

***FIRST DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION***  
***3 JUNE 2002***

**Department of Human Services / Health,  
Housing and Community Sectors**

**Partnership Agreement**



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**Preamble**

This Partnership Agreement represents a significant milestone in the ongoing relationship between the Department of Human Services and health, housing and community service organisations in Victoria. Representatives of the Department of Human Services and peak bodies for the health, housing and community services sectors have developed the Agreement jointly.

The Partnership Agreement has been developed in recognition of the mutual reliance between the Department and the service delivery organisations it funds. It recognises the importance of the strength of that relationship in ensuring effective public policy and best service outcomes for all Victorians. It acknowledges the respective strengths of both partners.

The Partnership Agreement is intended to provide an overarching statement, which encompasses planning processes, program agreements, service and funding agreements and review processes. It is consistent with the broad parameters of the government policy framework – ‘Growing Victoria Together’. As such it is a living document, which will be reviewed and, if necessary, amended from time to time.

All parties to this Agreement are committed to ensuring that this represents a new stage in the relationship between government and the health, housing and community sectors. It is an expression of our joint commitment to best possible human service outcomes for the people of Victoria.

Signed:.....

Signed:.....

Name:

Name:

Title:

Title:

Date:

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this Partnership Agreement is to affirm agreed expectations of a working relationship between the Victorian Department of Human Services and the independent health, housing and community service organisations that it funds. It recognises that the Department and service organisations have legitimate differences in governance and roles and responsibilities. However the Department and the health, housing and community services sectors share an overriding common objective, which is to achieve best possible outcomes from the provision of services to the people of Victoria. A key purpose of this document, therefore, is to present a statement of the vision, values and goals which the Department and funded organisations hold in common, and to support a shared approach to developing more effective working arrangements between the Department and the sectors it funds.

### **Vision**

A vision for the future of human service delivery in Victoria assumes the sustainable existence of robust and resilient health, housing and community sectors working in a dynamic partnership with responsive and effective government agencies.

The following assumptions underpin the vision:

- It is assumed that the health, housing and community organisations in the sector will continue to represent their communities of interest and advocate for their interests and needs.
- It is assumed that government will administer public funds and address program development in accordance with the policies of the elected parliament of the day and in accordance with existing statutes and regulations.
- It is assumed that in a complex and ever more rapidly changing society where existing and emerging needs far outstrip available funds and resources, that there need to be mutually agreed processes for planning, developing and delivering health, housing and community services, which are based on the principles of sustainability. An approach based on sustainability which assumes a commitment to long term planning and outcomes, together with a wide view of environmental impact, has the potential to deliver the most effective use of resources, and indeed may free up resources that are currently inappropriately utilized by either partner.
- It is assumed that the interests of Victorians are best served by a participative working relationship between the Department and the health, housing and community services sector, on these processes.

**Such an approach will incorporate agreed values, a mutual respect for the roles and responsibilities of government and the health, housing and community sector, a commitment to participate and adhere to agreed processes for policy development, planning, resource allocation, and service monitoring and review, and accountability. It would recognise the importance of taking the long-term view as well as responding to immediate and urgent need. It would recognise that social and environmental outcomes are as important as financial outcomes.**

**The ultimate vision is for service provision that supports a democratic, fair, accountable body of services, which accommodate and value diversity, which address the particular needs of vulnerable and marginalised people, which recognise regional and rural differences and which contribute demonstrable high quality outcomes in accordance with agreed standards. Service provision will contribute to maintaining an inclusive Victoria where all people are enabled to participate in their community and to lead purposeful lives.**

### **Shared Values and Principles**

This Agreement, consistent with whole of government directions for Victoria, and at the forefront of worldwide trends in sustainable service planning and administration, and informed by the vision for the future of human services in Victoria as described above, endorses the following as shared values and principles:

Above all else, we are committed to the delivery of high quality health, housing and community services needed by the people of Victoria

### **Values**

In the delivery of quality services we are committed to act ethically and in accordance with a shared set of values that translate into behaviour as an endorsed set of values. These values will underpin expectations of mutual respect in all exchanges between the Department and the health, housing and community services sectors. The health, housing and community services sectors have a body of implicit values. These should be explicitly stated and form part of the commitment to shared values in this Partnership.

### **Environments**

We recognise that we operate in a complex environment in which the needs of Victorian communities and individuals are constantly changing, and in which best practice is evolving through findings of research, innovation and ongoing development of organisational policy and practice and changing technology. In such an environment policy, planning and program development will be based on collaboration between the Department and the health, housing and community services sectors. This will occur at all levels, i.e. statewide across all programs, at program level, at regional level, and sub-regional level.

### **Transparency**

Organisations can best be sustainable if they measure, monitor and account for their use of resources and know their impact across social, environmental and financial arenas. This calls for high quality governance committed to requiring high standards of management; trained and well supported managers who are committed to high standards of service delivery and accountability; provision of infrastructure which will deliver information and sustain administration in accordance with current community standards (this includes IT hardware, software and support), administrative processes which support efficient and open communication and which minimise risk. These elements are recognised as underpinning direct and open transparency by both the Department and funded organisations

We will be accountable for the use of all resources.

