Companion House Strategic plan
2023-2028

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1. Vision, mission and principles

Vision statement

A community that supports the health, wellbeing and human rights of people who come to Australia seeking protection from persecution, war and torture.

Mission statement

Advance the health, well-being and human rights of people who have sought safety in Australia from persecution, torture and war related trauma.

Principles of Service

1. We promote and respect human rights encompassing the values of respect, dignity and equality for every person.

2. We acknowledge and respect the strength of our clients and promote self-determination and informed choice.

3. We foster professionalism through evidence-based practice, our accountability to clients and the community, and organisational collegiality.

4. We foster partnership and collaboration with clients, partners, funders and community.

5. We work within a framework of recovery that is based on building safety and control, fostering connections and belonging, and building meaning, justice and dignity.

Recovery Goals

We work to restore and foster:

1. Safety and control
2. Connections and belonging
3. Meaning and justice
4. Dignity and value

2. Goal one: Health care -safety, control and dignity

Goal one: People from a refugee background and asylum seekers have access to quality primary health care and access to health services which foster well-being, bodily integrity and recovery.

Companion House will:

1. Deliver quality primary health care within a human rights framework
2. Foster partnerships with primary care and specialists to meet need.
3. Build quality, strong clinical governance and sustainability.
4. Foster a strong clinical workforce alongside support staff.
5. Advocate for improved health and welfare systems and access for the community.
6. Work with government and community partners to ensure that the survivors of torture and trauma can access responsive therapeutic, primary health and advocacy services within the broader community.
7. Ensure integration across Companion House services.

Key Strategic actions 2024-2028: Accreditation, clinical governance, transitions, partnerships, structure and monitoring sustainability

1. Maintain accreditation and clinical governance to drive quality and safety.
2. Transition new arrivals to community general practice to safeguard sustainability.
3. Build partnerships within health sector to build capacity.
4. Maintain and strengthen staff structures and service workforce including clinical leadership and practice support.
5. Monitor workforce and financial sustainability -annual reporting with consultation process on the future of the service due 2025/2026.

Context

Access to health care is a core part of recovery and rebuilding. There are three groups of people who need to access primary health care at Companion House:

(1) Newly arriving people: Many newly arriving people have had very limited access to health care, before arrival often for many years as a result of displacement and refugee journey. It is common for people to have untreated or undertreated health issues and also often war and or torture injuries. Trauma and distress are also felt in the body, driving ill health and chronic pain.

(2) Asylum seekers: Asylum seekers struggle to access health care due to fluctuating access to Medicare, work rights and lack of social entitlements. Poverty complicates health care for many asylum seekers, driving ill health through stress and lack of ability to maintain healthy diet and or purchase medications.

(3) People with complex care needs: There are also some people who have complex care needs who need access to primary health care in a supported setting for the longer term.

As primary health care becomes more difficult to access across the ACT (due to work force shortages and pressure on general practice, and low rates of bulkbilling) delivery of primary health care becomes an even more important element of our mission. At the same time service sustainability has become a central issue for our organisation to monitor.

3. Goal two: Therapeutic services for recovery-safety, control, meaning, justice, dignity and connection

Goal two: Survivors of torture and trauma have access to therapeutic services which build safety and control, meaning, justice and dignity and foster connections and belonging.

Companion House will:

1. Provide specialised therapeutic services to survivors of torture and trauma across the age spectrum and with flexible and varied therapeutic approaches.
2. Facilitate access to economic and social rights through support and advocacy services that enable recovery and builds new futures.
3. Ensure clinical advice and documentation is included into migration processes and other processes determining eligibility for social entitlements.
4. Support a strong, safe workforce.
5. Ensure integration across Companion House services and sharing of expertise.
6. Provide access and equity across population groups and ensure intake processes are well governed.
7. Wrk in strong collaboration with the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASTT)
8. Strive to ensure adequate physical space for counselling activities.

Key Strategic Actions – New modalities, accreditation, evaluation, access and equity, waiting list management, FASTT collaboration.

