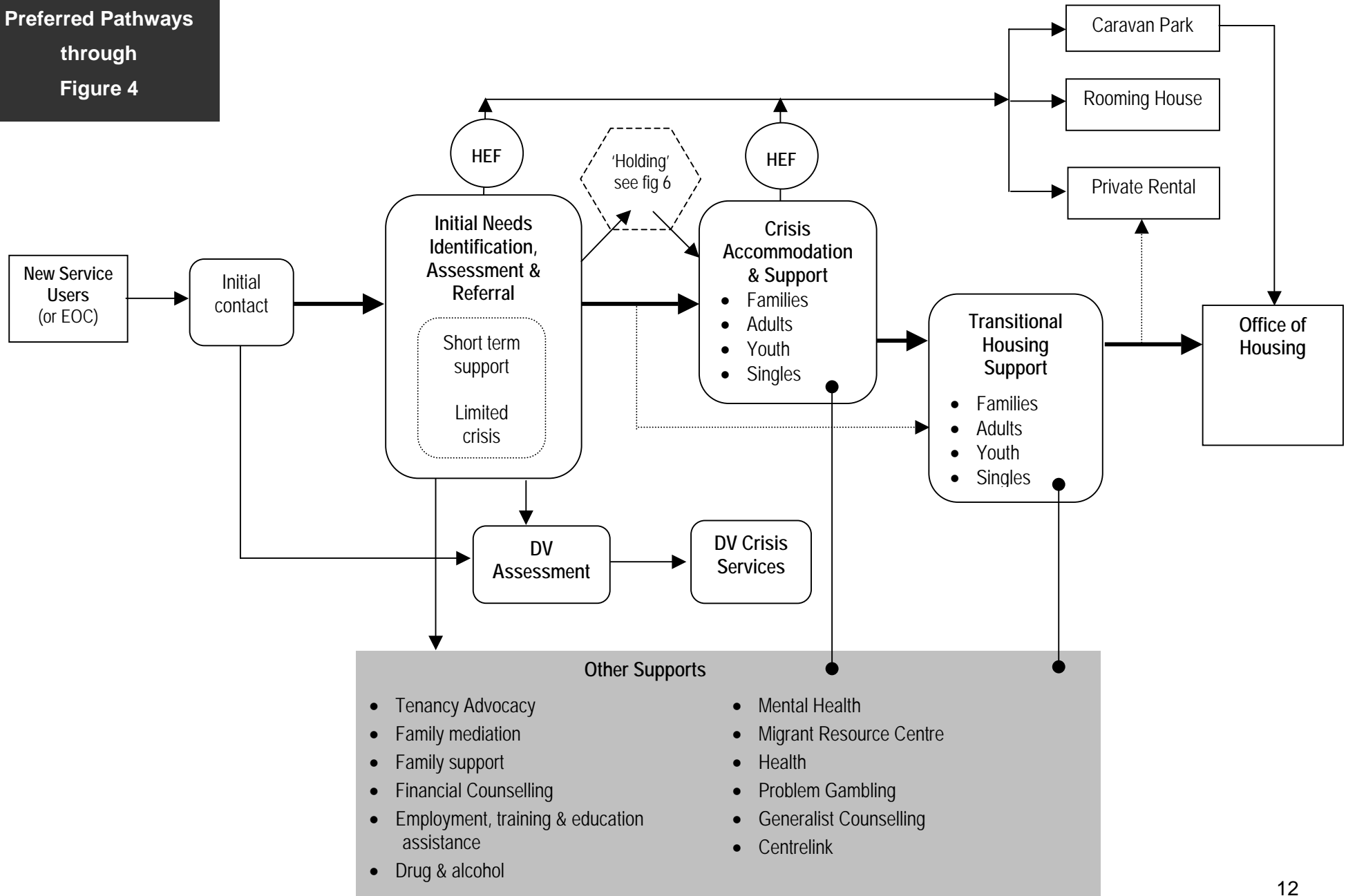
Pathways

If the centralised entry points of the Front Doors and Outposts are to be optimised for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and seeking assistance through the homelessness service system, it is imperative that pathways through this system are well articulated, accessible, appropriate and minimise the 'run around' for clients.

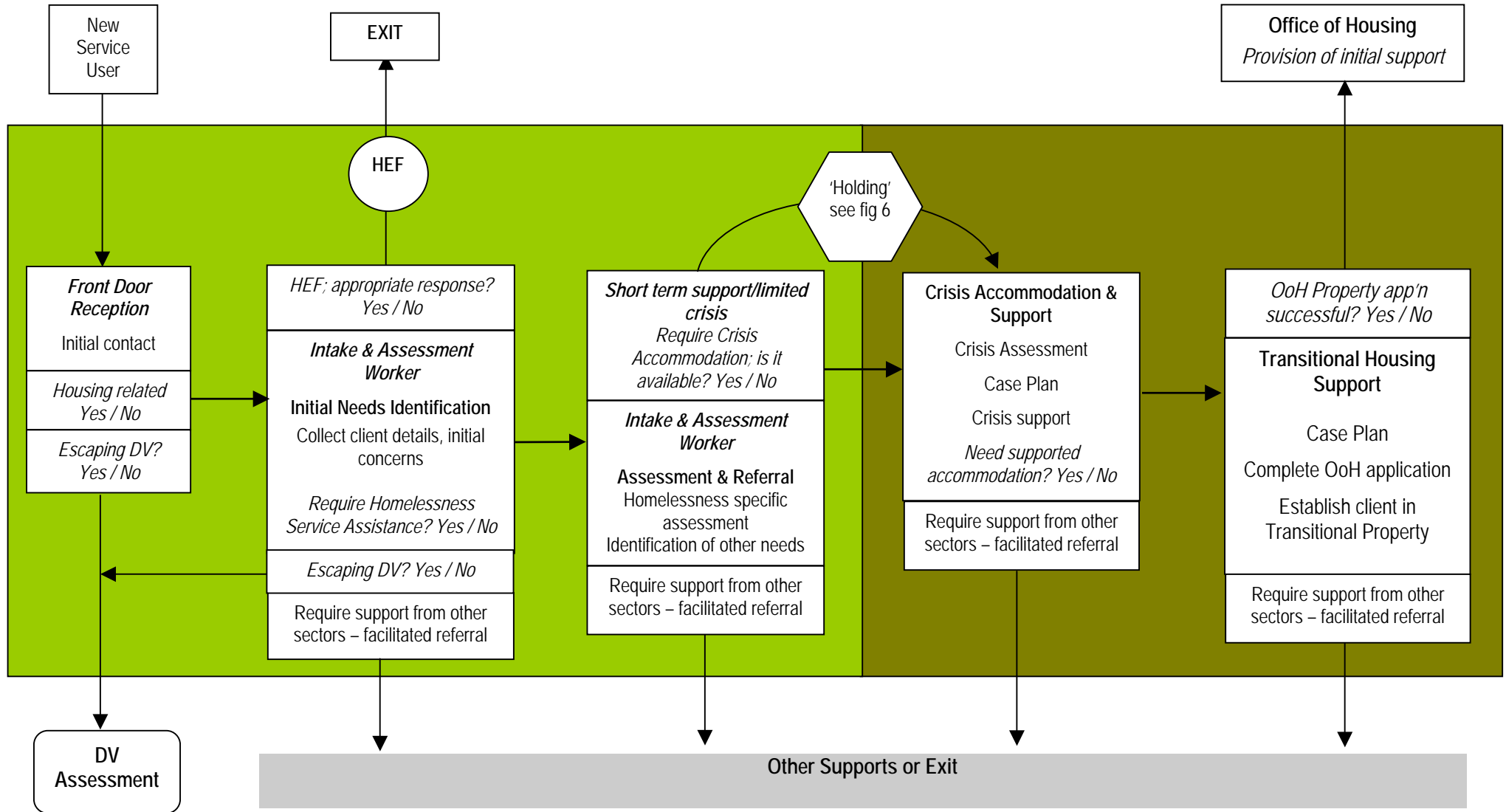
With this in mind the SC has developed a preferred 'client pathways' model (which is seen in Figure 4) through the homelessness service system that allows for a variety of client movements or options and service responses across the homelessness system. The pathways model offers a capacity to manage access to services through screening, assessment and referral into crisis and transitional services (and other accommodation options such as caravans, hotels, motels etc) followed by assistance into longer term private rental options or Office of Housing (OoH) accommodation. Figure 5 depicts Intake, Assessment and Referral Pathways through the homelessness service system.

As noted above, there are times when the homelessness service system may not be able to provide a service for a client who has been deemed eligible by the Front Door because no vacancies have been identified. In these circumstances the Front Door practitioners will 'hold' these clients for a limited time offering short-term support & follow up or crisis response. Those Services referring clients to the Front Door will be requested to continue to work with the client in these situations. Figure 6 details the holding actions that may be necessary in these circumstances.

