1 December 2014

Launch of National Complex Needs Alliance Position Paper, website and introductory video (including screening of introductory video)

Presentation by Michael Moore, CEO, Public Health Association of Australia: Why do we need the new National Complex Needs Alliance?

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people – the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

The National Complex Needs Alliance - or NCNA (pronounced Nic-nah) - was formed in December last year. Member organisations include a range of national, state and territory and local groups, focused on improving services and outcomes for some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged Australians. This includes both government and non-government organisations involved in research, policy and program development and implementation, and service delivery agencies across a number of different sectors.

The creation of NCNA was the culmination of several years of work by a broad range of organisations around the nation. In June 2012, the Public Health Association of Australia and the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia convened a roundtable event at Parliament House, bringing together a dozen key NGOs at the national level to discuss the idea of a multi-sectoral approach to addressing complex needs; and how NGOs could engage with the then Government’s broader Social Inclusion Agenda to achieve better outcomes.

One of the initiatives arising from that meeting was the idea of holding a National Social Inclusion and Complex Needs Conference in April 2013, to showcase successful programs and approaches in addressing complex needs and social determinants of health - with the broader purpose of identifying what works and how. The idea of forming a National Complex Needs Alliance was also first discussed at that initial roundtable.

The National Social Inclusion and Complex Needs Conference was held in April 2013. The conference focus on ‘Working together to achieve better outcomes for people and communities’ attracted around 300 participants looking to showcase and discuss innovative approaches to service delivery in Australia and abroad. One of the key outcomes of the conference was the endorsement of a Conference Declaration, to progress an ongoing agenda for change in relation to addressing complex needs. The first action outlined in that Declaration was the creation of a formal National Complex Needs Alliance to:

‘progress a collaborative and ongoing agenda/program of stakeholder, individual, family and community engagement and advocacy to remove red tape and break down structural and systemic barriers to the development and implementation of comprehensive, multifaceted, cross-sectoral approaches to achieving better health and social outcomes for people, families and communities with complex needs.’

The inaugural meeting of the new Alliance was held in December 2013. The second meeting of the Alliance was held in June 2014, with members finalising NCNA’s Terms of Reference and progressing the development of its new Position Paper. Today we are launching that Position Paper, the new NCNA website and introductory video. The introductory video features members of NCNA talking about their perspectives on complex needs and the reasons why the establishment of NCNA is an important step forward.
NCNA is clearly moving forward at a significant pace and has gone from strength to strength since that initial meeting back in 2012. It currently has over 60 organisational members working at the national, state/territory and local levels.

So what do we mean when we talk about ‘complex needs’?
In the UK, there is a commonly accepted definition of the term ‘complex needs’. A slightly adapted version of this definition has been adopted by NCNA and we encourage Australian services and governments to also adopt this definition:

‘Complex needs’ is a combination of health needs (e.g. diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation) and social needs (e.g. housing, social care and independent living).

There are a number of similar definitions in both the Australian and international literature but essentially the term ‘complex needs’ refers to people who have more than one problem.

So why is this a problem for the Australian community?
It has long been acknowledged that people with complex needs often fall through the cracks in service delivery – between national and jurisdictional service delivery, between government and non-government services, and between services delivered by different portfolio agencies.

Around 640,000 Australians experience multiple disadvantage, or 5% of the population. A 2013 study by the University of Canberra found people with persistent complex needs were more likely to experience chronic health problems, particularly disability and mental illness, and to suffer from financial deprivation: more than one-half of this group were living below the poverty line.

While the experience of a single disadvantage can create difficulties for people, the experience of multiple disadvantages can have a compounding and persistent effect, reinforcing barriers to getting ahead and increasing the likelihood of other related problems later in life. As well as the huge social and human costs, the economic costs to government are significant. A 2011 study on homeless people with complex needs found lifecourse institutional costs for 11 individuals, aged between 23 and 55 at the time, ranged from around $900,000 to $5.5 million each.

There are some brilliant examples of collaborative approaches to achieving better health and social outcomes for people with complex needs at the local level, but these are often not supported by traditional approaches to policy and funding that usually focus on a single area of need. By facilitating cooperation between agencies providing support and assistance to people with complex needs, governments will also be able to achieve better returns on existing investments in funding. People don’t live their lives within portfolios, and those with complex needs in particular need help to negotiate their way through the maze of available services.

What NCNA is seeking to achieve: key principles

1. Adoption and use of a national definition of ‘complex needs’.
2. Engagement with all levels of government, policy makers and funding providers to raise awareness of issues relating to complex needs.
3. To encourage government policy, programs and funding structures that facilitate collaborative cross-portfolio approaches to service delivery which best suit people with complex needs.
4. To highlight examples of collaborative approaches to achieving better health and social outcomes for people with complex needs at the local level, to demonstrate that by facilitating cooperation between agencies providing support and assistance to people with complex needs, governments can achieve better returns on existing and future investments in funding.
5. To build partnerships between different sectors and organisations delivering services to people with complex needs.
6. To promote research to build the evidence base and establish examples of best practice to inform improvements in service delivery.

Essentially, NCNA is focused on promoting partnerships and collaborations in policy, practice and service delivery to achieve better long term outcomes for people with complex needs.

What does NCNA believe needs to be done to achieve these outcomes?

1. Funding Structures
   - Acknowledgement of cross-portfolio and cross-sectoral collaborations in service delivery (cooperative case management) in government funding agreements and reporting requirements.
   - Cross-portfolio policy development in relation to complex needs.
2. Supporting Collaborations in Service Delivery
   - Explore potential for existing structures to play a role as Solutions Brokers/Project Managers in facilitating, supporting and building on cross-portfolio and cross-sectoral collaborations in service delivery.
3. Building the Evidence Base and Promoting Best Practice
   - Support for research projects designed to build the evidence base on effective interventions in addressing complex needs.
   - Support for efforts to promote the uptake of established models of best practice and the workforce training needed to enable it.
4. Council of Australian Governments
   - A National Partnership Agreement on Complex Needs, establishing the respective roles to be played by different levels of government, bi-partisan support, and appropriate accountability mechanisms which minimize bureaucracy.

Next Steps for NCNA

NCNA is today launching its newly approved Position Paper, website and introductory video, which will provide a platform for ongoing engagement and advocacy activities by the group. Further information about the work of the Alliance – and how organisations can get involved - can be found on the new website at: www.complexneeds.org.au.

Without further ado, I’d like to invite you all to sit back and enjoy the inaugural screening of the NCNA introductory video. I’m sure you’ll see some familiar faces and that their stories will resonate with your own experiences as service providers, researchers, policy makers, program managers and representatives of the Australian community.
SCREEN VIDEO

What a wonderful film, hey? I’d like to acknowledge the contribution of One Vision audiovisual services, which filmed and produced the video for free. One Vision provided AV services for the National Complex Needs Conference in 2013 and were so taken with the subject matter that they offered to produce the NCNA introductory video free of charge. We can’t thank Frank, Hector and the One Vision team enough for their support.

Now I thought I might just flick through a few pages on the new website to give you a feel for the style and content. The introductory video is also available on the website, along with the new NCNA Position Paper.

SHOW WEBSITE

Of course copies of the Position Paper have been distributed at today’s meeting and are also available on the new NCNA website.

Thank you all for your ongoing support in progressing the work of the National Complex Needs Alliance – I look forward to continuing to work with you all in the New Year and beyond.