Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared by a consultancy team comprising the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO), Craze Lateral Solutions, RMIT Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development, and Helen Connor and Associates.

The report draws to a close the initial phase of a national project to develop options for the measurement of client satisfaction in SAAP-funded services. The findings of this report will provide a foundation for further development and piloting of client satisfaction measures and approaches.

Preceding this report were:

- A Discussion Paper (November 2001), Discussion Paper; and
- A Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations from Consultation.

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Introduction

The Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) was contracted in 2001 by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to develop options for the measurement of client satisfaction in services funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

The consultancy team included AFHO as the lead agency, Leanne Craze (Craze Lateral Solutions), David Mackenzie (RMIT Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development), and Helen Connor (Helen Connor and Associates). The consultation phase involved eight partner agencies – the Women’s Refuge Group (WA), the Gateway Community Group (QLD), Alice Springs Women’s Refuge (NT), Youth Accommodation Association of NSW (NSW), Council to Homeless Persons (Victoria), Anglicare Tasmania (TAS), Beryl Women’s Refuge (ACT), and Homelessness SA (SA).

The Project’s Purpose and Importance

The purpose of this project was to develop options for the measurement of client satisfaction in SAAP funded services. SAAP funded agencies exist to provide services and assistance to people in crisis as a result of being homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This project explored how information about the views of people needing and using SAAP services can be obtained and used to improve the quality of the overall program and the services provided by individual agencies.

This project was designed to assist the SAAP Program and SAAP funded agencies further develop frameworks for consumer feedback, by facilitating discussion of a number of key questions. These were:

- What is client satisfaction in SAAP, what does it mean and what are its components?
- What is service quality in SAAP, of what does quality service comprise and how does it differ across service types?
- What are some feasible options for measuring client satisfaction and service quality in SAAP?
- How can SAAP service providers use client satisfaction information and measures of service quality to improve services?
- How can SAAP administrators and researchers use client satisfaction information and measures of service quality to improve program performance?
- How does the measurement of client satisfaction and service quality relate to improving client outcomes and program impact under SAAP IV?
The Project Phases

The project was conducted from September 2001 to October 2002 and involved the following phases:

(i) A literature review, and preparation and circulation to stakeholders of a Discussion Paper and Summary Paper. Extracts from the Discussion Paper are included in the Appendix of this report.

(ii) Consultation with SAAP clients, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders through meetings and written submissions; followed by the development of an Interim Report. Two separate consultation meetings were held in each consultation location; one meeting with SAAP clients, and one meeting with SAAP agencies and other stakeholders. SAAP clients were remunerated for their participation and assistance with this project. Approximately 10 to 15 participants attended each meeting. A list of meetings and submissions is in the Appendix of this report.

(iii) Piloting of options, refinement, and development of the Final Project Report. The Pilot Questionnaire, Agency Feedback Form, and details of agencies that participated in the pilot are in the Appendix of this report.

Pilots were held in eight locations around Australia during July-August 2002. The pilot client groups, location and agencies were:

- Families, Brisbane (Gateway Community Group)
- Young Women, Adelaide (St John’s Youth Services)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Alice Springs (Alice Springs Women’s Refuge)
- Domestic and Family Violence, Perth, (Stirling Women’s Refugee)
- People with High and Complex Needs, Hobart (Bethlehem House)
- Young People, Sydney (EASY)
- People from non-English Speaking Backgrounds, Melbourne (Melbourne Citymission)
- ‘Call centre’ – interviews by phone with single men aged 26-40, RMIT Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development.

Services that expressed an interest in running a pilot were provided with a copy of the Key Findings and Recommendations Consultation Report. Once services agreed to conduct a pilot each service was requested to administer the instrument to a negotiated number of clients, depending on their service throughput and their capacity to administer the questionnaire. AFHO actively sought the advice of the services as to the most appropriate way of administering the questionnaire to their
client group to ensure that the service was comfortable in conducting the pilot. Each service was also requested to nominate one or more preferred methods of administration (provision of questionnaires to clients for completion in writing, one-on-one interviews, telephone interviews, etc), which may work in their context.

At the completion of the pilots each agency was asked to complete a feedback form. The feedback forms and follow-up discussions with the agencies about the pilots form the basis for this report. The AFHO Secretariat visited the Melbourne and Hobart pilots.

Structure of Report

This report is divided into the following six sections.

Section One  Developing Client satisfaction Processes in SAAP: Background and Key Issues

Section Two  The Meaning of Client Satisfaction in SAAP

Section Three  Different Approaches to Measuring Client Satisfaction

Section Four  Progressing the Measurement of Client Satisfaction in SAAP

Section Five  The Resource Implications of Assessing Client Satisfaction in SAAP

Section Six  Recommendations

Major Findings and Conclusions

Section One: Developing Client Satisfaction Processes in SAAP: Background and Key Issues

General support for the introduction of client satisfaction measures

There is general support from both SAAP agencies and clients for the introduction of client satisfaction measures in SAAP.

Flexible, meaningful, and resourced

The development and implementation of client satisfaction measures in SAAP should be done in a way that is consultative, flexible, meaningful at the agency level, fully resourced and not overly burdensome on services or clients.

Relationship between client satisfaction and service quality

Measuring client satisfaction is not equivalent to measuring overall service quality. Client satisfaction may best be thought of as one distinct dimension of service quality and may best be measured as part of an integrated approach to assessment of service quality.
Quality improvement framework

The development of client satisfaction measures in SAAP should be undertaken in the context of a broader quality improvement framework which includes measures of unmet demand, client outcomes, evaluation of other programs which impact on SAAP clients, and support for continuous quality improvement in SAAP agencies.

Using client satisfaction measures

The purpose and intended use of client satisfaction data must be clarified and defined in consultation between SAAP agencies, the Commonwealth and States and Territories to ensure that only necessary information is collected, that there is no duplication, and that further development of client satisfaction measurements builds on already existing practices.

Client participation

To increase the reliability and representativeness of client satisfaction data, programs like SAAP, must continue to build relationships with consumers and consumer groups. SAAP client satisfaction data should assist to identify consumers needs, service preferences and barriers to consumer participation.

Client satisfaction measurements with children

Given the complex and sensitive issues involved in collecting client satisfaction data from children, there needs to be a separate project for accompanying children.

Ethical Requirements

As a prerequisite to the introduction of client satisfaction measures in SAAP, best practice ethical procedures will need to be developed in consultation with all stakeholders, to maximise participation and ensure adherence to privacy legislation. Such procedures will need to ensure free and informed client consent, clarity about the purposes for which data will be used; collection of relevant data only; client anonymity and confidentiality; overall benefit to clients; incentives to clients and services to participate; and relevant feedback to clients and service providers.

Section Two: The Meaning of Client Satisfaction in SAAP

Client satisfaction comprises the extent to which the response or service provided and the outcomes met the expectation and the needs of the client. Measures in SAAP should focus on a client’s level of satisfaction aspects of service delivery such as the quality of engagement and support by staff, the quality of information and communication, the helpfulness of support programs offered, and the standard of accommodation and other facilities.
Section Three: Different Approaches to Measuring Client Satisfaction

Common methodological principles in the collection of SAAP client satisfaction data

The development of a range of methodologies for measuring client satisfaction in SAAP should be based on common methodological principles relating to free and informed client consent, appropriate timing of information provision and data collection, judicious sampling techniques, and the need for both qualitative and quantitative data collection; as well as any additional principles which emerge from further work in this area.

Criteria for assessing different methodological approaches to client satisfaction

Criteria suggested by the literature and research for determining methods with greatest utility in service contexts like SAAP include the following:

- Cost-effectiveness
- Time-effectiveness
- Response rate
- Representativeness
- Flexibility of method
- Meaningful data
- Applicability
- Reliability of data
- Validity
- Client friendly and appropriate
- Inclusive of all groups
- Manageable at a program level
- Manageable at an agency level

Timing of raising the concept with clients

Client satisfaction information or consent should not be sought from clients immediately on their arrival at a service, as they are often in crisis and have more immediate problems and issues to deal with.

Timing and methodology for data collection

The actual collection of client satisfaction information, via interviews, surveys, etc, should take place after a client has settled into a service, at the identified most appropriate time. The findings and recommended times and methods of administering the client satisfaction instrument should at this stage be seen as indicative. The timing and methodologies outlined in this report need to be tested more thoroughly.
A toolkit of approaches to assessing client satisfaction

Given the high degree of diversity in the SAAP sector, in terms of both agencies and clients, a range of methodologies for assessing client satisfaction must be developed, rather than taking a simplistic “one size fits all” approach to gathering or obtaining client satisfaction data. There needs to be a “toolkit” of approaches. From the “toolkit” of approaches face-to-face interviews and interviews by phone conducted by independent third party appear to hold the greatest utility for most of the key population groups targeted by SAAP. Further approaches to explore in the next phase of development and piloting of the client satisfaction instrument include:

- Group processes;
- Website-based client satisfaction;
- Involvement of non-English speaking background community representatives as facilitators or interviewers, and
- The use of peers or mentors in interview or group processes.

Sampling

The next phase of development and piloting of the client satisfaction instruments and methods should consider the use of strategic or purposive samples. Strategic or purposive sampling is used to select locations or groups to participate in a study on the basis of a set of criteria used to guide the data collection.

The criteria could be selected around the characteristics of a service:

- established for more than 10 years;
- newly established – operating under three years;
- auspiced by a small community organisation;
- auspiced by a larger welfare, family support of church based organisation.

Criteria could also be selected around the type of service primarily offered by the service:

- information, referral and advocacy;
- accommodation;
- outreach support, etc.

Options for sampling that could be incorporated into a national program of measuring client satisfaction in SAAP include:

- All services or proportional sample of service over a short-time period eg as with the Survey of Unmet Need;
- A cross-section or purposive selection of services for each of SAAP’s target group;
A cross-section or purposive selection of services for a particular target group eg young people, single men etc;

- A geographic cross-section or purposive selection of services e.g. a sample based on geographic location nationally or within a state/territory eg urban, regional, rural and remote etc.

Section Four: Progressing the Measurement of Client Satisfaction in SAAP

The core set of questions

The “core” set of questions piloted in this project were confirmed as appropriate focal areas for measuring client satisfaction. This does not rule out the formulation and testing of different sets.

Need for supplementary questions

It is necessary to supplement the “core” questions of the client satisfaction instrument with additional questions relevant to different client groups and services.

The term ‘satisfied’ and the high positive response rate

The use of the term ‘satisfied’ and the content and order of the five-point scale prompted clients toward positive responses. The questions and any scale employed need to be worded with a view to encouraging clients to provide feedback on:

- What they did not like;
- The problems they experienced with the service;
- The extent to which they felt their expectations and needs were met; and
- The changes they consider to be necessary.

Pilot different instruments

The next phase of development and piloting of client satisfaction instruments should compare the effects of asking clients how unhappy they were with each focal service aspect as against how happy they were. Similarly, the effects of differing the order of a scale should also be piloted i.e. starting a scale with the negative options.

The questions should contain everyday language. Pictorial versions of the questions and scales could be designed in an attempt to assist the participation of client groups with literacy and numeracy issues and to assist clients whose first language is other than English.

Selective pilots using different methodologies

A number of more in-depth pilots could be conducted including:

- A call centre with single men;
- A mix of methods with young people;
Face-to-face interviews with women experiencing domestic and family violence; and

Face-to-face interviews and group processes with clients with high and complex needs.

Each pilot should give attention to identifying the support required to enable the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

**Client Satisfaction Resources for Agencies**

A package, including a tool-kit of methods, could usefully be developed to help agencies further design and routinely implement client satisfaction processes.

**Section Five: The Resource Implications of Assessing Client Satisfaction in SAAP**

**Training and Resourcing**

Agencies must be fully resourced to administer the client satisfaction instrument without detracting from other elements of service delivery. The proposed development of a resource package for agencies, including a tool-kit of approaches, would be a significant step forward in supporting agencies to further develop their client satisfaction processes.

**Positive incentives for agencies**

SAAP agencies should be encouraged and fully resourced to participate in the measurement of client satisfaction measures, using positive incentives.

**Rationalising client-reported data collection processes in SAAP**

To avoid unnecessary burden on clients and agencies, and to reduce administrative costs, there is a need to examine whether it is possible to merge processes measuring client satisfaction with processes measuring client outcomes.

**Major Recommendations**

**Recommendation One**

*Proceed to the next phase of design and extensive piloting*

It is recommended that the department initiate another phase of further design, development and piloting of client satisfaction instruments.

**Recommendation Two**

*Further testing of client satisfaction measures*

It is recommended that the ‘core set’ of questions developed in this phase of the project as well as additional sets be further tested.
Recommendation Three  
**The development of a resource package for agencies including a tool-kit of client satisfaction approaches**  
It is recommended that the Department in consultation with services develop over time a resource package including a ‘toolkit’ of client satisfaction approaches to be used throughout the sector.

Recommendation Four  
**Piloting different methods for collecting client satisfaction information**  
It is recommended that a number of more in-depth pilots be conducted including:  
- A call centre with single men;  
- A mix of methods with young people;  
- Face-to-face interviews with women experiencing domestic and family violence;  
- Face-to-face interviews and group processes with clients with high and complex needs.

Each pilot should give attention to identifying the support required to enable the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Recommendation Five  
**Accompanying children**  
It is recommended that the Department investigates and pilots the collection of client satisfaction information from accompanying children. Possible options include:  
- Forming a partnership with a tertiary education institution and a service provider to submit an application for SPIRT funding;  
- Sponsoring a research fellowship based within the Department;  
- Funding a project to specifically consider client satisfaction and accompanying children.

Recommendation Six  
**Addressing the high positive response rate**  
It is recommended that in further developing the client satisfaction instrument attention be given to ensuring that the instrument and methodologies encourage clients to provide information about:  
- What they did not like;  
- The problems they experienced with the service;  
- The extent to which their felt their expectations and needs were met; and  
- The changes they consider to be necessary.
Recommendation Seven
Minimising demands on the program, agencies and clients

It is recommended that during the next phase of design, development and piloting, consideration be given to identifying and testing opportunities for merging processes and instruments for measuring client outcomes with those for measuring client satisfaction.

Recommendation Eight
Ethical issues and protocols required

It is recommended that protocols for addressing the ethical issues identified and listed in this report be developed and included in the proposed Client Satisfaction Resource Package for agencies.

Recommendation Nine
Methodological and interpretative questions to be asked during the pilots

It is recommended that in further developing client satisfaction measures and approaches consideration be given to the methodological and interpretative questions identified in this report that could not be definitively and comprehensively explored during this phase of the project. Identified in the Memorandum of Understanding as priority areas for action over the five years of the agreement.

Detailed information is presented according to the ten Key Result Areas within each of the four strategic themes;

- Information on the States and Territories progress in Indigenous homelessness issues is incorporated in the summary of performance information;

- Chapter 5 outlines future activities at the national level and those activities identified by the States and Territories in their annual performance reporting to be undertaken over the remainder of SAAP IV, categorised according to the four national strategic themes; and

- Chapter 6 provides some concluding comments on achievements and challenges for SAAP IV in the future.
Section One
Developing Client Satisfaction Processes in SAAP: Background and Key Issues

1.1 Key Developments in SAAP and Quality Improvement

The use and continual development of client satisfaction measures in SAAP must be undertaken within the overall policy and strategic planning context of SAAP, as well as current data collection processes. Client satisfaction research in SAAP should also be consistent with quality improvement practices in Australia.

Outlook: SAAP 2000-2005

The overall aim of SAAP is the provision of crisis and transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services to help people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence. The four core principles guiding SAAP responses to client need are to:

- Provide a safety net for disadvantaged people;
- Focus on client need and satisfaction;
- Work collaboratively with other services systems; and
- Focus on the achievement of outcomes and be managed and evaluated on the basis of results.¹

Requirements for the Report on Government Services

Currently, government provided and/or funded services and programs are required to provide a report on their performance to the Council Of Australian Governments (COAG). The SAAP program reports on a number of performance indicators including measures for client outcomes, satisfactory standard of service, access and equity, appropriateness of service, client support, service delivery and service accessibility.² Client satisfaction is a further performance indicator, that to-date remains undeveloped and unimplemented in SAAP. This project is seeking to progress thinking and practice in relation to the measurement of client satisfaction in SAAP and how this might assist with reporting on quality.

¹ As outlined in: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) 2000-2005 Memorandum of Understanding, Department of Family and Community Services; and Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Strategic Plan SAAP IV 2000-2005, Department of Family and Community Services.

CLIENT OUTCOMES

A new project to develop a framework for the measurement of client outcomes in SAAP commenced in early 2002, based on the groundwork laid by the Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management in their report, *The Measurement of Client Outcomes in SAAP Services* (1999). Instruments for assessing client outcomes are currently being piloted. The instruments reflect conceptual links between measures of client satisfaction and client outcomes, particularly in relation to the reasons for which both sets of instruments are being developed, namely to:

- Focus service delivery and case management on the intended benefits for clients so that we can better plan and manage the service quality to meet clients' needs; and
- Ensure that program resources are targeted to meeting client needs and delivering appropriate outcomes (FIPPM, 1999:37).3

Conceptually, measures of client satisfaction complement client outcome measures by highlighting the client's view about the service's role in meeting, and capacity to meet, client needs. The program logic sets being developed by the Client Outcomes Project will assist to provide a context for analysis of the views of clients, particularly in relation to the extent to which SAAP services might be reasonably expected to meet both the needs and expectations of clients.

There is overlap between aspects of service provision focused on in this project's questionnaire and those focused on in the proposed questionnaires of the Client Outcomes Project. Both sets of instruments seek information about similar aspects of service quality. The Client Outcomes Project included the following instruments:

- Checklist for Very Short Contact Services (eg Information provided, Way treated);
- BT Scale (eg accommodation and different types of support);
- BT Scale Generic Outcome Measurement Instrument (eg different types of support).

The items of “feeling safe”, “knowing the next step”, “the quality of the food”, “cleanliness” and “personal space” that are targeted in the Checklist, were identified by clients during this project as factors influencing their satisfaction. Further, the Checklist for Very Short Contact Services, like the client satisfaction questionnaire proposed in this project, requires the client to reflect with reference to a five-point scale on the extent to which they were satisfied. It will be necessary to continue to take account of further common developments as the Client Outcomes and Client Satisfaction projects progress. In particular, it might be possible to merge the Client Satisfaction instrument with the Checklist for Very Short Contact Services.