**Preferred Pathways
through
Figure 4**

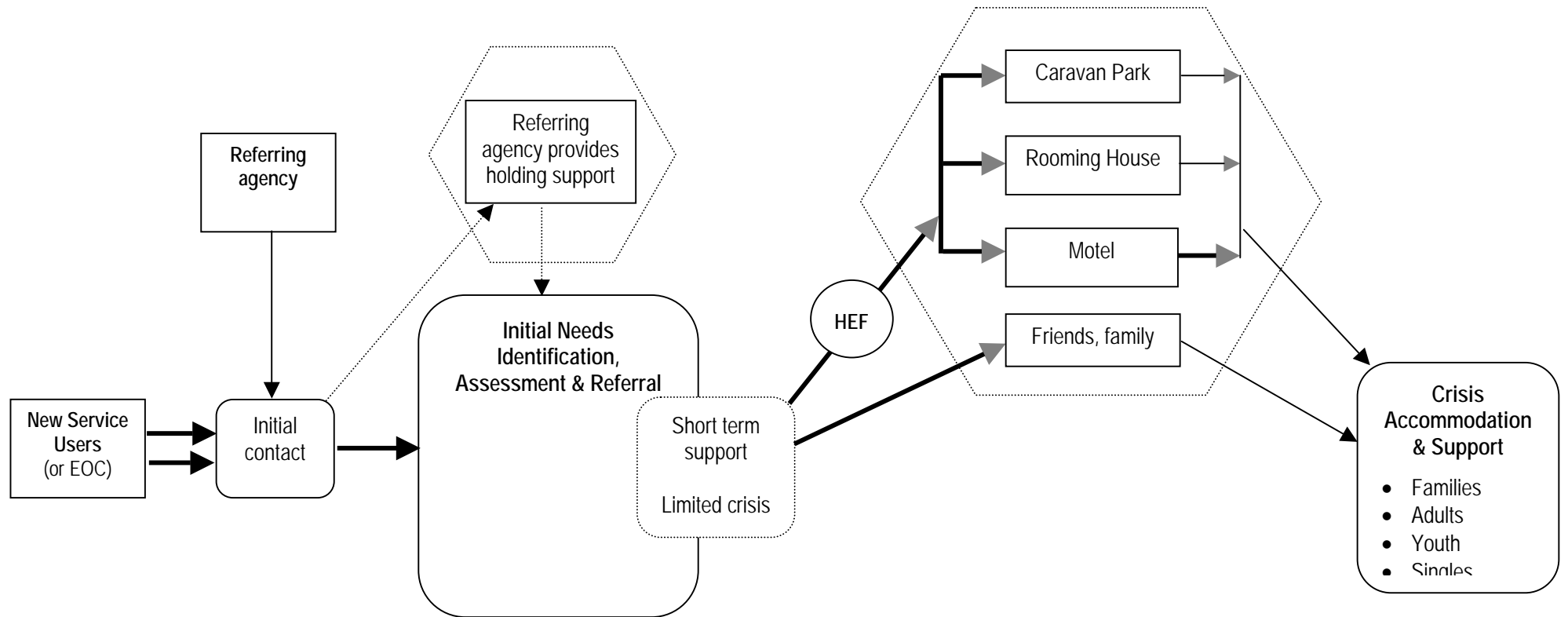


Intake, Assessment & Referral Process Figure 5



Holding actions

Figure 6



Outer Southern Metropolitan Region Homelessness Service System Development Project

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Policies and Procedures

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Guiding Principles

These are the overarching principles that have informed the development of policies for the Front Doors and Outposts model. They have been taken from the Housing Assistance Standards and adopted by the OSHSSD Project Steering Committee.

- Upholding the rights and dignity of consumers;
- Respecting the rights and addressing the needs of children and young people who are accompanying an adult or are consumers in their own right;
- Promoting and enabling access to services on the basis of the rights of consumers and their needs;
- Consumers determining their own goals and priorities;
- Working together with consumers to address their immediate needs and to build their capacity to achieve long term sustainable outcomes;
- Acknowledging and respecting the cultural backgrounds and heritage of consumers in the way we provide services;
- Working in cooperation with the homelessness service system, other agencies and community members to meet the needs of consumers;
- Providing user friendly pathways across the service system;
- Advocating to find lasting solutions for the issues contributing to homelessness;
- Encouraging consumer participation in program and policy development; and
- Building an organisational culture and system that supports the workers and strives for continuous improvement in our services.

Relevant documents

- Policies and Procedures for each of the provider organisations;
- Consumer Charter (for people accessing Victorian homelessness assistance and social housing services);
- The Homelessness Assistance Service Standards; and
- HEF Guidelines & Conditions of Funding.

Accompanying Children

June 2006

Please Note

This policy domain is an area that is currently being developed by many of the homelessness agencies in the region, in particular the Children's Support Worker currently employed by WAYSS.

PRINCIPLE

Children are recognised by the Front Door as being among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of those experiencing homelessness and need specific care and attention to ensure their social, physical and emotional needs are being addressed.

Consequently the Front Doors support the United Nations International Charter on the Rights of the Child and have developed practices around the rights of children and the 'duty of care' for children who accompany their parents or caregivers when accessing the Front Door. The following guidelines have been developed for staff working with adults and their accompanying child or children.

GUIDELINES

Assessment & referral (early identification of children's needs)

- Common Housing Assessment & Referral Tool (CHART) recognises the needs of the child and accordingly children are assessed in their own right alongside those of their parent(s) or caregiver(s). Front Door staff will assess the child or children's immediate crisis needs and other requirements such as medical, safety & security, legal, education, access arrangements or welfare concerns;
- Front Door staff through CHART will also need to assess and identify the immediate safety issues for the child or children if the parent(s) or caregiver(s) is escaping a FV situation or other high risk situations;
- The Front Door staff will recognise the child or children, as clients in their own right, that have the right to access resources and support; and
- Front Door staff members have a 'duty of care' to the child or children and as such will make notifications to DHS if they identify issues of neglect or abuse of the child or children through their assessment. Front Door staff will advise their manager and the parent(s) or caregiver(s) who is accompanying the child or children (unless safety concerns preclude the latter option), that they are making a notification to DHS Child Protection.

Support & intervention

- All support and intervention provided by the Front Door staff is based on a holistic approach to working with the parent/primary caregiver (client) of the child, or children.

- When the Front Door staff provide short-term support to the parents and their accompanying children then further assessment of the child's needs becomes necessary. After the assessment, a time limited case plan will be developed for the child in consultation with the parents/caregiver to ensure that needs are clearly identified and appropriate referrals and support to the child or children is provided;
- In some cases Front Door staff will make 'assisted' referrals to external agencies as required as a result of their assessment. In the instance of the Front Door staff making a referral to another service or agency, the informed signed consent of the primary caregiver on behalf of the child, or children is required. A 'Client Consent for Release of Information form' must be signed and a copy given to the client and a copy kept in the client's file; and
- Where Front Door staff require advice on how best to intervene or assist a child in the context of their family they may wish to contact the Children's Worker for secondary consultation and/or consult with their manager.

Children's play areas

- Front Door staff are responsible for the standard of the Children's play area at the service and must ensure that safety and hygiene are prioritised at all times; and
- Front Door staff are not employed to mind children that are attending the Front Door and this must be made clear to parents and caregivers. From time to time if an emergency situation necessitates, Front Door staff may provide this care for a short period of time only.

Supervision

- Front Door staff will require appropriate and regular supervision in their work with children so as to feel supported and well informed about practice issues and children's resources and services;
- The Children's Worker may be a useful resource to Front Door staff to provide professional development from time to time and the provision of advice and children's resources; and
- Front Door staff will require secondary consultation and debriefing support from their manager in relation to concerns for the wellbeing of children (eg when there is conflict of interests between the needs of the parents or caregivers and the needs of the child or when a notification to DHS is necessary).

Children's resources and services

- Up to date information on children's issues, resources and outer SMR programs should be maintained by the Front Door managers and staff to ensure professional practice with children is maintained; and
- For effective and timely referrals for children by the Front door robust relationships & protocols with Children's services in the outer SMR must be developed and maintained by Front Door managers and staff.

After Hours

June 2006

PRINCIPLES

It is the intention of the Front Doors and their Outposts to respond to people whom are homeless or are 'at risk' of becoming homeless and are requiring assistance, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. However at this stage of development, the Front Doors in both Dandenong and Frankston are only able to respond to those seeking assistance from Monday to Friday during normal business hours.

In recognition that service users will need assistance at times outside these designated hours of operation the Front Doors have collaborated with Hanover South East Robinson St Crisis Service in Dandenong who will provide assistance 'after hours' on behalf of the Front Doors and their Outposts to those who require it.

This policy should be understood in conjunction with the Demand Management, HEF and Filling Vacancies policies for the Front Doors. The 'after hours' guidelines make it clear to staff at the Front Doors (Dandenong and Frankston) and the staff at the Robinson St Crisis Service what is expected of them outside of normal business hours in responding to the needs of clients who make contact. The guidelines set out clear processes and understandings between each of the parties. It is anticipated that communication between the two services will be regular and on going. The guidelines are as follows:

GUIDELINES

'After hours' definition

For the purposes of this policy it is understood that the Front Doors (Dandenong and Frankston) will operate Monday to Friday from 8.30am - 5.30pm. Therefore 'after hours' in this context is defined as:

- Monday to Friday after 5.30pm and before 8.30am; and
- All day Saturday and Sunday.