We will participate in agreed regular measures of our shared work to improve the administration of human services in Victoria.

We support evidence based practice and will participate in research innovation and ongoing development of organisational policy .

We are committed to two way consultation and communication in the planning development and delivery of health, housing and community services in Victoria.

### **Life Cycle**

We recognise that the changing needs of Victorians for health, housing and community services will be affected by major shifts in demography, by changes in social and cultural life, by worldwide developments in technology, standards, and ideologies, by a range of cost factors affecting the delivery of services, and by the expectations of Victorians. Sustainable practices will recognise the interplay of these factors and will accept the importance of expeditious and planned change to programs and services.

We are committed to planning and administrative processes which recognise the long-term impact of human services, and which seek to maximise the potential of all Victorians, and minimise or mitigate known risks.

We acknowledge the importance of balancing short-term accountability and long-term investment in social capital. Specifically, we acknowledge that the Department must work within the annual budget cycles of government, but that legitimate service needs do not always fit within government cycles, and may extend over years or indeed a lifetime.

We recognise that service models have a life cycle and need to be reviewed, updated or replaced in the light of better alternatives.

We acknowledge that when current needs are met or decline, that resources should be redirected to new needs through accountable planning and decision-making processes.

We acknowledge the benefits of diversity.

### **Partnerships**

We acknowledge that successful organisations operate in a web of relationships that extend their 'reach'. Funding bodies and funded bodies are important partners and must share a commitment to values and outcomes. Partnership implies equal status on the matters over which the partnership exists. For the purposes of this agreement, the health, housing and community services sectors acknowledge the responsibilities of government in relation to administering legislation and the policy of the government of the day, the Department acknowledges the particular expertise of the health, housing and community services sectors as advocates of community need and as service providers.

It is acknowledged that the Department and funded agencies have an important partnership relationship in provision of statutory services, involving shared duty of care, shared risk management and shared public accountability

### **Time**

The relationship between the Department and the health, housing and community sectors is affected by the timeliness of a range of transactions. The respective needs for accountability for the use of public funds, and certainty of the availability of funds must be acknowledged. We agree that achieving a closer match between the two should be a major goal intrinsically and in order to achieve better working relationships between the Department and the health, housing and community sectors.

Beyond transactional matters it is recognised that successful organisations commit significant effort in planning five, ten, twenty or fifty years ahead in order to meet major goals.

We believe that the partners to this agreement should work together on a long-term sustainability strategy for health, housing and community services for Victoria. We see this as a vehicle to drive the delivery of the most appropriate quality human services in Victoria.

### **Governance**

The independence of health, housing and community service organisations as legal entities is recognised. Funded organisations are agencies of government only to the degree that they deliver services in accordance with funding and service agreements. Therefore, in order for health, housing and community service organisations to deliver best standards of services and meet their obligations to the Victorian community for duty of care, the highest possible standards of governance must apply. Governance must be consistent, sustained, ethical, skilled and accountable. The Department will support the continuing development of good governance.

We are committed to continuous improvement in all aspects of governance and management, recognising that we act in trust for present and future generations of Victorians in the delivery of human services.

## **The Partners: Defining the Relationship**

### **The Department of Human Services**

The mission of the Department of Human Services is to enhance and protect the health and well being of all Victorians, emphasizing vulnerable groups and those most in need.

In relation to a range of health and welfare services, the Department allocates funds for the provision of services by non-government organizations, government related agencies and Local Government. In disability services, child protection, juvenile justice and public rental housing, the Department is a direct service provider.

The Department is responsible for the effective administration of a range of legislation and regulation, and for the implementation of the policies of the government of the day. In partnership with key stakeholders, the Department undertakes policy and program development, and strategic planning. It administers funds for service delivery, administers processes for accountability of organisations in

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receipt of funds from the Department, and in turn is accountable to central agencies and government for its activities.

The Department aspires to five key organisational values, which inform how the Department goes about doing its business and affirm the importance of a partnership approach:

- Client Focus: working towards improving the health and wellbeing of clients and community
- Professional Integrity: treating all people with dignity and respect
- Quality: always striving to do its best and improve the things it does
- Collaborative Relationships: working together to achieve better results
- Responsibility: commitment to actions taken to achieve the best possible outcomes for clients and community.

Achievement of the Department's responsibilities is dependent on the delivery of services by the health housing and community services sectors.

