



# Forum notes

## **Transitional Housing Forums: Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington and Hamilton**

This document provides a summary of the transitional housing provider forums hosted by MSD and Community Housing Aotearoa between November 2017 and February 2018, in Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington and Hamilton.

These notes have been prepared by MSD and aim to provide an overview of discussions at all forums so that so attendees can see the topics covered in all forums, even if they weren't present.

The Transitional Housing Programme has been in place for around 18 months. As such, the forums were seen as a timely opportunity for:

- Providers, MSD and CHA to come together to network and share ideas
- Providers, MSD and CHA to reflect on successes/achievements
- Identify and share best practices and areas for improvement

The general feedback from attendees was positive – that these kinds of forums are useful for networking and connecting, and that we should look to hold more of them.

We'd like to thank everyone for attending and participating in the forums, and look forward to continuing to work with you, as well as holding more similar events in future.

## **Background to the Transitional Housing Programme**

The Transitional Housing Programme started in mid-2016.

Through the programme, MSD contracts providers to provide short term accommodation for an average of 12 weeks to people in need, along with assistance to secure longer-term, more sustainable, accommodation, and tailored social support. The premise is based on people not just needing a roof over their head, but also assistance in other areas to help them sustain more permanent accommodation in future.

## **Key discussion themes, Auckland Forum (28 November)**

There was acknowledgement that we (MSD and providers) have achieved a lot in a short space at time, and developed a good foundation for the Transitional Housing Programme that can now be fine-tuned.

The definition of homelessness was raised at the Auckland forum, with questions about whether there is a common definition used across the sector and a request for clarity (we have included this in the questions and answers).

The need for a sector-wide housing strategy that included strategies for preventing homelessness was seen as a good way to enable big picture thinking and planning. As part of this, there was discussion about how to help Māori and Pasifika Transitional Housing Providers to grow to ensure better outcomes for these whānau and communities.

The Social Investment Agency's presentation on ways to improve information sharing and the data transfer process was welcomed. It was acknowledged that reporting processes needed to be as simple and intuitive as possible for providers.

Attendees wanted to have more ability for providers and advocates to act on behalf of a client, to ensure support for more complex cases was exactly what was required.

### **Key discussion themes, Christchurch Forum (30 November)**

All attendees at the Christchurch forum agreed that Transitional Housing was a welcome addition to the housing continuum.

There was recognition that as a sector we need to keep a focus on supporting single people as well as larger families.

Ensuring that information data sharing was easy and intuitive was highlighted as a key priority. SIA's presentation on ways to improve information sharing and the data transfer process was welcomed. It was acknowledged that reporting processes needed to be as simple and intuitive as possible for providers.

As with Auckland, there was discussion around how some clients' needs were extremely complex and wide-ranging, and ensuring we are able to adjust approaches to meet their requirements was seen as important.

### **Key discussion themes, Wellington Forum (6 December)**

There was recognition from providers that positive outcomes for whānau and children are now occurring as a result of good relationships between MSD and providers.

Timely access for providers to data and statistics on transitional housing, and the role this plays in best practice and service delivery, was seen as being useful. This included information about clients' ethnicity and details on placements into permanent housing. There was also discussion about how to manage situations where someone needed longer than the average 12 weeks' accommodation.

Providers emphasised the importance of streamlining processes, information transfer and sharing to provide the best possible outcome for people and whānau.

Providers were interested in up-skilling and suggested MSD considers a combination of provider forums covering best practice and other key milestones or changes.

### **Key discussion themes, Hamilton Forum (13 February)**

As with previous forums, there was agreement that the forums were a welcome opportunity for providers to network, get together and share ideas.

There was a request for more information about what definition MSD used in relation to homelessness (see the questions and answers below). In addition, there was discussion about security in relation to transitional housing and how to manage after-hours, with MSD explaining that security should be allowed for within contracts and to follow up directly with a regional contract manager for further information.

Attendees discussed whether the 12 plus 12 weeks allowance was enough, with MSD explaining that this is just an average, and that allowances for longer periods could be made as required.

There was discussion about the continued importance of sharing information effectively, with attendees pleased to hear about the focus on continued improvement around data and information sharing from the SIA.

MSD was encouraged to continue including regional offices in its decision making as it means that local knowledge is taken into account.

## **CHA Transitional Housing Occupation and Tenancy Agreements Review**

Community Housing Aotearoa introduced a project they are working on to review current occupancy and tenancy agreements used by Transitional Housing providers to support the development of best practice in the use of these documents.