1. Build expertise in new therapeutic modalities
2. Maintain accreditation processes to drive quality and continuous improvement.
3. Develop evaluation and practice models that ensure client need and experience drives service.
4. Foster partnerships and bicultural and cross-cultural approaches.
5. Monitor and respond to access and equity issues across population groups.
6. Ensure active monitoring, management and reduction of waiting lists.
7. Participate in and contribute to national FASTT initiatives and programs with strong focus of data and evaluation.

Context:

Therapeutic service for recovery from torture and trauma sit at the core of Companion House mission and service. Survivors' wellbeing is impacted by history of torture, other traumatic events, both risk and protective factors in Australia and cross-cultural factors in the transition to a new environment. In response, therapeutic services focus on building safety and control, meaning, justice and dignity and fostering connections and belonging. We work with people from across the age spectrum, with torture survivors our strongest priority. We also work with survivors of war, persecution and state sanctioned violence. Our services are under intense demand and we need to monitor demand and service provision to ensure access and equity.
2024-2028 will be a period of intensive collaboration with FASTT over data, research and evaluation in particular.

4. Goal three: Community education and advocacy -safety, dignity, justice and connection

Goal Three: The community welcomes asylum seekers and people from a refugee background, and is sensitive to the needs and strengths of survivors of torture and trauma.

Companion House will:

1. Inform decision-makers and policy-makers about reforms needed to services, support and entitlements for asylum seekers and people from a refugee background to fully participate in the community and access social entitlements
2. Build the local community's understanding of the issues facing asylum seekers, refugees and survivors of torture and trauma through training programs, media and public events.
3. Work with other key partners, including the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) to ensure Commonwealth policies are informed by, and respond to, the needs of survivors of torture and trauma.
4. Provide research and representations on the accessibility of health and other service systems.

Key Strategic Actions: Connections and partnerships, advocacy re social justice and human rights, community education and amplifying voice of people from refugee backgrounds and asylum seekers.

1. Maintain and foster strong community partnerships to achieve goals, with particular focus on asylum seekers.
2. Work with decision makers and policy makers to establish initiatives that improve access to services and supports in areas of identified need.
3. Deliver community education program to health and welfare sectors in the ACT focused on torture and trauma, interpreter use and cross-cultural work.
5. Work with communities to enable community members to influence policy and decision-making, program design and health system planning.

Context:

Community education and advocacy aims to inform policy makers, funders, partners, service providers and the community at large about identified services gaps and systemic barriers which prevent asylum seekers and people from a refugee background thriving. Just as importantly, community education focuses on building understanding and expertise in service systems and empathy and welcome in the community at large.

We also work with community leaders and members to strengthen the voice of people from a refugee background.

Just as importantly we collaborate with community and Governments to ensure that community needs are well understood and new initiative's and programs developed. Partnership is always key to these efforts.

This goal overlaps with Goal 5 Human Rights.

5.Goal four: Community capacity building and casework-Safety, connections, skills, knowledge and justice

Goal Four: Communities, families and individuals affected by torture and trauma are strong, respected, and skilled and can access justice.

Companion House will:

1. Support asylum seekers and people from a refugee background to access justice and social entitlements, navigate systems and make connections.
2. Foster pathways to educational, skills development, healthcare, housing and employment in collaboration with partners.
3. Identify ways to support community leaders and members, emerging communities and young people within their communities to achieve identified goals.
4. Continue to build expertise in community consultation and engagement.

Key strategic actions: Resourcing, partnerships, consultation, casework practice.

1. Seek further resources for casework, particularly unfunded work with asylum seekers, health promotion and community development work.
2. Maintain commitment to ACT Asylum seeker Access Card and seek formal ACT Government partnership and resourcing.
3. Maintain commitment to asylum seeker support with housing, migration processes and financial aid, in collaboration with other services.
3. Partner with other organisations in building employment pathways and continue to fundraise and provide scholarships programs for asylum seekers.
4. Continue to build casework team and processes and focus on accreditation standards.
4. Design services on basis of need and consultation.