Accordingly the Department of Human Services will:

- Acknowledge its commitment to a strong and effective health, housing and community sector
- Acknowledge the value, autonomy and contribution made by the health, housing and community sector and promotes this in a positive way across government and in the wider community
- Recognise the role that peak bodies play in advocating for their constituencies and in providing their members with services to improve the quality of service delivery.
- Recognise the importance of sustainability and long term planning to the capacity of the health, housing and community sectors to deliver quality services
- Actively work with and involve the health, housing and community sectors in planning, policy development, program development, research, innovation and evaluation to ensure that these processes work for the community and to use the expertise and knowledge of the health, housing and community sectors. Ensure that collaborative forums exist at all levels between the Department and the health, housing and community sectors.
- In accordance with its commitment to accountability and open government, to make decision-making processes transparent and accessible, to make decisions public.
- Strive for high standards of management and decision-making including evidence based policy and evaluation and monitoring of outcomes

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- Adopt a consistent system of administration of funding and service agreements, their monitoring and evaluation, and the use of a central IT system
- Work towards the provision of access to basic IT for all funded organisations including basic hardware, software and helpdesk support so that all agencies and the Department can communicate by email and can administer funding and service agreements electronically.
- Replace annual funding and service agreements with a three-year rolling agreement for organisations in receipt of recurrent funding.
- The Department will continue to make quality improvement a major focus of its own management services and programs, including, specifically, timeliness of financial payments, and will support continuous improvement in health and community services organisations' governance and management

### **Health, Housing and Community Service Sectors**

The health, housing and community sectors exist to meet a diverse range of needs in the most responsive way. The health, housing and community services organisations' particular characteristic is that they exist as independent bodies which are accountable in accordance with their constitutions to their constituencies, to the wider community, to donors and funding bodies and to their peers/sector. Organisations work within the requirements of legislation, regulation, program parameters, and professional standards.

There are over 2,700 organisations in Victoria, which receive funds from the Department of Human Services. They form an extremely diverse group, ranging from the very large, with budgets of several hundred million dollars, employing hundreds of staff and having many different interfaces with the Department, to very small organisations, which may employ only one staff member, and are largely run by volunteers.

Accordingly the health, housing and community services sectors:

- Will recognise the importance of working with the Department to achieve positive outcomes in the community. As such they will seek to understand and respect the roles and responsibilities of government, communicate openly and constructively with the Department
- Commit to working constructively and collaboratively with the Department in policy development and program planning, review, research, innovation and evaluation
- Will participate jointly in a high level forum to be chaired by the Secretary of the Department to oversight matters undertaken through partnership
- Will strive for excellence and quality outcomes in service delivery, and in governance and management of organisations

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- Will actively involve consumers in the planning, delivery (including quality improvement), and review of services
- Promote improvements in services through innovation, research, innovation, evaluation and commitment to effective service outcomes

### **Partnership Commitments**

Partners to this agreement will:

- Commit to ensure that an agreed set of values is reflected in all behaviour, with each other and with service recipients and the wider community.
- Work together to achieve improved accountability tools, in the first instance exploring the applicability of triple bottom line reporting. This involves being accountable for financial, environmental and social impacts in accordance with an agreed framework and measures.
- Work together to achieve universal IT communication by ensuring that all DHS funded organisations have basic computer equipment, and software and access to a helpdesk, with the expectation that all can be communicated with electronically.
- Work together to achieve a consistent service agreement system based on Funded Agency Channel, with agreed single frequencies for reporting and turnaround of funding and service agreements.
- Achieve three year rolling funding for funded programs.
- Work together to achieve distribution of funds early in the funding cycle so that funded bodies are able to conform to annual plans and budgets, and accountancy standards. Where there is lack of clarity regarding the nature of payments made, to ensure that all financial transactions are clearly tagged with the payment purpose and service/program source.
- Work together to develop a sustainable strategy for health, housing and community services for Victoria.
- Participate in research, innovation and ongoing development of organisational policy and practice that supports evidence-based practice in health, housing and community services
- Participate collaboratively in forums ranging from a high level cross program partnership forum convened twice a year by the Secretary of the Department, to oversight all work of the Partnership Agreement, to forums at program and regional levels, which would address service planning and coordination issues.

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- Participate in the development, administration, interpretation and follow up of an annual agency satisfaction survey.
- Establish a partnership secretariat and other appropriate processes, to service the partnership agreement activities.
- Participate from time to time in reviews of the partnership agreement and updates of its work program.

**Monitoring of the Agreement**

The Partnership Forum will oversee the partnership agreement. This Forum will also deal with any perceived breaches of this agreement.

In addition review of progress of the agreement will occur as part of the Department's report to Parliament, will be incorporated into key performance indicators (KPIs) for senior departmental staff, and the results of the annual agency satisfaction survey will be reported on Funded Agency Channel.

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**Contact**

We would welcome your comments on the *Partnership Agreement Department of Human Services/Health, Housing and Community Sector First Draft* by

**Friday 26 July 2002.**

Comments from health, housing and community sector organisations can be forwarded through your peak organisation, or directly, to Kate Redwood either by email at the address below or to

VCOSS  
6/130 Little Collins Street  
Melbourne 3000

Department of Human Services staff can contribute to the formal response from their Division or Region, and may also forward individual responses to:

Sandy Forbes,  
Director, Policy Projects,  
5/555 Collins Street  
Melbourne 3000

For more information please contact: Kate Redwood (for health, housing and community sector agencies) 0419 515 259 or via email at [kate.redwood@vcoss.org.au](mailto:kate.redwood@vcoss.org.au)

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