Telephone routines

- At 5.30pm Monday to Friday staff at the Front Doors will divert the telephones across to the telephone number of the Robinson St Crisis Service;
- At 8.30am Monday to Friday staff at the Front Doors will divert the phones back to the number for the Front Doors; and
- Outposts of the Front Doors will advise service users to contact the Robinson St Crisis Service 'after hours' by calling their free call 1800 number.

Eligibility for 'after hours' response

- In recognition of the current resources provided at Robinson St Crisis service (i.e. two stand up staff employed on PM shifts and 1 on Overnight shifts at any one time) only *crisis* clients will be provided with comprehensive assistance 'after hours'. Crisis clients refers to those people who present in person or by phone to the Robinson St Crisis Service that are in immediate housing crisis (i.e. no where to sleep in the next 24 hours) and both need support and are willing to accept support from the homelessness service system;
- All other service users requiring assistance (who present in person or by phone) 'after hours' will be responded to, but with information and referral only and will be directed to the Front Doors for their assistance during business hours or to other appropriate services;
- Women and children experiencing and/or escaping Family Violence (FV) who present by phone or in person 'after hours' to the Robinson St Crisis Service will be referred directly to the South East Family Violence Crisis Service. (Please see FV Policy for more detail); and
- Young people (i.e. those under 18 years of age) and not in crisis will be directed to the Front Doors for their assistance during normal business hours or to the Youth State-wide services such as 'Stopover' Youth Refuge and/or Melbourne Youth Support Services.

Expectations of Robinson St Crisis Service staff

- It is expected that after hours, an assessment through CHART be completed by Robinson St Crisis Service staff for those clients presenting in crisis by phone or in person, and appropriate support provided. It is further expected that staff will engage with the new service user for the time that they are being assisted by the crisis service in order to maximise their stability. (Refer to HEF guidelines if necessary);
- Any actions to assist or advice provided to the client is to be recorded in CHART;
- Further, if the service user is being assisted by the crisis service and presents on Friday or Saturday it is expected that staff at the crisis service will follow up with the client over the course of the weekend by telephone to ensure that the service user has settled into their temporary accommodation and to offer other support on an as needs basis if appropriate;
- If the service user/s is unable to be contacted and it is deemed appropriate it may be necessary for the Crisis Service staff to make contact with the manager of the temporary accommodation (i.e. at the motel, caravan park or rooming house) to confirm that the situation of the client/s are satisfactory; and
- Crisis service staff will direct service users that they have been assisting over night or over the weekend back to the appropriate Front Doors for ongoing assistance the next business day.

Expectations of Front Door staff

- It is expected that designated staff at the Front Doors (Frankston and Dandenong) will be available in the mornings Monday to Friday for appointments with crisis clients who entered the service system through the Robinson St Crisis Service over the weekend or overnight; and
- It is expected that both the Front Doors and the Robinson St Crisis Service (when it is conducting business on behalf of the Front Doors) will provide a level of consistency in response, information, expectations and processes for the clients between the two services.

Communication between services

Regular communication (by phone, electronically and/or, in person) between the Robinson St Crisis Service and the Front Doors is crucial to the flow of information concerning client/s between the two services during business hours and after business hours. The following processes are important in this communication:

- The Robinson St Crisis Service must notify the relevant Front Door by the start of business on the following day or by the start of business Monday if seen over the weekend, that they have provided after hours 'Front Door' assistance to a client and referred them on to the Front Door for further support.
- It will also be necessary to provide the Front Door with the client details so that the CHART record can be accessed by the Front Door;
- Statistics of all client/s contacts or other work done by the Robinson St Crisis Service 'after hours' on behalf of the Front Doors will be collected; and
- All information shared between the Robinson St Crisis service and the Front Doors must uphold the Confidentiality and Privacy policies of these services and those developed for the Front Doors.

Evaluation and review

In recognition that both the Front Doors and the Robinson Crisis Service are new initiatives it will be necessary to review these guidelines on an ongoing basis and more formally after three months of operation. It is therefore suggested that:

- Managers of the Front Doors and Robinson St Crisis facility meet regularly (i.e. fortnightly to discuss issues or improvements to the 'after' hours operations)
- That the number of clients and their target groups who are seen 'after hours' are monitored closely by both Robinson St Crisis Service and the Front Doors to assist in determining the future opening hours and operations of the Front Doors.

Challenging Behaviours

June 2006

PRINCIPLE

There will be occasions when service users present in an aggressive, threatening or violent way towards staff and/or other service users or they might begin yelling and act in a verbally abusive manner towards staff and/or other service users. This behaviour might be exhibited in person or via other methods of communication such as phone or email.

In these instances it is important to remember that such behaviour occurs in a context that is often very stressful for the service user, such as impending or continuing homelessness and that there are often only limited options for providing assistance. However this behaviour is not acceptable and staff members are not expected to accommodate threats or abuse, nor should other service users, and so it is important to act immediately in order to manage the situation. A consistent approach should be utilised in each instance.

If service users do not respond to requests from staff to address their behaviour, and the only option is to ask them to leave, they will also be provided with the option of meeting or making an appointment with the Front Door manager to discuss how they can access future assistance.

It is also important to note that clients will not be prevented from accessing support at the Front Doors on the basis of past financial support.

The guidelines are as follows

GUIDELINES

Consistent response

It is important that any response to inappropriate behaviour is firm, calm and clear and every attempt is made to use a consistent approach across staff members at both the Front Doors and their outposts. The following steps are recommended:

Violent behaviour

1. Seek to move staff and other service users to safety
2. Call the Police

Threatening or aggressive behaviour

1. Inform the client that their behaviour is unacceptable and it must stop immediately;
2. Ask them again to cease their behaviour or they will be asked to leave;
3. Ask them to leave and if appropriate explain that they can return after they have made an appointment to see the Front Door Manager; and
4. If they refuse to leave the service, inform them that the Police will be contacted.

Abusive behaviour

1. Inform the client that their behaviour needs to be modified and be specific, eg “Tom, you are clearly upset but you will need to stop being abusive otherwise we won’t be able to work with you today”;
2. Remind them again that they need to modify their behaviour if they are to gain assistance today and also so that they can talk about why they are so upset;
3. Ask them again to cease their behaviour or they will be asked to leave;
4. Ask them to leave and explain that they can return when they can comply with the rules of the service; and
5. If they refuse to leave the service, inform them that the Police will be contacted.

Safety

The safety of staff members and service users is paramount and so efforts must be made to minimise the risk in the above instances. Staff should be ready to support each other but again by providing firm, calm and clear directions to the person(s) that is behaving inappropriately and by seeking to ensure that service users are moved out of the way of harm.

Access to further assistance

When an episode of behaviour by a client has subsided and the client can commit to compliance with the expectations of service users and the law, the Front Door manager will negotiate with the client their re-entry into the service system. Whilst this process is in train, other options for providing support to the client will be explored.

There might be times when an organisation needs to negotiate some specific rights and responsibilities with an individual to help make them and other people feel safe and secure. (Charter of Rights)

Where possible attempts should be made to verbally inform and document in a letter, how they can gain access to the service. Client Advocacy Services and the Front Doors Grievance Procedures should also be provided with this information. This information should be provided to the client as close to the incident as possible or else kept on their file until they return and then presented to them

Support to staff

Additional to regular opportunities for supervision, staff will also be provided with access to debriefing after experiencing violent, aggressive or abusive behaviour. Such support will also be provided in accordance with the Critical Incident procedures that are specific to each of the provider organisations.

Consumer Participation

June 2006

PRINCIPLE

It is very important that service users' experience of the Front Doors is captured so that this can contribute to the continuous improvement of Front Door services.

However this desire for understanding the experience of service users must be balanced against the pressure of the needs that they are attempting to address when attending the Front Door. Hence any strategies for seeking feedback must not add to the burdens that they are dealing with at the time of making contact.

In recognition of the importance of consumer contribution to the ongoing development of the Front Doors, the following guidelines have been adopted.

GUIDELINES

Information provision:

As well as providing information to service users about the function of the Front Doors in the outer SMR, the following will also be provided;

- Information about the mechanism for complaints will be clearly displayed and where necessary provided directly to clients; and
- Information about the different mechanisms for client feedback that are used at the Front Door are clearly explained to service users. The fact that the provision of feedback is completely voluntary and that when feedback is provided it will have no effect on the service(s) that are provided, will also be made clear. Consent to provide feedback will be included on the Consumer Consent Form attached in *Appendix 1*.

