



ACT AUDITOR-GENERAL'S OFFICE



MEDIA RELEASE

PA 08/03

19 May 2009

Performance Audit Report

Management of Respite Care Services

The ACT Auditor-General, Mrs Tu Pham, has today presented a Performance Audit report titled '**Management of Respite Care Services**', to the Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The audit examined the management of ACT respite care services, with a primary focus on the services provided by government respite houses. These houses are the largest providers of centre-based respite care for people with disabilities from school age to adults who are supported at home.

In 2007-08, the ACT Government spent \$65.3 million on disability services. Total expenditure on respite care services was \$5.6 million, of which \$3.8 million was used to fund the operations of the government respite service.

Audit Conclusions

The services and support provided by government respite houses met clients' basic needs for safety and respite care, and most respite services were provided to those with the greatest need. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for significant improvements in maintaining and updating client information, operational practices, performance review and risk management to provide better assurance of quality services and to minimise risks to clients.

Selected Key Findings

- DHCS written policies and procedures were not clearly referenced to the service standards in accordance with the National Disability Service Standards. Although DHCS staff were required to comply with the national standards, some staff did not consider them relevant to the services they provided to people with a disability. This indicated that expectations of management were not well communicated to support staff in the application and implementation of the national standards.
- The operations of the Disability ACT Information Service were not effective and the process for collection and management of data was inadequate.

- Procedures or guidelines used in assessing individuals' eligibility for services were not formalised, potentially leading to inconsistency in decision-making and a lack of transparency and accountability.
- There were significant weaknesses in some operational practices at government respite houses. A significant number of clients' Respite Care Plans and related documents had not been updated and reviewed and most clients' visit records did not have visit summary, files or progress notes. These documents were required to assist with client care, especially to those clients with high and complex needs.
- Disability ACT had not managed its respite clients' risks effectively since there was no evidence of a staff facilitated risk assessment for all the clients as specified in its risk management procedures. A significant number of incidents were not being reported promptly and some incidents were not recorded on Department's automated incident reporting and management system (Riskman).
- Systems and processes in managing staff training and development, client complaints and feedback, and quality assurance for government and non-government providers need improvements.
- Disability ACT's performance output indicators were generally in line with average national standards. Access to the respite services in the ACT was provided to people with the greatest need.
- Available funding for all disability services was not sufficient to meet demand. Funding applications processed in 2007-08 amounted to \$11.1 million and only \$2.8 million was granted, indicating a shortfall in funding of \$8.3 million, which represents the amount of 'known unmet demand'.
- In view of the significant amount of 'known unmet demand' and the projected increased numbers in the ACT of people with a severe or profound disability as well as ageing of informal carers, Disability ACT should develop and implement effective strategies and policies to monitor and manage the known and unknown demand or need.

Recommendations

The audit made fourteen recommendations to address the issues raised. DHCS agreed, or agreed in part, with most recommendations, and advised that it has already started work on the implementation of these recommendations.

Further Information

For further information, please contact Rod Nicholas, Director, Performance Audits and Corporate Services on 6207 0833. Copies of the report are available from the ACT Auditor-General's Office (Level 4, 11 Moore Street, Canberra City) and from its website, www.audit.act.gov.au.



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