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benchmark

This issue: **Quality Assurance**

Thumbs up from NSW Government

Relationships based on trust aren't always easy to establish or maintain. But when they work, they're worth hanging onto. In a written reference, Ethel McAlpine, Deputy Director General, Accommodation and Direct Services of the New South Wales Department of Ageing, Disability & Home Care, talks about her department's experience with Assessments Australia. (Continued on page 3)

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SUMMER ISSUE: The value of independence

Assessments Australia is the premier independent provider of assessment services in the allied health environment. Data becomes decision.



Assessments Australia – Corporate Profile



Data becomes decision

Assessments Australia is the premier independent provider of assessment services in the human services environment.

Values

Assessments Australia is a values-based enterprise that, through ethical standards and timely delivery, aspires to be:

- the acknowledged leader in human service assessments
- the employer of choice across the sector
- key to the promotion of access and equity in the delivery of public services.

Mission

Our mission is to deliver world-class assessment services to our clients through government, NGO and community service providers in areas such as aged care, education, employment, welfare, allied health and disability. We work through a range of stakeholders in our engagements including service users, all levels of staff from frontline service providers through to executive management, unions, peak organisations, parents, guardians and carers as well as professional associations and key thought and opinion leaders in human services.

Locations, services and delivery . . . wherever, whenever you need them

Assessments Australia was established to provide independent, sector-leading professional assessment and analysis in health, education and human services. The company has managed more than 15,000 assessments nationally in disability alone. A further 10,000 have been carried out in education, employment and aged care, with the numbers growing.

With offices in Melbourne and Sydney, Assessments Australia has structured its business and services to meet client needs anywhere in Australia at short notice. Through our proprietary Online Management System™ (OMS), our clients can now access real-time information, in a secure environment, on the status of their programs in and from any location.

The same technology allows us to tap into local assessor resources and knowledge and to deploy skilled, qualified staff rapidly anywhere.

Depth and independence

Assessments Australia brings innovation and depth to the intellectual concepts behind, and design of, any assessment program. These range from specific assessment or data management tasks to large scale end-to-end assessment projects, including complex statistical analysis, interpretation and intelligence delivery.

Experience and local knowledge

Our teams have managed tens of thousands of assessments across the full range of appraisal needs. Recent projects have included assessing 2,000 clients in 450 locations for the New South Wales Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, and the assessment of more than 6,000 applications for the Victorian Department of Education and Training's Program for Students with Disabilities. Similar extensive assessment programs have recently been carried out, and are underway, in other states.

We are independent, accountable, provide a single point of contact, and manage teams of fully trained and appropriately qualified allied health professionals. Recruitment and training of professional resources with a regional emphasis gives us access to local knowledge and lets us perform assessments on site in any location throughout Australia.

Assessments Australia provides a fully scaleable, independent assessment structure. We also provide resources for one-off projects, for assessment tasks that fall outside the core competencies of an organisation, or for those projects where urgency or high demand place the task beyond an organisation's response capabilities.

Services offered by Assessments Australia

- Management, design and execution of large scale, professional assessment programs
- Development of customised data collection and management systems
- Data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting
- Provision of organisational infrastructure to facilitate assessment projects
- Design, management and implementation of accreditation programs
- Data and systems analysis for development of modelling and benchmarking tools
- Quality assurance audits.

Benefits

The benefits of partnering with Assessments Australia to obtain informed guidance on service quality and funding value are:

- value – your assessments are guaranteed to be accurate and independent and reflect the reality of the service provider/client relationship
- quality – we conduct random five percent audits of our assessors' work
- peace of mind – you work with the people who designed, built and administer Australia's most trusted assessment tool, the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) – road tested over more than 25,000 assessments
- reliability – all our assessors are hand-picked, fully qualified allied health professionals in regular professional development programs
- credibility – you benefit from our association with Australia's leading universities involved in sociological and psychological assessment studies and research.



