

**Forging stronger partnerships to
address homelessness**

“Let’s make it happen!”

WA SAAP Protocols

Protocols between

Centrelink

and

**The Department for Community
Development**

in order to improve linkages between

Centrelink Customer Service Centres

and

SAAP services

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments.

FOREWORD

This Protocol acknowledges the agreement between Centrelink and the Department for Community Development (DCD) to work collaboratively to enhance operational relationships between Centrelink and Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services with the purpose of ensuring improved outcomes for mutual clients/customers.

This protocol has been developed by the SAAP Protocols Project in consultation with a working party comprising of SAAP sector representatives and staff from DCD and Centrelink.

A copy of this Protocol will be distributed to all SAAP services, Centrelink and DCD offices in Western Australia.

It is recognised that DCD, Centrelink and SAAP services have a joint responsibility to ensure the needs of shared clients/customers are addressed. The challenges for achieving better outcomes as well as improved service delivery are increasingly dependent on improved communication processes being established and maintained across all levels.

This is a dynamic living document. It is hoped that these protocols will encourage the development of effective working relationships and local linkages between service providers.

A WA SAAP Protocols Project File has been developed for SAAP services incorporating a guide and other support material for developing interagency protocols at the local level.

Let's make it happen!

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1. RATIONALE FOR THE PROTOCOL

Strong co-ordination between Centrelink and DCD at all levels, involving the SAAP services, is necessary to both improve the outcomes for people requiring services, and to improve the quality of services provided.

Centrelink and DCD have a shared customer/client group. This includes those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

It is also acknowledged that Centrelink and DCD have a shared customer/client group in respect of the SAAP program. This includes those trying to access SAAP services, those utilising SAAP services, and those trying to exit SAAP accommodation. Each of these stages presents challenges which require the commitment of all concerned to gain the best possible outcomes.

A collaborative relationship between Centrelink and DCD will ensure that common issues and any overlap or gaps in agency response can be dealt with effectively to enhance the service received by customers/clients. A commitment to effective collaboration and co-ordination is important across all levels including:

- * strategic policy and planning
- * program planning and management
- * service delivery

This protocol was agreed to by the Director General of Family and Children's Services, now the Department for Community Development, and the Area Manager of Centrelink. It provides a context which staff across both agencies can work together to improve the outcomes and quality of service for customers/clients.

Signed: .....

Director General
Family and Children's Services

Date: 12/1/2001.....

Signed: .....

Area Manager
Centrelink Western Australia

Date: 14 December 2000.....

2. AGENCY DESCRIPTIONS

CENTRELINK

Centrelink is a government agency delivering a range of Commonwealth services to the Australian community. Centrelink offers a 'one-stop-shop' so people can get more of the help they need in one place.

Centrelink customers include the retired, families, sole parents, people looking for work, people with a short-term incapacity, people with a disability, carers, primary producers, widows, students and youth, Indigenous people and people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Centrelink's service delivery network enables the provision of a diverse range of services that are tailored to the needs of customers and local communities. Centrelink is moving towards a more personalised service option in providing one-to-one services to customers.

Centrelink has a mission to build stronger communities through:

- providing opportunities for individuals through transitional periods of their lives
- delivering innovative, cost effective and personalised services for individuals, their families and community groups
- being committed to quality
- making the best use of available dollars
- listening to and enacting the communities ideas for giving better service
- building a quality relationship between customers and Centrelink.

One of Centrelink's main objectives is to assist customers through transitional periods in their lives. This includes people in crisis or homeless. A series of options are available ranging from practical assistance, access to income support as well as referral to appropriate specialists within Centrelink or external agencies. Centrelink has developed a Domestic Violence Policy to assist customers who may be facing such concerns. This may involve women and children in refuge accommodation as well as refugees on Temporary Protection Visas. In addition a Youth Protocol has been developed with the Department for Community Development which outlines roles and responsibilities in developing a co-ordinated approach to working with homeless young people.

THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The corporate goals of DCD are to work collaboratively with the community, to plan and provide service in Western Australia to:

- * enhance the well-being and development of families, children, individuals, and communities
- * promote parental care and responsibility
- * protect children and young people from harm and provide them with quality care.

