

David Roberts
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
GPO Box 125
Hobart 7001

1 June 2010

Dear David,

Quality and Safety – balancing reporting and improvement
Do community service organisations think DHHS have got it right?

In response to comments and concerns raised by our members about DHHS' new Quality and Safety Framework, TasCOSS conducted a survey of all DHHS funded community service organisations from March to April. The survey aimed to assess the level of satisfaction with the Framework and gain evidence of both the benefits and impacts of the *Quality and Safety Self Report – Initial Workbook* and *Incident, Compliments and Complaints* reporting. I attach a copy of our report on the survey for your consideration.

The survey results show broad agreement on the importance of constantly improving the quality and safety of services and being publicly accountable for this. However, there was a wide variation in responses relating to how the Framework is helping or hindering organisations to improve. Some organisations are happy with the Framework and have said it is long overdue. However, only 27% expressed satisfaction, and there was a high level of dissatisfaction with many aspects of the Framework and its implementation. The results indicate that significant changes are required if the Framework is to become the useful tool for facilitating real improvements in the quality and safety of services that both government and community service organisations would like to see.

The survey also indicates a concerning level of distrust of DHHS with significant barriers hampering the willingness of many organisations to raise concerns or complaints with the department on issues such as Quality and Safety and the Reform Agenda.

Based on the survey results, we call on DHHS to:

1. Review its Framework in consultation with community service organisations;
2. Use plain English language, provide more explanatory information and support organisations to develop quality improvement, data collection and reporting systems, and to share information on good practice;
3. Financially compensate organisations for the time to complete its reporting requirements (in line with recent Productivity Commission recommendations);
4. Consider a range of other suggestions from organisations on ways to improve quality and safety in the provision of community services as provided at the end of this report. Suggestions received have been grouped as follows:
 - Simpler questions and/or report structure
 - One size fits all is not appropriate
 - Less frequent reporting
 - Include on-site audits
 - Better communication from DHHS
 - Provision of support and/or compensation
 - Look at DHHS' own practices
 - Improve consultation processes
 - Align with other Standards or reporting requirements

5. Work with community service organisations in a spirit of partnership to rebuild trust and open communication.

TasCOSS supports the continual improvement of quality and safety in service delivery. We recognise that the Framework is a work in progress and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department to improve it.

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Gibson
Acting CEO

For more information on the survey, contact:
Tim Tabart, Industry Development Officer
tim@tascoss.org.au or 6231 0755.

Copies of both this letter and the report are being circulated to the following:

- Hon. Nick McKim MHA, Minister for Human Services
- Hon. Lin Thorp MLC, Minister for Children
- Hon. Michelle O'Byrne MHA, Minister for Health
- Hon. Cassy O'Connor MHA, Cabinet Secretary
- Relevant DHHS staff – Liz O'Malley, Aileen Ashford, Des Graham, Janet Carty
- All community service organisations