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3 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services 1999, *The Measurement of Client Outcomes in SAAP Services*, Report, prepared by the Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management, Flinders University, South Australia, p. 37.
SAAP National Data Collection
Information is collected by agencies for clients receiving support through SAAP and is forwarded to the SAAP National Data Collection Agency for reporting.\(^4\) Unmet demand for SAAP services is collected twice a year by agencies for a week at a time and focuses on average daily demand rate. Additionally, the Casual Client Collection, which elicits information about one-off assistance provided to homeless people is collected over a two-week period in May once every year.

It will be important for any attempt to measure client satisfaction to be mindful of current data collection, reporting requirements and processes, so as to avoid excessive costs and demands on resources and personnel within SAAP. It will also be important to identify opportunities for adding to existing data collections to provide insight into client satisfaction.

Information Management Plan
A SAAP Information Management Plan (IMP) is being implemented, following a review of SAAP information in 2000. The IMP aims to build on the success of the SAAP National Data Collection, to create a richer source of homelessness information as a by-product of information management at the agency level. The main focus of the IMP is on increasing the quality of information collection, by increasing its value and use for the SAAP agencies that collect it. Client satisfaction information could assist by providing agencies with the views and insights of clients.

Quality Standards
Within many service and industry sectors there is an increasing emphasis on ensuring quality management and continuous quality improvement. In some government funded sectors including disability, health and mental health, service standards have been established nationally in order to promote better outcomes. For example, Commonwealth funded disability services are independently audited on their compliance with National Disability Standards. In some states, service accreditation processes that include an emphasis on quality improvement have been established as part of service agreements between government and service providers.

Through the SAAP Bilateral Agreements the Commonwealth, States and Territories are striving to continually improve program management, policy development and service delivery through further discussion of mechanisms including:

- A national accountability framework;
- A national research agenda;
- Improvements to National Data Collection;

\(^4\) Each year reports include a national report, national demand reports, twice yearly agency report and other special publications, such as the Accompanying Children’s Survey report.
Professional and agency development; and
- Quality improvement strategies including client feedback mechanisms.

Client satisfaction measures and research in SAAP should be consistent with these directions and should be applicable, relevant and useful to the program needs of the Commonwealth, States and Territories.

1.2 Relationship between Client Satisfaction and Service Quality

The consultations and pilots found that client satisfaction is seen by SAAP agencies as a very important indicator of quality, and a very important source of information to guide continuous improvement efforts. However, as noted later, many factors influence client satisfaction, not all of which are related to service quality, and this needs to be taken into account in any attempt to use client satisfaction measures to assess or guide service quality.

In addition, measurement of client satisfaction is seen by many SAAP agencies as only one key component of an integrated approach to quality improvement in the SAAP sector. Other elements of this integrated approach were identified as:

- Measurement of unmet demand: Though unprompted by the consultation process, it was widely noted by participants that measures of client satisfaction can only really be applied to those clients who gain entry to a SAAP service and receive assistance, and that the views of those who are unable to gain entry are bypassed by such measures. It was widely pointed out that research into unmet demand is required to complement measures of client satisfaction.

- Measurement of client outcomes: Participants pointed out that client outcomes are not necessarily synonymous with client satisfaction. For example, it was noted that clients who are “pushed out of their comfort zone” by a service provider, and strongly encouraged to make changes in their lives, may not feel happy about this at the time, but may achieve better outcomes in the long run than those who are not “pushed”. It is also evident that many factors influence client outcomes, only one of which is the quality of SAAP service delivery (and as noted repeatedly, client satisfaction may not accurately reflect service quality).

- Evaluation of other relevant programs which impact on SAAP clients: It was frequently pointed out in the consultations, pilots and written submissions that SAAP does not operate in a vacuum, and that the success of SAAP service interventions depend to a large extent on the availability and quality of other services and programs needed by the client.

- Support for quality improvement at service level, eg through resourcing for staff and management training, mechanisms for ongoing self-assessment of quality service delivery by agencies, etc.
Aspects of service quality not effectively assessed through client satisfaction measures

Much work is undertaken by agencies which is not readily observable by clients. This work, though not visible to clients, does have an impact on the overall quality of services provided to clients, for example:

- Networking with other agencies and services and establishing sound working relationships;
- Submission writing, national/state/territory representation and contribution to policy and service development;
- Lobbying;
- Advocacy;
- Organisational and financial administration;
- Strategic planning and decision-making by staff and processes for review;
- Staff development, supervision and appraisal etc;
- Longer term outcomes of service delivery eg where a young person might, upon leaving a SAAP agency, be dissatisfied, but sometime looks back on the service received and is satisfied or sees the benefit of what happened.

The consultations suggested that other measures that might be used to assess agency and service effectiveness and quality include:

- Peer/service review;
- Performance appraisal;
- Review of planning processes;
- Review of aspects of care eg case closure;
- Team case reviews;
- Views of other people involved with clients eg family, teachers, other services etc; and
- Narrative evaluation of practice.

A submission by one agency\(^5\) provided a list of strategies in addition to client satisfaction measures that it uses to assess service standards and quality.

- An ongoing subcommittee of the Board of Directors is tasked with responsibility for monitoring standards of service.
- A six monthly audit of standards is undertaken by a senior staff representative external to the particular service and the service co-ordinator or manager.

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5 Submission 10.
Measurement against standards includes:

- Audit of staff policies and work practices
- Audit of service facilities
- Focus group of staff
- Focus group with clients;
- Client complaints and grievances procedures
- Consultations with external agencies and services to obtain feedback on performance
- Targeted evaluation and research on key aspects of service delivery.

According to this agency, the above processes seek to include the range of stakeholders relevant to service delivery.

In addition, the information comprises a mix of stakeholder opinions or perceptions as well as objective data on service quality. Our agency’s approach also acknowledges that multiple or “triangulated” measures and methodologies for assessing quality are required to fully inform improvements in service delivery.

1.3 Purpose and Use of Client Satisfaction Data

The consultations and pilots indicated that there is general support from both SAAP agencies and clients for the introduction of client satisfaction measures in SAAP, providing this is done in a way which is consultative, flexible, meaningful at agency level, fully resourced, and not overly burdensome on services or clients.

Most agencies participating in consultations already engage in some means of collecting client satisfaction information, whether by interviewing clients, holding house meetings or focus group sessions, administering written surveys, offering anonymous suggestion facilities, introducing client complaints and grievance procedures, and so on. Through trial and error, many agencies have come some way towards understanding what works and what doesn’t in their context. The development of a flexible toolkit of approaches (as discussed below) would allow services to build on work already done.

The consultations and pilots found that there is a need for clarity about the purposes of data collection on client satisfaction, as a prerequisite to “buy-in” from agencies and clients. The key issue of concern was how the data would be used, at the agency level and at the program level. There was a widespread view that measures of client satisfaction can be (and indeed in many cases already are) a useful tool for agencies to continuously improve service quality. There was also a strong view amongst agencies that any attempt to use client satisfaction as a measure of the quality of the overall SAAP program is likely to be problematic given the level of diversity within the sector, which could lead to data collection being so broad and so variable as to be meaningless.
The consultations and pilots found that the worst case scenario from the point of view of agencies was that a standardised “one size fits all” client satisfaction questionnaire could be imposed, with government departments requiring all agencies to administer the questionnaire, and send the resulting data back to the department. This scenario envisages the data being used as the basis for future decisions about funding at the program and agency level. The concerns expressed were that the data generated and used at this level could be subjective and meaningless on its own. During the project it was, for example, queried whether a high level of client dissatisfaction would be interpreted to mean that an agency should be defunded, or to mean that an agency required more funding to be better able to meet client need.

The best case scenario was that agencies would be resourced and supported to use or adapt the most appropriate methodology for their situation, from a “toolkit” of approaches developed and available nationally. The primary purpose would be to improve service delivery at agency level, with a limited amount of core client satisfaction data collated at the national level and used judiciously, in combination with other relevant data, to help guide the SAAP program overall. In this regard the data could be used to identify gaps in services.

There was a strong view, from SAAP agencies in particular, that the purpose and intended use of client satisfaction data must be clarified and agreed before any new initiatives in this area are introduced.

Usefulness of the questionnaire at the State/Territory and National level

Agencies emphasised that there must be collaboration between the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments to ensure that only necessary information is collected, and that there is no duplication.

Agencies expressed concern at the potential for services to be required to complete “another huge mass of paperwork” in relation to client satisfaction. The demands of the NDCA data collection is frequently seen as burdensome and onerous, especially by small agencies with limited administrative resources, and there is no wish to add to this burden. However, the possibility that there may be some value in correlating client satisfaction data with the NDCA was not rejected out of hand. The suggestion was made that client satisfaction information might provide the grounded data that is thought to be currently lacking in the NDCA.

The collection of client satisfaction information could be linked to existing surveys of SAAP service provision, and could be a means of having client input to NDCA data. At the same time, it was noted that NDCA data collection is very problematic, and more training and support is needed for services to collect data. If client satisfaction data is also to be collected, additional training and support will be needed.

Clients from the consultations emphasised the need for SAAP to be able to show that it is meeting clients’ needs, in terms of both client satisfaction, and client outcomes. The young people’s consultation suggested that client satisfaction information could
inform the development of minimum service standards as well as a charter of client's rights and responsibilities. Any such standards should be nationally consistent, and the compliance of agencies with these standards should be independently and externally reviewed.

The majority of agencies believed that collating the client satisfaction information on a state/territory level would be useful. The agencies were cautious about collecting the information nationally due to a concern that what is relevant in one region or state/territory may not be in another or across different target groups. Agencies did, however, support the potential of a client satisfaction instrument to identify gaps in SAAP nationally and to be a significant tool to address those gaps nationally.

**Usefulness of client satisfaction at an agency level**

Agency feedback from the consultations and pilots concurred with Standards Australia (2001:2) that client satisfaction measurement when used effectively and strategically can improve the quality of service by:

- Supporting and informing management decision making about how and what an agency does and where it operates from;
- Defining and directing an agency's effort to continually improve the quality of service and practice;
- Incorporating increased awareness of client needs and views throughout the agency;
- Improving existing facilities, programs and services;
- Anticipating future needs and identifying unmet need;
- Providing opportunities for service innovation;
- Improving the agency's standing and reputation;
- Providing more effective resource allocations etc.

The piloting phase of the project found some concerns regarding the pilot questionnaire in obtaining useful information for agencies. Major concerns with the questionnaire identified for usefulness were:

- The high positive response rate;
- The need for the questionnaire to be more meaningful and user-friendly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and for people with high and complex needs;
- The need for supplementary questions to elicit gaps in services provided by the agency, and a fuller picture of what the client wasn't happy with and what the client would like to see changed;
- That measurement of client satisfaction did not equate to overall service quality.
The literature supports the need for the development of supplementary agency questions. The research suggests that the more specific the information sought from clients about particular aspects of service, needs and expectations, the greater the chance of obtaining information that can be used in service planning and evaluation (Cooper and Jenkins 1998).

1.4 Consumer Issues with Client Satisfaction Measurement

Many barriers to service users participating in client satisfaction and service quality research have been identified including:

- Consumers may not want to give negative feedback or complain;
- Consumers may experience, or fear, negative consequences as a result of providing feedback;
- By reason of a sense of powerlessness, consumers may feel there is no point in providing feedback;
- Marginalised groups may feel reluctant to provide negative feedback, believing they are expected or obligated to be grateful for anything they get;
- Consumers may not have access to the feedback structures or processes or may lack the resources to provide feedback;
- Those who are most marginalised or who are in areas where there are few services often have the least opportunity to participate; and
- Client satisfaction research questions may not be relevant to clients. (Sen 1994; South Australian Community Health Research Unit 1996; Draper & Hill 1995; Lillie-Blanton & Hoffman 1995).

Furthermore, the research process itself may exclude input or may not be appropriate for some groups such as Indigenous Australians, people whose first language is other than English, people with disabilities and people with literacy problems who have difficulty in responding to written surveys.

There is an increasing number of families and children using SAAP services, and consideration is needed on whether client satisfaction should include feedback from children. Two Australian studies provide examples of methods used for obtaining the views of children about the services they received. The first by Consumer Contact (1996) interviewed 5-8 years olds and 9-12 year olds about their preferences for out of school care. Graphics and pictures were used to obtain more detailed information about the views of the young respondents. A recent study by Stonehouse (1999) asked older children about the aspects of family day care that they liked and disliked. There was no accompanying children pilot because of the complexity and sensitivity of collecting client satisfaction data with children. The conclusion from the consultation was that there needed to be a separate piloting of client satisfaction instruments with children after further research was conducted.
A range of issues which impact on the quality of information and knowledge developed through consumer feedback, satisfaction and participation activities was raised in the research reviewed. The consequence of poor processes can be that the information gathered is not useful for informing or implementing change. It is critical that methods are developed to ensure the production of knowledge that is useful for improving health services. It is also important that methods are developed to maximise the use of this information and knowledge to inform service development.

There is a range of issues about capacity of feedback and participation processes to involve consumers from marginalised groups. These issues will impact on the quality of the information gained in feedback processes, especially if these issues are not addressed by mainstream service providers undertaking routine or mainstream feedback processes. These issues include that:

- Many marginalised groups are routinely excluded from participating in mainstream feedback processes;
- The model of participation may not empower consumers to participate, and until consumers can experience being given more power in decision-making they may be reluctant to participate;
- Models of participation may not be appropriate to consumers from marginalised groups and may even re-produce patterns of inequality;
- Low response rates can make it difficult to interpret the results of participation and feedback activities;
- Clients may be sceptical about the capacity of service providers to hear their feedback;
- The types of scales used to measure consumer responses may not be meaningful to consumers.

Also, client satisfaction research and service quality measurement need to ensure consistency with best practice in confidentiality and privacy.

1.5 Ethical issues

Best practice ethical procedures will need to be developed in consultation with all stakeholders, to maximise participation and ensure adherence to privacy legislation.

The consultation found support for ethical procedures including:

- Requiring data collection to be based on free informed consent by clients, with no impact on clients’ access to service if they choose not to participate.
- Being clear about the purposes for which data will be used, and only collecting information relevant to the purpose intended.
SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- Adopting procedures to absolutely ensure client anonymity and confidentiality, including use of third party interviewers, and no use of unique identifiers.
- Ensuring that the collection of client satisfaction data in SAAP is done in a way which is meaningful to, and benefits, clients.
- Resourcing and supporting clients and service providers to participate in data collection.
- Providing feedback to clients about how the collection of client satisfaction data has influenced service delivery.
- Providing feedback to service providers about how the collection of client satisfaction data has influenced SAAP program management and policy.

1.6 Conclusions

General support for the introduction of client satisfaction measures
There is general support from both SAAP agencies and clients for the introduction of client satisfaction measures in SAAP.

Flexible, meaningful, and resourced
The development and implementation of client satisfaction measures in SAAP should be done in a way that is consultative, flexible, meaningful at the agency level, fully resourced and not overly burdensome on services or clients.

Relationship between client satisfaction and service quality
Measuring client satisfaction is not equivalent to measuring overall service quality. Client satisfaction may best be thought of as one distinct dimension of service quality and may best be measured as part of an integrated approach to assessment of service quality.

Quality improvement framework
The development of client satisfaction measures in SAAP should be undertaken in the context of a broader quality improvement framework which includes measures of unmet demand, client outcomes, evaluation of other programs which impact on SAAP clients, and support for continuous quality improvement in SAAP agencies.

Using client satisfaction measures
The purpose and intended use of client satisfaction data must be clarified and defined in consultation between SAAP agencies, the Commonwealth and States and Territories to ensure that only necessary information is collected, that there is no duplication, and that further development of client satisfaction measurements builds on already existing practices.
The purpose and use of client satisfaction measures should include:

At an agency level:

- Client satisfaction should not be used in a way that threatens clients, staff or agencies. Client satisfaction data collection processes should be empowering and should ensure anonymity and privacy.
- Client satisfaction data alone should not be used as measures of service quality.
- Agencies should consider the internal implications of client satisfaction data and information. Individual agencies should have processes in place to investigate and follow-up consistently negative client reports. For example, and as clients suggested, the results of client satisfaction data collection, along with the an agency's proposed or implemented action to address any issues raised, could be outlined in the agency's annual report.
- Networks of agencies or agencies within a particular region or neighbourhood could explore opportunities for discussing with each other trends in client satisfaction information and for sharing ideas for continuing to improve services and responsiveness to the views and need of clients.

At the planning level:

- Client satisfaction data could be used as a means of clients having input to reporting processes generally. Client satisfaction data should encompass agreed components of service quality and should be a key component of a broader quality improvement.
- Agencies and sector networks should be invited to discuss the implications of client satisfaction data for service planning and development with program administrators during scheduled regular meetings.
- Client satisfaction data should be aggregated.
- Trends indicating a program level problem such as service gaps or limitations should be further explored and followed up. Client satisfaction data should be used along-side other data collection processes as well as consultation and planning processes to provide feedback about SAAP practice and policy initiatives and about resource-based issues in SAAP.
- Providing support for quality improvement at service level, eg through resourcing for staff and management training, mechanisms for ongoing self-assessment of quality service delivery by agencies, etc.

It is important that adequate attention be given to how the results of client satisfaction data collection will be communicated to each of the key stakeholder groups:

- Service clients;
- Service staff and agency management; and
- State/Territory and Commonwealth Departments.
Client participation
To increase the reliability and representativeness of client satisfaction data programs like SAAP must continue to build relationships with consumers and consumer groups. SAAP client satisfaction data should identify consumers needs, service preferences and barriers to consumer participation.

Client satisfaction measurements with children
Given the complex and sensitive issues involved in collecting client satisfaction data from children there need to be a separate project for accompanying children. Possible options that the department could consider include:

- Forming a partnership with a tertiary education institution and a service provider to submit an application for Strategic Partnerships with Industry - Research and Training (SPIRT funding). SPIRT is a program administered by Australian Research Council and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training;
- Sponsoring a research fellowship based within the Department; and
- Funding a project to specifically consider client satisfaction and accompanying children.

