



The Caring Communities Program: An Introduction from the National Evaluators

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This document provides information about the Caring Communities Program together with a summary of how the Centre for Health Service Development (CHSD) will manage key aspects of the evaluation of individual projects within this program.

What is the National Palliative Care Caring Communities Program?

This program is a new initiative by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing designed to improve the quality of palliative care in the community by assisting families, carers and health service providers to give better support to people who are dying.

Tenders were invited for funding of between \$50,000 and approximately \$200,000 for those organisations with an interest in improving the quality of palliative care in the community.

This opportunity stimulated a lot of interest from various organisations around Australia. Approximately 270 submissions were received. Your organisation is one of 37 successful applicants.

These 37 projects address several 'themes' associated with palliative care, including:

- Improving community awareness of palliative care;
- Supporting dying people and their families;
- Increasing awareness of palliative care as an integral part of the health care system;
- Delivering education to support professionals providing palliative care

services; and

- Creating effective partnerships between palliative care providers, other health service providers and health systems, to coordinate care for dying people.

What will the CHSD do for you?

The CHSD has been selected by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing to be the National Evaluator of the Caring Communities Program.

The CHSD's most important role within this program is to assist you to measure the achievements of your project. In doing this the Centre understands that your project will have to be treated in a unique way to reflect its size, goals, resource levels, location, target group and the existing evaluation skills and interests of the participants. As a result the type and level of evaluation support provided by the CHSD will vary.

Why Evaluate?

Evaluation is a process of continuous learning. It is NOT a test in which to pass or fail. Rather it is a continuous process of asking questions, reflecting on the answers to these questions and reviewing your ongoing strategy and action. The evaluation should be a positive learning experience for both your organisation and ourselves. It is also important to share the

learning from each project for the improvement of palliative care services in Australia. The CHSD will attempt to make this process as simple as possible for your project.

The Project Evaluation

The evaluation of individual projects will be built around three key areas:

1. Impact on, and outcomes for, consumers (patients, families, carers, friends, communities)
2. Impact on, and outcomes for, providers (professionals, volunteers, organisations); and
3. Impact on, and outcomes for, the system (structures and processes, networks, relationships).

The challenge will be to create a balance between the requirements of the National Palliative Care Strategy, the need to have a cost-effective and realistic evaluation and your and your community's needs, as set out in your project.

As a first step, the CHSD will closely examine your proposal and classify its key aims. This will assist us in developing a draft set of key evaluation questions that assess the contributions of your project to the development of quality palliative care services.

Through discussions with your project staff the CHSD will produce an evaluation framework that will cover a range of activities to be undertaken by your project. These activities may include collecting activity data on patient care, developing educational and training materials, or documenting changes in service procedures, cultures and relationships.

The CHSD will be able to assist these activities by providing relevant tools and administrative support where necessary.

Progress Reports

Throughout the lifetime of your project you are required to provide a progress report to the evaluation team at six monthly intervals. The timing of these reports will depend on your location as follows:

ACT	-	May and November
NSW	-	January and July
NT	-	April and October
QLD	-	May and November
SA	-	May and November
TAS	-	May and November
VIC	-	May and November
WA	-	September and March

Writing these reports provides an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of your project and any issues that may need addressing. The reports will enable the CHSD to provide useful feedback about your project. Where relevant, we will also be able to make available some limited comparisons between your project and other projects that have similar aims and directions as your own.

Meeting your CHSD evaluation team member?

Representatives of the CHSD will be attending the National Workshop on the 14th and 15th of May 2003. This will provide a good opportunity for the evaluation team to meet with active members from each of the 37 funded projects.

After the workshop, members of the evaluation team will visit each project site. This will enable you to get to know your CHSD staff person. It will also enable them to better

understand the unique issues emerging from geographical, social and cultural factors influencing your project.

Project Support

Throughout the lifetime of your project the CHSD evaluation team will provide ongoing training and support as required. This process will be supported by:

Hotline (0407 935 384) - this number has been set up for projects to ask specific questions about the evaluation. This will enable us to provide targeted help as required.

Internet Chatroom/message board - it is likely that projects with similar aims will experience similar problems and/or issues. The CHSD will set up an internet chatroom which will enable you to share insights and solutions in an effective way with other projects with similar goals and aims.

Some Useful tips

The CHSD has been involved in numerous evaluations in recent years. This has given our team members valuable experience with the supportive role expected of evaluators. It has also provided us with some understanding of the key requirements of individual projects to ensure that each program runs smoothly, and can contribute to the overall evaluation of the program.

Some key points based on previous experience are listed below:

- Projects need to have clear goals, consistent interventions, and explicit arrangements for evaluation from the outset.

- Projects should keep the range of interventions simple and not underestimate the difficulty of implementation.
- Data collection requirements have to be clinically sensible, easy to implement, sustainable and agreed beforehand.
- Each project needs to establish and maintain an effective governance structure that ensures that the project is properly managed. This structure must pay attention to three elements:
 1. the interests of the sponsors/stakeholders;
 2. the needs of people receiving the program; and
 3. the intent of the project - its design and evaluation.

Remember...

Please be assured that the CHSD team considers its role is to support you and to ensure that the National Evaluation fits in with your individual project needs. We don't want to duplicate the role of the project evaluation or create extra data collection burdens.

