Client Disengagement and Strategies for Engagement

13 March 2025

Contents

1. Executive summary

This report documents a Brisbane Service Integration Workshop from June 2024 which focused on strategies to mitigate client disengagement in the housing and homelessness sector. It aims to summarise the valuable insights resulting from the session and serve as a resource for sector professionals, supporting their efforts to address client disengagement.
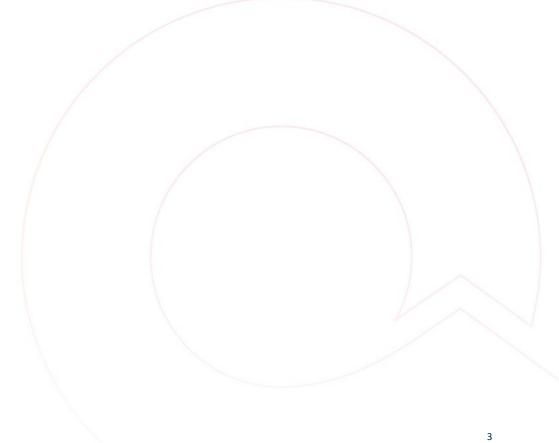
1.1 KEY INSIGHTS

- Client disengagement in the homelessness sector (as indicated by workshop responses) refers to scenarios where clients of homelessness services stop communication or attendance. This includes not responding to texts, phone calls, or emails and not attending appointments, activities or events—either with or without explanation to their point of contact.

- There are various reasons a client may disengage. Common reasons include lack of transport, inadequate phone access, mental health barriers, negative past experiences, fatigue with the homelessness system, not identifying as someone who would use a service, incarceration, and fears around safety.

- Effective service delivery hinges on a holistic approach that integrates client-centred practices, robust organisational strategies, professionalism, and a strong focus on client support and wellbeing.

- At a practice level, taking a person-centred approach and building rapport is a core component to mitigate client disengagement. Starting with honest and transparent expectation-setting and building trust from a space of authenticity builds ongoing relationships. Flexible funding and brokerage were also frequently mentioned a useful tool.

- At an organisational level, a holistic approach encompassing collaboration; integration; flexibility (including flexible brokerage); client-centred practices; staff support, supervision, and training; and an organisational culture that supports adequate staff resources were identified as essential for mitigating disengagement.

- At a systems level, leveraging relationships with other services through integrated service delivery was highlighted, along with encouraging simplification, flexibility, and optimal resource allocation when designing services and programs. Housing supply, systems integration and outreach services were also highlighted as key elements to prevent client disengagement.

- Ultimately, a person-centred approach which responds to people's needs rather than treating them as a number was identified as critical at all levels—practice, organisational, and systems.

1.2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This event was held at Barrambin. Q Shelter would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Turrbal People, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Q Shelter would also like to give our sincere appreciation to all participants, with a particular thanks to the special guests who made the day thought provoking and insightful.

2. Workshop background

On 7 June 2024, approximately 100 key regional stakeholders (Appendix 1) convened to recognise and develop strategies to better understand and address the reasons for client disengagement from services. The day included a keynote speaker presentation, an expert panel discussion, and a participant workshop.

2.1 KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Professor Cameron Parsell (University of Queensland) challenged some of the prevailing views on client disengagement, particularly within the context of homelessness services. His arguments highlighted key areas where conventional thinking may be flawed.

- **Reframing:** Instead of framing client disengagement as a problem of the individual/client, it is important to consider the resource deficiencies and system failures which lead to disengagement. Client disengagement might be a reasonable response to unreasonable service demands.

- **Individual responsibility:** Parsell questions the tendency to place responsibility for disengagement solely on the individual. He suggests that framing disengagement as an individual issue overlooks broader systemic factors, such as the lack of adequate housing and support. He argues that disengagement is often a reflection of the inadequacies in the services being provided, rather than personal failure.

- **Complex needs vs. complex systems:** Parsell also noted that the issue might not always be the complex needs of clients but rather the complexity of the systems themselves. He challenged the idea that individuals must adapt to services, proposing instead that services should be made more accessible and responsive to client needs.

- **Overemphasis on compliance:** Another critique he offered is the overemphasis on compliance and behaviour change. Parsell suggests that placing too many demands on individuals—such as requiring extensive data or imposing conditions—can lead to disengagement. He believes that the system's focus on compliance may be pushing clients away.

- **Disengagement as a choice:** Parsell disputes the idea that people "choose" homelessness or disengagement. Rather than rejecting help, individuals may be avoiding services that are inadequate or irrelevant to their needs. This challenges the perception that disengagement is a voluntary rejection of support.

- **Systems failure and trauma:** Parsell also points out that disengagement is often a response to repeated systemic failures, particularly for those who have experienced trauma. He challenges the assumption that clients walk away from beneficial services without recognising that such services may not have worked for them in the past. He advocates for trauma-informed care to better understand disengagement patterns.
- **Engaging with lived experience**: Parsell advocates that deeply engaging with lived experience might provide knowledge that 'we' do not have and help practitioners better understand what contributes to 'disengagement'.