Organisations were requested to participate by agreement and to provide copies of their occupation/ tenancy agreements and any rules/regulations that relate to the provision and occupation of emergency, transitional and shelter accommodation. No identifying references will be made to specific organisations or projects. Please email copies of your agreements, rules and related documents to Jordan Kendrick at [survey@communityhousing.org.nz](mailto:survey@communityhousing.org.nz)

### **Questions and answers**

Below is a summary of key questions raised at the forum, along with answers. Note that many of the issues and matters raised will be considered for adding into our work programme.

(Note that we had similar questions at all four forums, so have grouped them together as best we can.)

#### **How well is the Transitional Housing Programme working?**

Given the short time in which the programme has been operating, a lot has been achieved – as at December 2017 there were 1,901 transitional housing places available. This is a successful achievement and in large part is thanks to the hard work and efforts of our providers. However, as with any new programme of work, there is always room for improvement and we are continuing to focus ensuring our processes and operations are working as well as possible.

#### **Now that the programme has been running for more than a year, how will it be incorporated into “business as usual”?**

There is a strong commitment to continuing the success of the previous year and a half. We have made some significant gains and we want to see this continue, with a specific focus on ensuring that our processes and systems are embedded into how we work.

We want to hold more of these forums in future, and provide continued opportunities for our providers to network and share ideas.

#### **What is the difference between “transitional housing” and “emergency housing”?**

##### *Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant*

When we use the term emergency housing, we are referring to accommodation provided through the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG). The EH SNG is available for vulnerable people to meet the costs of emergency accommodation for a period of seven days, when the need is immediate and urgent. However, we acknowledge that motels are not a long-term solution, particularly for vulnerable people with complex needs, but they provide a short-term solution while more sustainable options are progressed.

##### *Transitional housing*

Transitional housing places are for temporary accommodation, with an intended average duration of around 12 weeks, that is provided expressly as a place for the individual or family to stay while their needs can be understood and long-term sustainable accommodation can be found. Transitional housing places contracted by MSD are managed by specialist providers who are skilled in providing a range of social and tenancy-related support.

### **How have the transitional housing places been sourced?**

They have been sourced through a mix of purchasing and leasing existing properties from the private market, utilising providers' existing properties, construction of new properties and contracting motels for set periods of time (and linking these with a provider so that tenants receive the support they need).

### **Why do you think the national average stay for transitional housing is 10 weeks?**

It's important to note that the programme allows for an overall average of 12 weeks, which is sometimes longer and sometime shorter depending on a client's needs. Our data shows that since the programme began, the national average stay is in fact 10 weeks. However, this is just an average – in many places the length of stay is longer, and in others. it's shorter.

### **How are motels being used in transitional and emergency housing, how are you working with motel owners?**

There are three main ways in which motels are being used by MSD:

Firstly, MSD has purchased motels to use as long-term transitional housing places. Where this is the case, the property is no longer used as a motel, and is managed by a contracted provider as transitional housing.

Secondly, the transitional housing programme currently includes the use of short-term contracted motels as a temporary measure until longer-term transitional housing supply is secured. The short-term contracted motels are funded through an MSD contract and providers are contracted to deliver support services.

The third and final way, is that motels are used to provide accommodation for people through the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG). EH SNGs are grants for stays at emergency accommodation (this is almost always a motel) for up to seven days at a time.

Where the motel continues to be owned by the motelier (the first and second examples) MSD works closely with the motelier to ensure a good working relationship.

### **What is the official definition of homelessness?**

The official definition of homelessness, developed by Statistics New Zealand, MSD and Housing New Zealand is: *living situations where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household, or living in uninhabitable housing.*

The needs of those people in temporary accommodation, or those who are sharing or living in uninhabitable housing, can be addressed by increasing the supply of public housing and reducing affordability pressures.

For those without shelter in insecure housing (chronically homeless, episodically homeless, and transitionally homeless), MSD's response (on top of working with Housing New Zealand and other housing providers to provide additional supply of long-term public housing) is typically focussed on Housing First<sup>1</sup>, transitional housing and EH SNGs.

MSD seeks to house a client first through long-term public housing or transitional housing, and then ascertains whether the client is more suited to Housing First. Short-term

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<sup>1</sup> Housing First provides stable housing to people who are chronically homeless (i.e. those who have been sleeping rough for a year or more), without conditions, before seeking to address any of any of the other issues they may be facing, such as mental health or addiction issues.

contracted motel units (a temporary measure until longer-term transitional housing supply is secured) are used if neither of these options are either available or suitable for the client. Finally, the EH SNG is used as a last resort.

MSD's view is that everyone should have access to a warm, dry and secure place to live and if they are in urgent need of housing, we will work with them to provide the support they need.