Collecting client feedback:

The Front Door will regularly seek feedback from clients through the following range of mechanisms as appropriate to the needs of individual service users:

- Optional questions will be included as part of the client interview process unless it is deemed inappropriate because of concerns for the client. The questions will be straightforward and the number will be confined to a maximum of three. Eg How did you find out about the Front Door? Was it hard to find your way here? A set of such questions might only be asked for a set time period eg. A week so that a reasonable sample of responses might be gathered. All such questions are voluntary for clients;
- Service users will be offered the opportunity to participate in follow up telephone surveys, face to face surveys, written surveys or focus groups about aspects of the Front Door, once their accommodation is stabilised. For those service users that are interested then the opportunity to participate for

a sample of them will be established through the agencies with whom they are housed. All participants will be paid for providing their time. Clients are offered some choice as to which collection method they would prefer to be part of;

- Service users are actively encouraged to offer their honest opinions about aspects of the service, whilst respecting their right to say no to participating;
- Genuine attempts will be made to engage a diverse range of service users, representing different cultural groups, ages, gender, etc, in the provision of feedback;
- Anonymity and confidentiality of client responses are respected at all times;
- Service users who offer feedback about the Front Door will not be treated either favourably or unfavourably with regards to decisions made in their assessment or referrals; and
- The collection of client feedback should not interfere with the general efficiencies of the day to day running of the Front Door.

Evaluation/review

- The views expressed by service users will be considered alongside, those of OSSHSD Steering Committee, management committees/boards, managers, staff and other stakeholders in determining any substantial changes to the Front Door services;
- Forms and other administrative mechanisms and procedures will be regularly updated to reflect feedback from service users and others;
- Homelessness and other services will be regularly consulted on aspects of the Front Door using a variety of mechanisms, including telephone surveys, face to face surveys, written surveys or focus groups;
- Feedback from homelessness consumer groups will be encouraged; and
- The process for seeking client feedback will be reviewed periodically to determine any improvements to the data collection process.

Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register

June 2006

PRINCIPLES

The goal of the Front Doors is to provide a well coordinated and integrated entry point to the homelessness service system for service users. The 'Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register' is the mechanism whereby all vacancies in the Outer SMR homelessness service system are coordinated, recorded and updated regularly by the Front Doors.

The Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register allows staff at the Front Doors to be well advised as to where the 'Crisis' vacancies are, the Crisis service providers to be well informed as to where the 'Transitional and Support' vacancies are in the region thereby assisting the process of referral and pathways through the homelessness service system for the service user.

The Front Doors, Crisis and Transitional providers in the Outer SMR will be able to access the Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register at all times. The Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register is however, not intended for use by those outside the Outer SMR, or the homelessness service sector more generally.

GUIDELINES:

Vacancy areas

The Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register will list current vacancies in the homelessness service system and will detail the following vacancy areas:

- Crisis support and accommodation;
- Crisis support only;
- Transitional support and accommodation; and
- Transitional support only.

Notification of vacancies

Homelessness service providers including the Front Door staff will advise the Front Doors of new vacancies in the aforementioned areas on a daily basis or preferably, as they are known. The following service providers will offer this advice:

- Transitional Housing & Support Managers will provide both transitional housing & support vacancies;
- The Front Door Managers will provide information about the available 'holding' capacity (i.e. limited support vacancies); and
- The Crisis Managers will provide both crisis accommodation & support vacancies.

Listing vacancies

A designated member of staff from the Front Door will be responsible for the Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register and will ensure that the following occurs:

- That the Register is up to date on a daily basis;
- That all the vacancies in the aforementioned areas are listed;
- That Homelessness service providers are reminded regularly that they are obliged to list their vacancies with the Front Door; and
- Prior to an electronic system being implemented, that these vacancies are communicated (usually by email) to those service providers in the SMR who are privy to this information (as stated previously).

It is agreed that from time to time, certain accommodation vacancies may require limitations or restriction for access. This may be for safety reasons to clients or other issues such as 'resting' properties in certain locations. In order to easily locate appropriate referral options, limitations will be clearly listed within the vacancy register. These limitations will require review each time the vacancy register is updated, as the register will not have the capacity to retain the restrictions indefinitely.

Protocols

Protocol agreements will be developed with those homelessness service providers who are obliged to offer vacancy information to the Front Doors. These protocols will be well understood and implemented by Front Door staff and their managers.

The Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register policy is best understood in conjunction with Filling of Vacancies, Holding and Demand Management policies developed for the Front Doors.

Filling Vacancies

June 2006

PRINCIPLE

The Front Doors & their respective Outposts provide the *only* entry points to crisis and transitional support and accommodation services in the outer SMR. Once in the crisis service clients can move directly through into transitional housing without having to go back to the Front Door.

The well-coordinated and timely entry into the homelessness service system through the Front Doors & their Outposts is crucial to those seeking housing support. Due to heavy demand on the homelessness service system it is important to note that vacancies in crisis accommodation and support services are very limited i.e. about two per day for adults in the region (including crisis accommodation and support only vacancies).

It is paramount that the experience of accessing services or support through the Front Doors is efficient, and practices consistent whilst being sensitive to the needs and circumstances of the individual, couple or family.

Service users in immediate housing crisis, that need and want support, will be eligible for referral to crisis services or into short term 'holding' by the Front Door staff.

This framework will provide the Front Door staff with transparent practices that are consistent between Front Door sites. There are specific policies that have been developed for young people and women and children escaping family violence, these will need to be read alongside these guidelines. The guidelines are as follows and should also be considered in conjunction with the Managing Demand Policy:

GUIDELINES

Vacancies in crisis accommodation, although limited, will usually be known in advance on the basis that most exits from crisis will be planned. It is essential that Homelessness service providers and the Front Doors maintain regular communication with each other in order to identify and plan the filling of these vacancies. On the rare occasion an immediate vacancy occurs in crisis accommodation, Front Door staff will be advised so that the referral process can be initiated as per other vacancies.

Eligibility

- Those people who present in person or by phone to the Front Doors who are in immediate housing crisis (i.e. no where to sleep in the next 24 hours) and both need support and are willing to accept support from the homelessness service system will be prioritised for referral into crisis support & accommodation service vacancies or into the 'holding' system provided by the Front Door; and

- Given the limited number of crisis vacancies available at any one time it will generally be the case that vacancies will be filled by those clients who are currently in the 'holding' system provided by the Front Doors who are still waiting for safe and/or suitable accommodation solutions and support.

Prioritising clients

- Those clients that fit the vacancy target group, have been held by short term support measures for the longest period of time and who have engaged with that support but have not yet gained safe suitable long term accommodation, will be prioritised for referral to fill the available crisis vacancy; and.
- In the interests of equity and access for filling vacancies by the Front Doors it will be important that all geographical areas of the outer SMR have equal access to support and accommodation crisis vacancies. To ensure this is the case the two Front Door managers will regularly review with each other the flow of referrals through supported crisis options from their specific regions and outposts.

Filling crisis vacancies

- Dandenong and Frankston Front Door support workers and Hanover South East crisis service will communicate regularly via a three-way telephone conversation at a designated time to discuss the referral and selection of a client(s) to fill a specific crisis vacancy;
- Details of the recommended clients to be considered for the vacancy will be available on the three-way conversation report. In the best interests of time management there would not generally be more than four referrals discussed for any one vacancy at any one time; and
- The conversation will be a 'structured' format between the three parties exploring the most appropriate client from those currently being held by the Front Door staff. This process will not result in further assessment for the client(s). (A conversation checklist has been developed so as to ensure that all necessary areas are covered so that the 'best match' for the vacancy is made and the selection process is in some way accountable) The 3 way conversation checklist is attached in *Appendix 2*;
- The final decision to accept the client(s) to a particular vacancy will rest with the crisis accommodation provider. Following the 3 way conversation, the crisis accommodation provider will complete the vacancy register accept / reject function for each client referred.
- Front Door staff will endeavour to fill any crisis vacancy within 24 hours of that vacancy being known to them and available for occupancy.

Filling transitional vacancies

- Crisis providers in the outer SMR requiring access to a transitional vacancy can locate vacancies on the Accommodation & Support Vacancy Register. Criteria for vacancies will be clearly stated and it is important that only appropriate referrals are made to each vacancy. The referral will be via email to the vacancy 'owner'. A vacancy will remain 'open' for 24 hours or until a

maximum of 4 referrals are received. The transitional provider will consider each referral and where appropriate contact the referring agency to discuss the referral. A decision is made based on 'Best Match' as described below.

- The final decision to accept the client(s) to a particular vacancy will rest with the transitional provider.

'Best match' for vacancies

- It is necessary that the crisis service or the transitional provider take into consideration the 'match' of clients not only to the particular vacancy type but also the facility or neighbourhood dynamic. As previously stated the ultimate decision to accept the client to a vacancy rests with the specific service provider.

Outposts

- Due to the lack of resources currently available at the Outposts, the Outposts will not make referrals for crisis vacancies directly to the crisis service providers. The Dandenong Front Door will be responsible for the coordination of referrals on behalf of Narre Warren, Pakenham and Cranbourne Outposts. Similarly the Frankston Front Door will be responsible for the coordination of referrals on behalf of the Rosebud outpost; and
- The Outposts will not have the staff capacity to offer short-term support and 'hold' clients with the exception of the Rosebud Outpost. From time to time clients (usually families) may be accommodated and supported by the Front Doors in an Outpost's location if this is seen to be the most appropriate and stabilising option for them. (Refer to the 'holding clients' policy for more detail).