Cameron Parsell challenged the conventional view of disengagement as an individual issue, calling for a broader understanding that accounts for systemic barriers, trauma, and the limitations of current services. His approach emphasises the need for more accessible, compassionate, and responsive solutions for people experiencing homelessness.

2.2   PANEL DISCUSSION

A panel discussion provided workshop participants with insightful perspectives and practice wisdom as an introduction to the workshop. This panel offered a snapshot of Brisbane's housing system and featured Michelle Debert (HART4000), Karyn Walsh (Micah Projects), Jason McDonald (Brisbane Youth Service), and Nick Hopely (Department of Housing).

The panellists were asked to reflect on the following questions.

1. **What is your response to Professor Parsell's presentation?**

The panellists unanimously supported Professor Parsell's presentation, closely aligning with his perspectives on client disengagement from homelessness services. Each panellist expressed agreement with the key points raised by Professor Parsell, reinforcing his observations with examples from their own experiences in the field.

Rather than offering new perspectives or differing insights, the panel's response echoed the consensus that Professor Parsell's analysis was both thorough and accurate, capturing the complex realities of client disengagement. Their unified stance underscored the validity and relevance of the issues he raised, further highlighting the importance of addressing these challenges in service provision. Although no additional insights were provided, the consensus from such a diverse group of practitioners emphasised the widespread recognition of these barriers in engaging clients effectively.

1. What have you found works well when engaging clients?

When engaging clients, building trust through consistent, non-judgmental interactions is crucial, as is maintaining flexibility in how services are delivered—whether by meeting clients in familiar environments or reducing bureaucratic hurdles to make services more approachable. A trauma-informed approach is also essential, recognising that many clients have experienced repeated trauma. By acknowledging this in service delivery, anxiety is reduced and clients are more likely to remain engaged. Offering practical, immediate support, such as housing assistance combined with health services also helps clients see tangible benefits early on, fostering trust.

For specific populations, such as young people, a tailored approach that respects their autonomy and provides flexible engagement options (e.g. through digital platforms or youth-oriented outreach teams) is important. Additionally, simplifying processes and reducing red tape ensures that pathways to housing and support are clear and accessible. A multi-agency approach, where housing is integrated with healthcare, social services, and education, helps clients feel supported holistically. Overall, the key is creating accessible, responsive services that meet clients where they are and address their immediate needs.

2. Are there specific demographics or client populations more likely to disengage?

For a variety of reasons, certain demographics are more likely to disengage from homelessness services. People with complex trauma histories, mental health challenges, and those from marginalised ethnic or cultural backgrounds often struggle to stay engaged—particularly if they have had negative past experiences or feel that the system is not designed for them. Women escaping domestic violence and Indigenous Australians are also more prone to disengagement. For women, concerns about safety and their children can drive this, while Indigenous Australians clients may face cultural barriers, systemic discrimination, or distrust of services rooted in historical trauma.

Young people, especially those who identify as LGBTQIA+, are at a higher risk of disengagement. They may feel alienated by mainstream services or pressured to conform to adult norms, which can push them away. The stigma of homelessness can further complicate their engagement. Clients who have experienced long-term housing instability, particularly those who experienced homelessness multiple times, also tend to disengage more frequently. They may lose hope in the system's ability to provide lasting solutions, highlighting the need for sustainable, person-centred housing options.

3. **How can we gather better feedback from clients about their experiences, and / or barriers they face?**

Gathering effective feedback stems from approaches that foster trust and comfort. Informal feedback collected during outreach is particularly effective, as clients are more likely to share honest opinions when they are not in formal settings. Creating feedback loops, where clients can see how their input has led to tangible changes, is also crucial for maintaining trust.

Co-designing services with clients and employing peer workers with lived experience also encourages authentic feedback. Clients are more open when they feel understood by people who have been through similar experiences. Regular, casual check-ins, rather than formal evaluations, help reduce feelings of scrutiny and foster open communication.

For younger clients, technology such as apps or social media can provide a non-intrusive way to gather feedback, as many prefer digital platforms over face-to-face conversations. Offering anonymous feedback channels is also important, especially for vulnerable populations who may feel stigmatised.

Engaging third-party evaluators or neutral organisations to conduct surveys or focus groups can result in more honest feedback, as clients may feel safer providing criticism when speaking to an independent entity. Ensuring that feedback mechanisms are accessible and linked to real improvements in service delivery is essential for maintaining client trust and engagement.

2.3 PARTICIPANT WORKSHOP

The participants represented an array of specialised community-based support services, Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs), Community Housing Providers (CHPs), and Department of Housing officers from both Service Delivery and Programs.

The workshop comprised of four (4) facilitated sessions, during which discussions focused on the following questions:

- Who are the people who are disengaging? What are they doing, seeing, saying, hearing, thinking and feeling?
- What actions have worked well for you at a practice level to reduce client disengagement?

- What actions have worked well for you at an organisational level to reduce client disengagement?
- What actions can we take at a systems level to reduce client disengagement?

All workshop participants had a chance to input individual responses to the first three questions using Mentimeter. At the end of the session, the workshop participants were asked to highlight one response that stood out.

