A stronger, more diverse and independent Community Sector

WINDANA

Life. Changing.

TaskForce

Where hope finds help.

Contents

Windana Alcohol and Drug Recovery (Windana) and TaskForce Community Agency (TaskForce) welcome the opportunity to provide a response to the issues outlined in *A stronger, more diverse and independent Community Sector*.

About Windana and TaskForce

Windana provides evidence-based, wrap-around services to people experiencing harm from alcohol and other drugs (AOD). Windana is in the process of merging with TaskForce (effective Monday 20 November), who also provide services to people experiencing challenges with AOD, family violence, mental health concerns and social disadvantage.

Our combined service offering across Victoria includes:

- A suite of community-based alcohol and other drug, family violence, education, training, and employment services
- Alcohol and other drug residential and non-residential withdrawal services
- Alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation

Windana and TaskForce both receive funding from the Federal Government, while the bulk is provided by the Victorian Government.

Our response reflects our experience, and what we see as areas of best practice for governments of all levels when working with, and funding, Community Service Organisations (CSOs). We have responded to the following areas of focus from the Issues Paper:

- Area of focus 1 – Giving the sector the voice and respect it deserves through a meaningful working partnership.
- Area of focus 2 - Providing grants that reflect the real cost of delivering quality services.
- Area of focus 3 – Providing longer grant agreement terms.
- Area of focus 5 - Partnering with trusted community organisations with strong local links.

Area of Focus 1 - Giving the sector the voice and respect it deserves through a meaningful working partnership

The relationship between governments and CSOs is complex. It constantly shifts from a partner in consultation and program design; to a contractor model, delivering a funded service on behalf of the funding agency. Further, Windana and TaskForce, like most CSOs, receive funding from all levels of Government. One of the biggest challenges for CSOs today is managing the different roles and funding streams needed to remain financially viable.

Reporting and compliance

Given the diversity of funding sources for CSOs, compliance and reporting requirements often vary significantly, creating administrative and financial burdens. Eg. Reporting at the State level does not align with reporting at a Federal level, creating dissonance in reporting on service types leading to an increase in unfunded activity to meet these standards.

There is opportunity to better align reporting requirements between State and Federal governments and acknowledge the administrative and financial resources required by CSOs. This should also be acknowledged in the partnership approach between federal governments and CSOs, and factored into the way programs are designed and funded.

Consultation with CSOs and service users

Wide consultation for program design, acknowledging that CSOs have deep connections to the communities they service is vital. The intersectional nature of the clients CSOs support must also be considered. For example, a person accessing AOD services often requires legal, housing, mental health and other supports.

Consultation and program design can address these factors by:

- Undertaking consultations with CSOs and communities that reflect the intersectional nature of the clients the programs are seeking to support and leverage the CSO connections with target communities. Eg. consulting with AOD sector representatives for a program sitting within family violence.
- Engaging with peak bodies across sectors and States to support and coordinate sector-wide consultation.
- Resourcing and publishing outcome evaluations of funded programs to inform future program design.
- Ensure existing lived/living experience platforms and frameworks are used during consultation and program design. Eg. The Victorian Collaborative Centre's Lived Experience Advisory Panel and the Victorian Government's Victim Survivor Advisory Council.

Engaging with non-service users

It is challenging to access and engage people who are not ready to engage in treatment. Data systems only collect information on people who engage the system which translates into policies and programs being implemented informed only by those who are engaging. For example, research indicates that up to 500,000 Australians would benefit from AOD treatment but do not engage support[1].

The central factors deterring service access and therefore comprehensive service user engagement in service design are:

- a. Extensive demand leading to lengthy wait times, resulting in people disengaging from support[2]
- b. Broader system issues with regard to challenges in engaging the system

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[1] A Ritter, J Chalmers and M Gomez, 'Measuring Unmet Demand for Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment: The Application of an Australia Population-Based Planning Model', Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, Supplement, s18, 2019

[2] VAADA 2022. VAADA election statement. Equitable access to alcohol and other drug treatment for all Victorians. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.vaada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/SUB_VAADA-election-statement_12042022.pdf

      c.   Stigma, which is pervasive and deters help seeking behaviour. Specifically, this impedes the prioritisation of AOD treatment and broader systemic support for people experiencing dependency[3].

