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Department of Social Services

Reconnect Program
Operational Guidelines
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Version 2

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Version Control

Version	Changes	Approved by	Date
1	New version	Stewart Thomas Branch Manager Housing Programs and Homelessness Department of Social Services	3 July 2018
2	Updated	Rob Stedman Branch Manager Housing and Homelessness Program Delivery Department of Social Services	20 June 2023

Key changes in Version 2

Page	Change
All	Minor changes made throughout the document
16-19	Re-define 'Group work' and 'Unidentified client' in-line with Data Exchange reporting
20	Inclusion of Critical Incident Reporting
20	Inclusion of Child Safe Practices
21	Data Exchange Partnership Approach – updated
22	Stocktake report, changed to Activity Work Plan
24	Budget section updated and moved to Section 4
25-26	Updating glossary of key terms

1. Introduction

The Reconnect Operational Guidelines 2023-2026 ('Guidelines') provide the operational framework for Reconnect service providers in the implementation and administration of the Reconnect program.

These Guidelines provide the basis for the service delivery of Reconnect and should be read in conjunction with the funding arrangements under which payments to deliver Reconnect services are made.

The Guidelines include:

- The purpose of Reconnect
- The role and expectations of Reconnect services providers
- Information pertinent to the successful delivery of Reconnect

The Department of Social Services ('the Department') reserves the right to amend these Guidelines from time to time, by whatever means it may determine at its absolute discretion, provided the changes are consistent with the Standing Grant Agreement. The Department will provide reasonable notice of these amendments.

The Department will ensure the most current version of the Guidelines is available on the Department's Reconnect website (www.dss.gov.au/reconnect).

It is the responsibility of each Reconnect service provider to ensure they are familiar with the content and requirements of these Guidelines.

2. Overview

Reconnect was established in 1998 as a response to youth homelessness, following a 2-year pilot Youth Homelessness Project.

Reconnect is a community-based early intervention and prevention program for young people aged 12 to 18 years (or 12 to 21 years in the case of newly arrived youth) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. For a definition of early intervention for the Reconnect program, please refer to [Section 8.2](#) Expanded definitions of key terms.

Reconnect is a long-standing program and recognised as contributing to better outcomes that improve the lives of vulnerable young Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Reconnect services provide counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to the whole family, to help prevent homelessness from occurring. Reconnect service providers also purchase other services to meet the individual needs of clients, such as specialised mental health services.

Reconnect workers use a range of interventions and strategies with a young person and their whole family, to deliver timely intervention. Examples of approaches typically used by Reconnect workers include:

- assessment and goal setting
- case management
- referral
- advocacy
- counselling (individual and family)
- mediation
- group work
- outreach
- practical support
- brokerage
- therapies (individual and family)
- collaboration with other services (specialists, community stakeholders and networks)

2.1. Outcomes, aims and objectives

Reconnect is intended to help young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to stabilise and improve their housing situation, achieve family reconciliation (wherever practicable and safe) and improve their level of engagement with education, training, employment and the community.

Reconnect objectives include:

- young people re-engage or strengthen their engagement with education or training, employment and community, including through:
 - increased school attendance
 - finishing school or training
 - increased social connectedness, such as with sporting groups
 - improved employment opportunities
- family reconciliation, wherever practicable and safe, between young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and their family includes:
 - the young person returns home (wherever practicable and safe)
 - ongoing positive family relationships are created which provide the young person with emotional and physical support
 - conflict is reduced or managed more positively
 - reconciling the young person with other family members, for example with grandparents or siblings

- parent(s) and the young person both accepting that growing and developing independence is appropriate for the young person
- establishing a viable support system for the independent young person that includes a member of their family
- fewer entries into homelessness including:
 - preventing homelessness
 - fewer young people end up homeless
 - effective early intervention for people who have recently been homeless
 - more young people in safe, secure and stable housing
- improved wellbeing and mental health including:
 - improved sense of self and positive self-worth
 - young people are more resilient, feel supported and are self sufficient

3. Operation of Reconnect

3.1. Reconnect Good Practice Principles

In delivering early intervention and prevention services to meet the aims of the Reconnect program, Reconnect service providers are expected to comply with the following Good Practice Principles, and must ensure Child Safe policy and practice ([Section 3.2](#)) is part of their organisation's culture, and actively embedded and reflected in all service activity.