"Gathering effective feedback stems from approaches that foster trust and comfort. Informal feedback collected during outreach is particularly effective, as clients are more likely to share honest opinions when they are not in formal settings."

Panel discussion

3. Workshop learnings

The following is a summary of the workshop discussions. See Appendix 2 for further detail and question responses.

3.1 ANALYSIS OF DISENGAGED CLIENTS

- Identifying and addressing the needs of disengaged clients in the housing and homelessness sector involves understanding their demographics, behaviours, emotional states and the specific challenges they face.
- Effective service delivery must also consider workforce issues, systemic and structural challenges, and specific population concerns to ensure resources and services are appropriately allocated and accessible.
- Disengaged individuals often face barriers to service such as lack of transport, absence of a phone, fatigue, incarceration, substance use disorder and low income.
- Clients in remote areas or out of catchment zones also struggle to access services. Many clients have unmet needs and lack trust in the system, feeling disenfranchised and unheard.
- Particularly affected groups include the elderly, young people, women (especially domestic violence survivors), First Nations people, and families.
- Disengaged clients can also be characterised by their emotional and psychological states. Many experience a lack of hope, self-insight, and community connection. Chronic mental health issues and trauma are also prevalent among these clients, who often report feeling judged, fearing they will fall through the cracks, and having safety concerns—especially in social housing.

Examples where disengagement can occur include:

- A client missing their appointments due to issues with transport and subsequently feeling isolated and lacking support.
- A young person struggling with substance use disorder may feel judged and unable to access help due to inefficiencies in the system.

Broader systemic issues leading to inadequate resources (such as transport and housing), eligibility restrictions, and slow government processes contribute to client disenfranchisement and frustration with the service system. Addressing the needs of disengaged clients requires a comprehensive understanding of their demographics, behaviours, emotional states, and any

specific challenges. Effective service delivery must tackle workforce issues, systemic and structural challenges, and specific population concerns to ensure that resources and services are adequately allocated and accessible. In turn, this will ultimately lead to improved client outcomes and satisfaction.

3.2 PRACTICE-LEVEL ACTIONS TO REDUCE CLIENT DISENGAGEMENT

Effective service delivery in the housing and homelessness sector hinges on a holistic approach that integrates client-centred practices, robust organisational strategies, professionalism, and a strong focus on client support and wellbeing.

At the heart of this approach are **client-centred practices** that include:

- Maintaining honesty and transparency in communication; this is essential as it involves setting realistic expectations with clients.
- Tailoring services to meet individual needs, with an emphasis on actively listening to clients.
- Flexibly adapting both approaches and funding options to accommodate diverse client needs, ensuring services are responsive and relevant.
- Offering choices and control to empower clients, fostering their autonomy and involvement in their own care.
- Building genuine relationships and rapport with clients which enhances trust and engagement.

Supporting these practices is **strategic organisational planning** that enhance service delivery.

- Internal and external collaboration is crucial for integrating services and improving outcomes.
- Providing consistent and reliable services, along with dependable follow-ups, builds trust and ensures continuity of care.
- Continuous training and support for staff are vital to maintain high standards of service.
- Employing creative engagement methods, such as community activities and flexible communication techniques, also helps to reach and engage clients effectively.

Maintaining **professionalism and boundaries** is also integral to effective client interactions.

- Clear boundaries ensure professional and respectful relationships.
- Adherence to ethical practices guarantees nonjudgmental and equitable service delivery.
- Accountability in client support and service outcomes is essential for maintaining trust and integrity in service provision.

- A strong emphasis on client support and wellbeing is fundamental and includes creating safe and supportive environments to nurture client growth and success.
- Recognising and celebrating client achievements reinforces positive outcomes and motivates clients.
- Managing caseloads effectively ensures that staff can provide quality care without being overwhelmed, maintaining the standard of care and attention each client receives.

Workforce issues compound challenges to maintaining professionalism and boundaries. High burnout and turnover rates among staff, inadequate training and qualifications, and staff fatigue lead to a lack of quality time with clients. These issues diminish the effectiveness of service delivery.

Systemic and structural challenges further complicate service provision.

- Inadequate systems and duplicated services cause inefficiencies, while miscommunication and stigmatisation hinder client engagement.
- Long waiting lists and inappropriate questions during assessments exacerbate client frustration.
- Specific population concerns must be addressed to provide effective care. Elderly individuals, young people, and women face unique issues, including safety concerns in social housing and a lack of integration between housing and health services.
- Resource and service allocation is a critical aspect of addressing these challenges, as is ensuring the availability and accessibility of services.
- Discrepancies between client expectations and the actual services received need to be minimised to improve client satisfaction and engagement.

In summary, effective service delivery in the housing and homelessness sector requires a comprehensive approach that integrates client-centred practices, strategic organisational planning, professionalism, and a focus on client support and wellbeing. These elements collectively ensure that services are tailored, effective, and supportive, which leads to improved client outcomes and satisfaction.

3.3   ORGANISATION-LEVEL STRATEGIES TO REDUCE CLIENT DISENGAGEMENT

A holistic approach encompassing collaboration and integration, flexibility, client-centred practices, staff support, and a supportive organisational culture with adequate resources is essential for effective service delivery in the housing and homelessness sector.