There is an opportunity to update the National Drug Strategy to address the above challenges. Such an approach would facilitate greater service user access and therefore increased participation in service planning across a broader range of people experiencing substance dependence and related issues.

Area of focus 2 - Providing grants that reflect the real cost of delivering quality services

Grant funding that reflects the true cost of delivering quality services would acknowledge the following:

- Compliance and regulation costs.
- Facility and program expenses – rent, utilities, maintenance, equipment and supplies needed.
- Administrative costs – 15% of the total grant amount.
- Annual indexation in line with inflation and Fair Work Commission salary decisions based on an agreed formula, similar to that recently agreed to by the Victorian Government, built into funding agreements. Eg. 80:20 - Fair Work Australia obligations (80% of the increase) and CPI (20%).
- Funding should be dedicated to reporting, data capture and evaluation of programs that meets the needs of the Departmental requirements and adds to the evidence base.

Area of focus 3 – Providing longer-term grant agreement terms

Across all levels of government there many short-term funding contracts (ie. 12 months or less) creating several challenges for CSOs, including:

- Inconsistent service provision to clients, leading to poorer outcomes.
- Recruiting suitably qualified staff into short-term roles.
- Lack of job security for employees.
- Limited strategic planning capacity for funded organisations.

We recommend the Federal Government commit to a minimum of 5-year contracts for CSOs based on the needs of the target populations, with annual reviews that allow for flexibility and innovation in program design and delivery. This ensures:

- The changing needs of the community are met, and continuity of care can be provided
- CSOs can work with the funding agency to embed innovation into service planning and reporting.

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[3] Farrugia et al, Basic care as exceptional care: addiction stigma and consumer accounts of quality healthcare in Australia. Health Sociological Review. 30:2. Pp 95-110.

- Recruit and build in longer term programs of capacity building and develop cross sector relationships.
- Suitably qualified staff can be recruited and retained.

Notice of funding expiration

For grants of all types and lengths, CSOs should receive at least six months' notice regarding whether a grant will be continued beyond its scheduled expiration date, as well as a guarantee of when the agreed funding will be paid.

This will allow agencies time to properly plan as needed. Eg. close programmatic activity, liaise with community and other stakeholders to inform them of pending services changes and provide assurance or otherwise to the impacted workforce.

Area of Focus 5 - Partnering with trusted community organisations with strong local links

Reflections on place-based funding approaches

Agencies that have an established presence in a community with strong relationships with the local community, service users, people with lived and living experience, and other CSOs should be recognised as a priority for funding bodies.

Windana and Taskforce are leaders in delivering place-based initiatives that have established platforms for collaboration across sectors, with organisations all working to a common goal, including CSOs and Government departments. These approaches have been developed from identified community need, developed with best practice academic evidence and practice wisdom, delivered in partnership, guided by lived experience and evaluated for impact. Place-based approaches are well placed to demonstrate innovative approaches to complex social issues and adapt to respond to other locations.

Despite the positive impact of these approaches and attained outcomes, securing funding for such initiatives when they have not been seeded by a sustainable funding source impedes impact.

And while collaborative funding models between philanthropy and Government are welcomed, a reliance on these models for ongoing place-based service delivery is unrealistic. Philanthropic funding is often engaged as a means of piloting new programs rather than as long-term funding.

As outlined in section two, a minimum of 5-year contracts address many of these challenges.

Example – Living Free Project

TaskForce's Living Free Project is a unique placed-based initiative in the Frankston Mornington Peninsula region of Victoria providing an innovative response to young girls at risk of victimisation and criminalisation. Over 7 years, the project has supported over 500 of our most vulnerable girls and young women, engaged with over 1,000 professionals to build their capability to improve how they identify and respond, formally partnered with eight other agencies, contributed to advocacy efforts to improve policy and decision making and provided a platform for those with lived experience to also contribute to the change narrative.

Despite the enormous benefit, evaluated outcomes and widespread support, the funding model supporting the project is complex to sustain and manage. Over the 7 years the project has seen 7 philanthropic funders and two-year Federal Government funding that was not a sustainable funding stream. Organisational resources have been used to support the project however this is not sustainable. Government has a responsibility to provide adequate, sustainable funding to allow organisations to drive such impactful initiatives.

We thank you again for the opportunity to provide input into this process. If you would like to discuss this submission, or would like further information, please contact Adam Miller, General Manager Communications and Partnerships at adam.miller@windana.org.au