Thumbs up from NSW Government

– Ethel McAlpine

(continued from pg 1)

“Assessments Australia has undertaken a number of projects

with the government delivered disability services section of the Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care (previously part of the Department of Community Services). This has included:

- conducting support needs assessment of approximately 1200 clients across New South Wales
- undertaking roster reviews of approximately 300 group homes and analysing cost drivers in the provision of direct care
- developing costing benchmarks for all group homes based on client needs and updating these
- developing an online ‘roster coster’ tool
- developing a financial reporting system for community group homes
- review of cost drivers in large residential centres.

“The client group of the Department’s accommodation services are people with an intellectual disability who may also have other secondary disabilities eg mental illness, autism, physical disabilities or sensory impairments.

“This work has occurred in a number of discrete phases. This commenced in 1999/2000 with the initial assessment of clients and review of rosters. Additional work was completed in 2002/2003, the most recent piece of work commenced in approximately May 2005.



“In the initial work approximately 1200 clients (1184) living across NSW were assessed. This involved the client, family/guardian or advocates and group home staff being present for the assessment. This was completed within approximately one month.

“The initial roster analysis involved the collection of hand written rosters from approximately 300 group homes from across the state, data validity checks with the houses, data entry of the information onto a specially developed data base, generation and analysis of reports. This allowed Assessments Australia to analyse staffing patterns by region, by local manager and by client support profile. From this Assessment Australia were able to identify the service cost drivers, significantly these were not solely



“The client group of the Department’s accommodation services are people with an intellectual disability who may also have other secondary disabilities eg mental illness, autism, physical disabilities or sensory impairments...”

client need but local decisions made on the model of care. This allowed Assessments Australia, in consultation with the Department, to set roster benchmarks and with the financial reports that were developed allowed local management to control program expenditure...

“There was no negative reaction from families/guardians, staff, their union or client advocates. In the somewhat emotive area of disability service provision this was a very significant outcome...

“The current work being undertaken by Assessment Australia has resulted in the benchmarks being updated

and has identified additional efficiencies that could be achieved...

“Assessments Australia has completed a number of pieces of work for our organisation. Their performance on all occasions has been exemplary.

“... the Department would use Assessments Australia in the future, we have high regard for their work and consider them a quality and value for money organisation. The work they have completed has delivered significant benefits to the operation of our services...”





Quality assessments need quality assurance



"Assessors should be carefully selected through a recruitment process that begins with the appropriate qualifications and includes substantial experience within the particular assessment environment..."

If government and community organisations want accurate and reliable assessments

to underpin funding for employment, education, disability and health services, they must be built on rigorous quality assurance processes.

"As demands grow on public service provision, whether directly by government or through community agencies, the accuracy and integrity of assessments becomes an ever keener issue," says George Vermont, Assessments Australia's Director, Professional Services.

In assessments where subjective factors such as cultural bias, emotional entanglement and pressures to maximise funding can often intrude, five primary factors must be present. The five are:

- the quality and independence of the people carrying out the assessments



- the consistency of training and experience across the assessor group
- the integrity of the assessment instrument itself
- feedback between assessors, clients and service providers
- a formal evaluation and audit process.

"Quite often, too much emphasis is placed solely on the assessment tool when these other factors are equally as important. Quality assurance starts with the right people – carefully chosen through a recruitment process that begins with the

appropriate qualifications and includes substantial experience within the particular assessment environment," he says.

- the right people
 - rigorously trained
 - using a quality tool
 - under monitored conditions
- mean that the accuracy of assessment information is assured. That, in turn, leads to the most important outcome for both the government agencies and service providers – equity of access to finite public resources.

Get in touch, stay in touch

Our assessment services can be accessed anytime. If you have a need, or want to learn more about our services, call Ian Bamford on 03 9429 9685 or email: ian@assessments.com.au

Please feel free to pass this newsletter on, or register your details on: www.assessments.com.au/benchmark

Are you the best of your kind in assessments?

Assessments Australia employs only qualified, experienced, and dedicated allied health professionals as assessors.

If you're at the top of your tree with qualifications in areas such as education, employment, disability, aged care, rehabilitation and psychology, we want to hear from you.

Our projects can arise at any time and take place anywhere in Australia. If you're interested in registering with Assessments Australia for future assessment work, please forward you CV to: joinourteam@assessments.com.au

Assessments



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