Collaboration and integration

Collaboration and integration are fundamental to enhancing service delivery. This involves engaging in both internal and external collaboration to ensure a seamless flow of information and resources. By adopting community-based strategies, organisations can build robust support networks that facilitate complex care coordination across various services. This holistic approach ensures that all aspects of a client's needs are addressed, promoting better health outcomes.

Flexibility and adaptability

In terms of flexibility and adaptability, it is crucial to offer flexible service delivery options that can be tailored to the unique needs of each client. Additionally, flexible funding models are essential. These models should be adaptable to allocate resources based on the evolving needs of clients, thereby ensuring that services remain relevant and effective.

Client-centred practices

Client-centred practices are at the core of effective service delivery. This involves implementing engagement strategies that focus on building strong connections with clients and involving frontline workers in decision-making processes. A holistic approach is necessary, considering all aspects of clients' lives to provide comprehensive support. This ensures that the services provided are not only relevant but also empowering for clients.

Workforce support

Staff support is another critical component. Regular supervision and support are necessary to enhance the skills and capabilities of staff. Continuous professional development and training opportunities are vital in keeping staff updated with the latest practices and knowledge in the field. Additionally, promoting staff wellbeing is essential to prevent burnout and improve staff retention, thereby ensuring a stable and competent workforce.

Supportive organisational culture

Fostering a supportive organisational culture and ensuring adequate resources are imperative for sustained service delivery. Cultivating a culture of wellbeing within the organisation prioritises both staff and client wellbeing. This supportive environment can lead to better service outcomes and a more motivated workforce. Furthermore, ensuring adequate resource allocation is necessary to sustain effective service delivery. This includes securing sufficient funding and resources to support the various initiatives and strategies implemented by the organisation.

A holistic approach encompassing collaboration and integration, flexibility, client-centred practices, staff support, and a supportive organisational culture with adequate resources is essential for effective service delivery in the housing and homelessness sector.

3.4   SYSTEMS-LEVEL ACTIONS TO REDUCE CLIENT DISENGAGEMENT

Enhancing client engagement and service effectiveness needs several strategic approaches.

- Simplifying administrative and service delivery processes is a crucial element to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Clear and straightforward communication is also vital in maintaining transparency and understanding with clients.

- Ongoing professional development and support for staff is equally important. This includes regular training to keep staff updated with the latest practices and methodologies, as well as fostering supportive work environments that manage workloads effectively, promoting overall staff wellbeing.

- Flexibility in service delivery is another essential component. This means offering adaptable service options that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of clients. Similarly, flexible funding models are necessary to allocate resources based on client priorities, ensuring that funding is directed where it is most needed.

- Community engagement plays a significant role in strengthening support networks. Active collaboration with community organisations can enhance service provision and create robust support systems. Involving clients in decision-making processes and programme design is also crucial, as it ensures that services are client-centred and responsive to their needs.

- Efficient resource management and integrated service delivery within the organisation are fundamental to providing comprehensive support. This involves ensuring that resources are allocated optimally and that services are coordinated to offer holistic care to clients.

"A holistic approach encompassing collaboration and integration, flexibility, client-centred practices, staff support, and a supportive organisational culture with adequate resources is essential for effective service delivery in the housing and homelessness sector."

Workshop learnings

4. Recommendations for addressing disengagement

Following the insights gathered from the Brisbane Service Integration workshop, the following recommendations are provided to mitigate client disengagement and enhance service delivery.

4.1 STREAMLINE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

- Assess current processes: Conduct an audit of existing administrative procedures to identify areas of complexity.
- Implement improvements: Simplify forms, reduce bureaucratic steps, and streamline approval processes.
- Test user-friendly systems: Develop and pilot user-friendly platforms for service access and administration.

4.2 CLEAR COMMUNICATION

- Develop communication guidelines: Create a standard for clear and concise communication with clients. Establishing clear guidelines for interacting with clients and training staff in effective, transparent communication can help ensure that clients are well-informed and feel valued. Regular updates about services and any changes can further enhance client engagement by keeping them informed and involved throughout their journey.
- Streamline procedures for clients. Clients often disengage from homelessness services due to cumbersome administrative processes and unclear communication. To address these issues, it's essential to streamline procedures by conducting an audit to pinpoint and eliminate unnecessary complexities. Simplifying forms, reducing bureaucratic steps, and testing user-friendly platforms can make access to services more efficient and less frustrating for clients.
- Train staff: Train staff on effective communication techniques and transparency practices.
- Regular updates: Provide clients with regular, straightforward updates about services and any changes.

4.3 ENHANCE TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR STAFF

Ongoing training

- Develop training programs: Create comprehensive training programs focused on client-centred care and cultural competence.
- Schedule regular sessions: Implement a schedule for regular training sessions and workshops.

- Evaluate training effectiveness: Assess the impact of training on staff performance and client outcomes.

Supportive work environment

- Implement supervision structures: Establish regular supervision meetings to support staff and address concerns.
- Promote wellbeing: Introduce initiatives focused on staff mental health, such as counselling and stress management programs.
- Manage workloads: Monitor staff workloads and adjust as necessary to prevent burnout.