Ethical Requirements
As a prerequisite to the introduction of client satisfaction measures in SAAP, best practice ethical procedures will need to be developed in consultation with all stakeholders, to maximise participation and ensure adherence to privacy legislation. Such procedures will need to ensure free and informed client consent, clarity about the purposes for which data will be used; collection of relevant data only; client anonymity and confidentiality; overall benefit to clients; incentives to clients and services to participate; and relevant feedback to clients and service providers.
Section Two
The Meaning of Client Satisfaction in SAAP

2.1 Client Satisfaction in SAAP

Meaning of client satisfaction in SAAP

Respondents to the discussion paper emphasised the need to clarify the definition and scope of client satisfaction in SAAP. For example:

It is [our] view that the measurement of client satisfaction should focus on agreed components of service quality as an integral part of a broader quality improvement strategy. It should be targeted at core values (or SAAP standards) and functional elements of service delivery.

It should not involve duplication of information concerning client output and services provided. Rather measures should focus on quality elements of service delivery, including:

– information and communication;
– quality of engagement;
– support by staff; and
– standard of facilities.6

A level of agreement was noted that measures and indicators of client satisfaction in SAAP must be both:

➢ relevant to the type of service offered; and
➢ able to take into account the expectations and circumstances of clients.

Based on definitions and discussion provided in the literature (Standards Australia 2001:2), client satisfaction in SAAP funded agencies might be viewed as:

The extent to which the response or service provided and the outcomes met the expectation and the needs of the client. Measures should focus on the key elements of service delivery including information and communication, quality of engagement, support by staff and the standard of facilities.

Within this definition, client satisfaction measurement is a means of assessing the performance of a service from the client’s viewpoint. This definition places emphasis on the client’s views on the extent to which both expectations and needs were met. This definition should enable an analysis of how the expectation of different groups of clients compares with the response which SAAP agencies might reasonably be expected to provide given an agency’s role, internal resources and the external factors effecting client needs (e.g. the availability of stable and suitable accommodation on leaving SAAP).

Standards Australia (2001:3) argues that in order to both measure and improve client satisfaction, it is important to understand and ask questions about what factors actually contribute to a client feeling satisfied and dissatisfied. The information sought
and the questions asked during client satisfaction research should be “relevant, reliable and representative”.

If client feedback is not relevant, reliable or representative the ability of any organisation to meet the objective of effective customer satisfaction measurement will be compromised and limited (2001:1). Relevant, reliable and representative client satisfaction research will provide critical data on the following questions:

- What is important to clients?
- What do clients expect?
- How well is the agency performing in meeting these expectations?
- How well does it need to perform to meet expectations?
- Where should improvement efforts be focused? (Standards Australia 2001:20)

2.2 Clients’ views regarding the ideal SAAP service

The project explored the meaning of client satisfaction in the consultation phase by asking clients to provide their views about what an ideal SAAP service, or one that they would be satisfied with, would be like. A summary of views obtained from the different groups of clients is provided below.

**Young people**
- Longer term accommodation in decent, clean and modern facilities.
- Accommodation in staged facilities suiting their changing needs.
- Rules and workers that encourage young people to be independent and responsible by involving them in decision making and trusting them with keys.
- Good complaints procedures.
- The involvement of young clients in decisions about the running of the house eg rules, food and program.
- Procedures for young people to stay in the house even if the workers are not there throughout the day.
- Flexible decision making processes and flexible application of rules.
- Procedures for young people to have a key to their own room and a locker or cupboard.
- Procedures to ensure privacy.
- Adequate kitchenware and utensils.
- A service that is as much like “home” as possible.
Families
- A service that has the physical space and layout that enables parent(s) to have autonomy to care for their children themselves.
- Child-care support and a worker who works specifically with the children.
- A positive approach to working with accompanying teenagers and young people – not ignoring their needs because of their reluctance to engage.
- The capacity to provide or arrange counselling for children where needed.
- Services that are available and accessible when needed.
- Services that have the capacity to provide range of support in view of the diversity of circumstances faced by clients.
- Workers who are available, who listen and who are supportive.
- The provision of budgeting assistance.
- Workers who are skilled at brokering services and resources and assisting clients to access them.

Accompanying children
- Services that are located near a school so that children can attend and not be too far away from family.
- Services that have weekend workers and staff available 24 hours a day.
- Weekend programs for children.
- More space, including large central play areas, both inside and outside, to enable children to be watched without their parent having to be with them.
- More living space.
- Access for people with disabilities.
- Bedrooms that lead onto private courtyards.
- Bedrooms with phone access to the agency office.
- Services based on a cluster model of accommodation so that individual families have more space and greater privacy. (This is said to reduce conflict between children from different families, which in return reduces conflict between parents.)
- Design features that assist families to live together.
- Provision for those who fear being alone at night eg sensor lights, personal alarms etc.
- Flexible rules.
- Friendly staff.
- An outreach program for parent and children kids once they leave, to enable the provision of follow-up (“when you leave it’s like you’re in the world all on your own”).
Child support workers who work specifically with children and young people, and who the young residents can phone even after they leave.

Services which are as much like home as possible under the circumstances.

**Women experiencing domestic and family violence**

“A place to tell your story and be believed”.

Space (physical and personal) to maintain family and household structures, and to look after children independently.

A place of safety.

The provision of good information about client rights and options.

Access to crisis accommodation, financial help, and support to face reality and to learn to plan and rebuild.

A place that challenges and stretches clients, and ultimately strengthens clients and helps them rebuild self-esteem.

Other residents with similar experiences and needs, with whom a client can connect.

Inclusive services.

Access to emergency assistance when arriving at the service, such as food money.

Support with medical needs, eg hospital if women have experienced physical injuries due to violence.

Assistance and support to prepare for leaving the service.

The ability to access ongoing support after exiting the service.

**Men**

Clean facilities.

The provision of private bathroom and toilet facilities for each resident.

A safe and secure place

Good and nutritious food.

An accessible service.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

In centres like Alice Springs, where many Indigenous clients of SAAP services may not be fluent in English, cultural and language supports are required. Without these supports communication is difficult and clients stated that they are left feeling isolated and very dissatisfied. Other important agency characteristics identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients included:

The provision of sustained support.
SECTION TWO – THE MEANING OF CLIENT SATISFACTION IN SAAP

- Access to exit accommodation.
- Clean, neat and tidy premises.
- Safe premises.
- Services with staff members who are Indigenous.

**People with high and complex needs**
- Security, safety and privacy.
- Self-contained and independent housing that is supported.
- Warm, clean and homely premises.
- The availability of workers around the clock.
- The provision of individualised support.
- The provision of counselling.
- Ongoing support and commitment to clients, rather than referrals to other agencies.
- Access to a client advocate.
- Continuity of support and follow-up, even after exiting the service.

**People from non-English speaking backgrounds**
Language and cultural supports were described as very important, particularly for women from a non-English speaking background. It was noted that the ethnic background of the workers at a service was important, as clients from a non-English speaking background were generally happier to access a service with higher levels of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, even if they were not from their own cultural/language group, because they felt that a person from a non-English speaking background would be able to more readily identify with their feelings and needs.

**Interaction with and attributes of staff**
The project also explored the importance or otherwise of the following attributes of staff in influencing client satisfaction, and whether it is possible to say which of these might be most important to clients.

- Being taken seriously
- Competent and efficient service
- Anticipation of my needs
- Explanations in my terms
- Basic courtesies
- Being informed of my options
- Not being passed around
- Being listened to and heard
- Dedicated attention
- Knowledgeable help
- Friendliness
- Being kept informed
- Follow-through
- Honesty
- Feedback
- Professional service
- Empathy
- Respect
From the consultations all of these attributes were thought to be important as they provide indicators of the quality of contact with staff. Other attributes or actions identified as having a bearing on client satisfaction in SAAP included:

- Be welcoming;
- Having a sense of humour;
- Being culturally aware;
- Being encouraging and supportive of independence;
- Acknowledging and praising achievements and progress;
- Providing access to a client's personal file and to personal information;
- Not being intrusive;
- Being solution focussed rather than problem focussed;
- Being consistent;
- Being able to establish a rapport with children and young people.

It was pointed out that clients may often be unhappy with agency staff because the staff may have to enforce rules concerning the payment of rent, acceptable behaviour etc. The dual role of agency staff, being both “helpers” and “enforcers”, was reported to have a bearing on client satisfaction, particularly in the short term.

2.3 Factors Influencing Client Satisfaction in SAAP

The consultations and pilots indicated that a range of factors influence a client’s satisfaction with a SAAP service, and that only some of these factors are directly related to service quality. Factors influencing client satisfaction can also relate to the level of resources available within SAAP and other programs. The range of factors identified as influencing client satisfaction included those now discussed.

The outlook and life experiences of the individual client

SAAP is a program of last resort, and most people accessing SAAP are disadvantaged, marginalised, and in desperate circumstances. They have not “chosen” to be a SAAP client or to access a particular agency – circumstances have forced it upon them. The SAAP agency cannot solve all of the multiple problems the client may have: family or relationship problems, financial problems, low self-esteem, and so on. In addition, an increasing number of clients have mental health problems, chemical dependency problems, cognitive impairment, and/or other difficult issues to deal with. Some may be unhappy, for example, about the reasonable requirement of an agency that illicit drugs not be brought onto the premises. To complicate the matter still further, some clients may have high expectations (eg they want the service to solve all of their ongoing problems), while others may have low expectations (eg they simply want a bed for the night). Also, some clients have accessed a number of agencies, and may
make comparisons between them. All of these factors can clearly impact on their feelings of “satisfaction” with the SAAP agency, often independently of the quality of the service.

**The resources available to the SAAP agency**

SAAP agencies are not sufficiently resourced to meet all of the expectations and needs of clients. For example, some agencies are unable to offer accommodation that satisfies clients’ wishes for privacy; buildings may be run down, and furniture may be old, worn and broken, and this may be seen as unsatisfactory by clients; there may be an insufficient staff load to enable staff to spend as much time with clients as they would wish. While these issues impact on both service quality and client satisfaction, they may be outside the control of the SAAP agency to change within their current funding levels. In such cases, client dissatisfaction may indicate a need for increased resourcing, rather than any deficit in the way services are delivered.

**The behaviour of other clients of the SAAP agency**

Participants in several of the client meetings specifically identified the behaviour of other clients of the SAAP agency as a key factor in their own feelings of satisfaction. For example, noisy behaviour, a perceived lack of cleanliness or tidiness, the behaviour of other people’s children, alcohol and/or other drug use, theft of personal property, and manifestations of mental illness, were all identified as problematic. Again, no matter how well a service is run, there is often likely to be a degree of conflict between clients, particularly when facilities are shared and privacy is limited. On the other hand, the forming of friendships with other clients can help a client to feel very happy with a service.

**Access by the client to other relevant programs**

SAAP agencies cannot meet the expectations and needs of all their clients due to circumstances beyond their control, for example, a shortage of exit housing options, a shortage of available employment options, inability to access a drug treatment service, difficulties with Centrelink, etc. It is important to note that these external factors impact considerably on client satisfaction.

**The quality of service delivery by the SAAP agency**

Several factors that are linked to the quality of service delivery were identified in the consultations as being important factors in client satisfaction. These included:

- The quality of engagement by staff: The level of care and respect demonstrated by staff, along with their level of knowledge, skills, and professionalism, were identified by clients as of central importance to their feelings of satisfaction or otherwise with a service. This included the need for staff to be welcoming; to be capable of dealing appropriately and sensitively with the specific client groups, eg women who have experienced domestic violence, Aboriginal people, etc; and to respect client confidentiality.
The provision of relevant information to clients in an appropriate way: including information about the service and what it can and cannot offer the client; relevant and accurate information about the client's rights and responsibilities, including complaints procedures; relevant and accurate information about other programs and services; etc.

The provision of relevant support services, such as referrals to relevant agencies, assistance in accessing jobs or education, assistance with housing or legal problems, transport, etc, was another key element in client satisfaction. This is to some extent a resourcing issue for agencies.

The standard of the facilities (space, privacy, adequate good quality furnishings, appropriate food, etc) was identified as a key element in the level of client satisfaction, but as noted above is often beyond the control of the agency due to resourcing issues. However, some aspects, such as the cleanliness of accommodation or the type of food available, were identified by clients as very important and may be within the control of the agency to influence; and feedback on facilities may assist agencies with future design, purchases, or renovations.

It was felt quite strongly by many participants in the consultations that client satisfaction measures must address the more “objective” specific aspects of service quality, rather than “subjective” notions of satisfaction.

2.4 Conclusion

Clearly, the complexity of the factors influencing client satisfaction in SAAP, and the fact that many of them are outside the control of SAAP agencies, indicates that there are major methodological challenges to be faced in defining and measuring client satisfaction in SAAP. However, there was generally a strong understanding that client satisfaction in SAAP relates to the client's views about components of service quality.

What to measure

Measures of client satisfaction in SAAP should seek to measure a client's level of satisfaction with aspects of service delivery such as the quality of engagement and support by staff, the quality of information and communication, the helpfulness of support programs offered, and the standard of accommodation and other facilities.

Information provided

For example explanation of rights and responsibilities, information about services provided, age, gender or cultural appropriateness of information, information about services provided by other agencies, information about options and choices, assisted to make informed choice, kept informed, know what is happening next etc.
- **The way clients are treated**
  For example promptness or timeliness of initial response, sensitivity of staff, treated with respect, active respect for rights, not treated in a discriminatory manner, involved in decision making, problem or complaint resolution procedures.

- **Accommodation**
  For example location's accessibility, waiting period, standard, cleanliness and suitability of premises, personal safety afforded, privacy, personal space, accommodation on exit, cost, food provided

- **Other help and support**
  For example financial/employment related, counselling, support, advocacy, specialist services, accessing other services and resources, help with practical problems, interpreters, cultural supports, level of preparation for leaving the service, support on exiting.

Any client satisfaction measures must still acknowledge that an agency's ability to improve the quality of some aspects of its service depends to a degree on the adequacy of its funding. In this regard strong caveats must be applied to the use of client satisfaction data as a measure of the quality of an individual agency, or of the SAAP program overall.
Section Three
Different Approaches to Measuring Client Satisfaction

3.1 Current Examples of Client Satisfaction in SAAP Agencies

Informal processes
At a minimum, agencies have informal processes in place that generally involve staff asking clients about their expectations and about how things are going. For example, in the Alice Springs agency consultation meeting, agencies reported that upon a client's entry to the service care is taken to discuss what could be reasonably expected. Complaints mechanisms and grievance procedures were also identified as a means of obtaining information about client satisfaction. Other mechanisms identified for obtaining client satisfaction information included discussion during regular residents or house meetings, exit interviews and service reviews. It was noted that most services already have client feedback measures in place, such as residents' meetings, which are not generally documented, but which give good information to the agency about what aspects of their service could improve. Participants discussed the potential for client satisfaction measures to be more formally built into case management, including into exit planning.

The Client Satisfaction Survey in Western Australia*
In Western Australia the Department for Community Development is required to report on key performance indicators and output based measures in its Annual Report. Customer satisfaction is one of the Effectiveness Indicators as well as Quality and Timeliness Output Measures in its Annual Report and the Department’s reporting to Treasury for the Annual Budget Statements. These Performance Indicators are also audited by the Auditor General.

The WA client satisfaction survey, which is conducted annually, provides the Department with information on customer satisfaction, timeliness and includes aspects of service provision and changes in consumer knowledge and confidence as a result of services provided directly by the Department of Community Development and by non-government organisations funded by the Department.

The survey consists of a short written survey form with a list of simple questions, and a sample of clients is provided with this form and asked to forward it back either via the service or by mail directly to the contracted market research agency. At the Western Australian consultation it was seen as important that any national initiative on client satisfaction should not duplicate the state initiative.

* During the course of the Client Satisfaction Project information on State requirements for client satisfaction were only available from Western Australia.
According to participants in the agency consultation meeting in Western Australia, various methods have been tried with this survey. Previous survey methods asked clients to complete forms on “exit”, or to mail back a form after exit. These surveys encountered problems with low response rate. The low response rates can be interpreted as due to clients having many issues to deal with when they leave the service which may seem more urgent than completing a survey, or that some clients are asked to leave the service and therefore not well disposed to the official process. The current WA survey method uses a feedback form, which can be filled out by the client as any point in the process. Agencies suggest that taking a snapshot when a client has settled into a service for some time works better than the survey upon exit.

Agencies report that Aboriginal clients in Western Australian SAAP funded services are often suspicious of having to complete forms and do not like completing them. Both the questions and the process of the surveys can be confusing. The State Department is trying to address these issues.

At the consultations, it was noted that feedback is provided to SAAP funded agencies based on the current client surveys run by the WA State Department, and that this is used as far as possible by agencies to guide their activities and contribute to service quality. Some agencies expressed the view that these surveys are not very effective in identifying what aspects of service quality could be improved, and that agencies’ own activities of seeking client feedback are often more useful in improving quality at a service level. However as these agency surveys can differ in content between agencies there are difficulties in obtaining consistent feedback across SAAP services.

Some argue that the experience in Western Australia with client satisfaction surveys points to the importance of moving away from a quantitative focus on measuring client satisfaction – such as scales 1 to 5 or 1 to 10, which may not be well understood or consistently used by clients. These agencies proposed a move towards a focus on more meaningful qualitative feedback. However, within the constraints of existing resources and accountability requirements, seeking more qualitative information is likely to be a complex task, requiring careful examination.

**Other client feedback forms and surveys**

In the ACT, agencies attending reported that currently at agencies where feedback forms are given routinely to clients who are leaving, only the very satisfied or the very dissatisfied tend to complete and return the forms. A NSW agency providing a submission reported that they used to collect client satisfaction information from every client (who was willing – approximately 90 per cent of all clients) throughout the whole year. The information includes:

- Views about the strengths and limitations of the service eg staff, property type, furniture etc, services/help provided;
- What could be improved to better assist them and their satisfaction level.
The agency collates the information, reports the findings in annual publications and reports on the changes implemented from the previous review. By reason of the workload involved with resourcing the young people, collecting the information, collating it, reporting on it and analysing it took a lot of time, the agency has reduced the period in which the data is collected to a six month period every second year.  

Another agency submission reported that evaluation and client satisfaction forms are given to clients at house meetings. The feedback and suggestions provided by clients are discussed and clients receive feedback as to the possibility of implementing changes.  