**What is the sector and Government doing to help people in housing need? What is the strategy?**

Ending homelessness is a priority for the Government. This will take intensive intervention and require an increase in the overall supply of more permanent housing options across the full housing continuum. We expect to have further direction and strategy from the Government following Budget 2018 announcements. The Government has signalled that it sees the community housing sector playing an important role. We will provide updates in our sector newsletters, as information becomes available.

**What can be done to provide more support for Māori and Pasifika families?**

MSD is always looking to ensure that there is support for Maori and Pasifika in its programmes. We are actively working to ensure that we are helping Maori and Pacific housing providers build capacity, and are also committed to continuing our engagement with this sector to find out what we can be doing. Note that in addition to the support provided by MSD, that Te Puni Kokiri manages a Maori Housing Network and also funds the peak body for Maori housing, Te Matapihi. Community Housing Aotearoa also supports a Pacific housing provider network forum to help build capacity among Pacific housing providers.

**Data, planning and reporting**

**Can you please provide more context about how you report information and data?**

What we're hearing from providers is that they would value any insights that could be provided back to them on various aspects of their services, and the people and communities they work with. Once the data flow is up and running, we anticipate that the sensible next step would be to work with a small group of providers to figure out how to return useful information back to them in ways that would make sense for their needs.

**Are we able to get any ethnicity data on the figures you are reporting?**

The reporting approach has been designed to accommodate capture and reporting on iwi within the data items captured. That option could be utilised through agreements with providers in a variety of ways, for example pointing out the option and how to use on a provider-by-provider basis. See also the answer on "how we report" above.

**How will the development of the automated process work for providers who utilise a Customer Records Management system (CRM)?**

This process is currently based on a data exchange trial involving MSD and the Social Investment Agency (SIA). This centres on a cloud based tool that makes it easy and safe for organisations to connect and share data safely, whilst preserving their full control over what is shared and with whom. The trial looks at transitional housing data flows using an example CRM, but we believe it can easily be adapted quite easily to a wide variety of CRMs, even in cases where these are based on spreadsheets. The automated data exchange is intended to be one type of data exchange that providers can use, with other options, such as a manual data exchange, still available to use. MSD is happy to discuss

the trial, or the current manual data exchange, with other transitional housing providers. Just get in touch with Carl Robinson ([carl.robinson010@msd.govt.nz](mailto:carl.robinson010@msd.govt.nz)) in the first instance.

### **Could regional data be shared with the providers?**

Yes, we think that would be useful, for example through the high level process outlined above. We have initiated regional factsheets that can be accessed at <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/quarterly-factsheets/2017.html>

### **Information sharing/processes**

#### **How does MSD share information with providers about clients? Is there a way to make sure the right information is provided to allow providers to make good decisions?**

MSD's Case Managers complete a referral letter which the client takes with them when they meet with a provider. The provider's assessment is an important part of the process, as it may identify additional needs.

We would be interested to hear how providers think better information sharing can occur, in particular the type of information you value that you may not have been receiving.

#### **How does the Ministry work with the sector on its operational and other processes for the Transitional Housing Programme?**

MSD aims to work closely with the sector on developing its processes. Our Client Experience and Service Design team will involve providers in designing new programmes to ensure they work well. MSD also has an External Focus Group that it uses as an expert panel on a range of topics including the Transitional Housing Programme. We intend to continue engagement and communicating with the sector as we move forward.

#### **How does the assessment process work?**

Case Managers will hold in-depth, face-to-face discussions with clients. During the discussion they will also use information held by the Ministry to confirm that:

- the client has an immediate emergency housing need;
- they meet the target group of clients that your service caters for.

If the client has any other significant risk factors or potential behavioural issues that we are aware of, we will contact you to make sure you are aware of these risks, and have the opportunity to agree to or decline the client.

#### **What is being done to help providers deal with methamphetamine testing and decontamination?**

MSD is currently reviewing the issue of how providers could be helped in this area. Provider contracts commonly take into account testing for meth, which also have provisions to cover the costs of decontamination. MSD is continuing to work other agencies involved in this issue.

#### **What is the pet policy for transitional housing?**

Historically, pets are not allowed in transitional housing properties and applications to have a pet will be considered on a case by case basis, taking into account the needs of the tenant and the suitability of the accommodation.

**Providers usually have good information about demand in their area – how can we share this with MSD?**

Primarily we encourage providers to link anyone with an urgent housing need to MSD, so we can understand the demand and their specific need, as well as provide support through the range of housing solutions available. We also welcome feedback from providers and encourage people to get in touch by emailing the MSD Housing Group at [housing@msd.govt.nz](mailto:housing@msd.govt.nz)

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