Staff disengagement or ineffective service delivery in the homelessness sector can often be traced back to inadequate training and a lack of support. To counteract this, it is crucial to implement robust training programs that emphasise client-centred care and cultural competence. Regular training sessions and workshops should be scheduled, with ongoing evaluations to ensure they are enhancing staff performance and improving client outcomes.

Additionally, fostering a supportive work environment is key to retaining motivated and effective staff. This includes establishing regular supervision meetings to address concerns and providing mental health support through counselling and stress management programs. Managing workloads effectively to prevent burnout is also essential, ensuring that staff can perform their roles effectively without being overwhelmed.

4.4   ADOPT FLEXIBLE SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

Tailor services

- Assess client needs: Conduct regular assessments to understand individual client needs and preferences.
- Design flexible options: Develop service options that accommodate various client needs, such as extended appointment times and different communication methods.
- Implement personalised plans: Create and review personalised support plans for clients regularly.

Facilitate flexible funding

- Review funding models: Evaluate existing funding models and identify areas for flexibility.
- Adjust allocations: Allocate resources based on current client needs and service demands.
- Monitor effectiveness: Continuously monitor the effectiveness of funding models and adjust as needed.

Clients may disengage from homelessness services when they encounter inflexible service delivery models that do not meet their individual needs. To address this, services should be tailored to better align with client preferences and requirements. This involves regularly assessing client needs and designing flexible service options, such as extended appointment times and varied communication methods. Personalised support plans should be created and regularly updated to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

In addition, adopting flexible funding models can enhance service delivery. By reviewing and adjusting funding allocations based on current client needs and service demands, resources can be better utilised to address the most pressing issues. Continuous monitoring of these funding models ensures they remain effective and responsive to changing needs, ultimately leading to more successful client engagement and support outcomes.

4.5   STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Build partnerships

- Identify key partners: Identify and reach out to community organisations and agencies for collaboration.
- Formalise partnerships: Establish formal agreements or memoranda of understanding with partners.
- Coordinate services: Develop mechanisms for coordination and communication between partner organisations.

Involve clients

- Create feedback channels: Establish channels for clients to provide feedback and participate in decision-making.
- Incorporate client input: Regularly review and integrate client feedback into service design and delivery.
- Engage clients in planning: Involve clients in the planning and design of new programs and services.

Disengagement from homelessness services can also stem from a lack of community involvement and collaboration. To address this, it is essential to strengthen partnerships with community organisations and agencies. Identifying key partners, formalising agreements, and developing coordination mechanisms can enhance service delivery and ensure a more integrated approach to support.

Additionally, actively involving clients in the process can significantly improve engagement. Establishing feedback channels allows clients to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making. Regularly incorporating this feedback into service design and actively engaging clients in planning new programs ensures that services are responsive to their needs and preferences. This collaborative approach helps to create more effective and client-centred services, fostering a greater sense of ownership and connection among clients.

4.6   OPTIMISE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND SERVICE INTEGRATION

Efficient resource allocation

- Conduct resource audits: Regularly audit resource usage and needs.
- Adjust allocations: Reallocate resources based on current needs and priorities.
- Monitor resource use: Track resource usage and address any inefficiencies.

Service integration

- Map services: Create a map of existing services and identify gaps or overlaps.
- Develop integration plans: Design and implement plans for integrating services across the organisation.
- Evaluate integration success: Assess the effectiveness of service integration and make improvements as needed.

4.7   PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Clear policies and procedures

- Develop and document policies: Create clear policies and procedures for service delivery and client interaction.
- Communicate policies: Ensure all clients are informed about policies and procedures.
- Review regularly: Regularly review and update policies to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

Accountability measures

- Implement monitoring systems: Develop systems for tracking client interactions and service delivery outcomes.
- Conduct regular evaluations: Perform regular evaluations of service effectiveness and staff performance.

- Use data for improvement: Utilise evaluation data to drive continuous improvements in service delivery.

Clients may disengage from homelessness services when there is a lack of transparency and accountability. To address these concerns, it is essential to promote clear policies and procedures. Developing and documenting these policies ensures that service delivery and client interactions are standardised and transparent. Communicating these policies effectively to clients helps them understand what to expect and feel more secure in their interactions with the service. Regular reviews and updates of policies ensure they remain relevant and responsive to changing needs.

Additionally, implementing robust accountability measures can enhance service quality. Developing monitoring systems to track client interactions and service delivery outcomes allows for ongoing oversight. Conducting regular evaluations of both service effectiveness and staff performance provides valuable insights. Using this data to drive continuous improvements ensures that services are constantly evolving to better meet client needs and improve overall service delivery, fostering a greater sense of trust and engagement among clients.

4.8   ENHANCE DATA AND EVALUATION PRACTICES

Data-driven decision making

- Collect relevant data: Gather data on client needs, service delivery, and outcomes.
- Analyse data: Use data analysis to identify trends, gaps, and areas for improvement.
- Inform decisions: Use data findings to inform decisions and strategic planning.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Develop monitoring systems: Create systems for ongoing monitoring of client progress and program effectiveness.
- Implement evaluation frameworks: Use established frameworks to evaluate programs and services.
- Adjust based on findings: Make adjustments to services based on evaluation results to improve effectiveness.