Client satisfaction approaches incorporating peer consultants

An example of this approach was provided by St John's Youth Services in Adelaide, who engaged the CREATE Foundation to:

- Assist in achieving the objective of quality service provision for young people;
- Ensure the voices of young consumers are heard; and
- Empower young people receiving services in having their ideas and concerns heard and accurately reported.

The CREATE Foundation is an organisation of young people in care and is run with and for young people in care in Australia. CREATE is managed and staffed by young people who are in care of have a care background. CREATE worked with St John's to redesign its client satisfaction form and processes. One client satisfaction approach used involved a Young Consultant conducting fortnightly client satisfaction interviews with young people at each service. In addition to the surveys and personal interviews over a five month period, the CREATE Foundation provided the clients of St John's with an additional 1800 phone number which could be used to call the Young Consultant and to give further information or to discuss grievances.

3.2 Different Methodological Approaches to Client Satisfaction

Survey and questionnaires

Surveys are currently used to assess client satisfaction nationally in a number of human services sectors including public housing, community housing, disability services and Centrelink. There are many strengths and weakness associated with the use of surveys and questionnaires to measure client satisfaction. The main reported strengths of asking service users to anonymously respond to a written survey or questionnaire is that it is a relatively inexpensive, non-intrusive and non-threatening method to administer. Open-ended questions enable more detailed information to be collected, but increase the cost

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7 Submission 21.
8 Submission 16.
9 Curtain, R & M. Metters 2001, The Low Down: Young People's Satisfaction with Emergency Accommodation Services, CREATE Foundation in Partnership with St John's Youth Services, Adelaide
of analysis and may lead to a lower response rate. There is some evidence that surveys by phone or face-to-face may increase the reported satisfaction ratings leading to skewed results, particularly if the respondent considers there is a chance of being identified (Cooper & Jenkins 1998; Rose et al 1998).

Face-to-face interviews, where necessary using bilingual researchers or interpreters, can be a good technique for obtaining the views of many people including those whose first language is other than English. Interviews conducted by members of Indigenous communities who are independent of SAAP services may assist a better response rate as well as obtain more detailed information from Indigenous SAAP users. Face-to-face interviews are also useful for respondents with literacy and numeracy problems. On the down side, oral interviews are more expensive to administer and analyse. Given the diversity and turnover of SAAP service users, there are some difficult technical issues in obtaining a representative survey sample with an adequate response rate.

A review of patient satisfaction surveys and approaches by Hill and Draper (1995), identified a number of limitations of questionnaires and surveys including:

- The questions asked might not be relevant or appropriate because service users don't have enough input into their design;
- The questions are not sensitive to the complex issues or to the service/care pathways experienced by many people;
- Some people have difficulty in filling in surveys or questionnaires or find them threatening;
- Many people see no point in completing satisfaction surveys, as they do not think their views will be used to change and improve services (Minicucci 1997).

The SAAP Performance Indicators Working Group Discussion Paper on client satisfaction in SAAP (1999) has raised the issue of response bias, with more responses from people who are either very satisfied and or dissatisfied and fewer responses from people with views in the middle from responding. The Working Group also raised concerns about the feasibility and reliability of a survey by mail or by phone in the SAAP context.

A recent review of patient satisfaction surveys in Australian hospitals (Ford 2001) concludes that surveying consumers about their experiences and satisfaction with their care is an important component of the quality improvement process of a health care agency. Ford's review also concludes that surveys by themselves provide a limited picture of the views of service users.

By themselves, patient satisfaction surveys are a passive form of consumer participation and provide hospitals with only a limited picture of what consumers think about their care. Integrated with other methods of seeking consumer feedback and as a component of a larger consumer participation program, patient satisfaction surveys add valuable information about consumers' overall perceptions of their care (Ford 2001:24).
An analysis of recent Australian experience and of the broader literature suggests there is a level of agreement about what should be done with client satisfaction surveys and questionnaires to obtain reliable, valid and useful information about service quality. Some essential requirements include the following:

- Clear identification of those aspects of service that are most important to consumers (Cooper and Jenkins 1998);
- Inclusion of all sub-groups of service users irrespective of their need, culture, ethnicity, age, level of literacy and numeracy etc (Curtis et al 1999, Davis et al 1998, Brown and Lumley 1997);
- Clarity about the types of comparison that are to be made (comparison of satisfaction across service type, target population, service location etc) to ensure that any data collection has sufficiently discriminatory power for valid comparisons (E-Qual 1998);
- Use of multiple sources of information about consumer views and service quality (Ford 2001); and
- A data collection strategy that is a component of an overall strategy for service evaluation and planning and quality improvement, not a one-off exercise (Minicucci 1997; NRCCPH 1999).

**Focus groups and nominal groups**

Focus groups are used to provide an opportunity for clients in a supportive group environment to express their views and reactions to the services they have received. According to the SAAP Performance Indicators Working Group, focus groups are useful in identifying needs and assessing the acceptability and availability of a service.

Nominal groups usually involve a wider group including service users, service providers and members of the community. Participants are given questions and either respond orally, in writing or with the aid of an electronic means. There is no discussion between participants. Ideas and responses are registered, listed and outlined. All participants then rank the generated ideas.

Information and data collected via focus groups and nominal groups generally needs to be validated or tested using other research methods, because of concerns about how representative the small groups information is of the wider population of service users.

**Client complaints procedures**

Consumer complaints mechanisms are another means of monitoring clients’ feedback about services. The obvious problem with using information about complaints as a measure of client satisfaction is that it will produce more information about dissatisfaction than satisfaction. This information is useful in logging and responding to the kinds of problems in SAAP, but does not provide a balanced picture of the positives and negatives.
Client service report cards

Report cards can be devised and given to every client to gauge overall satisfaction as well as satisfaction with a number of key service aspects. The idea is to restrict the number of questions so that the report card does not become a survey or questionnaire. Drawbacks of this method include the limited nature of information gathered and the high level nature of this information.

User advisory boards

User advisory boards comprising a small number of service users might provide assistance in mapping out differences between expectations and experiences of service users. User boards can also provide invaluable assistance with client satisfaction research methodology and question design as well as with the conduct of components of the research process and with analysing the implications of research findings. There are practical problems associated with enabling and sustaining user boards to have an ongoing role in the context of SAAP as well as there being issues of representativeness.

3.3 Measuring Strengths and Weakness of Different Approaches

Client satisfaction information collection should be planned, systematic, sufficiently detailed, documented and replicable over time and with different client groups (Standards Australia 2001:9; IPPM 1999:23; Andrews 1994). Criteria suggested for determining methods of client satisfaction collection with the greatest utility in service contexts like SAAP include:

- **Cost effectiveness** (minimal cost for return)
- **Time effectiveness** (speed in obtaining data)
- **Response rate** (enough clients responding)
- **Representative** (reflects client groups targeted by SAAP and types of services and programs)
- **Flexibility of method** (adaptable to the diversity and circumstances of SAAP clients)
- **Meaningful data** (the utility of both the instrument and the data obtained for the client and the agency/field)
- **Applicability** (addresses dimensions important for the client and useful for the worker, but also enabling the aggregation of data in a meaningful way)
- **Reliability of data** (the measuring instrument provides the same results when administered by two different people)
- **Validity** (the instrument measures what it is designed to measure)
- **Client friendly and appropriate** (acceptable to clients and to agencies, brief and user friendly in terms of language, format and administration)
Inclusive of all client groups
Manageable at program level (relative extent of ease of collecting and analysing data for program administrators)
Manageable at an agency level (relative extent of ease of collecting and analysing data for agencies)
Sufficiently informative for improving the quality of a service

The strengths, weaknesses, and the possible usefulness of particular methods are discussed below. Drawing on the research and available evidence, Table One provides a summary of the relative utility of the different methods. Table Two, Three and Four synthesise the findings of the consultations and pilots to compare the overall utility of different methods across client groups and the most appropriate time of administering the questionnaire.

Table One: Utility of Methods for Obtaining Client Satisfaction Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Method for obtaining client satisfaction information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mail survey                          Written survey at central location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost effective</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time effective</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client friendly</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manageable</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manageable for program</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manageable for agency</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key for Table: ✓ Appropriate
          ✓✓ Very appropriate
          x Inappropriate
          xx Very inappropriate
3.4 Methodological Findings from the Consultations and Pilots

**Methodologies for measuring client satisfaction**

Consultation meetings and submissions reiterated the view that given the high degree of diversity in the SAAP sector, in terms of both agencies and clients, a range of methodologies and indicators (a “toolkit” of approaches), needs to be used rather than taking a simplistic “one size fits all” approach.

The variety of SAAP service models includes, for example, crisis accommodation services, a category which encompasses a range of services catering to diverse client groups; street outreach services, catering for marginalised longer term homeless people; services offering longer term transitional accommodation and support programs; and so on. Services also vary in terms of their location (urban, rural, remote), in terms of their relationship with other services (eg housing services, alcohol and other drug services, mental health services), in terms of the level of their resourcing and the programs they are able to offer, and so on. Some offer very short-term support and have high throughput, whereas others offer much longer-term support and have lower throughput. All of this suggests that agencies require flexibility in terms of how they measure client satisfaction, and what specific indicators are used.

There is also a diversity of overlapping SAAP client groups, each of which have different issues and needs in relation to the measurement of client satisfaction. The issues identified for various client groups, and the suggested methodologies that may be successful with each group, are summarised in Table Two and Table Four. The information in these tables is based on the consultation meetings with clients and service providers, and the pilots. Given the limited extent of the consultations, the suggested methodologies for each group should be seen as hypothetical at this stage, to be tested by further research.

In further testing of the client satisfaction instrument it will almost certainly be necessary to use different methodologies (eg written surveys, one-on-one interviews administered by appropriate third parties, group meetings) in different contexts. There will also be a need to vary specific questions to reflect the differing context and the different kinds of services on offer – for example, some agencies may find it useful to ask clients their views on specific programs or approaches, which may not be relevant to other agencies.

**Approaches for accompanying children**

From the consultations there was agreement that it is very important for the voice of accompanying children to be heard, and for their views to be obtained as part of the collection of client satisfaction information. The development of different approaches was advocated for the different age groups of accompanying children.

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10 Given the complexity and ethical issues involved in client satisfaction measurements with children the suggested methodologies were not tested in the pilot phase.
 SECTION THREE – DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO MEASURING CLIENT SATISFACTION

Under 7 year olds: It was suggested that questions about client satisfaction be explored through play activities, painting, drawing and making a journal. If possible, this should be done with a couple of children in an open area where they feel comfortable and can move around (eg a play area).

8–11 year olds: With this group also, it was suggested that information could be sought in a relaxed atmosphere (eg play room/area), or over afternoon tea for example. It was suggested that the children be asked about both general and specific aspects of their stay eg food, their bedrooms, staff etc. It was also suggested that questions be kept simple.

12–15 year olds: Small group discussions after school with afternoon tea were suggested. It was noted that this age group often does not like to do individual work or to talk to an adult by themselves, and that group work (eg a girls’ group and a boys’ group) might better enable everyone to have their say. It was suggested that computer or internet-based approaches could be considered with this group (eg having a menu driven survey where the young people can pick boxes and write short answers).

Young people 16 and over: It was suggested that with many young people over 16 it would be possible to have a similar approach as to that employed with their parents. An offer payment or in-kind payment would be appropriate and would help to facilitate responses from this age group; and a computer/internet approach would also work well with this age group.

It was suggested that there is a need to neither overload workers nor children, as agencies currently conduct several different scales and tests with children in relation to family functioning and emotional wellbeing, behaviour and functioning of children. Obtaining satisfaction information from accompanying children could be part of the closure process or could be collected during their first month in residence. As their views are often sought routinely as part of the case management process, this could be built upon. It was suggested that the information sought should be kept to a minimum eg:

What did you like? Or: What did you most like?
What didn't you like about your stay here? Or: What did you like least?
What changes would make it better for you while you are here?

The time taken to obtain client satisfaction information should be brief – probably no longer that 30 minutes. It is also important to ask mothers and/or fathers about how they consider the children fared and about what could be improved to help children more.

The timing of administering the questionnaire
During the pilots the questionnaire was administered at various service delivery points at each of the pilot sites. Table Three summarises the findings of pilots as to the most
appropriate timing for administering the questionnaire. The major conclusion was the need for flexibility so that the questionnaire could be administered at different points during a client’s contact with a service.

**Methodology used in the pilots**

The methodologies used in the pilots included face-to-face interviews with agency staff, face-to-face interviews with an independent party, face-to-face interviews with an independent party and interpreter, written surveys, and telephone interviews. There was no pilot that used a group process for client feedback. **Table Two** draws on the research and literature and findings of the consultation as well as findings emerging during the pilot phase and summarises the utility of different methods for obtaining client satisfaction information. Face-to-face interviews and interviews by phone appear to hold the greatest utility for most of the key population groups targeted by SAAP. Pilot agencies also suggested that the usefulness of group processes should be explored in the next phase of development and piloting. Additionally, the potential use of website-based client satisfaction surveys could also be explored, particularly for young people, accompanying children and people with high and complex needs. The examination of the use of peers or mentors was also suggested for clients experiencing domestic or family violence, single men and young people.

**The Call-Centre Pilot**

As a method of collecting client satisfaction data, it was reported that the Call-Centre approach seemed to work well. Two call-centre researchers were on hand to conduct the interviews and both found the process smooth and relatively quick. There was a little uncertainty at the beginning about how to ask the clients the questions, and how best to obtain information from clients. Nonetheless, after several phone calls, the interviewers felt more confident and felt comfortable relating to clients.

The interviewers reported that they felt less pressure because they did not have to present themselves to the clients and establish direct rapport as in the case of face-to-face interviews. The interviewers reported that the clients were generally easy to talk to and were friendly. Overall, the researchers felt comfortable administering the survey over the phone. The client-participants were co-operative and seemed to like the idea of calling in. In regard to the non-English speaking background clients, both researchers felt that they needed to speak to the client in a simple and clear way, for example replacing satisfy with the word “happy” or “ok”. It would have been better to interview these clients in their own language.

The pilot did not include all groups within the homeless population and further trials with different groups should be undertaken.
SECTION THREE – DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO MEASURING CLIENT SATISFACTION

Collection of data by independent third parties
The biggest obstacle identified by clients to providing information about their level of satisfaction, was fear of reprisal (e.g., fear they will be treated badly by staff if they complain, fear they will be unable to access the service in the future, etc.). It was found across the consultations and pilots that client satisfaction information should generally be collected by third parties rather than by agency staff, to ensure clients are able to express their views freely. There were several suggestions that these third party could be “peer surveyors” (i.e., appropriately selected and trained ex-clients of SAAP services), as such people would understand the issues and experiences of other clients and be able to communicate appropriately with them. Other suggestions for third party data collectors were regional SAAP Advisers, and agency Board members who do not generally come into contact with clients.

Administering the questionnaire on an ongoing or sample basis
Many participants in the consultations and pilots pointed out that it is not feasible to collect comprehensive client satisfaction data from every SAAP client. Judicious sampling is required.

Some agencies that carried out the pilot believed it possible to administer the questionnaire on an ongoing basis, but only if agencies are fully resourced. Agencies that reported that administering the instrument to all clients is not possible cited the number of clients that receive accommodation or support from the agency and the lack of available resources and staff time to administer the instrument. Agencies also stressed the reality that clients often leave without informing agency staff or return to crisis, hence undermining the capacity to implement the instrument on an ongoing basis. Some are evicted or leave a service without notice; others may have concerns about confidentiality or other issues; others may have mental health problems or cognitive impairment that inhibits data collection; others may simply not be interested in participating.

Given the difficulty in administering the questionnaire on an ongoing basis, the consultations found that a process of ongoing sampling of a percentage of clients; or an annual special collection involving all clients currently accessing the agency were both possible alternatives.

Client perspectives on the piloted client satisfaction process
Clients that participated in the pilots were happy to have the chance to offer their view, but stressed the importance of confidentiality. If the process was conducted by interview, clients stressed the need for an independent third party to conduct the interview to ensure confidentiality and objectivity. A number of young people who participated in the Youth Pilot found the process assisted them in reflecting on their overall situation and the support they had received from the agency.
Clients who phoned the Call-Centre Pilot reported that they thought it was a good way to express their views about their experience of the SAAP service. Some stated that they felt it was important to give feedback so that services could be improved. Some respondents recognised that telephone interviews allow providers to get data back more quickly, as their responses were recorded directly:

- I think you have the better end of the stick;
- Better on the phone, save lots of money, and stamps, and got the result quicker;
- It’s a quick and easy way.

Most people who phoned the Call-Centre Pilot did not think the questions were lengthy or difficult:

- Very good, no problem with questions;
- Pretty happy and comfortable when answering the survey questions;
- Questions are sufficient, question time just the right length;
- Very good way to get information, good as it is and not too lengthy.

Clients also said that they felt comfortable calling a call-centre like RMIT Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development:

- I thought it would be a lot more intense, more in-depth, but I was comfortable;
- I felt ok, don’t mind it;
- It’s good, I suppose it is comfortable over the phone.

Those who phoned the Call-Centre and spoke English as a second language experienced difficulty in understanding the questions. It was apparent that an interpreter would be required. One caller who spoke English as a second language said that he felt embarrassed:

- I’m feeling a bit embarrassed as I did not understand the questions you asked.

One Call-Centre respondent compared the current interview experience with a previous interview process. He said that being interviewed by phone was much easier and that he felt more relaxed:

- Quite easy, not face-to-face, not being stare at;
- If I didn’t come up with the answer that they wanted, they stared at me;
- Over the telephone it’s freer than when doing a survey with someone … less pressure”.

Another participant also compared the trial telephone interview with a prior face-to-face experience and said that the current process saved time, particularly given that he did not have to travel:

- I have participated in some other survey … they sat me down and went through names and stuff … it took lots of time, I was there for half an hour. I also do not have to travel to you, you know arrange bus ticket etc, same for you, this save time.
The majority of Call-Centre respondents said that they would prefer to call in rather than to have someone call them. They felt more comfortable to call in as they had control over the timing. As one participant put it:

- It's better that we call you as we are making the decision to call or not and when to call, not being called to answer questions, we might be willing that way.