Client-centred

Reconnect services provide assistance to clients which is based on their individual needs, and deliver flexible services that can adapt to the needs of both young people and their families. Some key features of client-centred services include:

- solutions-based goal setting with the client, which provides skills to deal with both current and future situations
- establishing trust and rapport with clients, through demonstrating a genuine commitment to helping young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families, and a capacity to relate to them with dignity and respect
- linking participants with a range of supports and ensuring they are referred to appropriate services; brokerage funds may enable a service to respond creatively by purchasing specific services
- assisting young people to develop creative solutions to their problems
- advocating for young people in a service system environment
- promoting ethical behaviour and anti-discriminatory practice that treats young people, family and staff with dignity and respect

Where Reconnect workers are using clinical interventions such as counselling or individual / family therapy, the worker would be expected to have a requisite qualification.

Accessible

Reconnect services should be accessible and visible to the client in their local community. Some key features of accessible services include:

- promotional material which is sensitive in the language it uses, to avoid clients being perceived as 'problem subjects'
- responses by Reconnect workers within 24-48 hours can decrease the possibility of young people leaving or being excluded from the family home
- outreach, for example through offering assistance in a place that clients are most comfortable, such as meeting them in a café or youth centre, can help reduce the stigma people may feel about accessing a 'welfare' service
- offering client-centred, safe, culturally appropriate, and trauma informed services

Sustainable

Reconnect services should empower clients and their families to make positive and sustainable choices towards their goals. Some key features of sustainability include:

- empowering the client to achieve more sustainable outcomes
- strengths-based practice that recognises and builds on the client's capabilities and strengths and encouraging them to build resilience in striving towards goals despite setbacks
- empowering communities by increasing local understanding of what is happening for young people and families, and providing information to assist solutions and ways forward
- recognising a young person's identity is their strength
- using approaches which promote agency and are solutions-focused so clients gain increased control of their own lives
- equipping young people with resources to make decisions about their own lives
- developing knowledge of, and using existing local community resources

Relationship-based

Constructive working relationships between clients and Reconnect services are essential to effective interventions and strategies for addressing youth homelessness. Reconnect services should:

- allow their workers the autonomy to build and maintain safe and appropriate relationships with clients
- ensure workers have compassion, patience and an ability to empathise with clients

- ensure young people are connected to others, such as their family and community, and support the development of safe, appropriate and positive relationships
- build friendly and confidential relationships with clients
- recognise that trauma may have occurred in a young person's prior relationships, and that this may impact their behaviour

Collaborative

Reconnect services should use some of their time networking and developing effective working relationships with other services and schools, in order to facilitate a streamlined service system. Some key features of collaborating include:

- working with a range of core services including schools, community agencies, and specialist services (e.g. culturally-specific, drug, mental health, alcohol and health services)
- participating in relevant interagency networks including state and territory government services
- sharing information, where consent from the client has been obtained, to facilitate seamless referrals and improve services clients receive
- working in a collaborative case management context to support young people at risk
- partner with other organisations to improve outcomes for young people

Holistic

Reconnect services work with the understanding that problems are not isolated from other aspects of a client's life. Reconnect services should consider a client's situation in the context of education, family and community participation. Reconnect services should use a range of interventions and strategies with a young person and their whole family to prevent homelessness from occurring, including:

- working for the young person with families and other relevant people or groups
- providing assistance, where appropriate, to improve housing outcomes or stabilise living arrangements
- providing a 'tool box' of interventions such as counselling, group work, mediation, family meetings and practical assistance

Culturally and contextually competent

Reconnect service delivery requires a sensitive approach to cultural and contextual differences. Reconnect services should be informed by the different needs of clients and communities. Cultural considerations may include:

- language issues where translation and interpreters is required
- differences in First Nations communities and
- intersecting experiences of marginalisation creating diversity of experience within cultural groups

- different roles young people play within their families and differing cultural expectations family members may place on them
- differing expectations according to the age of the young person and differences between generations
- protective factors that already exist within communities, that can be used to support a young person
- effects of migration on families
- recognising the young person's refugee journey as a strength and a tool for building resilience
- the difference in the culture of the country of origin and the new culture which can cause conflict between parent and young person
- different experiences of young people who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community, and young people who are questioning their sexual orientation and gender identity

Contextual considerations may include:

- geographical location (metropolitan, regional or remote)
- distances to travel to access services and availability of public transport
- noting key issues affecting families in the community
- role and crossover that communities may play in the young person's family
- advocating for young people in a service system environment
- family composition and arrangements with people from diverse backgrounds can mean extra pressure on housing

Review and evaluate

Ongoing review and evaluation is important in ensuring that early intervention services are effective and responsive to the needs of participants. Established evaluation methods, for example by using implementation science or a Participatory Action Research approach, assist Reconnect service providers to provide flexible services. Building in regular feedback from participants and other agencies should enable adjustments to service delivery and have additional positive benefits, such as improvement of young people's situations.