Clients may disengage from homelessness services when there is insufficient use of data and evaluation practices to inform and improve services. To address this, it is crucial to enhance data collection and analysis. Gathering relevant data on client needs, service delivery, and outcomes allows organisations to identify trends, gaps, and areas needing improvement. This data-driven

approach helps make informed decisions and to plan strategically, ensuring that services are tailored to meet actual client needs.

Additionally, developing robust monitoring and evaluation systems is essential for assessing the effectiveness of programs. Creating mechanisms for ongoing monitoring of client progress and program performance ensures that services are responsive and effective. Implementing established evaluation frameworks helps systematically review programs and make necessary adjustments based on findings. This iterative process of using data to refine and improve services can lead to better outcomes and higher client engagement.

"Establishing feedback channels allows clients to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making. Regularly incorporating this feedback into service design and actively engaging clients in planning new programs ensures that services are responsive to their needs and preferences."

Recommendations for addressing disengagement

"Clients may disengage from homelessness services when there is insufficient use of data and evaluation practices to inform and improve services."

Recommendations for addressing disengagement

5. Summary and conclusion

The following section summarises the key takeaways from the workshop, focusing on client disengagement in the housing and homelessness sector. It analyses the root causes of disengagement and offers recommendations for enhancing client engagement and improving service delivery. The workshop highlighted several key areas: streamlining administrative processes to reduce complexity, enhancing staff training and support, adopting flexible service delivery models, strengthening community engagement and collaboration, optimising resource management and service integration, and promoting transparency and accountability. By addressing these areas, the workshop aimed to provide actionable strategies to better meet client needs and improve overall service effectiveness for understanding disengaged clients.

5.1 UNDERSTANDING DISENGAGED CLIENTS

Disengaged clients face significant barriers such as lack of transport, absence of a phone, fatigue, incarceration, substance abuse, and low income. Those in remote or out-of-catchment areas often struggle to access services. Many feel disenfranchised and lack trust in the system, with particularly affected groups including the elderly, young people, women (especially domestic violence survivors), First Nations people, and families. Emotionally, these clients often experience a lack of hope, chronic mental health issues, trauma, and fears of judgment and abandonment, especially in social housing.

5.2 CLIENT-CENTRED CHALLENGES

Addressing client disengagement requires a holistic approach. Client-centred practices involve transparency, tailoring services to individual needs, adapting approaches and funding, building rapport, and empowering clients. Organisational strategies include internal and external collaboration, consistent services, continuous staff training, and creative engagement methods such as community activities and flexible communication. Professionalism, clear boundaries, ethical practices, and accountability are crucial for effective interactions. Supporting client wellbeing through safe environments, celebrating achievements, and managing caseloads effectively fosters client growth and success.

5.3 EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

Key barriers include inadequate resources (e.g., transport, housing), systemic issues (e.g., eligibility restrictions, slow processes), and feelings of being unheard. Workforce problems such as high burnout, insufficient training, and staff fatigue reduce service effectiveness. Systemic issues

like inadequate systems, duplicated services, miscommunication, stigmatisation, long waiting lists, and inappropriate assessment questions complicate service provision. Specific concerns include safety in social housing and lack of integration between housing and health services. Aligning resource and service allocation with client expectations is essential for improving satisfaction and engagement.

5.4 KEY STRATEGIES

Adopting these actionable steps has the potential to significantly enhance organisational ability to address client disengagement, improve service delivery, and elevate overall client satisfaction and outcomes.

- Enhancing client engagement involves streamlining administrative processes, ensuring clear communication, and providing continuous staff training and support.
- Flexible service delivery and funding should be tailored to client needs.
- Collaborating with community organisations and involving clients in decision-making ensures client-centred services.
- Efficient resource management and integrated service delivery enhance comprehensive support.
- Transparent policies, client education, data-driven decision-making, and effective monitoring improve service quality and outcomes.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Tackling client disengagement in the housing and homelessness sector requires integrating client-centred practices, strategic planning, professionalism, and a focus on client support and wellbeing. This approach ensures services are effective and responsive, leading to better client outcomes and satisfaction.

"Streamlining administrative processes to reduce complexity, enhancing staff training, adopting flexible service delivery models, strengthening community engagement and collaboration, optimising resource management and service integration, and promoting transparency and accountability…"

Key areas to address disengagements

Appendix 1: Forum attendees

FIRST NAME	Surname	Company
VANESSA	Alfonzo	The Salvation Army
ADRIANA	Alvarenga	The Salvation Army
KALEN	Anderson	The Salvation Army
LAXMAN	Aryal	Mission Australia
ADAM	Barnes	Anglicare Southern Queensland
MEGAN	Bonetti	Brisbane Housing Company
WESLEY	Bonhomme	Salvation Army
ELI	Brooker	Department of Housing
GLENN	Brown	St Vincent de Paul
SALLY	Bryon	Mangrove Temporary Crisis Accommodation
ANTHONY	Campbell	BHC
FIONA	Caniglia	Q Shelter
BROOKE	Carroll	Incite Collective
JORDYN	Chapman	RBWH Homeless Health Outreach Team
BELINDA	Clare	WMQ
FIONNA	Coburn	Ray White Logan City
CLAIRE	Colwell	Transforming Life in Change
JODIE	Cowie	Q Shelter
PAUL	Davidraj	Micah Projects
HAYDEN	Davis-Lane	Churches of Christ Housing Services
MICHELLE	Debert	Communify
VIVIAN	Deng	Queensland Health

