



DADHC's new OHS program falls short

The Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care (DADHC) have commenced an occupational health and safety (OHS) program designed to reduce risks to its staff. As pointed out by People With Disabilities (PWD) in their recent newsletter, there has been no specific mention of risks to service users despite there being a significant number of reported incidents of injury to DADHC service users over the past 3 years.

DADHC advises that the Integrated Monitoring System (IMS) will monitor and review how well providers and services are performing against funding requirements and against standards of safety and quality. The IMS framework comprises:

- Service Provider Annual Return
- Service Reviews – including a triennial review currently using the Continuous Improvement Matrix (CIM)
- Reporting Requirements such the Minimum Data Set
- External reports arising from agencies such as the Ombudsman's Office

While MHCC encourages the development of improved systems to monitor the safe provision of services, it is unclear as to how the IMS will actually work to address the needs of people with a mental illness.

The Paterson Whitlam Support Service from Aftercare was one of the test organisations involved in the early development of the IMS. As an Outreach service for people with an intellectual disability, they found many of the questions posed to them could not be fully addressed as the IMS assumes 'one size fits all', yet seemed to be aimed at accommodation group homes. They also commented on the unresolved issue relating to how community services will manage the tensions between the Disability Services Act (DSA) and the absolute obligation of employers to guarantee safety in the workplace found in the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Act and associated regulations.

MHCC concurs with the concerns that PWD have outlined below which highlight the some of the shortcomings of the IMS:

- The IMS incorporates very little of the statutory framework and legal obligations governing the provision of disability services in NSW, the (DSA) and its objects, and principles and applications of principles in particular. It establishes no minimum acceptable standards for service quality.
- It is not clear how DADHC will deal with its conflict of interest in monitoring its own services.
- Some quality improvement measures will require additional funding, e.g. to move from a congregate to community-based service system. DADHC is the agency principally responsible to provide these funds. DADHC therefore has a conflict of interest in administering the monitoring system.
- There is no provision for consumer participation in the monitoring process, despite the clear obligation for it contained within the DSA.

Kaiyu Enterprises Inc, one of MHCC's members, also expressed the concern that the IMS may perpetuate the difficulty NGOs have in accounting differently to different departments, unless other NSW Health and human service departments work together to develop a common pathway.

MHCC supports PWD's preference for an independent accreditation agency to review disability services against the requirements of the DSA. Such an accreditation agency and approach was recommended in the NSW Law Reform Commission's 1996 Review of the Disability Services Act.

**Further information about the Integrated Monitoring Framework is available on the DADHC website:
www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au**