An important program for achieving these aims is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

SAAP is a joint Commonwealth/State program administered in Western Australia by DCD.

SAAP Aims

The aim of SAAP is to assist people who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless and in crisis, to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence. This includes people who are experiencing long term homelessness and those escaping domestic violence.

Assistance is aimed at the resolution of crisis, re-establishment of family links where appropriate and reintegration into mainstream society. This is achieved by providing, or actively promoting, access to a range of services including accommodation. The degree to which this is achieved for each person varies.

Program Management

A Commonwealth/State SAAP Memorandum of Understanding, National Strategic Plan and Bilateral Agreement sets broad parameters and directions for the program. The documents identify goals, priorities and specific gaps which need to be addressed.

DCD purchases SAAP services from the non-government sector. SAAP funds are used to purchase services against generic specifications for seven types of services as follows:

- * Domestic Violence Supported Accommodation Services
- * Domestic Violence Support Services
- * Supported Accommodation Services for Young People
- * Services for Young People
- * Supported Accommodation Services for Families and Single Adults

- * Supported Accommodation Assistance Program: Day Centres
- * Counselling Services

The Department for Community Development funds over 120 SAAP services. A list of the current SAAP services and the contact information is available at www.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au. On the website go to: Information for Non Government Organizations/ Programs/ Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

NOTE!

For further information on SAAP and SAAP funded services contact
The Senior Policy Officer SAAP on (08) 9222 2641
or the local Community Development and Funding Officer.

3. THE AIMS OF THE PROTOCOL

The aims of the Protocol between Centrelink and DCD are:

1. To enhance the working relationship and communication between Centrelink and DCD for SAAP clients in respect of:
 - * strategic policy and planning
 - * program planning and management
 - * service delivery.
2. To establish a collaborative working relationship between Centrelink and DCD.
3. To improve service outcomes for mutual clients/customers.

4. PRINCIPLES

The principles underpinning this Protocol include:

1. The best interest of the customer/client is the primary focus for the development and implementation of this Protocol. Improved outcomes will be achieved by addressing operations across levels including:
 - * strategic policy and planning
 - * program planning and management
 - * service delivery.
2. The agreements promoted within this Protocol should be implemented flexibly to ensure that the needs of all are considered.
3. This Protocol intends to promote a mutual climate of co-operation, professional respect and goodwill between Centrelink, DCD and SAAP services.
4. Both Centrelink and DCD will strive to maximise the potential of their services to serve the needs of mutual customers/clients. This may include:
 - * Ensuring relevant departmental information and communications are exchanged in a timely manner
 - * Ensuring relevant departmental information and communications are passed on to service providers, both internal and funded services, in a timely manner
 - * Encouraging the development and nurturing of collaborative relationships between SAAP services and Centrelink
 - * Encouraging participation and input into the development of new initiatives
 - * Encouraging opportunities for combined learning and professional development.

5. PROTOCOL GUIDELINES

The Protocol negotiated between Centrelink and DCD is described in the Agreed Practice for Service Delivery Guidelines.

AGREED PRACTICE FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

Issue	Intent	Practice
<p>Access to Centrelink Customer Service Centres (CSC) and financial assistance for SAAP clients</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear process of referral and assistance • Standardise referral practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAAP to encourage clients to notify Centrelink that they are in a refuge as soon as possible on arrival. • Centrelink will receive referrals from SAAP agencies and assist as a matter of priority. • Centrelink will ensure the earliest provision of any payments to which customers may be entitled to support themselves and their children. • SAAP agencies will have access to Centrelink specialist services, including Social Workers, Community Officers, Multicultural Service Officers, Indigenous Staff and Youth Service Unit. • Centrelink will provide details of key factors to allow applications to be assessed quickly and avoid delays. These may include: POI and other verification material (e.g. medical certificate, details of circumstances confirmed by third party – youth worker or refuge worker). • SAAP workers will encourage customers/clients to keep appointments and attend interviews taking appropriate materials with them e.g. POI/verification details. • Centrelink will arrange a room for client privacy when required. • Standard 'Referral Form' and 'Authority to Release Information Form' to be utilised when working on behalf of clients/customers. <p>Standard referral processes will be agreed at the local level by Centrelink and SAAP services.</p>
<p>Access to SAAP services for Centrelink customers / clients</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline process for referral and assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink to access SAAP accommodation in metropolitan area through Crisis Care Unit and Salvo Care Line by direct or self-referral. • More specific arrangements to be developed at the local level.
<p>Confidentiality and security of SAAP address</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAAP service street address remains confidential where requested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink to be aware of SAAP service security requirements including instances where the SAAP service requests that only PO Box details be used on behalf of the customer/client.