3.2. Child Safe compliance

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the necessity for a national response to child safety and the need for organisations to provide an environment where children feel (and are) safe, protected and respected.

In response, the Australian Government introduced the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework (Framework) which sets out the minimum standards for creating and embedding a child safe culture and practices in Commonwealth entities.

One part of the Framework is for Commonwealth entities to impose child safe obligations on funding recipients through grant agreements. The Department includes Child Safe clauses in any grant that, in delivering the activity, may involve interaction with children.

Child Safe clauses articulate the requirements that funding recipients are to meet, committing them to their child safe obligations and driving better child safe outcomes. Child Safe clauses and the requirement for an annual Statement of Compliance against the Child Safe clause has been included in Reconnect grant agreements.

More information can be found on the Department's website (www.dss.gov.au/child-safety-for-dss-grants).

3.3. Critical incident reporting

All Reconnect service providers must notify the Department of critical incidents within 48 hours of incidents occurring, or within 48 hours of becoming aware of a critical incident occurring.

A critical incident is an alleged or substantiated incident involving a service provider's staff, clients and/or other relevant persons, for example subcontractors or family members. They include events that could significantly impact the current and/or future delivery of a program, including through reputational damage to a service provider or the Commonwealth.

More information can be found on the Department's website (www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-parenting-families-and-children-activity/critical-incident-reporting-guideline-and-form)

3.4. Reconnect target group

Reconnect service providers are funded to deliver services to young people aged 12 to 18 years (or 12 to 21 years for newly arrived youth) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Services must consider issues relating to obtaining consent from minors, and whether they need to obtain legal advice.

The Department must agree in writing to any change on previously agreed target groups/specialist approach (e.g. Indigenous, newly arrived youth or leaving detention).

Up to 10 per cent of a Reconnect service provider's participant caseload can be out-of-scope clients who are either outside the target group, including age range or who live outside of the funded geographic area, provided that expanding the scope of service in this way will not disadvantage eligible participants from accessing Reconnect services.

As soon as the out-of-scope client number is more than 10 per cent of the participant caseload, the Reconnect service provider should detail the rationale for focusing on this additional target group and obtain written approval from the Department to exceed the 10 per cent flexibility.

All Reconnect providers are able to provide support to eligible young people. The Reconnect program recognises some client groups have unique needs. Some Reconnect services offer specialised assistance and support to specific client groups. These groups are:

- First Nations Peoples
- LGBTIQ+
- Mental health
- Multicultural
- Newly arrived and refugee
- Young incarcerated women or young people with mothers who are incarcerated

Reconnect services that offer specialist services should ensure that 80 per cent of their caseload is made up from the specialist target group.

3.5. Length of support

As a guide, a typical early intervention engagement with a Reconnect service would be expected to average 3 to 4 months in length.

Early intervention in a Reconnect context refers to measures taken to assist a young person when they are at risk of homelessness, or as soon as possible after they become homeless, and their families.

Some Reconnect service providers offer midstream services, where the caseload will often require more complex support for clients who require case management over 6 months.

3.6. Referrals

Reconnect aims to improve collaboration between services to ensure young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families can access appropriate assistance from multiple entry points to services.

As part of the homelessness services system, Reconnect services are expected to work collaboratively with other services, such as schools, to increase the early intervention capacity of the service system and make sure all clients presenting or being referred to Reconnect either receive assistance or are directed to more appropriate services.

It is important that contact with referred clients be attempted within 24-48 hours of the referral being made. Evidence suggests that responses from service providers within 24 hours can help to prevent home leaving in at-risk youth. Response can include making contact to set up an intake time.

Reconnect services can accept referrals from any source. Reconnect services should maintain effective linkages with appropriate agencies in their local community to assist with timely, appropriate and effective referrals to the Reconnect program. Participants may self-refer or be referred from a range of sources including:

- schools, education and training organisations
- family and caregivers
- friends
- non-government community agencies
- Centrelink
- juvenile justice agencies
- police or legal units
- youth refuge, youth housing or accommodation services
- medical services
- mental health services
- other government departments
- within your organisation

This list is not exhaustive. Reconnect services can accept referrals from any source as long as the person being referred meets the eligibility criteria.

3.7. Working with other services and schools

Focusing on early intervention and prevention will mean more young people in need of assistance are identified early and have access to services before they become homeless or disengaged and before problems compound. An important characteristic of early intervention and prevention services is the establishment and maintenance of links with key stakeholders across other services and schools.