Context

Activity to enable individuals and families to build connections and skills, access social entitlements and justice are key elements of all services across Companion House. Much of this activity occurs as part of counselling and primary health.

We will also provide casework to identified groups for the same purpose -asylum seekers, refugee on temporary visas, people with chronic health conditions/disability and families with children are strong priorities. Not all of this casework is funded and our work is dictated by internal capacity. Further resourcing is needed.

We also foster knowledge and skills building in key areas (which are our core business or where there are key gaps in service provision). This may be at individual, family or community level. Priorities are: health service navigation, health promotion, and cultural transition, access to education and employment pathways.

We do this work in partnership with peer mentors, community leaders and bicultural advisors.

Just as importantly, we collaborate with leaders and communities to strengthen connections and community through supporting community structures and events and creating opportunities to foster connections between people

6. Goal five: Human Rights -safety, dignity and justice

Goal Five: Human rights principles and focus on justice underpin our work and our expertise about human rights issues inform policy makers and the community at large.

Companion House will:

1. Plan and deliver our work through a human rights and justice lens.
2. Maintain commitment to Asylum Seeker Access Card, asylum seeker advocacy issues and collaborative work with partners on asylum seeker issues.
3. Articulate needs of survivors of torture and trauma in local support systems through Individual and systemic advocacy.
4. Support asylum seekers and advocate regarding asylum seeker policy and human rights issues, particularly at the local level.
5. Provide individual and systemic advocacy regarding social and economic rights of asylum seekers and people from a refugee background.
6. Articulate the needs and rights of children from asylum seeker and refugee backgrounds.
7. Advocate against torture, genocide and persecution.

Key strategic actions: Documentation and advocacy on human rights issues, work with asylum seekers, commitment to filling gaps in asylum seeker service provision, fundraising, partnerships.

1. Continue commitment to collaborative work with partners in asylum seeker support work, particularly Acute Rental Support Coordination Committee (ARSCC) partners and housing work and seek new collaborations.
2. Document the impact of punitive approaches and human rights violations towards asylum seekers, refugees and survivors of torture and trauma witnessed by Companion House in our work.
3. Work with community members to enable their voices to influence policy and decision making, program design and health system planning.
4. Build expertise in telling asylum seekers and refugee stories in safe, respectful and empowering ways.
5. Build capacity to undertake anti-torture and human rights advocacy.

Context

Companion House was first formed in 1989 by local activists from Amnesty International interested in the nexus between health and human rights. Companion house continues to place a human right and justice lens on our work into our future. This enables us to foster recovery goals and to ensure our service remains focused on core mission.

7. Goal six: Quality Governance and Management -safety, dignity and justice

Goal Six: Companion House is a high quality and responsive service with excellent governance and management.

Companion House will:

1. Continue to invest in a strong professional and supported staff team.
2. Maintain an active and diverse board and staff with skills and knowledge to fulfil their role.
3. Build and maintain strong external partnerships and relationships, including funders, health organisations and FASTT.
4. Maintain commitment to accreditation, accountability and quality improvement.
5. Build and strengthen financial sustainability.
6. Improve our physical space.
7. Develop service models and strategic directions on 4 yearly cycle and maintain an annual operational plan.
8. Ensure service systems are robust to protect privacy and confidentiality as key commitment.

Key strategic Actions –accommodation, accreditation and quality improvement, workforce and financial sustainability, community consultation, cybersecurity and security review.

1. Engage with community and partners around the challenges of the current location of Companion House, with the view to identifying improved facilities (also in 1).
2. Continue to support accreditation processes for clinical and therapeutic services to drive quality and continuous improvement (also in 1).
3. Maintain support for a highly skilled and engaged workforce, including active succession planning.
4. Provide accountability and transparency in governance and management.
5. Build and strengthen financial sustainability.
6. Continue to strengthen formal community consultation strategies and processes.

Context

Companion House is now a medium sized organisation which strives for excellence in quality and governance through strong Board and staff, accreditation processes, collaborations and community consultation and engagement.