Issue	Intent	Practice
Access to special provisions for people in crisis, including family and domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear process for ensuring customers can access information on access to special provisions for those in crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A co-ordinated response and support to be developed between the local Centrelink CSC, the SAAP service and customer/client where crisis/risk has been identified. • Timely appointments will be made for SAAP clients/customers. • Centrelink and SAAP staff will discuss and clarify information in relation to exemptions, payments, and policy in order to ensure customers/clients are not penalised or disadvantaged. • Centrelink Social Workers can use SAAP service information as a source of verification of domestic violence.
Client information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both Centrelink and SAAP to be responsible for the security of client/customer information and consent arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Centrelink office to be aware of role of SAAP service in assisting SAAP clients where SAAP agency is acting on customers' behalf. • SAAP agency to have available authority to release information form. • Where informed consent is not provided, implied consent may apply where it is apparent that the person receiving the information is working on behalf of customers/clients. See attachment 1 for definition of 'implied authority'. • Where there are safety concerns, restricted access arrangements on customer/client files can be made through the local Centrelink office as a double security measure.
Proof of identity where POI is difficult or impossible to obtain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Centrelink and SAAP staff are aware of and have access to alternative options for POI provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of Identification is fundamental to accessing payments. In exceptional circumstances and where all other avenues have been exhausted Centrelink may utilise other options. • Centrelink may utilise system-based verification of identity e.g. family records. • In some circumstances a two-pay period review may be arranged.
Case Management/ Joint Case Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual clients/ customers receive appropriate support from SAAP and Centrelink 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink and SAAP service will establish common agreements for the continuing support and assistance for those in need e.g. youth at risk, mental illness.
False, malicious and mischievous reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink will safeguard customers from nuisance reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAAP to advise Centrelink of situations where customers/clients may be subject to nuisance reports. • Where possible Centrelink will verify accuracy of report before taking action. • For future reference Centrelink will document any identified nuisance reports on customer file to avoid repetition.

Issue	Intent	Practice
Activity Test Exemptions (including mutual obligations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear guidelines for ensuring SAAP clients can access Activity Test Exemptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink to be aware of the impact of homelessness or other life crises on customers/clients ability to meet obligations under the Activity Test. • The impact of homelessness and life crises to be taken into account when either setting or reviewing Activity requirements for customers/clients in crises. • Where suitable, customers/clients to be given Activity Test exemptions or lesser requirements.
Impact of breaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application of breaches based on individual circumstances including SAAP and people in crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAAP service to encourage clients to notify Centrelink that they are in a refuge as soon as possible on arrival. • Centrelink and SAAP staff will discuss and clarify information in relation to breaches, customer obligations and penalties in order to ensure earlier intervention and minimisation of breaches. • SAAP workers will encourage customers/clients to keep appointments and attend interviews in order to minimise the possible occurrence of breaches. • Before a breach is imposed the Centrelink CSC to take into account homelessness and life crisis. <p>See below "Review of Decisions".</p>
Review of decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the impact of crises on customers ability to meet requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAAP service to provide any additional information that may effect review of decision to the original decision-maker. • The original decision-maker to take into account the impact of homelessness and life crises when reviewing decisions. • See flow chart.
Recovery of overpayments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of financial hardship in recovery of overpayments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recovery of overpayments may be reduced or suspended while customers/clients are in financial hardship or where this would assist the customer to return to independent living, e.g. saving for bond. • Where appropriate this can apply for up to 3 months and is then reviewed. <p>More specific arrangements to be developed at the local level.</p>
Strengthen local networks and establish collaborative relationships between Centrelink and SAAP services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink and SAAP services understand and know what each can provide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Centrelink CSC will provide up-to-date contact names, numbers and positions for easy and timely access. • Local SAAP services will provide up-to-date contact names, numbers and positions for easy and timely access. • Centrelink and SAAP services will arrange ways in which staff teams can meet and understand each working environment.