MARIA E	Didone	Wesley Mission QLD
FRANCINE	Dorante	HOWSS - Footprints Community Ltd
JO	Draper	Q Shelter
JONATHAN	Dyer	The Salvation Army - Veteran Support Team
MELISSA	Eales	Department of Housing
DANEKA	Easthope	WMQ
MIRANDHA	Escott-Burton	Churches of Christ Housing Services
WEI-LIN	Fan	Micah Projects
LOGAN	Fatnowna	Kurbingui Youth and Family Development
SHANE	Frost	Encircle Community Services Ltd
LEI	Gan	St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland
PRUE	Giles	St Vincent de Paul Ipswich
MAYA	Glassman	Q Shelter
MARINA	Gobbi	UCC
TUI	Gordon	Saint Vincent de Paul- IASS
AMY	Griesheimer	Footprints Community
JESSICA	Gunawan	Footprints
JOCELYN	Harrison	The Salvation Army
JACKSON	Hills	Q Shelter
MICHELLE	Hine	Department of Housing
REBECCA	Hinton	Q Shelter
ASTRID	Hofmann	The Salvation Army
DANI	Horner	The Salvation Army
PETA	Hyde	The Salvation Army
EMMA	Irvine-Collins	Q Shelter

JESSICA	Jones	The Salvation Army
SARA	Judd	Anglicare
DALJIT	Kaur	Anglicare SQ
JODIE	Keidge	Churches of Christ Housing Services
LIZ	Kemp	Q Shelter
SKYE	Kilpatrick	Mangrove Temporary Crisis Accommodation
LAUREN	Kippin	Q Shelter
JADE	Kozionas	Micah Projects
ELIZABETH	Kuol	3rd Space
CHRIS	Lawrence	Live well support services
DAVE	Lyons	Fixed Address (38KPR)
JANET	Maher	Mission Australia
KELSEY	McArthur	Community Connections, CLA Inc
CATHERINE	McCredie	Mission Australia
LISA	McDermott	Office of the Public Guardian
SONIA	McKenzie	Family Accommodation Support Service Ipswich
LAUREN	McNamara	Q Shelter
MICHELE	Mewies	Ray White logan City
VICKY	Meyer	Department of Housing
KERRIE-	Minehan	Two By Two
BIANCA	Mooney	FEAT
ROWENA	Mooney	Churches of Christ Housing Services
THOMAS	Mulder	Salvation Army
JACKIE	Mullins	Wesley Mission Queensland
AMITA	Nand	UCC

GIANG	Nguyen	The Salvation Army
EMILY	Nielsen	4zzz 102.1FM Community Radio
BEN	O'Brien	Teen Challenge Qld - New Hope House
LISA	O'Donnell	Lady Musgrave Trust
IKORO	Okocha	Safehands support services
LIANA	Parks	Kyabra Community Organisation
CAMERON	Parsell	University of Queensland
REBECCA	Patterson	Northside Connect
MIA	Pattison	Footprints Community
JESSICA	Pragnell	Q Shelter
RUBY	Pritchard	Anglicare
LORELEI	Pryce	Transforming Life in Change
BELINDA	Pugh	Footprints
CHRISTINA	Puttanani	The Salvation Army
NELLY	Radisavljevic	WMQ
CLARE	Ravenhall	Brisbane Housing Company
KELLY	Sciacca	Communify
SUZANNE	Smith	Anglicare Southern Queensland
SEAN	Smith	The Salvation Army - Homelessness Services (Mobile
PHILIP	Smith	Q Shelter
FLOYD	Stephens	Q Shelter
JESSIE	Stokes	Wesley Mission
DANIEL	Taber-	Q Shelter
JASON	Taylor	WMQ
ELOISE	Telford	Q Shelter

SARA	Torrabasas	Churches of Christ
TIMEA	Toth	The Salvation Army - Homelessness Services (Mobile
PEMBA	TSHULEMBO	Life Without Barriers
IRIS	Vukelic	MSAMHS Disaster Recovery Team
MAILE	Walker	Micah Projects
KARYN	Walsh	Micah Projects
STEVE	Waqavou	North East Community Support Group
JOELLA	Warkill	North East Community Support Group
JULIUS	Weate	WMQ
RHIANNON	West	Q Shelter
NATASHA	Whitaker	Speaking Up for You Inc Brisbane
ERIKA	Willett	Salvation Army
LINDA	Wilson-Marks	3rd Space
ERIN	Yarnold	Hart4000 Communify

Appendix 2: Snapshot of workshop responses

Answers were ranked according to their popularity.