After hours process

As developed in the after hours policy for the Front Doors Hanover South East, Robinson St Crisis Service will provide assistance to those service users who require assistance outside the 'normal business hours' of the Front Doors. (See 'After hours' policy for detail).

It is intended that the Robinson St Crisis Service will not fill crisis support vacancies on behalf of the Front Doors 'after hours'. However if an unplanned bed vacancy does occur at the Robinson Street Crisis Service after hours and a client/s is assessed as eligible for that vacancy under CHART it will be considered prudent to provide the bed to the client/s for the night if a weekday (or nights if a weekend) and then ensure the client attends the appropriate Front Door on the next working day.

Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) distribution

June 2006

PRINCIPLES

Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) is an integral part of homelessness assistance in Victoria and in the outer SMR of Melbourne. In particular it has assisted people 'at risk' of homelessness to maintain their housing and those that are homeless with gaining access to temporary or longer-term accommodation.

However, it must be noted that it is just one of a variety of tools or approaches that can be used by Front Doors & Outpost staff to assist those who present as homeless or 'at risk' of homelessness. Whilst HEF might be applied as a form of assistance on its own, it is usually more effective if this is done in conjunction with other funds or forms of support to enable a person, couple or family to find suitable solutions to their homelessness or pending homelessness situations.

The Front Doors & Outposts provide services to those where support and/or financial assistance can minimise the risk of a housing crisis occurring as well as addressing the need of those in immediate crisis (i.e. nowhere to sleep tonight). In either situation HEF may be provided for the purpose of paying rent arrears or paying rent in advance or securing accommodation, through the purchase of a motel for the night. However, wherever possible, HEF is to be used to find longer-term solutions to housing problems rather than 'temporary' solutions.

HEF is funded through the Office of Housing (OoH) to the Front Door services and as such is administered according to *HEF Guidelines and Conditions of Funding* set down by the OoH with regards to its allocation. The following guidelines for HEF distribution sit inside the OoH guidelines and have been developed to ensure a consistency of approach across the outer SMR service system whilst still allowing for some flexibility should the circumstances of service users require it.

GUIDELINES

Eligibility

- HEF will be considered for all target groups who present as homeless or are 'at risk' of becoming homeless;
- Primarily those seeking assistance will have links to the outer SMR region; and
- The Common Housing Assessment Referral Tool (CHART) will be used to identify those that are eligible for HEF.

Response timeframes

Front Door staff will respond to requests for HEF inside set timeframes according to urgency. These are as follows:

- General response; Front Door staff will make assessments of a client's eligibility for HEF and as appropriate aim to make relevant appointments by the end of the next working day after their initial contact with the Front Door; and
- Crisis response; Clients with no immediate shelter will be prioritised for assessment and access to HEF that day to secure appropriate housing whilst a medium term housing plan, if necessary, is developed and worked towards. (i.e. some clients presenting in crisis will be fortunate and secure a long term housing outcome that same day and not need further assistance).

Limitations

- HEF is a limited financial resource and as such it is used when other financial solutions (eg clients own income, Centrelink payments, Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program, funds from emergency relief or aid from Churches or other charitable organisations, Court funds via Magistrates Court or SAAP brokerage) or support have not been found or in conjunction with these;
- In general HEF will not be 'capped' per person, couple or family (other than by OoH guidelines) however staff must be mindful of monthly limitations on HEF and should consult their managers when an allocation will exceed \$250/ or two weeks rent, whichever is the greater;
- In general HEF will not be used for the payment of Bonds as these can be sought through the OoH or for bond debts that have been incurred. Bond debts should be addressed through the other financial options named above. However HEF can be used as a last resort to contribute towards Bond costs in order to secure an accommodation solution if a consultation has been undertaken with the Front Door manager;
- In general HEF will not be used to purchase 'essential furniture' as these can usually be obtained via other financial solutions, church organisations or 'no-interest' loan schemes. HEF might be allocated for the cost of removals provided that this ensures that an accommodation solution is found;
- HEF will not be administered as a loan, to ensure that people will not incur further debt or be deterred from coming back to the service;
- Although the provision of assistance from HEF on multiple occasions, is not encouraged for any individual, couple or family, in those circumstances where other solutions have been explored and are not possible or appropriate, Front Door staff with the approval of their managers may readminister HEF in accordance with an agreed case plan. Those clients who seek repeated (i.e. a second appearance inside a 6 month timeframe) and ongoing HEF should be referred and assessed by an available 'short term' support worker at the Front Door. The role of the worker in this instance is to examine the underlying issues precipitating repeated housing stress and make appropriate referrals to other supports (eg Financial counselling or gambling counselling). The purpose of the involvement is to set in place strategies to stabilise their accommodation and prevent their future need of HEF;
- In all instances, where children are in the care of clients presenting with no shelter and no long term housing options can be found HEF can be used to secure overnight emergency accommodation irrespective of the past number

of assists. Exceptions may include clients who have repeatedly resisted engagement with Front Door workers, continually contact after hours or who are refusing alternative reasonable accommodation solutions.

Geographical boundaries

- If clients present in person at the Front Door and are not linked to the region and are itinerant, they will be assisted if assessed as appropriate for HEF; and
- If clients phone the Front Doors from regions outside the outer SMR requesting HEF support they will be directed to the appropriate agencies that distribute HEF for their region.

Agency requests

- If SAAP funded services request additional HEF to assist clients exiting their services in the outer SMR, these will be considered on their merit on a case by case basis and in accord with these guidelines. The Front Door manager will be consulted in these instances. These requests will be acted on within 48 hours.

Budgets

- Front Door managers will be required to keep abreast of their HEF budgets on a weekly basis to ensure that HEF monies are available throughout the month for those requiring it. Front Door Managers will keep their staff informed and up to date on any problems or concerns associated with HEF distribution; and
- On the few occasions where HEF has have been exhausted in any one month by one of the Front Doors, the Front Door manager from this service can seek HEF assistance from the other Front Door for those clients presenting in crisis.

'Holding' Clients

June 2006

PRINCIPLES

The Front Doors for the homelessness service system seek to enable a client's timely referral into appropriate supports and services. The Front Doors acknowledge however, that there are times when the homelessness service system may not be able to provide the desired service for a client(s) who has been deemed eligible by the Front Doors, because no current vacancies in the homelessness service system exist.

In these circumstances the Front Door practitioners will 'hold' these clients for a limited time offering some short-term support and follow up whilst housing solutions and supports are being established.

It is also expected that any services referring clients through the Front Doors in these situations would continue to work with them until accommodation solutions have been secured.

It is envisaged that the short-term support offered by the Front Doors will help to alleviate the impact of the current housing crisis in the client's life and thereby prevent the spiral or the continuance of longer-term homelessness. The support offered by the Front Doors will be provided in a case managed framework and the interventions provided will vary according to the client's needs and circumstances.

The following framework has been developed to guide decision-making by staff at the Front Doors for holding clients. Work done by Front Door staff with young people and women and children escaping family violence will not be covered by this policy. (Refer to the Young People's policy and the Family Violence policy for guidance with these target groups) These guidelines allow for some flexibility in practice and should be viewed in conjunction with Demand Management and Filling Vacancies policies.

GUIDELINES

Eligibility

Assessment by Front Door staff through CHART will determine those eligible for 'holding' in short-term support through the Front Doors. Eligibility is as follows:

- Those people who present in person or by phone to the Front Doors that are in immediate housing crisis (i.e. no where to sleep in the next 24 hours) in the outer SMR and both need support and are willing to accept support from the homelessness service system will be prioritised for referral into crisis support & accommodation services and into short term support (holding) by the Front Doors.

Referral

- In general the two Front Doors and their Outposts will make referrals of clients into 'holding' support at their own locations however at different times the Frankston Front Door & Rosebud Outpost may make referrals for holding to the Dandenong Front Door and the Dandenong Front Door and their Narre Warren, Pakenham and Cranbourne outposts may make referrals to the Frankston Front Door; and
- The Dandenong and Frankston Front Doors will require regular and ongoing communication with each other so as to make appropriate referrals and be well versed with regard to the range of clients who are currently being coordinated and/or held by each of the Front Doors and their outposts.

Short-term support ('holding') and management of clients

Designated Front Door staff will be responsible for working with clients on a 'short term' basis until suitable housing solutions or other supports are put in place. To further this capacity for support to clients in immediate housing crisis it is envisaged that Front Door staff will also look to the wider homelessness service system and to other service providers (eg mental health and drug and alcohol services) to assist in this process. Other considerations are as follows:

- 'Holding' clients by Front Door staff is intended as a short term measure but will vary according to the needs of the client, their circumstances and available housing solutions;
- The number of clients held at any one time by Front Door staff will be variable according to client need and circumstances, however workers' case load capacities will be overseen by Front Door managers and reviewed regularly;
- The focus for this short term support is on assisting the clients in gaining suitable accommodation or until such time as other support options become available;
- The Front Door staff will work with a client in a 'case managed' framework and have the capacity to provide outreach support to these clients;
- The usual housing pathway for clients, who are being held by the Front Door, is that they will be assisted to find temporary or longer-term options or until a crisis supported accommodation becomes available. Temporary options might include motels or caravan parks whilst longer-term options include rooming houses, caravan parks, share accommodation or private rental opportunities;
- Those clients held temporarily in caravan parks, rooming houses or motels will be eligible according to their assessed needs to move into crisis accommodation vacancies, particularly if these arrangements are not considered appropriate; and
- Conversely those clients who have been assisted into rooming houses, caravan parks or other private rental options and these options are assessed as appropriate would then no longer be considered for crisis accommodation vacancies that become available.

