

The Specialist Homelessness Sector Transition Plan (2018-2022)

Make effective use of new technologies

The Specialist Homelessness Sector Transition Plan (2018-2022) outlines 15 goals.

Action tables have been developed to provide more specific detail on what each goal means, why it is important, future vision, relevant literature, good practice examples and helpful resources.

The action tables are designed to be a useful reference and a good starting point for organisations or individuals wanting to action any of the 15 goals in the SHS Transition Plan.

All 15 action tables can be found at: chp.org.au/shs-transitionplan18/.

9. Make effective use of new technologies

What we mean	Making best use of currently available technologies and communication platforms to improve SHS efficiency and effectiveness, with special consideration being given to the needs of rural and regional areas.
Why is this important	Effective use of new technologies has the capacity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Save time and money• Improve data sharing and communication• Improve service coordination.
Future Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective use of new technologies by the SHS that improves consumer outcomes• Effective use of new technologies by the SHS that improves service coordination• A connected and engaged SHS workforce able to take up sector training opportunities irrespective of geographic location.
Literature	A recent Australian review of technology use by community service organisations and their service users found ¹ : Service users: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access the internet and use mobile devices to connect from anywhere, at any time, this is even true for isolated and marginalised groups

¹ Knight, K., and Hunter, C. (2013). Using technology in service delivery to families, children and young people. Australian Government. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Child Family Community Australia. CFCAS Paper No. 17.

- For some groups (e.g., young people), technology may be their preferred method of communication
- People are using the internet regularly and from anywhere, they are connecting with social networks and investigating services with digital tools.

Organisations:

- Tend to use technology infrequently and in 'one direction' (pushing information out)
- Technology works best when used to augment or improve existing services, or to offer innovative approaches
- Technology can be used in diverse ways for organisational improvement (e.g., remote access, staff training, professional development) or client services (e.g. online counselling, SMS appointment reminders, access to resources)
- Using technology does not necessarily involve large monetary investments
- Using technology does not require significant policy and procedural changes. Often it is a matter of adapting and refining existing services and policies to better suit the online world.
- Incorporating technology into services takes time, and will need continued assessment and refinement to be successful.

A consolidated review of the benefits and challenges of using online technologies to provide services found²:

Benefits:

- Services can be more accessible (e.g. rural groups, people with disability)
- Electronic communications enable clients to reflect on content before responding
- Anonymity, privacy and convenience
- Specialist practitioners can respond regardless of geographic location
- They may be preferable, for 'tech-savvy' adults, young people and children
- Practitioners' time may be freed up for other clients, as the number of face-to-face sessions are reduced
- Services can be more flexible
- Services may be more affordable.

Challenges:

- Some people, especially older clients and staff may lack the necessary skills

² Cited in: Knight, K. & Hunter, C. (2013). Using technology in service delivery to families, children and young people. Australian Government. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Child Family Community Australia. CFCAS Paper No. 17. Adapted from sources: Abbott, Klein, & Ciechomski (2008); Bischoff (2004); Casey & Halford (2010); Cavanagh & Shapiro (2004); Griffiths, Farrer, & Christensen (2007); Hunt, Shochet, & King (2005); Pollock (2006); Recupero (2005); Rochlen, Zack, & Speyer (2004); Syme (2004).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication can be harder for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds • Online services may lack visual and non-verbal cues, which may lead to misunderstandings • There may be time delays between contact and response in this type of online communication. • There is a diminished capacity to deal with immediate crises • There may be problems with technical failures, limited access to the communications infrastructure, and/or unreliable internet • There are security risks, such as email being misdirected through address errors, messages being intercepted, or data becoming corrupted or stolen • Clients may expect online services to be free • Services need to address legal and ethical issues, including confidentiality and privacy • There may be a lack of practitioner training in the specific requirements of providing online service.
<p>Good practice examples</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask Izzy is a mobile website developed by Infoxchange that connects people with essential support services such as shelter, food, clothing and health care. • Launch use Tableau data analytics tools and software to support aggregation and analysis of data across multiple programs • The Regional Homelessness Network use Microsoft's OneDrive, a central cloud storage system to centrally store relevant documents, edit documents in real time and support collaboration and coordination.
<p>Helpful Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Technology in Community Services Service Delivery. Australian Government. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Child Family Community Australia. • Digital technology for the not-for-profit sector in 2018³ a report by Infoxchange to help not for profit organisations understand how others use technology, identify areas for improvement and where they can best focus effort for the biggest impact • Using tech for better impact (without breaking the bank): information from Infoxchange for community service organisations on cost effective use of new technology.

³ Infoxchange. (2018). Digital technology in the not for profit sector.