Issue	Intent	Practice
Information exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAAP services have accurate up-to-date information about any changes in Centrelink payments, policy and practices and vice versa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink hold a Community Information Briefing Forum quarterly. SAAP services to contact local Centrelink office to be included on mailing list. • Centrelink Community Consultative Committee Meetings are held quarterly. Contact 9229 3430 for information on PEAK representatives. • SAAP services will make local Centrelink offices aware of any changes in staff, practices and service provision.
Joint training for Centrelink and SAAP services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared training opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrelink will invite SAAP workers to training and professional development sessions where this is relevant and places are available. • SAAP services will invite Centrelink staff to training and professional development sessions with SAAP workers where this is relevant and places are available. • Models of training need to be flexible.
Resolution of differences between Centrelink and SAAP agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolve differences speedily and professionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff involved will endeavour to resolve differences speedily and in a professional manner. • If staff are unable to resolve the issue, the matter will be referred to the Centrelink CSC Manager.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROTOCOL

Strategies for Implementation to include:

- * A formal launch involving Centrelink, the Department for Community Development and SAAP services
- * A nominated senior officer from each agency to be responsible for the implementation, promotion and monitoring of the protocol within their agency
- * SAAP and Centrelink CSC Managers will meet to discuss agency specific arrangements in order to meet the commitments made in this protocol
- * Local forums to be held within three months of the launch of this protocol in order to establish local arrangements
- * A manual is available to assist in the development of local arrangements
- * The provision of relevant training should agencies require any around the implementation of this protocol.

The Department for Community Development have established a quarterly Strategic Monitoring Forum in order to monitor and evaluate the implementation and development of protocols and to share information on changes in policy, personnel, training requirements and future directions. The Strategic Monitoring Forum has broad representation of key government departments and SAAP.

EVALUATION

This Protocol will be reviewed within two years of implementation. The review process will involve departmental staff from both DCD and Centrelink as well as representatives from SAAP services.

Any proposed amendments and/or additions to this Protocol are to be circulated for comment with a reasonable period for feedback prior to agreement.

Further reviews are to take place every two years to ensure the arrangements are relevant to the identified needs of the target group and any other significant influencing factors.

7. ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Agencies - include government departments, commissions, authorities, local government authorities, as well as non-government organisations such as incorporated associations, businesses, etc.

Collaborative relationship - working together for the benefit of the client/customer.

CSC – Customer Service Centre.

DCD - The Department for Community Development.

Implied Authority - An implied authority for a person to receive information on behalf of a customer can be taken to be in place where it is apparent that the person receiving the information is acting in the best interests of the customer, and that an express authority would be provided if circumstances allowed. The person will normally be a doctor, social or welfare worker.

The Centrelink staff member should be aware of the validity of the third party's claim to be acting for a customer. Each case must be judged on its merits and, where there is any doubt, the customer must be contacted and asked to provide express authority.

Mutual client / customer - could be either:

- * a SAAP client who is engaged with both parties
- * A Centrelink customer who requires the services of the other party.

Protocol¹ - is an agreement between agencies to enable all parties to gain maximum benefits and outcomes.

POI - Proof of identity.

SAAP - Supported Accommodation Assistance Program ².

SAAP services - service delivery agencies in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

SAC - SAAP State Advisory Committee.

¹ See diagram titled 'Mandates and Responsibilities', taken from the *SAAP Protocols Project Planning Process*.

² See Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994.

8. RELEVANT CENTRELINK DOCUMENTS

- 8.1 Centrelink Customer Charter 2000
- 8.2 Domestic and Family Violence Policy
- 8.3 Youth Homelessness Protocols

9. RELEVANT DCD DOCUMENTS

- 9.1 Memorandum of Understanding to 2005
- 9.2 National Strategic Plan to 2005