Outposts

- In general outposts (Narre Warren, Pakenham, Rosebud and Cranbourne) will not provide for the 'holding' of clients with the exception of Rosebud

where some short-term support of clients may be possible from time to time but more limited than that offered through the Front Doors;

- The Frankston Front Door will coordinate the 'holding' of clients for the Rosebud outpost and Dandenong will coordinate the 'holding' of clients for outposts in Pakenham, Narre Warren and Cranbourne; and
- It will be difficult for clients to be held by the Front Doors in the outpost regions unless support can also be provided through another service. However from time to time clients (usually families) may be accommodated and supported by the Front Doors in the Outpost's location from whence they came, if this is seen to be the most appropriate and stabilising option for them and enables established supports and links to be maintained.

Internal and External Referral

June 2006

PRINCIPLES

There is a range of ways in which referrals can be made between services from facilitated through to non-facilitated. In the interest of client self-determination the Front Doors will adopt referral mechanisms that best respond to the differing needs and capabilities of their client/s. In the interests of transparency and consistency across the Front Door sites both the Dandenong Front Door and the Frankston Front Door will make referrals based on this same premise.

Referrals made by the Front Doors will be made both within the homelessness service sector (internal) and to those services outside of the homelessness service sector such as mental health services, drug and alcohol services, and health services (external). It is envisaged that through the development of the Front Doors, protocols for referral will be agreed to and implemented between services both internally and externally to assist the movement of clients through the different sectors.

This policy is best understood in the context of all other policies developed for the Front Doors with specific focus on Demand Management and Filling vacancies policies. These guidelines offer Front Door staff some broad direction for decisions pertaining to making 'good' referrals with and on behalf of clients who present at the Front Doors. These guidelines are as follows:

GUIDELINES

Definitions of terms

- **Supportive** referral involves both facilitated referral and the provision of ongoing support until the organised contact is made. Such support may, for instance, involve continuing contact with the client over a period of days whilst waiting for their turn to come up on a waiting list, and follow up on referrals to ensure clients were assisted by the referring agency as arranged.
- **Facilitated (or assisted)** referral is referral to other services that is instigated by the assessment practitioner. It involves the practitioner contacting the other service and arranging a contact time and person for the client. It is also likely to involve assistance with transport to the referred service. It does not, however, involve the provision of ongoing support or follow up while the client is waiting for assistance at the service referred to.
- **Non-facilitated** referral means that the client (when assessed and engaged) has agreed that they are able to make referrals to services on their own behalf and to set up and attend appointments. They may simply require information pertaining to services or a telephone from staff at the Front Doors.

Assessment of client

Appropriate referrals require that a client/s needs, circumstance and capabilities are well understood by those conducting intake and assessment at the Front Doors. The careful completion of CHART by staff at the Front Doors will assist the making of well-informed decisions and referrals and will help to determine the following:

- What service options and types (internal or external) will need to be referred to;
- The type of referral that is required for the client/s (i.e. Supportive, facilitated or non facilitated); and
- The follow up, of referrals required by the client/s and/or staff at the Front Doors.

Expectations

- Clients will be provided with clear information by Front Door staff in order for them to be able to provide 'informed consent' on matters such as where they are being referred to, the process of referral and the criteria or eligibility for entry to the particular service being referred to. (Please refer to Client Confidentiality & Privacy Policies of both the Service provider and those developed for the Front Doors)

Protocols and referral pathways

Referral protocols developed between services (internally and externally) must be well understood and adhered to by Front Door staff at all times. Many of these will be continuously created into the future, such that managers must keep their staff abreast of these developments.

The current protocol for 'Filling vacancies' at the Front Doors is well documented in that policy. However it is worth noting here the agreements made for referral processes to filling vacancies in crisis and transitional accommodation. They are as follows:

- Dandenong and Frankston Front Door support workers and Hanover SECAS will communicate regularly via a three-way telephone conversation at a designated time to discuss the referral and selection of a client(s) to fill a specific crisis vacancy; and
- Crisis providers in the outer SMR requiring access to a transitional vacancy and those transitional providers where a vacancy has been identified will communicate via a joint telephone conversation at a designated time to discuss the referral and selection of a client(s) to fill a specific transitional vacancy (including transitional accommodation & support and support only).

Managing Demand

June 2006

PRINCIPLES

The Front Doors operate from a social justice framework that recognises the rights of people to safe, secure and affordable housing. Accordingly, the Front Doors endeavour to assist people who are homeless or 'at risk' of homelessness to find suitable solutions to their housing issues.

It is well acknowledged that the demand for housing assistance by those who are homeless or 'at risk' of homelessness in the outer SMR far outstrips the ready supply of safe, secure and affordable housing, and that this in turn impacts on the approach taken to the provision of homelessness assistance by the Front Doors.

Notwithstanding this level of demand the Front Doors will endeavour to respond to the presenting needs of all those approaching the Front Doors, many of whom with the appropriate intervention will not need to enter the homelessness service system.

The Front Doors' processes around managing this demand must be transparent and balance the needs of many different people who are at different stages of homelessness. These approaches must be consistent between the Front Doors and their Outposts.

With respect to these important principles, the following broad framework has been developed to guide decision-making by staff at the Front Doors for managing demand. These guidelines offer some flexibility and are as follows:

GUIDELINES

Screening & assessment

- Assistance will be provided to all those who make contact with the Front Doors who are homeless or 'at risk' of homelessness in the outer SMR. That is, all target groups will have equity of access to the Front Doors and be assisted in some way;
- The Front Doors recognise that some clients will have repeat episodes of homelessness and present on more than one occasion at the Front Doors and will not discriminate on this basis, but will endeavour to continue to explore and secure long term solutions to their housing problems;
- Those who present with issues other than issues of homelessness will be provided with an assisted referral to other appropriate services or agencies. In some situations these referrals will be made in accordance with protocols that have been developed between those services and the Front Doors;
- Front Door staff will provide the initial assessment of clients that require and are eligible for the assistance of the homelessness service system. The Common Housing Assessment Referral Tool (CHART) developed for the

outer SMR Front Doors will provide the framework for the screening and assessment of service users' needs. The collection of this information is necessary for identifying the most appropriate options that can be actioned; and

- Wherever possible and appropriate Front Door staff will explore opportunities for housing solutions outside of the homelessness service system (eg. in, private rental, flats, caravans, boarding houses or share accommodation arrangements etc).

Prioritising need criteria

- Those people who present in person or by phone to the Front Doors who are in immediate housing crisis (i.e. no where to sleep in the next 24 hours or in unsafe housing) and both need support and are willing to accept support from the homelessness service system will be prioritised for referral into crisis support & accommodation services.

Short-term support ('holding')

There will be times when clients that are eligible and approved to enter the homelessness service system will need to be supported in temporary accommodation (eg. in a local motel, rooming house or caravan park) by the Front Door, due to the lack of available capacity in the homelessness service system. 'Short term support' provided by staff at the Front Doors is intended to be:

- Of a short term nature but will vary according to the needs of the client, their circumstances and available housing solutions; and
- Focused on assisting the client in gaining accommodation or until such time as there is a vacancy in Crisis Accommodation or other support options become available or the accommodation issue is resolved.

NB: With limited Crisis Support vacancies available, a 'three way' conversation will be held between the Front Doors and Hanover South East, in order to fill the available vacancy(s) using an agreed template for discussion. This is documented in greater detail in the 'Holding' policy developed for the Front Door. It should be read in conjunction with this policy

Eligibility & access to homelessness support services

The Front Doors and their Outposts are the only point of access and assessment for clients seeking entry into the homelessness service system in the Outer SMR of Melbourne. In the best interests of client pathways through the service system it is expected that:

- 'Homelessness service system crisis providers will be obliged to accept referrals made from the Front Door staff whenever a vacancy exists for support or support and accommodation;
- Transitional services will be obliged to accept referrals from the crisis services (and on a few occasions those from the Front Door) when a vacancy exists for support or support and accommodation; and
- Front Door staff are aware that in the interests of 'duty of care' toward clients already housed by crisis support services or transitional housing support

services that there will be some occasions when referrals may not be accepted by the homelessness service system.

Referrals to crisis support

There is a shared understanding by staff at the Front Doors and Crisis Support providers that in most instances referrals to crisis services from the Front Doors will be made on behalf of those clients currently being held by the Front Doors in short-term support arrangements. Where vacancies in crisis accommodation services in the region have been identified client's referrals into these services will be:

- Well coordinated between Front Doors and their outposts and the Crisis service providers; and
- When their referral has been accepted by the crisis service (i.e. after three way conversation between Front Doors and Crisis provider) they will be well advised as to the details of the service they have been referred to.

