

**Submission
No 32**

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN
COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS**

Organisation: Nambucca Shire Council

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SUBMISSION

NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs

Nambucca Shire has a population of about 20,000 with a higher than State average of older people and a strong Aboriginal community with a higher than State average number of Aboriginal people. The Nambucca Shire rates high on the SEIFA index, being one of the top 10 Shires in NSW exhibiting disadvantage in the areas of income, education and employment.

The Community Development team at Nambucca Shire Council has gathered information pertaining to service coordination through directly working with service providers in the delivery of programs, the Nambucca Valley Interagency, the Nambucca Valley Aboriginal Interagency and other networking opportunities. The following response is submitted in relation to the areas identified by the Standing Committee on Social Issues

- (a) The extent to which government and non-government service providers are identifying the needs of clients and providing a coordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside of their particular area of responsibility
- Service providers are identifying needs of clients however access to services, especially crisis response services are limited in our area, therefore making it difficult to refer and coordinate locally. As one member of the Nambucca Valley Network stated, 'it is difficult to coordinate services if there are very few services on the ground to coordinate.'
 - Crisis accommodation for individuals and families who are homeless, victims (usually women and children) of family or domestic violence, and homeless youth is extremely limited if available at all. All of these crisis accommodation services are based in Coffs Harbour, if indeed a bed/place is available. In the case where one night's accommodation might be available in the local area, the individual or family is required to travel to Coffs Harbour the following day to apply for further crisis accommodation. Travel to Coffs Harbour is at least 50 km or more from outlying areas in the Shire. Similarly mental health crisis response requires travel to Coffs Harbour. Access to a crisis service is difficult for individuals and families as public transport is limited in regional areas and access and cost to run a vehicle can be prohibitive. These distances inevitably impact on the link with family, friends, school and community.
 - Service coordination following a crisis situation can also be difficult as follow up appointments often require travel to Coffs Harbour or another regional centre. Service coordination can easily fall over and become fragmented when and if a client is unable to make an appointment or a series of appointments. It is well known that service provision is more effective when a person or family can stay connected with family, friends, school and are in an environment that is supportive and known to them.
 - There are a number of services that outreach to the Nambucca Valley however their capacity to reach communities is not always adequate and may only be onsite 1 day per week. Regionally based organisations are not necessarily familiar with local characteristics, don't necessarily know the community and are not there when needed.
 - Unless a service is funded to provide a case management service there is little incentive, understanding, follow up, resources and/or capacity to deliver a coordinated service response that is outside of their particular area of responsibility.
 - A holistic approach to service provision is not necessarily identified in service specifications or delivery

(b) Barriers to the effective coordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy laws

- Limited number of services and therefore service options
- Lack of Aboriginal workers in mainstream services especially where there is a large number of Aboriginal clientele may affect the uptake of services
- Individuals/clients may be apprehensive in disclosing information, especially when they have to repeat their personal information or they have had a bad experience in the past with services and/or agencies.
- In some cases services are so focussed on securing their funding and meeting their outcomes that it can lead to competition between service providers. This can impact on cross promotion and information distributions, supported referrals and service coordination.
- Whilst there are a number of services funded to cover the Nambucca Shire often these services are based in cities with the outreach component lacking in funds, travel time and capacity. They may also not be aware of the local services that are available.
- Services, as much as possible should be client driven; a holistic approach where the client is supported to see the whole picture and able to seek the range of services that support and benefit them

(c) Considerations of initiatives and best practice models for the coordination of services

- Models to improve service coordination could include service agreements that identify partnerships, collaboration, pathways, follow through, monitoring and evaluation.
- Service coordination could be better fostered amongst service providers through staff training.
- Need to have clear policy and practice in place for sharing confidential information between services. This may take the burden off the individual/client to repeatedly disclose their personal information.
- Apart from the Nambucca Valley Network the Nambucca Valley no longer has a place where services can leave brochures and information and community members can just drop for information. Individuals should be encouraged and supported to take responsibility where they can to improve their situation and knowledge about services. The neighbourhood centre functioned as a community hub and a drop in option, however it no longer operates.

(d) Other

- Mobile phone and internet coverage is limited in some of our areas