Key stakeholders include:

- schools in their community
- Centrelink
- youth services
- accommodation and/or refuge services
- charitable organisations

- state/territory government youth and welfare departments and other government departments
- police, juvenile justice and legal services
- counselling services
- cultural, recreational and/or sporting groups
- community elders, young people, families etc.

Effective engagement with key stakeholders is integral to providing a holistic and quality service and can provide valuable information on issues including referral processes, client needs, local issues, community feedback and approaches or gaps in service delivery. Key stakeholders are those with whom the Reconnect service provider interacts during service delivery. They are services that either make client referrals to, or receive client referrals from, Reconnect service providers.

Active involvement with key stakeholders is in-line with the Good Practice Principles ([Section 3.1](#)). It also assists Reconnect service providers to incorporate community feedback into their planning and review processes.

When working with Centrelink, with appropriate client consent, Reconnect service providers could provide Centrelink with a detailed written and/or oral report if requested for the following scenarios:

- where a young person is homeless, is a current Reconnect client, and is currently in receipt of income support (due to it being unreasonable for them to live at home), and that support is shortly to be reviewed
- where a young person is homeless, is a current Reconnect client, and is applying for Australian Government income support

Reconnect service providers should prioritise working relationships with organisations delivering similar programs to avoid duplication of effort, develop strong referral pathways, enable collaborative casework strategies, and build effective sector capacity to support the Reconnect target group.

Reconnect service providers must acknowledge that the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* may apply to the use and disclosure of reports. The Department or Centrelink may also require Reconnect service providers to sign declarations of privacy and confidentiality when receiving personal and other information.

3.8. Improving connections with local services

To ensure young people are referred to Reconnect services earlier and before problems compound, Reconnect service providers should:

- develop strong links and close collaboration with relevant services in their area to better connect young people to key local services

- raise their profile in the local community and with related services and organisations to support early identification and support for young people at risk
- raise their profile through the use of supporting material to explain what Reconnect does and its focus on providing early intervention and prevention services for young people at risk of homelessness and their families, and assist Reconnect services to work with key local services

3.9. Improving connections with local schools

To ensure more young people receive services they need sooner and before problems compound, Reconnect service providers should:

- work with schools where there are a high number of young people at risk of homelessness, and have an agreed clear service offer with these schools
- work with relevant services and local schools to identify young people most at risk of homelessness
- work in a sensitive and responsible manner in relation to appropriate confidentiality and consent requirements including clients and parents of young people

3.10. Community collaboration

Reconnect service providers can assist young people by networking, developing collaborative partnerships and providing leadership in early intervention issues. This can be done through:

- collaborating on support for individuals
- integrating service delivery
- networking with agencies to identify issues and address gaps and barriers in local service delivery

Effective community collaboration includes the opportunity to:

- participate in inter-agency groups, committees and forums to work on issues of common concern
- collaborate in joint ventures with agencies working with the same target group or issues of concern
- collaborate in local community gatherings or state-based forums
- develop positive working relationships with government agencies
- exchange ideas and knowledge

3.11. Community capacity building

In addition to supporting young people and families through service delivery, Reconnect service providers are encouraged to contribute to building the capacity of their community. Strengthening community capacity can be defined as enhancing the ability of individuals, schools, organisations and communities to manage their own affairs and to work collaboratively to encourage and sustain positive change.

The aim of community capacity building in Reconnect is to assist communities to identify risk factors or early signs of disengagement from school, community and family, youth homelessness, awareness of available resources and people, and strategies to address issues.

Reconnect services vary in the extent to which they initiate, or are a part of, community capacity building projects aimed at bringing about broader change within a community. Examples of community capacity building projects may include, but are not limited to:

- working with relevant community stakeholders and agencies to address issues arising from Reconnect service delivery (e.g. developing a holistic community response to cyber bullying)
- identifying gaps and establishing a new service, or working to change the way current services respond, in addressing need. For instance, a Reconnect service might work with other agencies to establish a mentoring service by seeking funding to allow the service to operate, or a Reconnect service might work with other services to run weekend camps that connect young people with culture
- raising awareness on how services can work more effectively with young people and their families, especially in early intervention to prevent youth homelessness
- working with businesses to expand work opportunities, and training young people in action research and getting them to research some aspect of need
- providing information about a Reconnect service to a school group

Community capacity building projects may take a long time to complete and may result in a range of outcomes. A project may be initiated and developed over a few years with smaller projects occurring as supplements to the main project.