One participant stated that though the experience was “OK”, the only reason he had called was due to the incentive provided by the project (in-kind reimbursement). In conclusion, all 18 Call-Centre respondents reported that they felt comfortable with the process and thought it was an effective method.

Table Two: Utility of Methods for Obtaining Client Satisfaction Information for Different SAAP Client Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method for obtaining client satisfaction information</th>
<th>Client Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mail survey</td>
<td>Domestic &amp; family violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written survey at central location</td>
<td>Young women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face interview</td>
<td>Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Centre phone interview</td>
<td>Single men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups/group discussion</td>
<td>Aborigional &amp; Torres Strait Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input via complaint procedures</td>
<td>People with high &amp; complex needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service reports</td>
<td>Young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input via advisory boards</td>
<td>People from Non-English Speaking Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website survey</td>
<td>People with literacy and numeracy issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key for Table: ✓ Appropriate
               ✓✓ Very appropriate
               x Inappropriate
               xx Very inappropriate
Table Three: Most Appropriate Time for Administering Client Satisfaction Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot Target Group</th>
<th>On Arrival or early</th>
<th>During</th>
<th>Toward end or at point of exit</th>
<th>After Exit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Women</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic &amp; Family Violence</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High &amp; Complex Need</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English Speaking backgrounds</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men aged 23-46 (Call-Centre)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key for Table: ✓ Appropriate
✓✓ Very appropriate
x Inappropriate
xx Very inappropriate

3.5 Conclusions

Build on existing approaches

The introduction of client satisfaction measures at a national level should build on existing formal and informal approaches for collection of client satisfaction information in the SAAP sector.

Common methodological principles in the collection of SAAP client satisfaction data

The development of a range of methodologies for measuring client satisfaction in SAAP should be based on common methodological principles relating to free and informed client consent, appropriate timing of information provision and data collection, judicious sampling techniques, and the need for both qualitative and quantitative data collection; as well as any additional principles which emerge from further work in this area.

Criteria for assessing different methodological approaches to client satisfaction

Criteria suggested by the literature and research for determining methods with greatest utility in service contexts like SAAP include the following:

- Cost-effectiveness
- Time-effectiveness
- Response rate
- Representativeness
- Flexibility of method
- Meaningful data
SECTION THREE – DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO MEASURING CLIENT SATISFACTION

- Applicability
- Reliability of data
- Validity
- Client friendly and appropriate
- Inclusive of all groups
- Manageable at a program level
- Manageable at an agency level

Timing of raising the concept with clients
Client satisfaction information or consent should not be sought from clients immediately on their arrival at a service, as they are often in crisis and have more immediate problems and issues to deal with.

Timing and methodology for data collection
The actual collection of client satisfaction information, via interviews, surveys, etc, should take place after a client has settled into a service, at the identified most appropriate time. The findings and recommended times and methods of administering the client satisfaction instrument should at this stage be seen as indicative. The timing and methodologies outlined in this report need to be tested more thoroughly.

A toolkit of approaches to assessing client satisfaction
Given the high degree of diversity in the SAAP sector, in terms of both agencies and clients, a range of methodologies for assessing client satisfaction must be developed, rather than taking a simplistic “one size fits all” approach to gathering or obtaining client satisfaction data. There needs to be a “toolkit” of approaches. From the “toolkit” of approaches face-to-face interviews and interviews by phone conducted by independent third party appear to hold the greatest utility for most of the key population groups targeted by SAAP.

To further the “toolkit” of approaches it was concluded from the pilots that the next phase of development and piloting of the client satisfaction instrument include:
- Group processes;
- Website-based client satisfaction;
- Involvement of non-English speaking background community representatives as facilitators or interviewers, and
- The use of peers or mentors in interview or group processes.

Minimising demands on the program, agencies and clients
It is important to ensure that client satisfaction measurement processes are resourced and that the data collection processes do not place unnecessary burden on the program, agencies and clients. Consideration could be given to exploring
opportunities for merging processes and instruments for measuring client outcomes with those for measuring client satisfaction.

**Sampling**

Strategic and purposive sampling will be required in the further development of client satisfaction measurements. Options for sampling that could be incorporated into a national program of measuring client satisfaction in SAAP include:

- All services or proportional sample of service over a short-time period eg as with the Survey of Unmet Need;
- A cross-section or purposive selection of services for each of SAAP’s target group;
- A cross-section or purposive selection of services for a particular target group eg young people, single men etc;
- A geographic cross-section or purposive selection of services eg a sample based on geographic location nationally or within a state/territory eg urban, regional, rural and remote etc.
### Table Four: Issues Relating to Collection of Client Satisfaction Data from Specific Client Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client group</th>
<th>Specific issues in relation to measuring client satisfaction</th>
<th>Suggested methodologies for measuring client satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women fleeing domestic violence</td>
<td>◗ Often shocked/distressed/experiencing shame, which can make communication and data collection difficult</td>
<td>◗ One-on-one interviews with peer interviewers (eg trained ex-clients of DV services) were suggested, to enable empathy and overcome “shame” issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Immense need for privacy and security of identifying information</td>
<td>◗ Written surveys may also be useful in some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>◗ House meetings also seen as important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Clear and well communicated data privacy and security procedures must be a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying children</td>
<td>◗ Ethical issues involved with interviewing children, particularly where children have witnessed and/or been victims of violence or abuse</td>
<td>◗ A number of options need to be on offer to address different age groups and developmental stages, eg play/art activities, interviews in a setting which is comfortable to the child, small group discussions, computer-based forms, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Need to consider consent by and appropriate involvement of parents/guardians</td>
<td>◗ Ethical protocols for informed consent by both the child and the parent/guardian need to be developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Need for age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate data collection methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</td>
<td>Diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia</td>
<td>Due to diversity, a single approach may not suit all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Educational disadvantage and lower levels of literacy; suspicion of “government forms”</td>
<td>For communities where English proficiency and/or literacy is limited, verbal rather than written data collection is required, in Aboriginal languages if appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ English is often not the first language</td>
<td>Individual one-on-one interviews may be preferable to group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Often prefer to deal with other Indigenous people rather than non-Indigenous people</td>
<td>Interviews should be conducted by Indigenous people known to/trusted by the client if possible, and from their language group if applicable, or with an interpreter if needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ May be “shy” about speaking up in group meetings</td>
<td>Any group meetings may need to be separated by gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Often a need to keep men’s and women’s business separate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds</td>
<td>Many diverse language and cultural groups</td>
<td>Due to diversity, a single approach may not suit all people from CALD backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ English is often not the first language</td>
<td>For communities where English proficiency is limited, verbal rather than written data collection is suggested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Often prefer to deal with other CALD people, even if not from the same language group/culture</td>
<td>Interviews should be conducted by people from the same language group and/or with an interpreter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Cultural issues, eg gender issues, shame associated with homelessness, etc</td>
<td>Sensitivity around specific issues of culture and previous experience is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Some may have experienced torture and trauma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Four (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client group</th>
<th>Specific issues in relation to measuring client satisfaction</th>
<th>Suggested methodologies for measuring client satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single men</td>
<td>◗ May have alcohol or other drug dependencies</td>
<td>◗ Verbal rather than written means of data collection may be preferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ May have mental health problems</td>
<td>◗ Male interviewers may be preferred, particularly “peer surveyors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ May have experienced imprisonment</td>
<td>◗ It was suggested that a “hot line” might work if sufficiently publicised, though this may not be acceptable to all clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Some may have literacy problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Some may object to women interviewers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with high and complex needs</td>
<td>◗ Mental health problems and/or substance misuse may lead to disordered perceptions</td>
<td>◗ It was suggested that clients should have the choice of filling out written forms, or being interviewed by an independent third party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(eg mental health, substance misuse</td>
<td>◗ Behavioural issues associated with substance misuse etc may lead to conflict with SAAP agency staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>issues, experience of trauma)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>◗ May be homeless due to unemployment, eviction, family breakdown, domestic violence, chemical dependency, etc – these may be sensitive issues</td>
<td>◗ Preference for face-to-face interviews was expressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people</td>
<td>◗ Many have experienced family breakdown and/or abuse; some may have substance misuse and/or mental health problems</td>
<td>◗ Verbal rather than written means of data collection generally preferred, via interviews conducted by third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ May have difficulties with accepting agency rules and restrictions (eg regarding drug use, curfews)</td>
<td>◗ It was suggested that young people who had used SAAP services could be trained as peer surveyors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Schooling often interrupted, may be literacy issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◗ Often prefer to deal with other young people rather than older people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While different approaches and a tailored set of questions will be required in different settings, the project found that it is possible to develop a very simple “core” set of questions. A “core” set of questions could be the basis for measuring client satisfaction in SAAP, whatever the client group, the context, or the methodology. The “core” set of questions could be used as a starting point for agencies to develop a tailored questionnaire suiting their needs. The common information collected by all agencies could be used on a program level.

From the consultations the following “core” set of questions were developed and piloted:

1. (For accommodation agencies only) Were you satisfied with the accommodation this agency provided?
2. Were you satisfied with the other kinds of help and support this agency provided?
3. Were you satisfied with the information the agency provided to you?
4. Were you satisfied with the way the staff treated you?

A 5-point scale (ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied) could be used for each question, with qualitative comments on each question also sought (this could be done by asking why the client felt this way, for each question, and/or asking clients what they would change).

While all of this information may be useful at agency level, at program level only some (eg the quantitative information) will be useful for collation at State/Territory or national level. It was suggested that at program level, this quantitative information could be a useful means of assessing overall client satisfaction within the SAAP program (in conjunction with other measures, such as unmet demand studies); and could be useful in identifying gaps in service delivery.

4.1 Appropriateness of the questionnaire

Table Five summarises the findings of the pilots concerning the appropriateness of the questionnaire developed during this project. The major views reported were that:

- The focus of the questions was appropriate (ie on information, accommodation, other support and the way a client was treated);
- Supplementary questions for different population groups would be required;
- The use of the term “satisfied” perhaps encouraged a positive response;
- There was a sense that clients felt disinclined to give a negative response;
The term “satisfied” was a difficult one for indigenous Australian, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and people with high and complex needs;

The order of questions needed to be changed to reflect the process by which a client has contact with an agency.

Supplementing the “core set” of questions with specific agency questions

There was agreement that opportunity should be given to the client to provide additional comments on each question. This would enable the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. There was agreement across the pilots that the “core set” of questions needed to be supplemented with more meaningful questions in relation to the individual agency services. Internal agency questionnaires are more specific and targeted. Additional questions would enable agencies to obtain more meaningful information about what clients find dissatisfying. The high and complex need pilot, for example, reported a need for more practical questions relating to food, meal times, heating, privacy, security of belongings, cleanliness of the facility etc. Likewise, the domestic and family violence pilot found that additional questions to elicit meaningful responses on the following would have been beneficial:

- Was there anything you did not like about staying in SAAP accommodation?
- Do you have any suggestions for providing better services for people?
- What would have helped you more?

Similarly, the youth pilot found the questions appropriate but believed that additional questions specific to the clients would be beneficial. Supplementary questions might be necessary for each of the SAAP’s major client groups. Examples, listed below, are based on the characteristics of an “ideal” SAAP service provided by clients during the consultation and discussed in Section 2.2.

**Young people**

How clean was the building you were in?

Did you feel the rules of the service helped you to be sufficiently independent?

How satisfied were you with the complaints procedures?

Did you think that staff involved you sufficiently in daily decision-making? Or were there any aspects of daily decision making that you thought you could have had greater involvement?

Did you have sufficient privacy?

Were personal belongings sufficiently secure?

How satisfied were you with the food? Was the kitchen adequately equipped?
Families
Was there sufficient space for both yourself and your children?
Was the physical layout of the facility sufficiently suited to the needs of both yourself and your children?
How satisfied were you with the level of support provided to your children?
Were workers sufficiently available and accessible?
Was sufficient attention given to linking you to other services and resources?

Accompanying children
How friendly were staff?
Were there enough things for you to do?
Did you feel safe enough?

Women experiencing Domestic & family violence
Did the layout of the facility sufficiently enable you to independently look after your children?
Was sufficient attention given to linking you to other services and resources?
Did you feel sufficiently safe?
Were you given good enough information about your rights?
Was the facility's atmosphere sufficiently supportive?
Did you receive sufficient support with getting help for your medical needs?
Did you receive sufficient support to prepare you to leave the service?

Men
Were the facilities clean enough?
Did you have sufficient privacy?
Were the bathroom and toilet facilities sufficiently private?
Did you feel safe?
Was the food sufficiently nutritious and adequate?
Did you have any trouble in accessing the service?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Was the building clean and tidy enough?
Did you feel safe?
Did you get enough good support through your stay?
Were you able to appropriate accommodation on leaving the service?
Did staff understand your situation?
Did the service have enough indigenous staff members?

**People with complex needs**
Did you feel safe enough?
Did you have enough privacy?
Were your belongings safe?
Was the building sufficiently clean (where appropriate, and sufficiently heated?)
Did you get enough individual support from staff?
Did you get sufficient support and follow-up after leaving the service?

**People from non-English Speaking backgrounds**
Did you have sufficient access to qualified interpreters?
Was the service sufficiently supportive and responsive to your cultural needs?
Did you feel comfortable enough to share your needs with staff?

Other general topics suggested for supplementary questions from the pilots included:
► What clients didn't like about staying in SAAP accommodation;
► What clients did not like about the SAAP service;
► Whether clients thought their needs and expectations were met;
► Suggestions for better outcomes from the service;
► Suggestion for better services for people;
► Why people left the service early;
► What accommodation people would like to access;
► Whether people are on waiting lists and if so for how long;
► Whether clients consider there are appropriate/adequate accommodation options.

**The appropriateness of the term satisfaction**
The high and complex needs, non-English speaking background and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pilots all recorded significant difficulties with the term “satisfaction”. The high and complex needs pilot found that the language was inappropriate and flawed because “satisfaction” differs greatly between clients and their circumstances before and during their stay. It was found that the questionnaire does not recognise and try to overcome the fear that high and complex needs clients have about making a complaint regarding service.
The non-English speaking background pilot concluded that the term “satisfaction” was “loaded” with the effect that questions were constructed to provide a “satisfied” response. The agency conducting this pilot referred to difficulties in translating the term “satisfaction”, and the problem clients had with the language of the questionnaire. A consequence of this difficulty was the need for the interpreter or the third party interviewer to change the wording to ensure that the questions were understood. This is problematic as interpretations may differ. The agency suggested that the “core set” of questions could be illustrated with standard examples for each question.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pilot reported that the word “satisfied” was uncommon for the client group using the service, and that words such as “very good” or “OK” may be clearer terms to use.

In the Call-Centre Pilot, the interviewers found the closed questions were straightforward but the open-ended questions needed more probing. The interviewers generally felt the open-ended questions (comments part) allowed clients to elaborate and were more important in terms of gathering information on how client’s felt about the services.

The order of the questionnaire

The non-English speaking background pilot noted that the ordering of the questionnaire could be changed to reflect the process of agency support. It was suggested that the first question should relate to information, the second question to accommodation, the third question to other help and support and the fourth to the way clients were treated by staff.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pilot also found that question number five caused the clients confusion, as it seemed to repeat questions that had already been asked.

The appropriateness of the questions and high satisfaction response

There was a high satisfaction response across the pilots. A number of pilots noted this was in part due to client concern about giving a dissatisfied answer for fear of losing accommodation or support. The usefulness of the high-satisfied response is modified where clients have written additional comments or made recommendations. For example, while the domestic and family violence pilot received a high-satisfied response to the questions, heating in the facility was consistently identified by clients as an issue of significance. The families pilot also had a high satisfaction response but there were also a number of comments from clients about the lack of longer-term accommodation and secure tenures. As has been pointed out elsewhere in this report many of these issues are outside the control or influence of many individual agencies and often relate to resourcing or other programs affecting the SAAP program.

Clients from non-English speaking backgrounds and clients with high and complex needs provided less additional commentary about what could be improved or what
was dissatisfying. For clients from non-English speaking backgrounds the high satisfaction response is linked with cultural responses, fear of losing support, and, for some clients, previous experience of questionnaires in different situations. The fear of losing accommodation and support was also recognised by the high and complex needs pilot as part of the reason for the high satisfaction response.

Table Five: The Appropriateness of the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot Target Group</th>
<th>Focus of core questions</th>
<th>Need for supplementary questions</th>
<th>The term satisfied</th>
<th>Order of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Women</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic &amp; Family Violence</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High &amp; Complex Need</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English Speaking</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men aged 23-46 (Call-Centre)</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key for Table: ✓ Appropriate  
✓✓ Very appropriate  
x Inappropriate  
xx Very inappropriate

4.2 The strengths and weaknesses of the methods used to assess client satisfaction during the pilots

The methodologies used in the pilots included face-to-face interviews with agency staff, face-to-face interview with an independent party, face-to-face interviews with an independent party and interpreter, written surveys, telephone interviews by agency staff, independent parties and by a call-centre.

The high and complex need pilot

Approximately one-third of the clients completed the questionnaire themselves and handed it to staff. This process was thought to be flawed with clients who filled in the instrument by themselves predominantly giving a “tick box” response.

A staff member or a known volunteer interviewed the remaining two-thirds of clients. The agency expressed concern that clients may have thought “they had to give the right answer” or risk losing their accommodation.

The agency identified administration of the questionnaire by an independent third party as a possible alternate process that may be more objective. The agency cautioned, however, that this was not without limitations for the client group generally mistrusts “strangers” asking questions. A consequence of this may be a low participation rate or the same result of “giving the right answer”.

The agency also suggested that for people with high and complex needs selective focus groups could be used. This would only work if clients who can work within a group environment were selected to participate. It is problematic, however, as it would not be representative of the client group as a whole.

**The domestic and family violence pilot**

The instrument was administered using a face-to-face interview process with all clients. The interviewer was independent and unknown to all clients. The process avoided any embarrassment for clients with limited English or literacy problems. Using the same interviewer ensured that all clients were given the same information and that questions were explained in a uniform way. This approach was found to suit all clients and it was noted in a number of client questionnaires that it ensured no bias or conflict. The agency also reported the process enabled frank and honest answers to be given.

