



**SUBMISSION to HOMELESSNESS WORKING GROUP  
DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND  
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

**NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK  
to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness**

**May 2011**

## **1. Introduction**

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### **The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)**

The MYAN is a nationally recognised policy and advocacy body that represents migrant and newly arrived young people, in order to advance their rights and interests. The MYAN is comprised of representatives from each of Australia's states and territories. These representatives are involved in multicultural youth issues at the policy or program levels in their respective states and territories.

The MYAN was established in 2005 in response to an identified need for a coordinated national advisory and advocacy network for multicultural youth issues. The issues and needs of multicultural young people are often overlooked as they are a sub-group of both the broader youth and multicultural sectors and underrepresented in the policy and advocacy work of both the government and non-government sectors.

Young people from multicultural backgrounds demonstrate high levels of strength, resilience, resourcefulness and understanding. (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007:7) However, this group of young people face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities. These barriers include language, culture, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes, racism, and discrimination. These factors can place multicultural young people at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which in turn can place them at higher risk of social isolation.

The MYAN believes that a targeted response at both the policy and service delivery levels is necessary to support their sustained participation and engagement in Australian society and believes that a national Multicultural policy framework is essential to achieving this.

## **2. About this Submission**

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The MYAN welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission into the development of a National Quality Framework (NQF) to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness. This submission provides a national perspective, drawing on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia. One of the MYAN's policy priorities is Housing and Homelessness.

Given the focus of the MYAN, this submission is largely concerned with ensuring a NQF supports the needs of young people from CaLD<sup>1</sup> backgrounds in their interaction with housing and homelessness services.

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<sup>1</sup> This term includes young people from migrant, refugee and newly arrived backgrounds.

### **CaLD young people and homelessness**

In an Australian context, it is estimated that the risk of homelessness for young people from refugee and newly arrived young people, is up to 10 times higher than for the general population (Coventry, et.al. 2002:50). Access to safe, secure and affordable housing is central to social inclusion and the ability to settle successfully in a new country. MYAN members agree that in our practice and experience, homelessness is a widespread issue for CaLD young people (particularly those from refugee or newly arrived backgrounds) and has significant ramifications for mental health, family relationships, safety, connection to community, and engagement in education and employment.

This group of young people can experience particular barriers that prevent their equitable access to adequate housing and housing support. These include:

- Limited English and unfamiliarity with Australian systems – both conceptually and practically. Most young people from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds have no substantive knowledge of our complex housing and broader service system (e.g. advocating for housing needs, leases, tenancy rights) as there is often no equivalent in their countries of origin. This often results in an inability to navigate the housing and homelessness service system.
- Limited resources and lack of cultural competency (e.g. in assessment and support provision) within the mainstream housing sector – i.e. in identifying risk factors for this group of young people, assessing them as homeless and; providing culturally appropriate support to negotiate the housing and homelessness system.
- Implications of current homelessness policy and practice frameworks (that shape funding guidelines and service delivery approaches) for refugee and newly arrived young people. This includes limitations of the term ‘homelessness’ for accurate data collection, assessment and early intervention support programs.

In order to address some of these barriers, the MYAN believes that there is a need for:

- Consistent data sets (i.e. age and gender by country of birth, language spoken, visa type and length of stay in Australia) that better capture CaLD young people’s experiences of homelessness and access to the homelessness service system.
- Research to be undertaken with a focus on the extent and nature of youth homelessness for this cohort of young people.
- The monitoring and reporting against priorities in *The Road Home* to include reporting against outcomes for this cohort of young people.
- Workforce development to build the capacity of mainstream services.
- Flexible, responsive and ‘family-centred’ service delivery approaches.

## **NQF Discussion Paper**

### **1. National Homelessness Charter**

The MYAN believes that the Charter should have a rights-based focus, and can be clearly linked to standards and therefore service delivery. This includes reference to the right to culturally-competent services and the right to communicate in a language of choice. The MYAN supports NEDA's comments in their submission to the NQF regarding the inclusion of responsibilities in the Charter – i.e. “arguing against the inclusion of responsibilities as this individualises homelessness as an issue.” (NEDA Submission, p.4)

### **2. National Quality Standards**

The MYAN particularly supports the ‘key themes’ listed on p.10 of the NQF Discussion Paper, including:

- “quality service delivery is focussed on client outcomes, is rights-based, flexible, responsive and culturally appropriate”.

However, we would like to see more specific reference in the standards to addressing the needs of those from CaLD e.g. listing types of disadvantage under 1.4 Access and Equity, or specifically referring to Cultural Competency. The MYAN is concerned that, without specific reference culture or language (at minimum), or cultural competency, the particular needs of CaLD young people in the homelessness services system will continue to be overlooked and this disadvantaged group will therefore continue to be under-represented in homelessness services.

### **3. Implementation Issues**

#### ***Sector Support***

The MYAN commends the recognition of the need for sector support in the implementation of a NQF and endorses one of the key principles underpinning the development of the NQF, that “there will be a supportive and enabling approach to implementation.”

The MYAN believes that a critical component of this supportive and enabling approach is the provision of resources, including financial, to support agencies (particularly smaller agencies) in implementing the NQF.

#### ***Workforce Development***

The MYAN commends the recognition of the need for workforce development in the implementation of a NQF. The MYAN believes that cultural competency training and professional development in relation to working with CaLD young people must be made available as part of the NQF workforce development. This would go some way in addressing one of the key barriers for CaLD young people in accessing homelessness services - the lack of culturally competent service delivery.