The everyday work of Reconnect services to maintain partnership arrangements, build service relations, and contribute to one-off community events, should not be recorded on the Data Exchange (the Department's IT system for recording performance) or in the Activity Work Plan (AWP) report as community capacity building projects unless they are part of a larger community capacity building activity.

3.12. Group work

While individual casework is the core requirement of the program, Reconnect service providers are able to work with clients and potential clients through group work as a preventative measure. Group work may:

- be all that some young people need
- be a less threatening 'soft' entry point to support
- allow young people to attend with their peers or siblings and assist in 'breaking the cycle' of negative behaviour or influence
- provide support to young people in realising 'they are not alone' in dealing with certain issues

- offer a support network
- develop opportunity for young people formerly engaged in the service to act as peer support and/or mentors, thereby empowering young people through supporting people of their own age and experience
- involve a number of support services participating over the course of time, particularly if the group is multi-session
- be effective in engaging young people if a waiting list exists at the time of referral and one-to-one work is not initially possible
- be an effective way to provide services in an outreach location where ongoing one-to-one support is not readily available
- provide a network for other groups including parents and other care-givers
- provide opportunities for social and fun activities
- bring together young people of the same gender or target group
- be a cost-effective way of managing larger groups of clients

If a Reconnect service is undertaking a project that includes running a training group as an element, it would be recorded as 'Group Work' on the Data Exchange, and as a project in the AWP to capture the larger scope of the work.

3.13. Non-engagement client

In recognition of the additional work of Reconnect service providers in-line with the 'no wrong door' policy with clients who are *not eligible* Reconnect clients, the Department has created the category of 'non-engagement client'.

A 'non-engagement client' is a person who does not fit the Reconnect target group, refer to [Section 3.4](#) Reconnect target group. An example of a 'non-engagement client' may be they are the carer of a young person, are supported by Reconnect but the young person they care for is not engaged or does not engage.

The reporting of work with the 'non-engagement client' is voluntary and not a requirement of the Reconnect grant agreement. Work with 'non-engagement clients' could be reported in the AWP report, refer to [Section 5.2](#) Activity Work Plan.

Non-engagement clients do not count towards the Reconnect 10 per cent flexibility of caseload, refer to [Section 3.4](#) Reconnect target group for more information.

3.14. Unidentified clients

Reconnect is primarily client facing where ongoing relationships are formed. As an early intervention and prevention program, Reconnect services can work with clients and potential clients through group work. It is expected that most clients recorded will be identified and provided with individual client goals and recorded in the Data Exchange, although some clients can be recorded as unidentified clients.

For Reconnect, an example of where use of unidentified clients may be appropriate includes education sessions delivered in a large group setting (such as a high school year group). Individual clients should be recorded in all other circumstances.

Reconnect service providers are expected to record group work in their AWP report, refer to [Section 5](#) Data Collection for more information.

3.15. Reconnect forums

Reconnect forums are a highly valued and essential tool for supporting Reconnect service providers to maximise outcomes for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Forums bring together Reconnect service providers and Departmental representatives to discuss the operation of Reconnect, set direction and facilitate good practice.

Reconnect services providers are required to participate in any Department Reconnect forums, which aim to improve the capacity of services and the program to deliver effective early intervention strategies through evidence-based good practice.

Reconnect forums enable Reconnect service providers and Departmental representatives to come together to collaborate on 'good practice' approaches and recent policy developments.

4. Funding within the program

4.1. What Reconnect grant funding may be used for

Reconnect service providers **can** only spend grant funds on eligible expenditure directly related to Reconnect program grant activities.

Staffing costs

Direct service delivery staffing costs, including:

- staff salaries and on-costs / staff accruals
- professional development
- staff supervision costs
- training and conference expenses
- workers compensation
- superannuation
- job advertising

Operational costs

Costs associated with direct Reconnect service delivery to program participants:

- service delivery expenses
- activities expenses
- consultancies for the purposes of service activities
- community education
- delivery of training to clients
- information sessions, marketing / promotion and advertising
- support activities and other program development costs
- translation and interpreter services
- travel costs including travel expenses, cost associated with staff travel and motor vehicle leases for those vehicles used for direct service delivery

Administration costs

Administrative costs related to delivering a Reconnect service:

- insurance
- electricity and gas expenses
- telephone
- postage, printing, photocopying, stationery
- office equipment
- depreciation, maintenance and repairs of office equipment
- stores and other admin / operating costs
- computer software
- meeting costs
- equipment insurance
- legal expenses
- amenities
- library
- external audit and accounting services
- finance costs, bank charges and interest paid on overdrafts
- organisational memberships and levies including that of peak bodies and other social services organisations and other operational expenses
- property costs: those costs for example associated with accommodation, rent, building insurance, cleaning, maintenance and repairs of buildings and grounds, rates and taxes, depreciation (property), and other property expenses

Brokerage / client costs

Brokerage costs intend to enable Reconnect service providers to offer additional support services that they do not have the capacity to provide.