**The non-English speaking background pilot**

The instrument was administered using a face-to-face basis interview process with all clients. The interviewer was independent and unknown to all clients. Fifty percent of the interviews required an interpreter. As noted elsewhere there were significant difficulties with the language of the questions requiring explanation and examples to be provided by the interviewer and interpreter.

The only other approach identified by the agency that may work is focus groups facilitated by community leaders from within the different non-English speaking background communities. This would facilitate gathering more critical information and ensure that the process involved the communities and was appropriate for the different communities.

**The young women’s pilot**

The questionnaire was given to clients to complete in written form. The agency followed up with clients with any questions for clarification. The approach of written questionnaires with the opportunity for verbal clarification worked well.

Follow-up of clients was conducted by the manager. This worked for the pilot but on an ongoing basis is not considered realistic or feasible. The agency reported that it would be preferable if all staff were trained in interviewing techniques especially because the agency is a 24-hour service and clients leave after hours when a Manager, Team Leader or Senior staff member are not present.

**The families pilot**

The agency employed a person who had worked as a casual employee within the agency to conduct face-to-face interviews. The interviewer was known to some clients, but generally not in a support work role. The agency believes the most professional and beneficial approach would be to employ an interviewer who has not been involved in any capacity with the agency. This would help to ensure the most unbiased and honest responses.
The youth pilot
The questionnaire was administered through telephone interviews with the clients that had already exited the service. The telephone interview approach ensured that young people who have limited literacy skills were not disadvantaged in any way. It should also be noted that clients who were interviewed over the telephone appreciated the process because of the contact initiated by the service.

For those clients still accessing the agency for accommodation and support the instrument was administered as a written questionnaire. The written questionnaire was completed by clients without assistance from the agency staff. This gave the client the opportunity to make comment free of face-to-face confrontation.

The agency reported that both the telephone and written questionnaire approach worked well and enabled the maximum opportunity for the young people to be open and honest in their responses.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pilot
The questionnaires were administered as part of a one-on-one interview with each client. This allowed each client the opportunity to discuss each question with the worker. This was the best option to overcome low English literacy. Recorded answers were read back to the women at the end of the session for clarification. Client feedback on the process was that interviews were more appropriate than written questions. In the agency’s previous experience with written client evaluation forms there was a low response rate, believed to be due to low literacy levels.

No interpreters were used for the delivery of these questionnaires. In relation to interpreters the agency reported that a majority of the women using the service do not have English as first language, and there are great variations in English fluency. Interpreter access for international languages is free and available with some planning, however, Aboriginal interpreters are costly and not easily available. The agency strongly recommended that the cost of interpreters be incorporated into any costing for delivery of this survey.

4.3  The need for a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies
Agencies participating in the pilot agreed with research and consultation findings that if the factors contributing to customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction are to be researched, methods for collecting information of a qualitative nature will be required, in addition to quantitative data. Possible disadvantages of obtaining qualitative data relate to the expense and subjective nature of qualitative research. However, quantitative and qualitative research processes are not mutually exclusive, and the key question is more often how to achieve an appropriate balance by “trading-off” particular advantages and disadvantages. For example, if more detailed qualitative research is conducted and if there are budgetary constraints, then it is likely sample
size will need to be small. While small samples may increase anxiety about the representativeness of any findings, the value of qualitative data analysis does not depend on representative sampling alone.

Similar problems also arise with quantitative research – collecting data for a large number of items and for a large number of people (either a valid random sample or all SAAP clients) will have cost and resource implications. An economy approach that enables an appropriate balance or trade-off to be struck in relation to the mix of research methodologies used or available and which enables both quantitative and qualitative data to be obtained is clearly required. For example, giving opportunity for clients to provide additional comment on a “core” set of questions would enable the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

As discussed in Section 3, the pilots confirmed the need for any “core set” of minimum questions to be supplemented with questions enabling the collection of a fuller picture of a client's satisfaction with an individual agency's services. Section 3 has provided examples of possible supplementary questions. The next stage of this project may explore further the research methodologies that can be used to obtain feedback from client about both the core set and the supplementary set.

Whilst initial findings from the limited pilots suggest that face-to-face interviews and interviews by phone appear to hold the greatest utility for most of the key population groups targeted by SAAP, other methods that could be added to the toolbox of methodologies include:

- Focus groups and other group processes eg facilitated, specially convened house-meetings;
- Website-based client satisfaction surveying or dialogue based options;
- Peers or mentors using a number of approaches including face-to-face interviews, interviews by phone and group processes.

The pilot confirmed the earlier reported view that client satisfaction processes should be planned, systematic, sufficiently detailed, documented and replicable over time and with different client groups. Different methods used may be employed across the SAAP funding or program cycle. For example, a survey comprising a core set of questions might be administered in all agencies in a similar fashion to the Survey of Unmet Need. Every second national administration might involve the collection and reporting of data on supplementary questions. More in depth studies might be especially designed for each different sector and administered less frequently to a sample of services within each sector.

The next stage of this project could usefully build on the pilots that were reported to work well. Options include the following.

**Call centre approach with single men** – This project’s call-centre pilot with single men aged 26-40 could be expanded and administered, for example, with a mix of urban, rural and remote areas services within a single state.
Young people – An expanded trial of using a mix of methods with young people could be conducted. Based on the pilot’s findings methods to be further piloted might include:

- telephone interviewing of young people who had exited;
- written survey with those present; and
- group processes with both sets.

Again, an expanded pilot might be conducted within a single state. Clearly, building on previous and current work would be advantageous.

Domestic and family violence – An expanded trial could be conducted of face-to-face interviews administered by different people eg independent third party, peer mentors, staff or service members.

High and complex needs – The findings of the pilot pointed to a trial of different methods, namely, group processes and face-to-face interviews by an independent third party. This trial would need to allow time for clients to have a number of contacts with the independent third party in an attempt to counter the tendency of this group to mistrust “strangers”. A more in depth pilot might involve a small number of agencies who specifically target this target group eg 10-15 across Australia.

In each of the further pilots attention should be given to:

- Trialling the same as well as different sets of questions eg core set allowing comment, core plus supplementary and questions asked differently for example, in positive and in negative and by reversing the ordering of scales;
- Trialling a common as well as different instrument formats, designed to suit the specific needs and circumstances of different target groups of a pilot eg different formats for clients with numeracy and literacy needs;
- Assessing the effectiveness of the method or methods used to measure client satisfaction;
- Researching the effect of conducting the pilot by using different people eg independent third party, peer mentors, staff member;
- Where appropriate, conducting the pilot with a mix of urban, rural and remote areas services; in a single state;
- Identifying the support required to enable the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
4.4 Capacity building in the SAAP sector

The next phase of this project could assist to build on client satisfaction work currently being undertaken by agencies and states and territories. An option for so doing, is the compilation and production of a client satisfaction resource package for agencies. The package could comprise a range of resources to help agencies further design and routinely implement client satisfaction processes including:

- A guide to what the research says about measuring client satisfaction;
- A tool-kit of methodologies for assessing client satisfaction;
- Best practice principles;
- Protocols for addressing ethical issues;
- Core and supplementary questions;
- Examples of questionnaires and forms;
- Methods for identifying agency specific supplementary questions;
- Strategies for agencies to design and implement their client satisfaction processes;
- Resources to assist with data analysis and reporting;
- Check-lists;
- Information and training resources for management and staff;
- Strategies for capacity building and using client satisfaction information to improve service quality within a service, within a local area or within a sector;
- Strategies for providing feedback to clients etc.

Also included in the package could be strategies for addressing the following barriers to client participation in client satisfaction processes:

- Concerns about confidentiality;
- Concerns that views expressed would get back to the worker or agency and that because of this, the client would be treated differently;
- Fear of being discriminated against or evicted;
- Literacy levels and communication difficulties;
- Lack of access to phones;
- Lack of clarity concerning the purpose, use and distribution of collected information.

The package might be available via website, CD rom, and hard copy. Actual products within the package might include modules, overhead transparencies, audio-visual aids eg video.
4.5 Conclusions

The core set of questions
The “core” set of questions piloted in this project were confirmed as appropriate focal areas for measuring client satisfaction. This does not rule out the formulation and testing of different sets.

Need for supplementary questions
It is necessary to supplement the “core” questions of the client satisfaction instrument with additional questions relevant to different client groups and services.

The Toolkit of approaches
The pilot agencies confirmed the findings and recommendations of the consultation phase that the administration of the questionnaire needs to be flexible to ensure that both the “core” set and “supplementary” set of questions does not limit the usefulness of the process for agencies or clients. This confirmed the need for a “toolkit” of approaches utilising both quantitative and qualitative approaches including:

- Written survey administered on-site with or without assistance or externally by mail;
- Face-to-face interviews;
- Interviews by phone;
- Focus groups and other group processes eg facilitated, specially convened house-meetings;
- Website-based client satisfaction surveying or dialogue based options;
- Peers or mentors using a number of approaches including face-to-face interviews, interviews by phone and group processes.

The term “satisfied” and the high positive response rate
The use of the term “satisfied” and the content and order of the five-point scale prompted clients toward positive responses. The questions and any scale employed need to be worded with a view to encouraging clients to provide feedback on:

- what they did not like;
- the problems they experienced with the service;
- the extent to which they felt their expectations and needs were met; and
- the changes they consider to be necessary.
Pilot different instruments
The next phase of development and piloting of the client satisfaction instrument should compare the effects of asking clients how unhappy they were with each focal service aspect as against how happy they were, for example:

- How unhappy were you with the way staff treated you; compared with
- How happy were you with the way staff treated you.

Similarly, the effects of differing the order of a scale should also be piloted i.e. starting a scale with the negative options, for example:

- Very unhappy, unhappy, neither unhappy or happy, happy, very happy; compared with
- Very happy, very unhappy, neither happy or unhappy, unhappy, very unhappy.

The questions should contain everyday language. Pictorial versions of the questions and scales could be designed in an attempt to assist the participation of client groups with literacy and numeracy issues and to assist clients whose first language is other than English.

Selective pilots using different methodologies
A number of more in-depth pilots could be conducted including:

- Call centre with single men;
- A mix of methods with young people;
- Face-to-face interviews with women experiencing domestic and family violence;
- Face-to-face interviews and group processes with clients with high and complex needs.

Each pilot should give attention to identifying the support required to enable the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Client Satisfaction Resources for Agencies
A package, including a tool-kit of methods, could usefully be developed to help agencies further design and routinely implement client satisfaction processes.
5.1 Nature and Type of Resources Required for the Development and Administration of Client Satisfaction Processes

Given the limited nature of the pilots during this phase of the project, the estimated costs provided below must be regarded with caution. Care must be taken to more extensively and accurately identify costs associated with any further pilots. The nature and type of resources required to assess client satisfaction will depend on the methods employed. A written survey completed onsite and forwarded to a central data collection point would cost less than one forwarded by mail after a client has left an agency. A telephone interview conducted by a call-centre is likely to cost less pro-rata than a face-to-face interview conducted by an independent third party.

For example, the costs of survey/instrument production and data collection, processing, analysis and reporting based on standard industry rates might be estimated at:

- $20-30 per respondent for on-site completion of written survey
- $25-50 per respondent by mail survey
- $120-150 per respondent by face-to-face interview conducted by an independent third party
- $1,200-1,500 per group or $150-187.50 per person through conduct of a focus group or a similar group process.

If client satisfaction was to be assessed by staff conducting the interviews, then training in interviewing techniques would be required. However, almost all the agencies involved in the pilot did not believe that interviews by staff members are appropriate and consequently the resource implications would be the funding of an independent person to conduct the interviews or run group sessions. It would be necessary to resource agencies so that an appropriate amount of staff time could be allocated for client introductions and preparation.

The pilots provided indicative information relating to the resources required to fund agencies to implement client satisfaction measurements. These indicative costs were as follows:

- **Call-centre pilot with single men** – 18 clients interviewed at a total cost of $1,358.22;
- **High and complex needs pilot** – estimated total cost of $1,110.40 based on the assumption that 20 clients are interviewed by staff;
MEASUREMENT OF CLIENT SATISFACTION IN SAAP

- **Domestic and family violence pilot** – 6 clients interviewed by face-to-face interviews by independent third party at a total cost of $419.00;

- **NESB pilot** – 10 clients interviewed face-to-face by independent third party at an estimated total cost of $640.00 (not including the costs of interpreters);

- **Families pilot** – 7 clients interviewed face-to-face by independent third party at an estimated total cost of $350.00 or by group process at a cost of $338.00;

- **Youth pilot** – 40 young people interviewed using a mix methods at an estimated total cost of $1,650.00; and

- **Aboriginal pilot** – 10 clients interviewed by a member of staff at an estimated total cost of $284.00 (does not include cost of interpreters).

The domestic and family violence pilot, for example, provided a detailed estimate of the resource implications to administer the instrument on an ongoing basis using an independent person to conduct face-to-face interviews. The following figures are the agency's approximate costs to administer the questionnaire to around 90 clients (75 per cent of residents) per year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer costs (time and travel) 90 hrs @ $25 per hour</td>
<td>2,250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin costs – Photocopying</td>
<td>40.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postage &amp; Telephone/Fax</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collate &amp; report (3 hrs quarterly)</td>
<td>300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training approx 4 hrs per year @ $25</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Total Annual Cost</td>
<td>2,740.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It must be noted that the more qualitative data collected, the greater the costs would be for the collation, processing, analysis and reporting of data.

For further details of the estimate costs supplied by pilot agencies for implementing the client satisfaction questionnaire see the Appendix.

### 5.2 Encouraging and resourcing SAAP funded agencies to participate

It is important that SAAP funded agencies are both encouraged and resourced to participate in the introduction and/or enhancement of client satisfaction measures in their services. It was noted in the consultations and pilots that for agencies there are already increasing administrative and reporting requirements that are often seen as burdensome and as detracting from quality service delivery. The collection and use of client satisfaction is not only time consuming, but to be done well, requires adequate training and support. It was seen as important that measures of client satisfaction are not simply another administrative burden, but are viewed as meaningful, and
supported by agency staff. The proposed development of a resource package for agencies, including a tool-kit of approaches, would be a significant step forward in supporting agencies to further develop their client satisfaction processes.

There was a widely expressed view that positive rather than negative incentives are more likely to achieve a real commitment by agencies to the collection and use of client satisfaction data. Measures that were suggested to encourage and resource SAAP funded agencies to participate in the collection of client satisfaction information include:

- Engaging SAAP funded agencies and clients as much as possible in the development and introduction of client satisfaction measures.
- Developing a flexible tool kit of approaches from which agencies can select or adapt the one most suited to their needs (as noted above), rather than being required to follow one standard approach.
- Over time, introducing reasonable requirements for the collection of and reporting on client satisfaction data into service funding agreements (but it is likely that this will only be acceptable if there is flexibility in the system, and if agencies are properly resourced to undertake this additional work).
- Providing adequate information and training to SAAP agency staff to enable them to feel confident to participate, and to be able to respond to and use the data to enhance service quality.
- Providing additional funding to agencies to build capacity and cover the additional staff time required to be trained in, collect and report on, and respond to client satisfaction data.
- Providing financial bonuses to agencies for the provision of client satisfaction data.

**Rationalising client-reported data collection processes in SAAP**

To avoid unnecessary burden on clients and agencies and to reduce administrative costs, there is a need to examine whether it is possible to merge processes measuring client satisfaction with processes measuring client outcomes. There is a level of apparent overlap and synergy between the proposed client satisfaction questions and the Checklist for Very Short Contact Services.

5.3 Conclusions

**Training and Resourcing**

Agencies must be fully resourced to administer the client satisfaction instrument without detracting from other elements of service delivery. The proposed development of a resource package for agencies, including a tool-kit of approaches, would be a significant step forward in supporting agencies to further develop their client satisfaction processes.
Positive incentives for agencies
SAAP agencies should be encouraged and fully resourced to participate in the measurement of client satisfaction measures, using positive incentives.

Rationalising client-reported data collection processes in SAAP
To avoid unnecessary burden on clients and agencies, and to reduce administrative costs, there is a need to examine whether it is possible to merge processes measuring client satisfaction with processes measuring client outcome.
Section Six
Recommendations

Recommendations

Recommendation One – Proceed to the next phase of design and extensive piloting
It is recommended that the department initiate another phase of further design, development and piloting of client satisfaction instruments.

Recommendation Two – Further testing of client satisfaction measures
It is recommended that the “core set” of questions developed in this phase of the project as well as additional sets be further tested.

It is critical that there be further testing of client satisfaction measures given the limited nature of the pilots in this project. Attention should also be given to the possibility of formulating and testing different sets of “core questions”. Such a developmental process is critical to ensure that strategies developed and tested in the future are valid and can inform the ongoing quality improvement of SAAP at both an agency and program level.

Recommendation Three – The development of a resource package for agencies including a tool-kit of client satisfaction approaches
It is recommended that the Department in consultation with services develop over time a resource package including a “toolkit” of client satisfaction approaches to be used throughout the sector.

Approaches included in the toolkit might include:

- Written survey administered on-site or externally by mail;
- Face-to-face interviews;
- Interviews by phone;
- Focus groups and other group processes eg facilitated, specially convened house-meetings;
- Website-based client satisfaction surveying or dialogue based options;
- Peers or mentors using a number of approaches including face-to-face interviews, interviews by phone and group processes.

These methods could be conducted internally or by client peers, agency peers or other third parties. Using client peers and agency peers would require the development of a training program as well as guidelines, protocols and procedures. A mix of the above methods could be used to collect client satisfaction for both agency and program level purposes.
Other resources in the package could usefully include:

- A guide to what the research says about measuring client satisfaction;
- Best practice principles;
- Protocols for addressing ethical issues;
- Core and supplementary questions;
- Examples of questionnaires and forms;
- Methods for identifying agency specific supplementary questions;
- Strategies for agencies to design and implement their client satisfaction processes;
- Strategies for addressing common barriers to clients participating in client satisfaction processes;
- Resources to assist with data analysis and reporting;
- Check-lists;
- Information and training resources for management and staff;
- Strategies for capacity building and using client satisfaction information to improve service quality within a service, within a local area or within a sector;
- Strategies for providing feedback to clients etc.

The package might be available via website, CD rom, and hard copy. Actual products within the package might include modules, overhead transparencies, audio-visual aids eg video.

