

Improving Information Sharing for Effective Social Outcomes

In order to build government structures and activities more around the fundamental needs of individuals and to achieve more effective social outcomes for New Zealanders therefore, how then can cross-government information sharing be improved, taking into account fundamental rights like the privacy protection of individuals? What can be learned from other jurisdictions in that respect? These questions are to be examined in a project commissioned by Public Service Chief Executives under the EIP programme based on a partnership between VUW and the Public Service.

Focus of the Research

Transforming service design with a primary objective to achieve effective social outcomes is one of the key challenges for public management in the 21st Century. Individuals dependent on welfare support often are facing complex problems with interrelated, underlying causes located in various policy domains, such as unemployment, education, health, housing, and justice. Traditionally, it is expected that the individual joins up the existing structures of government in a way that the complexity of the individual's problem can be met. By taking a more holistic viewpoint of the individual's needs however, increased effectiveness of public service provision can be achieved by building government support around those interrelated needs of the individual. Using an integrated case management approach, the Ministry of Social Development already is working towards transformed public service design in order to achieve more effective social outcomes.

To support this paradigm shift of organisation-centric to citizen-centric government, improving information sharing across government is essential. However, with emerging tensions between required information sharing across government and an individual's privacy for instance, fundamental citizens' rights like the protection of privacy and confidentiality need to be taken into account in transforming public service design. Countries with similar jurisdictions to New Zealand, such as the UK, Canada and Australia, are developing strategies to overcome these tensions between goals of service transformation and the privacy protection of individuals, with a current focus on developing cross-government IDM solutions and allowing specific information sharing arrangements for targeted user groups, such as the most disadvantaged in society.

Key objectives and research methodology

The objective of the project is to identify opportunities for improved information sharing across the NZ government in order to achieve more effective social outcomes, without compromising fundamental rights of individuals, such as privacy protection and confidentiality. In order to achieve that objective the research will first need to explore how, under what conditions and to what extent, information related to complex problems of individuals in the wider social policy area (including health, education and justice) is currently being collected, managed and shared within and across government departments. The research would involve qualitative, case-study based research. Secondly, to be able to learn from what is happening in other jurisdictions a document study of international strategies and arrangements for improving cross-government information sharing in the UK, Canada and Australia will be conducted.

These research findings will be discussed and further developed in three focus group meetings with front line staff members, middle managers and user groups respectively, and secondly in a strategic discussion seminar with NZ senior public managers and public officials (under Chatham House rules).

Moreover, a reference group will be established for this project, which will include representatives of stakeholder organisations, such as MSD, MoH, MoJ, SSC, Treasury and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

Planned Timeframe and Deliverables

The timeline for the project is:

- 1) establishment of a reference group in September 2008;
- 2) an *exploration* research phase in which a) empirical case study-based research will be conducted and b) international strategies and arrangements for cross-government information sharing will be explored. Timeframe is 1 September 2008 – 30 April 2009;
- 3) a *solutions-focused* research phase in which research findings from the exploration phase will be discussed and further developed in three focus group meetings and a strategic discussion seminar with key public officials. Timeframe is 1 May 2009 – 30 August 2009

It is proposed that the outputs of the project include:

- Research Report (August/September 2009)
- Summary Report of research findings and recommendations (August 2009)

If you would like to be involved in this project or have any further questions, please contact professor Miriam Lips at the School of Government on (04) 4635507 or Miriam.lips@vuw.ac.nz.