Brokerage / client costs are not intended to replace emergency relief or other crisis / cash assistance from other sources.

As a guide, 5 per cent of annual funding should be reserved for brokerage. Brokerage costs can be used to purchase a range of services or items including but not limited to:

- educational / vocational related items and / or costs associated with facilitating engagement or re-engagement in education, training or work
- health-related services which cannot be accessed within a reasonable timeframe from the public health system, including mental health services
- legal services
- specific services to assist young people and their families in practical ways, such as transport, meals, private psychological assessments, counselling and mediation, accommodation assistance (including respite), and translating services

Reconnect service providers must ensure staff are aware of the amount of brokerage funds available in order to use them effectively to provide support to participants.

4.2. What Reconnect grant funding cannot be used for

Reconnect service providers **cannot** use the grant for:

- service management fees
- purchase of land
- major capital expenditure
- covering of retrospective costs
- costs incurred in the preparation of a grant application or related documentation
- subsidy of general ongoing administration of an organisation such as electricity, phone and rent not related to delivering Reconnect services
- major construction / capital works
- overseas travel
- activities for which other Commonwealth, State, Territory or Local Government bodies have primary responsibility

4.3. Annual budget

The Department may, at its discretion, require Reconnect service providers to submit a detailed budget as part of the Activity Work Plan process, see [Section 5.2](#) Activity Work Plan.

Budget expenditure must only include eligible Reconnect program grant expenditure. Please refer to [Section 4.1](#) above.

4.4. Establishment costs for new Reconnect services

Establishment costs are intended for new Reconnect services or services that have minimal infrastructure and are provided at the Department's discretion.

5. Data collection

Data collection provides the information required by the Department to monitor and evaluate the Department's programs. Continued funding of programs relies heavily on the ability of the Department to provide observable and objective measures of performance.

5.1. Data Exchange Partnership Approach

To be better informed on the effectiveness of Reconnect services, all Reconnect service providers are required to participate in the partnership approach under the Data Exchange.

The focus of the partnership approach is collecting information about the outcomes achieved by clients. Client outcomes can be achieved in a variety of different ways and progressively over different periods of time.

The partnership approach includes a Standard Client/Community Outcomes Reporting (SCORE) element, which has been designed to collect information in ways that do not impose additional administrative costs on providers. There are four different types of outcomes measured through SCORE to help tell the story of what has been achieved.

The following SCORE components and domains are important for Reconnect clients and for collecting and collating evidence on the efficacy of the program:

- **Circumstances:** community participation and networks; employment, education and skills training; family functioning; housing; and mental health, wellbeing and self-care
- **Goals:** changed behaviours; changed impact of immediate crisis; changed knowledge and access to information; empowerment, choice and control to make own decisions; engagement with relevant support services
- **Satisfaction:** the service listened and understood the issues of the client; satisfied with the service received; better able to deal with issue that client sought help with

The following SCORE component relates to activities of group or community activities where it is not feasible to record the changes for individual clients:

- **Community:** group / community knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours for a group of clients or community members participating in the service, community infrastructure and networks to better respond to the needs of targeted clients and communities.

The partnership approach includes extended data items that provide additional information about clients. For Reconnect this includes the homelessness indicator (Yes / No / At Risk). This data item is extremely important to allow the Department to understand the housing or homelessness circumstance of Reconnect clients. This is directly relevant to the aims and outcomes of the Reconnect Program. The response should be based solely on what is reported by the client.

Data must be provided in accordance with the [Data Exchange Protocols](#) available on the Department's website (<https://dex.dss.gov.au>).

There are no prerequisites or browser requirements for the Data Exchange web-based portal. It has been tested to work with multiple browser types and versions. However, there are requirements and exceptions for running AUSkey, which is the government authentication system that Reconnect service providers require to access the Data Exchange. Information on browser compatibility is available from the Australian Business Register website (<https://abr.gov.au>).

5.2. Activity Work Plan

Reconnect service providers must complete a Reconnect Activity Work Plan (AWP) in consultation and agreement with their Department Funding Arrangement Manager.

Reconnect service providers are required to specify how they will deliver activities and include information on risk management strategies, budget, governance, and stakeholder engagement.