**Recommendation Four – Piloting different methods for collecting client satisfaction information**

It is recommended that a number of more in-depth pilots be conducted including:

- Call centre with single men;
- A mix of methods with young people;
- Face-to-face interviews with women experiencing domestic and family violence;
- Face-to-face interviews and group processes with clients with high and complex needs.

Each pilot should give attention to identifying the support required to enable the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

**Recommendation Five – Accompanying children**

It is recommended that the Department investigates and pilots the collection of client satisfaction information from accompanying children. Possible options include:

- Forming a partnership with a tertiary education institution and a service provider to submit an application for SPIRT funding;
**Sponsoring a research fellowship based within the Department;**

**Funding a project to specifically consider client satisfaction and accompanying children.**

**Recommendation Six – Addressing the high positive response rate**

It is recommended that in further developing the client satisfaction instrument attention be given to ensuring that the instrument and methodologies encourage clients to provide information about:

- What they did not like;
- The problems they experienced with the service;
- The extent to which they felt their expectations and needs were met; and
- The changes they consider to be necessary.

**Recommendation Seven – Minimising demands on the program, agencies and clients**

It is recommended that during the next phase of design, development and piloting, consideration be given to identifying and testing opportunities for merging processes and instruments for measuring client outcomes with those for measuring client satisfaction.

**Recommendation Eight – Ethical issues and protocols required**

It is recommended that ethical issues identified and listed in this report be addressed in further development of client satisfaction instruments and approaches. These issues include:

- Assurance of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity.
- Informed client consent for any use of the information.
- Use of the information in a way that does not threaten services, workers, or clients.
- The need for information that is critical of a service not to jeopardise the client’s future access to that or other services.
- If, when and how an agency worker might be informed if a client is critical of their behaviour/attitude.
- The possible overstating of client satisfaction or the selection of biased samples that may arise if client satisfaction information is used in decision-making about funding.
- A commitment to disseminating and using the client satisfaction information wherever possible to improve service delivery.

Protocols for the above issues as well the following, could be developed and included in the proposed Client Satisfaction Resource Package for agencies.
Making clear the purposes for the collection of the data;

Involvement of clients with the development and review of client satisfaction approaches;

The issue of who within the organisation collects the information;

Interpretation and use at both an agency and program level;

Sampling;

Use of interpreters and cultural or disability support people;

Situations of disclosure of inappropriate or illegal behaviour by staff or another resident.

**Recommendation Nine – Methodological and interpretative questions to be asked during the pilots**

It is recommended that in further developing client satisfaction measures and approaches consideration be given to the following methodological and interpretative questions:

a) The suitability and effectiveness of the approach for obtaining meaningful and useful client satisfaction information:
   - from the selected group;
   - for that particular type of agency;
   - for the agency's own purposes;
   - for program level purposes.

b) What has been learned about the content, validity and suitability of the questions that clients are asked?

c) Are sampling approaches required?

d) What has been learned about the timing of the conduct of the approach?

e) What are the costs for conducting the approach?

f) How often could the approach be feasibly conducted?

g) How could the approach be improved?

h) Did any further ethical issues arise?

i) What further approaches would the agency recommend?
Appendix A

Draft questionnaire to assess client satisfaction in SAAP

How satisfied were you with the accommodation provided by this agency?
- Very satisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Quite dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Not applicable

Comment on the accommodation you experienced?
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

How satisfied were you with the other kinds of help and support provided by this agency?
- Very satisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Quite dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Comment on the other kinds of help and support you received?
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

How satisfied were you with the information provided by this agency?
- Very satisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Quite dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
Comment on the information given to you?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

How satisfied were you with the way agency staff treated you?

– Very satisfied
– Quite satisfied
– Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
– Quite dissatisfied
– Very dissatisfied

Comment on the way agency staff treated you.

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of the support and accommodation at the agency?

– Very satisfied
– Quite satisfied
– Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
– Quite dissatisfied
– Very dissatisfied

Comment:

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Are there any ways the agency's services could be improved?

_______________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Feedback Questionnaire for agencies running the client satisfaction pilots

Name and location of service:
What kind of service does your agency provide?
What is your primary client group?
How many clients generally access your agency at any one time?
Approximately how many clients have accessed your agency over the last 12 months?
How many clients did you administer the questionnaire to?
How did you select the sample?
When did you administer the questionnaire – while the clients were accessing your agency, as they were leaving, or after they had left? Which approach works best and why?
How was the questionnaire administered – in written form, as one-on-one interviews, or in some other way? Which approach works best for your clients, and why?
If interviews or group meetings were held, who did the interviewing or facilitated the meetings – a staff member of the agency, a member of the project team, or some other person? How well did this work?
Were the questions appropriate, or would you recommend changing them to make the process better and get more meaningful information?
What did the clients who participated think about the process?
If your agency was to administer these questionnaires on an ongoing basis, is it feasible to do this with all clients, or a sample? If a sample, how do you think the sampling should be done?
What kinds and level of resources (eg additional funding or training) would your agency require to administer these questionnaires on an ongoing basis?
Please provide an estimate of the actual financial cost to your service of administering the questionnaire to each client using a particular methodology or methodologies (taking into account staff time and other resources), and please quantify any one-off or annual costs such as training costs for your staff.
Do you think information from questionnaires like this would be useful to your agency? If so, how would you use the information? If not, why not?
Do you think there would be value in collating information from questionnaires like this, to use at State/Territory or national level? If so, how do you think this information could be used? If not, why not?
Do you have any other comments or suggestions?
Appendix C

Pilot Agency Details

People with High and Complex Needs Pilot:
◗ Bethlehem House
◗ The number of clients involved in the pilot was seventeen
◗ Services provided are emergency accommodation to single men 20 years and over, Semi-supported long term accommodation to single men with high and complex needs
◗ Primary client group is single men 20 years and over
◗ The agency has a 36 bed in-house capacity and 12 outreach community placements

Families Pilot:
◗ Gateway Community Group
◗ The number of families involved in the pilot was seven
◗ Services provided are supported accommodation in the short to medium term
◗ The primary client group are families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
◗ At any one time the agency is supporting nine families with accommodation and providing follow up support to approx 8 - 10 additional families

Women Escaping Domestic and Family Violence Client Satisfaction Pilot:
◗ Stirling Women's Refuge
◗ The number of clients involved in the pilot was six
◗ Services provided include crisis accommodation and support services
◗ The primary client group is women and their children, who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, due to domestic or family violence
◗ At anyone time the agency has accommodation for 5 families, with the total number of beds 25

People from non-English Speaking Background Client Satisfaction Pilot:
◗ Melbourne Citymission
◗ The number of clients involved in the pilot was eight
◗ Services provided include case management and outreach to clients in transitional accommodation, case management & outreach to client in inappropriate accommodation, duty service to clients and other services
The primary client group is individuals 21 years and older or people 18 years and over with children.

At any one time the organisation provides case management and support to up to 80 individuals or families and services an average of 70 clients through the duty service each month.

**Young Women's Pilot:**
- St. Johns Youth Services
- The number of clients involved in the pilot was twelve
- Services provided by the agencies include emergency accommodation, maximum 3 weeks
- Young women aged between 16 and 21 years
- At any one time the organisation provides services to 10 young women and a maximum of 6 children at any one time

**Youth Pilot:**
- EASY
- The number of clients involved in the pilot was ten
- Medium to long term accommodation, information, support and referrals
- The primary client groups is young people aged 12 to 24 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- There are 15 young people accessing the services at any one time

**Call Centre Pilot:**
- RMIT, Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development
- The number of clients involved in the pilot was 18
Appendix D

List of consultation meetings held

Meeting 1: Brisbane, 4 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on families
Meeting 2: Brisbane, 4 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on families
Meeting 3: Adelaide, 5 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on single men
Meeting 4: Adelaide, 5 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on single men
Meeting 5: Alice Springs, 5 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Meeting 6: Alice Springs, 5 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Meeting 7: Perth, 7 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on women
Meeting 8: Perth, 7 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on women
Meeting 9: Hobart, 10 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on people with high and complex needs
Meeting 10: Hobart, 10 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on people with high and complex needs
Meeting 11: Sydney, 11 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on young people
Meeting 12: Sydney, 11 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on young people
Meeting 13: Melbourne, 12 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
Meeting 14: Melbourne, 12 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
Meeting 15: Canberra, 13 December 2001, SAAP agencies and other stakeholders, focus on accompanying children
Meeting 16: Canberra, 13 December 2001, SAAP clients, focus on accompanying children
Appendix E

Submissions received

1. Adolescent Crisis Intervention Service, Tamworth, NSW
2. Adult and Family Services
3. Albany Youth Association, WA
4. Ballarat Community Health Centre, Victoria
5. Bethany Family Support, Geelong, Victoria
6. Christopher Monie
7. Coffs Harbour Youth Refuge, NSW
8. Darwin Youth Providers (Anglicare Youth Housing Program, Darwin; Anglicare Youth Housing Program, Palmerston & Rural; Community Placement Program, YWCA)
9. EPWCSC
10. Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne, Vic
11. Ipswich Community Youth Service, Qld
12. Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service
13. Jardamu Safe House, Wyndham, WA
14. Jireh House Association
15. Kilvington Collective, Narrewarren North, Vic
16. Manna House (St Vincent's Community Services), Fortitude Valley, Qld
17. Mental Health Services, Tasmania
18. Newcastle Adult Accommodation Support Service, NSW
19. Peel Youth Programme, Mandurah WA
20. Stepping Out Housing Program
21. Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong, NSW
22. Support and Accommodation Rights Service, Victoria
23. The Tableland Women's Centre Inc, Atherton, Qld
24. Top End Association for Mental Health, NT
25. Women and Girls Emergency Service
Appendix F

Agency Feedback from Consultations about Client Satisfaction approaches suited to different client groups

Agencies argued that in order to assist clients to participate in satisfaction reviews, barriers could be addressed by providing:

- Child care;
- Interpreters;
- Cultural support;
- Disability support;
- Transport or vouchers for fares; and
- Incentives including remuneration.

Some of the suggested methods for measuring client satisfaction made by agencies in relation to the different client groups are outlined below.

Agencies favoured a mix of methods, arguing that this is the only way comprehensive, meaningful and useful information will be obtained, given the diversity of SAAP clients and the diverse range of services provided through SAAP funding.

**Men**

Peer driven processes where experiences are shared can encourage greater participation and provide an atmosphere where men will say what they think. The CREATE approach, as outlined above in Section 3.1, was given as an example. Agencies within a particular region could assist client satisfaction processes by assisting client support groups to be established and to operate. The support groups could provide a safe means for clients to give feedback about service quality.

Feedback could be given by men throughout their stay if feedback forms were readily available and could be placed in a box that is cleared regularly.

**Families**

It was suggested that client satisfaction should be incorporated into approaches such as regular house meetings and face-to-face interviews once a family has settled in.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

The need for specialised approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users was stressed. It was suggested that verbal/oral means of obtaining client feedback, with interpreters where necessary, would probably be the most effective option for settings like Alice Springs. The quality of the questions asked in such contexts was seen as very important – they need to be very well thought through, and
asked in simple language. It was suggested that Indigenous focus groups could be useful. Some services use tick sheets next to the phone so that when clients phone with a comment about the service, the information can be readily recorded. However, it was noted that in different contexts and with different Indigenous clients, differing methodologies may be needed, so it was suggested that multiple types of feedback need to be allowed for, though perhaps with standard content of questions.

**Women**

Agencies felt that the client satisfaction experienced by women service users would be best measured through face to face interviews and group discussions. When interviews are employed, some clients will prefer to be interviewed by someone they know, others might prefer someone who is external and independent from the service. Some women would be happy to privately fill in a written confidential survey. It is important for clients to have a number of possible options and to be free to choose the option with which they most comfortable. It was also suggested that there must be provision for disability support, cultural support and language support. One women's agency suggested in their submission to the project that questionnaires or surveys could be incorporated into an exit plan.11

**Young People**

It was suggested by agencies that face-to-face interviews or similar interactive approaches would probably be the best approach with young people.

**Culturally and linguistically diverse communities**

The need for culturally appropriate methods was emphasised. For example, in some cultures, oral criticism of authority figures is unacceptable, or criticism must come from a particular person.

**Clients with high and complex needs**

The following suggestions were made with regard to this client group:

- The use of an independent or peer interviewer so the client does not feel pressured to say only nice things to workers;
- The use of a suggestion box to give clients the opportunity to express how they feel without being asked a question;
- Utilisation of pictorial responses, for example smiley faces and sad faces to represent the clients’ satisfaction even if they are not literate;
- A comment book or box where clients can write their feelings about the service freely and as they choose;
- Internet surveys so that the client can provide feedback by logging on through a computer at the agency and thereby avoid having to interact with another person.

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11 Submission 23.
Approaches for accompanying children

There was agreement that it is very important for the voice of accompanying children to be heard, and for their views to be obtained as part of the collection of client satisfaction information. The development of different approaches was advocated for the different age groups of accompanying children.

- **Under 7 year olds:** It was suggested that questions about client satisfaction be explored through play activities, painting, drawing and making a journal. If possible, this should be done with a couple of children in an open area where they feel comfortable and can move around (e.g., a play area).

- **8-11 year olds:** With this group also, it was suggested that information could be sought in a relaxed atmosphere (e.g., play room/area), or over afternoon tea for example. It was suggested that the children be asked about both general and specific aspects of their stay, e.g., food, their bedrooms, staff, etc. It was also suggested that questions be kept simple.

- **12-15 year olds:** Small group discussions after school with afternoon tea were suggested. It was noted that this age group often does not like to do individual work or to talk to an adult by themselves, and that group work (e.g., a girls’ group and a boys’ group) might better enable everyone to have their say. It was suggested that computer or internet approaches could be considered with this group (e.g., having a menu-driven survey where the young people can pick boxes and write short answers).

- **Young people 16 and over:** It was suggested that with many young people over 16 it would be possible to have a similar approach as to that employed with their parents. An offer of payment or in-kind payment would be appropriate and would help to facilitate responses from this age group; and a computer/internet approach would also work well with this age group.

It was suggested that there is a need to neither overload workers nor children, as agencies currently conduct several different scales and tests with children in relation to family functioning and emotional wellbeing, behaviour and functioning of children. Obtaining satisfaction information from accompanying children could be part of the closure process or could be collected during their first month in residence. As their views are often sought routinely as part of the case management process, this could be built upon. It was suggested that the information sought should be kept to a minimum, e.g.:

- What did you like? Or: What did you most like?
- What didn’t you like about your stay here? Or: What did you like least?
- What changes would make it better for you while you are here?

The time taken to obtain client satisfaction information should be brief – probably no longer than 30 minutes. It is also important to ask mothers and/or fathers about how they consider the children fared and about what could be improved to help children more.
Clients from this group expressed a preference for face-to-face interviews by someone from the service.

**Accompanying children and their parent (s)**

The preference was for afternoon or evening meetings for children and young people where they could be encouraged to raise their concerns and ideas for making things better. Choice on whether and how to provide input and feedback was advocated. It was suggested that some people prefer to provide written comments, whereas others have difficulty with this and would prefer to tell their views to someone. It was further suggested that if clients’ views were provided by talking to someone, this needs to be someone who is easy to talk to and who can be trusted. Some people would feel more comfortable just talking to a worker. It was felt that it is important for people to be supported and assisted to put complaints in writing. Some clients stated that because they have to complete so many forms, it would be better if they could give their views in a meeting with a small number of other people.

**Women**

The women who attended the meeting in Perth argued that that a formal client satisfaction approach should comprise interviews on a one-on-one and face-to-face basis rather than through focus groups, as “the people in any group are all different, some of our experiences are very personal and it’s hard for some people to speak up in a group”. They felt that the client feedback interviews should be conducted not by a member of the service, as this would prevent people from identifying problems; but by a third party. This third party should be someone who has knowledge and preferably personal experience of the issues, and who therefore knows how SAAP services work,
and how to communicate with residents. It was suggested that some ex-residents could be trained up for such work. The women also expressed the view that the weekly residents’ meetings are an important means by which services can get ongoing feedback and suggestions from clients. They felt there was a place for day-to-day feedback in improving aspects such as the way meals are prepared in the refuge.

**Men**

It was suggested that a hotline could be provided for current or ex-clients of SAAP services to phone-in and provide feedback. Some of the men present said they would not like to be interviewed by phone. Others suggested that being interviewed by or meeting with paid peers would be an effective strategy.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

Face-to-face interviews were preferred by this client group, but it was also felt to be important for staff to routinely ask residents if they are satisfied or if they have any problems with the service. The young Indigenous clients said that they felt uncomfortable being consulted in a group and that they would prefer to talk in private and in their own language. The young people said they like to talk with one person from the service and that this should be an Aboriginal person.