Q1: Who are the people who are disengaging? What are they doing, seeing, saying, hearing, thinking and feeling? Who is disengaging?

Demographics and behaviours

- Clients facing barriers to service (e.g. no transport, no phone, tiredness, incarceration, substance abuse, low-income earners, and those out of catchment areas).
- Clients with unmet needs, feeling disenfranchised, unheard, and lacking trust in the system.
- Elderly, youth, women (especially domestic violence survivors), First Nations people, and families are particularly affected.

Emotional and psychological states

- Many clients feel a lack of hope, self-insight, and community.
- Clients often experience chronic mental health issues and trauma.
- Clients report feelings of judgment, fear of falling through the cracks, and safety concerns in social housing.

Specific examples

- A client misses appointments due to transportation issues and subsequently feels isolated and unsupported.
- A young person struggling with substance abuse feels judged and does not receive the needed help due to system inefficiencies.

Barriers to service

- Inadequate resources (transport, housing).
- Systemic issues (eligibility restrictions, slow government processes).
- Disenfranchisement with the service system and feelings of being unheard.

Workforce issues

- High burnout and turnover rates.
- Inadequate staff training and qualifications.

- Staff fatigue and lack of quality time with clients.

Systemic and structural challenges

- Inadequate systems and duplicated services.
- Miscommunication and stigmatisation.
- Long waiting lists and incorrect questions asked.

Specific population concerns

- Issues unique to elderly individuals, young people, and women.
- Safety concerns in social housing and lack of integration between housing and health services.

Resource and service allocation

- Challenges related to the availability and accessibility of services.
- Discrepancies between client expectations and the actual services received.

Q2: What actions have worked well for you at a practice level to reduce client disengagement?

Client-centred approaches

- Honesty and transparency: Transparent communication and setting realistic expectations.

Person-centred care

- Tailoring services to individual needs and actively listening.
- Flexibility: Adapting approaches and funding options to meet diverse client needs.
- Building rapport: Developing genuine relationships and rapport with clients.
- Empowerment: Offering choices and control to clients, enhancing their autonomy.

Organisational strategies

- Collaboration: Internal and external collaboration to improve service delivery.
- Consistency and reliability: Providing consistent services and reliable follow-ups.
- Training and support: Continuous training and support for staff.
- Creative engagement: Innovative methods to engage clients, such as community activities and flexible communication methods.

Professionalism and boundaries

- Clear boundaries: Maintaining appropriate boundaries in client interactions.

- Ethical practices: Nonjudgmental and ethical service delivery.

- Accountability: Ensuring accountability in client support and service outcomes.

Client support and wellbeing

- Supportive environment: Creating safe and supportive environments.

- Celebrating achievements: Recognising and celebrating client successes.

- Managing caseloads: Ensuring manageable caseloads for quality care.

Q3: What actions have worked well for you at an organisational level to reduce client disengagement?

Collaboration and integration

- Collaboration: Engaging in both internal and external collaboration to enhance service delivery.

- Community approach: Adopting community-based strategies to build support networks.

- Complex care coordination: Ensuring coordinated care across different services.

Flexibility and adaptability

- Flexible service delivery: Offering flexible service options tailored to client needs.

- Flexible funding: Adapting funding models to allow resource allocation based on client needs.

Client-centred practices

- Engagement strategies: Effective engagement practices focusing on building connections and involving frontline workers in decision making.

- Holistic approach: Considering all aspects of clients' lives in service delivery.

Staff support

- Supervision and support: Regular supervision and support for staff to enhance their skills.

- Training and development: Continuous professional development and training opportunities.

- Staff wellbeing: Promoting staff wellbeing to prevent burnout and enhance retention.

Organisational culture and resources

- Culture of wellbeing: Fostering a supportive organisational culture that prioritises staff and client wellbeing.

- Resource allocation: Ensuring adequate resources and funding to sustain effective service delivery.

Q4: What actions can we take at a systems level to reduce client disengagement?

Simplification and Clarity

- Streamlining processes: Simplifying administrative and service delivery processes.
- Clear communication: Ensuring clarity and simplicity in communication with clients.

Training and Support

- Adequate training: Providing ongoing training and support for staff.
- Staff wellbeing: Promoting supportive work environments and workload management.

Flexibility

- Flexible service delivery: Offering flexible service options and responses tailored to client needs.
- Flexible funding: Adapting funding models for resource allocation based on client priorities.

Community engagement

- Collaboration and partnerships: Engaging with community organisations to strengthen support networks.
- Client involvement: Involving clients in decision making processes and program design.

Resource allocation

- Optimal resource allocation: Ensuring adequate resources and efficient management.
- Integrated service delivery: Integrating services within the organisation for comprehensive client support.

Transparency

- Clear policies and procedures: Establishing transparent policies and procedures.
- Open communication: Maintaining honest communication with clients about service changes and outcomes.

Education and training

- Client education: Informing clients about available services and empowering them in decision making.

- Staff training: Offering ongoing education on client centered practices and cultural competence.

Data and evaluation

- Data-driven decision making: Using data to inform decisions and improve service quality.
- Monitoring and evaluation: Implementing systems for monitoring client progress and evaluating program effectiveness.