Once mutually agreed, the AWP forms part of the grant agreement. Providers must report progress against their AWP annually, as specified in their grant agreement.

The AWP is a 'live' document and can be updated at any time, in consultation and agreement with their Department Funding Arrangement Manager.

The Reconnect AWP template, along with a guidance document, is available from the Department's Reconnect website (www.dss.gov.au/reconnect).

5.3. Program review

The Department will review the Reconnect program to measure how well the Reconnect program is achieving outcomes and objectives. Grant agreements require Reconnect service providers to provide information to help with this any review as needed.

Other mechanisms to monitor program performance and efficacy could include site visits by the Department, direct feedback from clients, or other evaluative processes to assess efficiency and effectiveness of the Reconnect program.

6. Complaints

6.1. Handling complaints

All Reconnect service providers are required to have mechanisms in place to address complaints from Reconnect clients and make this available to the Department if requested.

Complaint handling mechanisms should be easily identifiable, accessible and solution oriented. They should be sensitive to the issues Reconnect clients face, be responsive to their needs, and ensure confidentiality, natural justice and procedural fairness.

Reconnect service providers are required to maintain a formal register of complaints received and provide this to the Department if requested.

6.2. Complaints from Reconnect clients

Reconnect service providers are encouraged to work with clients to resolve matters before contacting the Department's complaints area. In some circumstances, Reconnect clients may not wish to discuss their complaint with their Reconnect service provider or may simply wish to deal directly with the Department.

Reconnect clients can contact the Department Feedback Coordination Team on:

Phone: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: complaints@dss.gov.au

Online complaints form available on the Department's website (www.dss.gov.au)

Post: DSS Feedback, GPO Box 9820, Canberra ACT 2601

Please Note: Calls made to the 1800 634 035 number will be recorded to assist in the effective management of the complaint as well as for training purposes. Please advise the complaints officer if you do not wish to have your call recorded.

Any documents provided or created by the Department in the investigation and resolution of a complaint may be subject to release under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

If there is a concern with the way the Department has handled the complaint, a complaint can be made to the Commonwealth Ombudsman on:

Phone: 1300 362 072

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

Online Form: [Web Form Submission \(ombudsman.gov.au\)](http://Web Form Submission (ombudsman.gov.au))

Post: GPO Box 442, CANBERRA ACT 2601

Website: www.ombudsman.gov.au

7. Contact Information

7.1. Funding Arrangement Managers

The Department's Funding Arrangement Managers are the first point of contact between Reconnect service providers and the Department. They provide assistance with queries relating to planning, data and reporting, or any new issues in the implementation or administration of the Reconnect program.

Queries regarding policy matters should be emailed to reconnect.policy@dss.gov.au.

7.2. Department's office locations

The Department's national number is 1300 653 227. Call rates from landline and mobile providers may vary. Please check with your current service provider.

Department Office	Street address	Postal address
National Office	Enid Lyons Building 71 Athllon Drive Greenway ACT 2900	GPO Box 9820 Canberra ACT 2601
New South Wales	Tower B, Levels 8-9 280 Elizabeth Street Surry Hills, Sydney NSW 2010	GPO Box 9820 Sydney NSW 2001
Northern Territory	Level 3, Jacana House 39-41 Woods Street Darwin NT 0800	GPO Box 9820 Darwin NT 0801
Queensland	100 Creek Street Brisbane QLD 4000	GPO Box 9820 Brisbane QLD 4000
South Australia	Level 13, 11 Waymouth Street Adelaide SA 5001	GPO Box 9820 Adelaide SA 5001
Tasmania	Level 2 99 Bathurst Street Hobart TAS 7001	GPO Box 9820 Hobart TAS 7001
Victoria	Level 10 & Part 11 180 Lonsdale Street Melbourne VIC 3001	GPO Box 9820 Melbourne VIC 3001
Western Australia	Level 2 45 St George Street Perth WA 6000	GPO Box 9820 Perth WA 6848