NB: The referral process is documented in greater detail in the 'Filling vacancies" policy developed for the Front Door. It should be read in conjunction with this policy

OoH segmented waiting list applications

- The Front Door staff will not complete applications for OoH Priority Housing segments 1 & 2 for clients presenting at the Front Door unless the Front Door is currently working with these clients in a 'short term support' capacity and they are in a position to collect and document all that is required for these applications. Otherwise it is expected that this work will be carried out by support workers in the homelessness service system; and
- The Front Door staff will assist presenting clients with applications for segment 3 & 4 where this is seen as appropriate based on the available time and or relevant knowledge of the client's circumstance.

Geographical issues

- The Front Doors have been set up to service the needs of those in the outer SMR and as such those with links to the region will be prioritised. Supportive referrals will be made on behalf of those clearly linked to other regions. Where clients have no links to specific regions because they have been itinerant for some time or require a new opportunity in a different region to that from which they came, the Front Door will work with them to find suitable solutions.

Holistic client focused responses

- In recognition that people are 'experts in their own lives' service users are treated as individuals and as such will require individual responses and solutions to their housing problems. Consequently the role of staff at the Front Doors is to problem-solve, present options, choices and advice, not to enforce compliance;
- The Front Doors recognise that homelessness is a process and thus is often associated with other problems and issues for the client. CHART recognises this through the assessment framework that it provides. Front Door staff will

endeavour to complete all appropriate parts of CHART so as to provide an holistic approach to referrals; and

- Clients presenting with 'complex' or 'high needs' will be assessed comprehensively through CHART such that the referrals emerging from this process are both appropriate and well informed. Such referrals can increase the likelihood of acceptance by services.

Staff flexibility & accountability

- In recognition of the demand on the homelessness service system, Front Door staff will be encouraged to think laterally to find effective and at times innovative solutions to clients' homelessness issues. The sharing of such solutions between the Front Doors is also strongly encouraged; and
- Whilst Front Door staff are provided with a level of flexibility around their decision making so that they can best meet the ever present demands of service users at the Front Doors, it is expected that all decisions are well documented, thus meeting accountability standards.

Review

In order to track and respond to demand on the homelessness service system over time it is necessary to:

- Engage in regular discussion of the demand management practices and their impact on service users, the service system and the Front Door staff;
- Conduct a regular analysis of statistics collected by the Front Doors across target groups along with staff knowledge of the issues for clients presenting at the Front Doors and the types of solutions found; and
- Conduct formal reviews at fixed points in the implementation of the new model.

Privacy, confidentiality and the transfer of information

June 2006

PRINCIPLE:

Privacy and confidentiality policy and procedures for those accessing homelessness services are well documented and utilised by the Front Door agencies.

The intention of this aspect of this policy is to address the central role that the Front Doors will provide as initial entry points to the Outer SMR homelessness service system. This fundamental shift in practice will result in a greater requirement for the sharing of client information between agencies. The collection, storage and sharing of this information must be performed in ways that uphold clients' rights to privacy and confidentiality.

The following guidelines are to be read in conjunction with those policies already in place in services managing the Front Doors.

GUIDELINES

Consent

- Clients must be informed about the role of the Front Door at the commencement of the entry screening & assessment process;
- Consent must be obtained prior to a client being referred to another agency or service or the sharing of any client information with another agency, service or individual. Consent requires that the service user understands what is being consented to and for what purpose. Also consent must be provided regarding the specific use of the information, the consent must be current and the information is freely given. A consent form constitutes part of the Front Door CHART. The Consent form is attached in *Appendix 1*;
- Clients must be made aware as to how their information is stored by the Front Door and how they are able to access it;
- Clients must be fully informed as to who has access to client information and what information is collected for NDCA requirements; and
- Clients who do not wish to provide consent must be made aware that this could limit their pathways and access to some services.

Collection of information from service users

- A private interview room will be used for assessments and the collection of other necessary client information for CHART;
- The privacy of clients must be maintained when client information is collected via the telephone;

- Client information is collected on a 'need to know basis' to satisfy the requirements of CHART and for finding solutions to their presenting circumstances or issues. Some information disclosed by clients may not be required for entry into CHART; and
- It will still be necessary to maintain 'hard copy' files of original client consent forms and for those clients that make HEF applications.

Transferring client information

- As for the collection of service user information, the transfer of information is also based on a 'need to know' basis;
- Client information can only be transferred with the prior consent of the client except in cases involving duty of care and/or protective concerns;
- If a client referral is accepted by an agency, then additional information other than CHART can be provided with client consent (eg. Client case notes); and
- Front Door staff will seek a response from the agency that has been the target of a client referral within 24 hours of the referral being made.

Storing client information

- Client information will be electronically stored on a centralised database and access to that information is restricted to 'approved users'. 'Approved users' includes staff at any of the Front Doors or Outposts that are responding to the needs of the client. Recipients of 'client approved' referrals outside of the Outer SMR Front Door system will be provided with faxed referral information, but will not have access to the database;
- In order to ensure the confidentiality of client information, Front Door staff are required to logout when their computer will be left unattended or the system will automatically logout after a period of inactivity; and
- Client Information must be stored for 7 years and in the case of statutory clients, specific guidelines around the storing of their information must be adhered to.

Policy Note

Regular professional development and sound induction procedures are crucial to good practice in this area.

Responding to Family Violence

September 2005

PRINCIPLE

Whilst the integrated family violence service system will respond directly to the majority of women and children experiencing and/or escaping family violence (FV), there will be some instances when women and children experiencing violence will present at one of the Front Doors. In these scenarios it is important that Front Door staff are sensitive to the needs of these service users and are well versed in the procedures and access arrangements for entry into the FV Crisis Protection system. This policy sits inside current agency practice in responding to service users that are experiencing FV.

Accordingly, the focus of this policy is on ensuring that women and children that present at a Front Door are then transferred into the FV service system by Front Door staff in a sensitive, seamless and timely manner that respects privacy, safety and security issues for the client and the worker.

The specific practice guidelines developed for the Front Doors include:

GUIDELINES

Entry screening

It is necessary to identify as quickly as possible at the time of Initial contact with the Front Door, those service users that are requiring FV assistance and in particular whether or not they have any immediate safety concerns. These service users are to be given priority and the following steps undertaken immediately:

- Assess if an interpreter is required and arrange one if necessary;
- Assess the level of immediate risk to the mother and children;
- Transfer the mother and children to an interview room as soon as possible or a safe location in the event of a security risk;
- Alert other staff to possible security concerns and contact police in the event of any identified security risks; and
- Provide support and information for the service user about Family Violence services and seek consent to refer them immediately to the South East Family Violence Crisis Service.

Coordination

- Staff will need to be well informed about the referral procedures & information required by FV services to which they are referring and also make these processes clear to the client; and

- In particular where special referral protocols and procedures have been established with local FV services, these must be followed.

Accompanying children (see Accompanying Children Policy for further detail)

- For those scenarios where a transfer to a FV service is not able to be made quickly then an assessment regarding the safety and immediate needs of the child or children is to be made with the parent (including the possible notification of the child to DHS Protective Services if any abuse or neglect is suspected); and
- Appropriate referrals for the child could be made with parental consent. Additionally a secondary consultation to the children's worker can also be made although only in the event that this type of support is not available through the FV service.

After hours access

Women and children experiencing and/or escaping Family Violence (FV) who present by phone or in person to the Front Doors 'after hours' will be assisted by the Robinson St Crisis Service & will be referred directly to the South East Family Violence Crisis Service. (Please see 'after hours' policy). The following procedure will be set in place to assist this occurrence:

- At 5.30pm Monday to Friday staff at the Front Doors will divert the telephones across to the telephone number of the Robinson St Crisis Service;
- At 9.00am Monday to Friday staff at the Font Doors will divert the phones back to the number for the Front Doors; and
- Outposts of the Front Doors will advise women experiencing and /or escaping FV to contact the Robinson St Crisis Service 'after hours' by calling their free call 1800 number.

Working with perpetrators of violence

- The Front Door can provide assessments for and make referrals into the homelessness service system on behalf of 'perpetrators of violence', however not at the expense of another person's sense of security and safety; and
- A Front Door worker will not knowingly work with both victim and perpetrator at any one time.

Policy note

These practices require cross-reference to the agencies general policies that specifically relate to:

- Client rights (including confidentiality & privacy and rights based approaches);
- Supervision;
- Safety and security for clients (including facilities & safety systems);
- Accompanying Children; and
- 'After Hours' Access.

Training and Induction Recommendations

June 2006

PRINCIPLE

The Front Doors & Outposts in Dandenong and Frankston are a new development for the Outer SMR homelessness service system. Accordingly the establishment of an effective and consistent response across all of the Front Doors and Outposts will require those staff members that are to be employed at the Front Doors & Outposts to undergo an extensive induction program that also incorporates a component of formal training.

