**Homelessness Emergency Accommodation Response Team (HEART)**

**North Metro Local Area Services Network (HMA & NEMA) **

**Terms of Reference – 27th May 2020**

**1.Background**

In December 2019, reported cases of a viral pneumonia caused by a previously unknown pathogen emerged. The pathogen was identified as a novel (new) coronavirus (COVID-19). Currently, there is no specific treatment (no vaccine and no antivirals) for the new virus. On 16 March 2020, a State of Emergency was declared in Victoria to combat COVID-19.

The shared challenge is to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to maximise community safety and well-being among people experiencing homelessness or in housing crisis during this pandemic.

The coordination of housing and homelessness service providers at a local level is a crucial element to an effective response to people experiencing homelessness that require access to, or have been placed in, purchased crisis accommodation during the pandemic.

To enable this coordination, a local Homelessness Emergency Accommodation Response Team (HEART) comprising of the Homelessness Networker, Homelessness Access Points, Support Providers and representatives from local DHHS Area Offices will be established in each local area to lead this response. The HEART response will work to prevent a return to homelessness for people currently in emergency accommodation. This includes preventing a return to unsafe, low amenity, private rooming houses.

This approach should not duplicate any recent emergency responses but build upon, support and assist as appropriate.

**2. Purpose**

The North Metro HEART is a working group of the Northern LASN established to develop and implement the HEART response, as outlined in the amendment to the Homelessness COVID-19 Guidelines and Conditions of Funding, May 2020.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The HEART Working Group undertakes this role (in accordance with NLASN and NHN Steering Group advice) to:

* ensure the best possible response to consumers
* coordinate the activities of the HEART
* collect the data required of the HEART.

**3. Roles**

**Homelessness Networkers**

Networkers have a key role to play in terms of mapping local homelessness resources and supporting the coordination of the HEART. This will include:

* convening the HEART meetings
* developing an implementation plan and terms of reference
* in collaboration with the DHHS Agency Performance and System Support, map local homelessness resources to contribute to the response and keep an updated record of available resources.
* regularly checking in with HEART members to identify changes in their capacity (the availability of local resources may change over time due to the impacts of COVID-19)

**DHHS - Agency Performance and System Support**

Agency Performance and Systems Support (APSS) teams play a key role in the contract management of funded organisations to deliver services on behalf of the department against their Service Agreement.

In relation to the HEART, APSS staff will:

* attend HEART meetings
* provide information to the HEART, including an up-to-date version of department guidelines and any other relevant information
* act as a key contact for stakeholders to communicate relevant issues to the department
* APSS will communicate with the Central Homelessness Accommodation and Support Unit as required, including confirmation of establishment of the HEART.

**Access Points**

Homelessness access points will perform the role of Primary Agency for the COVID-19 response given they provide the Initial Assessment and Planning function.

Access points will be responsible for coordinating the COVID-19 response for people in purchased emergency accommodation in each designated local area. Access points will have 2 main responsibilities:

**1. Coordination**

In its coordination role, Prioritisation staff at Access points will be responsible for the allocation of resources to meet demand. In order to fulfil this objective, Access points will be required to have visibility of the resources available within the local area, and to facilitate their appropriate use. The HEART group will be required to establish the most appropriate forms of sharing, communicating and recording this information.

**2. Service provision**

Based on the identified needs and available resources, the Access points will also be responsible for:

* brokering emergency accommodation for clients, including through the COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation call centre
* where there are no or insufficient existing supports, with client consent, referring clients to other services
* organising transport (e.g. provide taxi vouchers) so clients can be transported to accommodation
* providing a mobile phone for clients without means of contact, so support workers can contact them
* provide support workers with the phone number of clients who have received a mobile phone during their Initial Assessment and Planning.
* recording information regarding each client and services provided via the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP).

**Support providers**

* There is an expectation that all program areas, where possible, contribute resources to HEART. There is an expectataion that HEART support covers the geographical area of the Northern Metropoiltan Region including the CBD.
* Support Providers (including Transitional Support, Private Rental Assistance Program, Crisis Support) will be responsible for accepting referrals from the Access Points to support clients in purchased emergency accommodation, based on their identified needs.
* This also includes facilitating access to health services and ensuring clients have essentials. Please see the NM HEART Practice Guide for more details on the scope of the service offer).
* All support vacancies are to be listed on the Resource Register. All HEART vacancies are also required to be listed on the Resource Register using the HEART identifier. All vacancies must have enough details to ensure that PL staff can refer quickly and appropriately to the vacancy.
* Support Providers should keep the Access Points updated about available resources on a regular basis. Good lines of communication between stakeholders should ensure an appropriate and manageable allocation of support across the area’s homelessness service system.
* Support Providers also have the responsibility to advise the HEART of notable changes in service capacity.