8. Definitions

8.1. Glossary of key terms

Term	Definition
At risk groups	Groups or individuals identified as possibly having, or potentially developing, a problem (physical, mental or social) requiring further evaluation or intervention.
At risk (of homelessness)	See Section 8.2 Expanded definitions of key terms.
Case	Captures one or more instances or episodes when a service is received by a client (or grouping of clients) for an in-scope program activity that is expected to lead to a distinct outcome.
Data Exchange (DEX)	DEX (Data Exchange) is the program performance reporting solution developed by the Department in consultation with organisations. It allows organisations to report their service delivery information and demonstrate the outcomes they are achieving for their clients.
Department	The Australian Government Department of Social Services.
Early intervention	See Section 8.2 Expanded definitions of key terms.
Funding Arrangement Manager	The Department's State/Territory Office staff member who liaises with Reconnect service providers on grant agreement requirements and monitors service performance against the grant agreement.
Homelessness	See Section 8.2 Expanded definitions of key terms
LGBTIQA+	An acronym that refers to a group of people with diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity. It includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and other sexuality, sex and gender diverse people, regardless of their term of self-identification.
Newly arrived	A person who has been in Australia less than 5 years.
Non-engagement client	A non-engagement client is a person who requests to engage with a Reconnect service and does not meet the Program definitions of a target client.
Partnership Approach	An extended data set Reconnect service providers are expected to share with the Department, including information about a client's presenting needs and circumstances, such as the reason for seeking assistance, referrals (in and out), homeless status and income status. See Section 5 Data Collection.

Term	Definition
Prevention	The implementation of activities to assist and support young people, families and/or communities before problems arise. See Section 8.2 Expanded definitions of key terms.
Program	Refers to the Reconnect program.
Reconnect client	Recipient of Reconnect services delivered by a Reconnect service provider.
Reconnect Forums <i>Also known as Reconnect Network Meetings and Reconnect Interagency Meetings.</i>	Reconnect Forums bring Reconnect services and representatives from the Department together to discuss the operation of Reconnect, set direction and facilitate improved practice, share good practice and raise service and policy issues.
Refugee	See Section 8.2 Expanded definitions of key terms.
Service type	The type of service delivered under the Program, e.g. intake and assessment, information, advice and referral, counselling, family mediation, goal setting, or community capacity building.
Timely intervention	A timely intervention refers to measures taken to assist individual young people as soon as possible after the young person has become homeless or is perceptibly at risk of becoming homeless.

8.2. Expanded definitions of key terms

At risk (of homelessness)

Reconnect service providers make judgements about ‘risk’ by taking into account a complex body of qualitative information about a young person’s circumstances. Central to this is the evidence of escalating family conflict or dysfunction and reduced tolerance. Other factors include deteriorating academic performance, truancy, personality changes, mood changes, acting out and risk taking behaviours, inappropriate peer groups and substance abuse.

Young people can also be at risk of homelessness if their living situation places them in danger of physical or mental harm. It is important to note the living situation of a young person who is at risk can be volatile, and a young person can move from being housed to experiencing homelessness quickly.

Homelessness – prevention

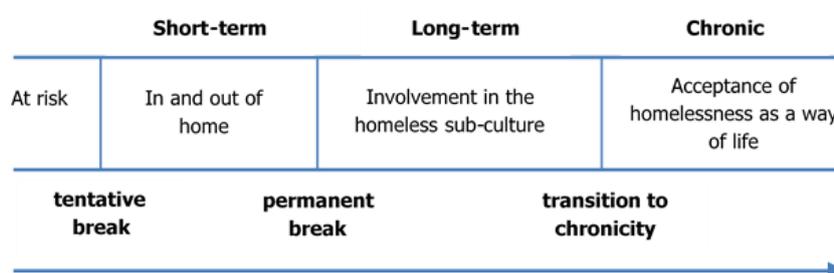
Prevention strategies are not necessarily targeted at specific individuals. Primary prevention strategies deal with social, economic and political causes of homelessness, and are typically outside the scope of Reconnect services.

Secondary prevention strategies, which are used by Reconnect services, focus on identifying young people perceptibly at risk of homelessness and strengthening their protective factors to enable them to remain engaged with school, community etc. For some services, they may also apply prevention strategies aimed at young people experiencing homelessness to prevent their transition to chronicity.

Homelessness – early intervention

For Reconnect, early intervention for young people experiencing homelessness will occur prior to the young person making a permanent break from home or school.

The literature on youth homelessness generally accepts the process of homelessness displayed at the figure below:



Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998: 71)

It needs to be understood that even with these definitions there are grey areas for particular cases where prevention blurs with early intervention and vice versa.

Refugee

Young people can be defined as a refugee if:

- they were born overseas and
- they have entered Australia under the Humanitarian Program, and have a Humanitarian visa, and
- are experiencing multiple barriers

Young asylum seekers living in the community under a community release Program are not eligible for Reconnect as they remain officially 'in detention' even though in a community setting, and have not been granted appropriate visas.

Reconnect service providers should contact the [Department of Home Affairs](#) if there is any question about the type of visa held by the young person, or the services they are able to access.