**People with high and complex needs**

People attending the meeting in Hobart expressed two major views: one group stated that they would like to be asked about their satisfaction in a face-to-face interview with someone they know, for example, a staff member who is not their case worker and is removed from day to day service provision; another group suggested that they would prefer to fill in a confidential form that staff at the agency couldn’t read. There was agreement among those present that people should be able to choose the method which suited them best.
## Estimate Cost of administering the questionnaire from the pilots

### Table Six: Estimate costs from pilot agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot Target Group</th>
<th>Estimate Details</th>
<th>Expenditure Items</th>
<th>Cost per item</th>
<th>Cost per client</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>The costs are estimates based on face-to-face interviews with 7 families</td>
<td>Employment of outside interviewer</td>
<td>239.90</td>
<td>50.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Travel costs for interviewer</td>
<td>22.75</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff time to liaise with clients and arrange interview times ($22 per hour x 4 hrs)</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>350.65</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>The costs are estimates based on 10 interviews of approximately 30 mins to conduct, and 30 mins to arrange.</td>
<td>Total time taken per week to conduct surveys: approximately 6 hours.</td>
<td></td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time taken to re-write survey forms and plan their delivery: 2 hours.</td>
<td></td>
<td>(not including interpreter costs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total worker time for survey delivery: 8 hours.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time taken to write report at the conclusion of the survey period and discuss conclusions: 4 hours (1 for worker, 3 for coordinator).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total (not including interpretation/admin costs)</strong></td>
<td><strong>283.92</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic &amp; Family Violence</td>
<td>The agency minimised its cost by accessing another City of Stirling Community Service worker who was familiar with undertaking surveys.</td>
<td>Organising and training of interviewer (4 hrs)</td>
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<td>69.83</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewing 6 x clients (3 hrs)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide debrief for interviewer</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Travel costs for interviewer (3hrs)</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff time to gain clients participation (1.5 hrs)</td>
<td>37.50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photocopying &amp; Stationery</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide Feedback information (4 hrs)</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>419.00</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High &amp; Complex Need</td>
<td>The costs are estimates based on interviews conducted by staff with 20 clients.</td>
<td>Staff Wages (20 interviews of one hour length @ $19.70 per hour)</td>
<td>394.00</td>
<td>55.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Administration Cost</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training for staff</td>
<td>400.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff wages for training</td>
<td>236.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,130.00</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table Six (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot Target Group</th>
<th>Estimate Details</th>
<th>Expenditure Items</th>
<th>Cost per Item</th>
<th>Cost per client</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Non-English Speaking backgrounds | The costs are estimates based on interviews conducted with 10 clients by an independent third party | - External person employed as Community Development Worker Class 2B Yr 4-6 @ $22.44 per hour  
- Internal staff time spent in preparation Soc 1 Yr 7 @ $18.63 per hour  
- Travel time & travel costs | $64.00 | (not including interpreter or admin costs) |
| Youth | These costs are estimates for administering the questionnaire on an ongoing basis to clients using an exit interview approach for 40 clients | - 40 hours @ $25  
- Administration  
- Ongoing training and supervision  
- GST  
- Total (not including admin/interpreter costs) | $100.00 | 41.00 |
| Men aged 23-46 (Call-Centre) | These costs are estimates for administering the questionnaire to 18 clients in one week period. | - 2 Researchers @$16.70/hour for 40 hours  
- Total oncosts  
- Equipment  
- Stationary/Printing  
- Other Overheads  
- Total | $668.00 | 75.46 |
Appendix I

Sections from the Project Discussion Paper, November 2001

Some Key Questions and Issues

What does client satisfaction in SAAP mean?

Standards Australia suggest that client/customer satisfaction comprises:

The extent to which customer product [i.e. service, response or outcome] expectations were met and the level to which the product [i.e. service, response or outcome] met the customer's needs (2001:2).

Within this definition, customer satisfaction measurement is a means of assessing the performance of a service from the customer's viewpoint:

A system that continuously captures the customer's viewpoint. (2001:2)

This definition places emphasis on the customer's views on the extent to which both their expectations and needs were met. In the context of SAAP, the “system” might be about program level information (at the various program levels) or agency level data, or both. The relative importance of the level at which information will be used has major implications for the data collection system that might be constructed.

Another issue for data collection and analysis is how a client's expectations would compare with the response which any SAAP agency might reasonably be expected to provide given an agency's roles, internal resources and the external availability of resources needed by a client (eg the availability of stable and suitable accommodation on leaving SAAP). In the context of SAAP, would a client's expectations skew their assessment of the extent to which the service satisfactorily met their needs? For example, one client may have expectations of simply getting off the street and having a roof over his/her head for the night, while another client may expect to gain access to long term, secure housing and other ongoing support services. The provision of the same level and quality of service to both clients by a SAAP agency may result in one being satisfied and the other being dissatisfied, given their differing expectations.

Questions

What is client satisfaction in the SAAP context?

When are users of SAAP services satisfied? When are they dissatisfied?

What influences whether clients are satisfied or dissatisfied with SAAP services?

On what basis do users view the services they receive as quality services?

Should the views of SAAP clients be sought about whether both their expectations and needs were met?

What benefit do you see in collecting information about client satisfaction?
What can measures of client satisfaction tell us about service quality in SAAP?

Can client satisfaction measurements in human service sectors such as SAAP be used to improve service quality? The research suggests that the more specific the information sought about particular aspects of service, needs and expectations, the greater the chance of obtaining information that can be used in service planning and evaluation (Cooper and Jenkins 1998). E-Qual, in reviewing approaches to satisfaction surveys of clients of disability services, argue that consumer satisfaction measures do not correlate highly with other performance indicators of service quality:

Measuring consumer satisfaction is not equivalent to measuring overall service quality. Consumer satisfaction may best be thought of as one distinct dimension of service quality (1998:11).

E-Qual suggests that consumer satisfaction may be best measured as part of an integrated approach to the assessment of service quality.

Questions

How might measures of client satisfaction be used to inform assessments about service quality in SAAP?

Are measures of client satisfaction likely to be reliable measures of SAAP service quality?

If not, how might client feedback and client satisfaction measures be further developed so that meaningful and pertinent client information can be used to assist with the assessment and improvement of service quality?

Or more broadly, how can service quality be otherwise measured and improved?

What should client satisfaction measures assess?

Standards Australia (2001:3) argues that in order to both measure and improve customer satisfaction, it is important to understand and ask questions about what factors actually contribute to customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The information sought and the questions asked during client satisfaction research should be “relevant, reliable and representative”.

If customer feedback is not relevant, reliable or representative the ability of any organisation to meet the objective of effective customer satisfaction measurement will be compromised and limited (2001:1). Relevant, reliable and representative client satisfaction research will provide critical data on the following questions:

- What is important to customers?
- What do customers expect?
- How well is the agency performing in meeting these expectations?
- How well does it need to perform to meet expectations?
- Where should improvement efforts be focused? (Standards Australia 2001:20)
A task in this project is to identify what questions or information about which aspects of an agency’s service best reflect or capture a client's level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction and a client's view on service quality. The questions should relate to the SAAP Memorandum Of Understanding and service agreements. Aspects of an agency's service about which client satisfaction research could usefully seek information might include some of the following.

**Overall views**
- Level of satisfaction with service overall
- Level to which needs were met overall
- Level to which expectations were met overall
- Level of satisfaction with outcomes overall

**Specific aspects of service or response**
- Accessibility of service
- Promptness of initial response
- Waiting period
- Location's accessibility

**Premises**
- Appropriateness of physical layout
- Standard of premises
- Personal safety

**Quality of interaction with staff**
- Being treated with respect
- Sensitivity of staff
- Not being the subject of discriminatory treatment
- Informed choice
- Involvement with decision-making

**Service provided/received**
- Housing/accommodation
- Information provided
- Financial/employment
- Counselling
- Support
- Advocacy
- Specialist services
- Communication and coordination between staff
- Help with accessing other services and resources
- Help with practical problems
– Interpreters
– Cultural supports or advisors

**On leaving service**
– Satisfaction with accommodation on exit
– Level of preparation for exit
– Support on exiting

**Client’s rights**
– Explanation of rights and responsibilities
– Active respect for rights
– Problem or complaint resolution procedures

Alternatively, elements of service that satisfy clients could be identified. Karten (1997) who explored “what customers actually want” as a way of developing measures of client satisfaction provided the following list.

› Being taken seriously
› Competent, efficient service
› Anticipation of my needs
› Explanations in my terms
› Basic courtesies
› Being informed of options
› Not passed around
› To be listened to and heard
› Dedicated attention
› Knowledgeable help
› Friendliness
› Being kept informed
› Follow-through
› Honesty
› Feedback
› Professional service
› Empathy

Not all important items of information need to be collected routinely or frequently. Some, particularly those most useful at a program level but less useful at the individual agency level, might be collected over larger scale cycles or even once during a program cycle.
Questions

Should measures of client satisfaction in SAAP seek information about factors influencing whether or not a client felt satisfied?

What aspects or elements of an agency’s service should client satisfaction measures focus upon?

What core set of items for client satisfaction could be routinely or more frequently measured?

Are any aspects of client satisfaction more suited to a less frequent but more in depth measurement?

What methods should be used to measure client satisfaction and service quality?

Commentators including Standards Australia (2001:3) argue that if the factors contributing to customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction are to be researched, methods for collecting information of a qualitative nature will be required, in addition to quantitative data. Qualitative research can assist to:

- More thoroughly understand clients’ needs and expectations;
- Provide greater understanding of underlying reasons for, and the range of issues related to, the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of clients;
- More sharply focus quantitative stages of client satisfaction research;
- Explain the trends and findings of quantitative stages of the research process; and
- Determine how to increase client satisfaction and improve service quality.

(Standards Australia 2001:23)

Standards Australia asserts:

Customer satisfaction research without a qualitative dimension cannot even indicate whether performance is improving or not. (2001:23)

Possible disadvantages relate to the expense and subjective nature of qualitative research. However, quantitative and qualitative research processes are not mutually exclusive, and the key question is more often how to achieve an appropriate balance by “trading-off” particular advantages and disadvantages. For example, if more detailed qualitative research is conducted and if there are budgetary constraints, then it is likely sample size will need to be small. While small samples may increase anxiety about the representativeness of any findings, the value of qualitative data analysis does not depend on representative sampling. Problems also arise with quantitative research – collecting data for a large number of items and for a large number of people (either a valid random sample or all SAAP clients) will have cost and resource implications. An economy approach which reduces the number of data items and sample size will increase error and raise similar concerns about the useful and meaningfulness of the data.
This project will need to consider ways in which an appropriate balance or trade-off can be struck in relation to client satisfaction information and to the methods used to collect this information.

Researchers and commentators agree that information collection about client satisfaction should be planned, systematic, sufficiently detailed, documented and replicable over time and with different client groups. Methods of measuring client satisfaction should be capable of continuous use rather than be an ad-hoc exercise (Standards Australia 2001:9).

Different methods may involve different time cycles. In general, collecting valid data at the agency level to inform agency level client feedback and quality assurance processes will require more frequent collection. At a program level, the data collections may be linked to program cycles, which could be annually, halfway through a program funding cycle or even once during the program funding cycle. The use of the various information within a quality framework will be a major determinate for these decisions.

Questions

Are any methods of researching client satisfaction more suited to collecting information about particular aspects of client satisfaction?

Which methods of researching client satisfaction do you think would best enable a balance to be struck between the following considerations?

- Cost effective;
- Time effective;
- Client friendly and appropriate;
- Inclusive of all client groups;
- Manageable at program administration level;
- Manageable at an agency level;
- Sufficiently representative;
- Sufficiently flexible;
- Sufficiently informative and instructive for improving service quality.

What consumer issues with client satisfaction research have been identified?

Many barriers to service users participating in client satisfaction and service quality research have been identified including:

- Consumers may not want to give negative feedback or complain;
- Consumers may experience, or fear, negative consequences as a result of providing feedback;
By reason of a sense of powerlessness, consumers may feel there is no point in providing feedback;

- Marginalised groups may feel reluctant to provide negative feedback, believing they are expected or obligated to be grateful for anything they get;

- Consumers may not have access to the feedback structures or processes or may lack the resources to provide feedback;

- Those who are most marginalised or who are in areas where there are few services often have the least opportunity to participate; and

- Client satisfaction research questions may not be relevant to clients. (Sen 1994; South Australian Community Health Research Unit 1996; Draper & Hill 1995; Lillie-Blanton & Hoffman 1995)

Furthermore, the research process itself may exclude input or may not be appropriate for some groups such as Indigenous Australians, people whose first language is other than English, people with disabilities and people with literacy problems who have difficulty in responding to written surveys. Given the diversity of the needs and circumstances of people using SAAP services, consideration will need to be given as to whether a single method can be applicable and relevant to all groups of SAAP clients. Also, client satisfaction research and service quality measurement need to ensure consistency with best practice in confidentiality and privacy.

There is an increasing number of families and children using SAAP services, and consideration is needed on whether client satisfaction should include feedback from children. Two Australian studies provide examples of methods used for obtaining the views of children about the services they received. The first by Consumer Contact (1996) interviewed 5-8 years olds and 9-12 year olds about their preferences for out of school care. Graphics and pictures were used to obtain more detailed information about the views of the young respondents. A recent study by Stonehouse (1999) asked older children about the aspects of family day care that they liked and disliked.

Questions

How might barriers to service users providing information to help with the assessment of client satisfaction and service quality be addressed?

What ethical issues and considerations need to be addressed with any process of client satisfaction and service quality research in SAAP?

What client satisfaction research processes would assist users of SAAP irrespective of their needs, culture or circumstances to give their views about the quality of the services they receive(d)?

Are there particular sub-groups of SAAP clients that require specific methods of obtaining satisfaction data?
Should the client satisfaction research process seek to obtain the views of accompanying children? If so, how and what ethical issues should firstly be addressed?

**When should client satisfaction with SAAP services be measured?**

Research indicates that surveying a client at the close of assistance provides the most informative information (McMahon & Forehand 1983). The alternative of assessing satisfaction after a person leaves a service would pose practical problems in the context of SAAP, as this method assumes a capacity to track clients. Whether it is possible and feasible to obtain information from clients some time after they have left a service requires discussion during this project. A further question is how frequently client satisfaction with SAAP services should be measured.

**Questions**

When should client satisfaction with SAAP services be measured? [ie. at exit from the SAAP service, during the provision of services or some time after leaving the SAAP service]

Is it feasible to obtain information from clients some time after they have left a SAAP service?

How frequently should client satisfaction information be collected?

**From whom should information on client satisfaction in SAAP be sought?**

The diversity of the population of people using SAAP services presents the client satisfaction project with some challenging practical issues. Questions requiring consideration include:

- Should client satisfaction information be sought from all people who use SAAP services?
- Would a sample of SAAP service users be adequate, and if so, how should service users be sampled?
- How might the client satisfaction research process ensure input from SAAP services users with literacy and numeracy difficulties, people with disabilities, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and from Indigenous Australians?
- Should information be sought from accompanying children?

**Questions**

Should client satisfaction information be sought from all people who use SAAP services?

If not, what sampling procedures would be valid and appropriate?
How might information obtained from client satisfaction research be used to improve SAAP service quality and program performance?

According to Standards Australia, effective client satisfaction research should help a program or an organisation to determine its strengths and weaknesses:

- It should identify specific functional areas that need improvement and provide direction about how to improve them. ..... It should provide an understanding of what customers think of your company. (2001:20)

A major issue is that client satisfaction information can be examined at various program or agency levels:

- Across the SAAP;
- Within states and territories;
- With smaller areas eg regionally;
- Within the different types of SAAP agencies eg youth, family, single men, women’s etc;
- Within an individual agency.

At this point there are two major sets of questions:

- How is the data and information about client satisfaction interpreted; and
- How is the data and information then used.

The first set of questions requires thinking about when client satisfaction information would indicate that remedial action is required. A major question would then become what level of satisfaction would be deemed acceptable i.e. are action benchmarks required internally and/or with reference to external comparisons? On the other hand, at the agency level continuous improve could be implemented and monitored whether of not there are defined standards.

There are many examples of benchmarks, for example:

- The Australian Communications Authority has set a benchmark standard of 80 per cent satisfaction, and 10 per cent dissatisfaction (Standards Australia 2001:9).
- The measurement of customer satisfaction is mandatory in Centrelink across its service centres. Having set a benchmark early in 1997, Centrelink compares performance in customer satisfaction across all sites and across different customer types in an effort to ensure high levels of customer satisfaction for unemployed people, Age pensioners’ and people with a disability.

Comparison across different service types and for different client groups is a further consideration for this project. Information of this nature could be used to identify what aspects of service quality need improving, and how improvements might be made.

The next set of questions focus on the issue of how client satisfaction and service quality research should be used to improve client outcomes and program performance. Standards Australia (2001:30-31) asserts that customer satisfaction
research should be used as a strategic management and programming tool that provides data both for improvements in service design and for development of new services or new responses to client need. According to Standards Australia, any process for measuring and monitoring client satisfaction within an organization should involve the following steps.

**Step One** Define customers.

**Step Two** Prioritise customer groups vis a vis impact on “bottom line”.

**Step Three** Decide who will manage the customer satisfaction monitoring process – internal or external and in deciding, consider the real cost of each option for measurement.

**Step Four** Define customer needs – externally, with reference to customers (using qualitative research), measure what they see as important features of the service.

**Step Five** Define customer satisfaction – again with reference to customers (using qualitative research), determine what satisfies or dissatisfies them.

**Step Six** Decide on appropriate quantitative research methods for reaching customers and assessing their levels of satisfaction.

**Step Seven** Gauge initial levels of customer satisfaction using quantitative research (i.e. benchmark the service/organization internally and externally).

**Step Eight** Report the findings to management.

**Step Nine** Re-engineer the service and act as required.

**Step Ten** Gauge changes in customer satisfaction over time using quantitative research.

**Step Eleven** Test how the re-engineered service meets the needs of customers (i.e. engage in continuous improvement).

Consideration is required as to how information on client satisfaction and service quality can be used on an ongoing basis to assist service providers, program administrators and researchers to improve client outcomes and program impacts under SAAP IV. The above process outlined by Standards Australia provides one model. This project needs to obtain the views of all stakeholders about potential models and approaches.

**Question**

How is information about client satisfaction and service quality currently obtained and used?
How can SAAP service providers use client satisfaction information and measures of service quality to improve services?

How can SAAP administrators and researchers use client satisfaction information and measures of service quality to improve program performance?

Should client satisfaction research in SAAP set benchmarks for acceptable levels of client satisfaction and dissatisfaction?

Should client satisfaction be compared across different types of SAAP services and across different client groups?

Summary

This paper has raised several key issues for further consideration. These include:

- The need for measures of client satisfaction to delineate the factors which influence how satisfied or dissatisfied a client is with a SAAP service. Some of these factors might relate to the service on offer and how it is delivered, whereas some might relate more to the client’s expectations and needs.

- The links between client satisfaction measures, and service quality improvement efforts. Client satisfaction measures are often seen as one way, but not the only way, of assessing service quality. It needs to be considered how client satisfaction measures might relate to service quality measures in the SAAP sector.

- The need to assess the relative advantages and disadvantages of the different methods which could be used to measure client satisfaction in SAAP. One particular method, or a combination of methods, might be used to assess client satisfaction with SAAP services. Whatever method/s are used, it also needs to be considered whether the satisfaction of all clients, or a sample, should be measured; and how both quantitative and qualitative measures might be used.

- How client satisfaction data could be developed as a program indicator to identify strengths and weaknesses across the SAAP program as a whole, but also as feedback information at the level of individual SAAP agencies, to inform a process of continuous quality improvement.

The potential to use client satisfaction measures to enhance focus on the core principles of the SAAP program, by achieving a fit with the overall policy and strategic planning context of SAAP, and with current SAAP data collection.
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