**Transitional Housing**

* There is an expectation that all program areas, where possible, contribute to HEART. This includes transitional housing providers.
* All transitional housing vacancies that have been identified as a HEART resource are to be listed on the Resource Register using the HEART identifier.
* All vacancies must have enough details to ensure that PL staff can refer quickly and appropriately to the vacancy.
* Transitional housing providers should keep their Access point colleagues and the HEART updated about available resources on a regular basis. Good lines of communication between stakeholders should ensure an appropriate and manageable allocation of support across the area’s homelessness service system.
* Transitional housing providers also have the responsibility to advise the HEART of notable changes in service capacity.

**4. Information Sharing**

Members are in agreement that HEART is part of the suite of possible responses available to consumers when they give consent, during an IAP assessment, for referrals to be made on their behalf to access support, housing or both. Households *without* an IAP assessment in place *cannot be included in the HEART response* until an IAP assessment has been completed and consent sought and documented.

* Access points will maintain their own lists of households in scope for a HEART response.
* Prioritisation staff at Access points will decide which households to bring to the HEART Allocation meetings for discussion and referral to the HEART resources on offer at that point in time.
* Households who are the most vulnerable and at risk will be prioritised for resources.
* Prioritisation staff from all three Access points will work together as a team to decide and agree on which households will be allocated a HEART resource.
* HEART Allocation meetings will take place three times per week via a dedicated Microsoft teams page. Meeting frequency may change if deemed appropriate.

**5. Meetings**

The group will meet fortnightly up until July 2020, further meetings will be scheduled post July if necessary.

**6. Accountabilities**

**1. Northern Local Area Service Network (LASN)**

The HEART is accountable to the NLASN and will ensure that the NLASN is well informed of HEART activities. Updates on the work of the HEART will be a standing item on the NLASN agenda going forward. The HEART working group will have permission to make decisions on behalf of the NLASN when appropriate.

The NLASN is a DHHS sanctioned SHS coordination body and the mechanism used to make decisions, progress its workplan and share information. Membership of the LASN includes all SHS funded services in the Northern Metropolitan Region. The NLASN Reference Group has 6 nominated representatives and is authorised by the NLASN to:

* develop and monitor the NLASN Strategic Plan
* manage the Network Coordinator
* guide the operational priorities and key tasks of the NLASN
* plan NLASN meetings and progress NLASN decisions
* ensure that the NLASN deliverables are achieved
* develop policy responses as required
* represent the NLASN as required.

**2. Record keeping and reporting**

* Service Providers will continue to report all client and service-related data according to the Homelessness Data Collection.
* Access Points will keep a record of the people supported in emergency accommodation, including ALPHA codes.
* Access Points will provide the DHHS representatives regular updates as to the number of people assisted through the HEART and of any local issues.

**7. Amendment, modification or variation**

This Terms of Reference is effective from May 2020 and will be ongoing until terminated by agreement between the parties. The Terms of Reference may be amended with agreement from members.

**8. Resourcing**

The Northern Homelessness Network will provide secretariat services, coordinate the agenda, circulate papers and provide minutes of the meeting up until July 2020. The NLASN Reference Group will review resourcing of the HEART working group if there is an extension of timelines post July 2020.

**9. Membership (see page 5 for full list)**

* Northern Homelessness Networker
* Launch Housing
* Merri Outreach Support Service
* Haven Home Safe
* VincentCare Northern Community Hub
* DHHS representatives (HMA & NEMA)
* WISHIN
* VACSAL
* Hope Street Youth and Family Services
* Melbourne City Mission

***Note:*** *Additional attendees with specific expertise may be invited to contribute to discussions on an as-needs basis.*

**10. Dispute Resolution**

As per the NLASN dispute resolution processes.

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| **NORTH METRO HEART Working Group** **MEMBERS** |
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1. <https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/news/updated-guidelines-funded-homelessness-service-providers-related-covid-19> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)