Whilst induction and training initiatives for staff are common to most homelessness service providers, this policy addresses those aspects that relate specifically to the Front Doors. The policy is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive but rather offers a guide to training and induction provision for the Front Doors. Like all policy it will need to be reviewed and updated over time.

GUIDELINES

In general the induction processes for new staff employed at the Front Doors will be the responsibility of the host organisations. Given the new nature of the roles and the structure, specific attention will be paid to the new incumbents' job descriptions, responsibilities and expectations both as part of the induction process and the formal training.

The guidelines that follow address the formal training program requirements as the training program will bring together appropriate staff from all of the organisations that are involved in the implementation of the Front Doors and Outposts. Involving staff representatives from the different services in combined training sessions will maximise opportunities for networking and the enhancement of relationships and an understanding of each other's organisations.

Staff involved in training & induction

The staff that will be involved include the following:

- All Front Door staff (specialist intake & assessment workers, limited crisis support workers) and their managers from both the Dandenong and Frankston locations;
- All frontline Outpost staff and managers at Rosebud, Cranbourne, Narre Warren, and Pakenham;
- All Robinson Street Crisis Service 'After Hours' staff and managers; and
- Others that the Front Door managers identify.

Training areas

The key areas identified for staff training at the Front Doors are to ensure:

- A clear understanding of roles and the accompanying expectations of staff;
- A comprehensive knowledge of Front Door Policies & Procedures and Organisational Policies & Procedures;
- A comprehensive understanding of CHART and the use of the electronic tool;
- A sound knowledge of services, including what they offer and referral processes (inside and outside homelessness service system) and resources in the local area;
- A general knowledge of policy context for the homelessness service sector and the Front Doors including HAS, HEF guidelines, Charter of Rights, Grievance Procedures for service users and The Children's Act;
- Competence with undertaking 'risk assessments'; and
- Consistent approaches to the management of challenging clients.

Training timetable

- The initial training program will need to be provided twice so that there can be adequate staff coverage at each of the Front Door services whilst training takes place. However the emphasis will still be on ensuring staff representation from across the services within each of the training programs;
- The timing of the initial training program for Front Door staff is important so it is expected that the training of relevant staff will occur not more than six weeks prior to implementation of the new Front Doors & Outposts and not less than two weeks prior;
- It is envisaged that the initial training session for staff may require up to two days of staff time; and
- More specialist training will need to be provided from time to time for specific staff at the Front Doors on an 'as needs' basis and this will be negotiated between the relevant services.

Training program

The following requirements are necessary for the establishment and implementation of a training program:

- The provision of funding by SMR DHS to meet the costs of both the development of the staff training package and its implementation; and
- The recognition that staff learn in different ways and hence the need for the training program to provide for a variety of learning styles; and
- An appropriately qualified and experienced training organisation will be contracted by the OSHSSD Steering Committee to develop and implement the training package. The development of the training package will require the training organisation to consult with representatives from WAYSS, PYFS and Hanover South East.

Review & evaluation

These new training guidelines and the training package developed must be reviewed after implementation to ensure that the training provided has been both relevant and effective to the needs of staff at the Front Doors. It is therefore important to include the following processes:

- Bring key Front Door staff, including managers together over the first fortnight of operations to consult where training gaps and problems may have arisen and respond to these accordingly; and
- Continue communications and protocol developments with the homelessness service sector and the other relevant sectors to ensure that Front Door staff training has adequately provided for the liaison and information transfer with the other parts of the service system in Outer SMR.

Young People

June 2006

PRINCIPLES

Young people aged 18 or under who are 'at risk' of homelessness or who are homeless will present in person or by phone to the Front Doors or their outposts. However it should be noted that the Front Doors are not intended to be the primary entry point to the youth homelessness service system in the Outer SMR nor the primary provider of assistance to young people. It is therefore important that the Front Doors are well linked to the youth sector both in the Outer SMR and to the statewide services. It is also important that there be a consistent response to young people across all sites.

Wherever possible, 'early intervention' frameworks will be employed by Front Door staff when youth present for assistance. Timely and appropriate interventions will be crucial to ensuring good outcomes for young people although many of these interventions will need to be provided by services outside the homelessness service sector. This will require that Front Door staff be well versed in the early intervention initiatives that are available to young people in the Outer SMR as well as statewide programs.

It must be acknowledged that housing pathways for young people are very limited and many such as caravan parks, motels and rooming houses are not appropriate for this target group. Those that are appropriate such as youth refuges or transitional housing are very limited in capacity. These factors combined with the limited life experience and vulnerability of young people necessitate the provision of higher levels of support by Front Door staff to assist these young people to find suitable housing solutions.

These guidelines will need to be reviewed in relation to any developments that emerge from the VHS 'Youth Action Plan' and as such may change according to initiatives or programs implemented as part of this. Additionally these guidelines should be read in conjunction with other Front Door policies, in particular Demand Management and Filling Vacancies. The guidelines are as follows:

Guidelines

Initial contact

Young people may be referred to the Front Doors by friends, family, school staff, other youth providers or present on their own. It is very important that Front Door & Outpost staff responds them to in a timely and appropriate manner in accordance with the following:

- Wherever possible young people presenting either by phone or in person at the Front Doors are to be immediately directed to those staff employed in the 'short term limited support roles', because of the likelihood that they will

require higher levels of support during the assessment and development of a response to their needs;

- When young people present either by phone or in person to the Outposts they are to be assisted by those staff employed in 'transitional youth housing and support roles', allowing greater time to be spent assessing and responding to the needs of the young person;
- The Common Housing Assessment Referral Tool (CHART) developed for the Outer SMR Front Doors will provide the framework for screening and assessment of young people's needs as per all other 'service users'. The comprehensive collection of information is necessary for identifying the most appropriate options that can be actioned for young people;
- This process of assessment although required to be comprehensive is to be undertaken in a sensitive and youth friendly manner. This might include completing CHART in stages, breaking for a cigarette or drink, having a young person's friend present, taking time to explain clearly the nature of the homelessness service system and related processes etc; and
- Wherever possible a young person's needs are to be responded to at the time they first present (rather than making an appointment for a later date), as this can foster their engagement and follow through.

Appointments

- Some flexibility is to be offered to young people around where the first appointment with Front Door staff is to occur. However due to the extensive nature of CHART and the interests of staff safety it is necessary that these appointments take place in an office environment, although this can include the Front Doors, schools or other services. Whilst a café may be appropriate for ongoing work it is not seen as suitable for the initial assessment of a young person; and
- In some circumstances it will be appropriate for partial initial assessments to take place over the telephone, so that appropriate information can be provided to a young person. In those instances when another organisation such as a school makes contact on behalf of the young person, it will be more useful to ensure that the referrer is adequately resourced so that they can make a direct referral to a youth specific service.

Responding to young people

As previously mentioned young people should be treated with sensitivity and in a 'youth friendly' way to ensure opportunities for engagement. It must be remembered by Front Door staff that young people may be homeless for the first time and possibly experiencing significant anxiety about contacting the Front Door for assistance particularly when they have had no experience with the homelessness service system. Front Door staff will need to ensure the following:

- That Front Door processes, services, rights and responsibilities are explained clearly in simple language to young people using the Front Doors; and
- Interpreters should be organised for those young people from CaLD backgrounds when necessary.

Housing options or pathways

- Wherever possible young people should be accommodated within their local areas so as to keep them connected to their friends, families, schools and other important connections:
- It is generally not seen as appropriate or safe to accommodate young people in caravans, rooming houses or motels: and
- Front Door staff must endeavour to explore all available options to identify those that best meet the needs of the young person.

Links & referral

Front Door staff in the limited support roles will require well established links to youth specific services both with in the Outer SMR and in Melbourne more generally and will make assisted referrals to these services.

Youth statewide services such as Melbourne Youth Support Services (MYSS) and Stopover Youth Refuge will be frequently used and therefore organisational protocols will need to be established for ease of access. Some of the other key links that will need to be developed or enhanced by Front Door staff will include:

- The statewide Family Reconciliation & Mediation Projects (FRMP);
- Outer SMR Reconnect Projects;
- SMR DHS Child Protection;
- Outer SMR Centrelink(s)
- SMR Youth Employment & Training Initiative (YETI); and
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

After hours

It is not seen as appropriate for the Robinson St Crisis Service to support young people when specialist youth support services are available. In general the following will occur:

- Young people who contact the Front Doors out of hours will be directed to the Robinson St Crisis Service for assistance and then referred onto Melbourne Youth Support Service or Stopover Youth Refuge if they are seen to be appropriate for these services; and
- If the Robinson St Crisis Service assesses their needs as inappropriate for these services then they will be referred back to the Front Doors for assistance at commencement of the next working day.

(Please see After Hours Policy for further detail and information)

Outposts

- Where possible Transitional accommodation and support staff based at the Outposts may be able to offer some limited support to young people who present for assistance in their locations. In these circumstances once assessed via CHART these young people may be referred to the most

appropriate local service option available or onto suitable statewide services;
and

- Where the support to young people is not available at a designated outpost these young people will be referred onto the closest Front Door for assessment and assistance.