

Service use patterns at a high-volume homelessness service

Unison Housing Research Report No. 4

The report uses longitudinal administrative data to examine service use patterns over a six-year period at Unison's Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) service.

Findings

1 The report shows the proportion of households presenting to Unison for the first time is steadily declining each year. When we view the data by month there is much greater volatility but by June 2018 the proportion of new and return households was approaching parity. Without further data we can only speculate on whether the increasing number of return households is a positive or negative metric of service quality.

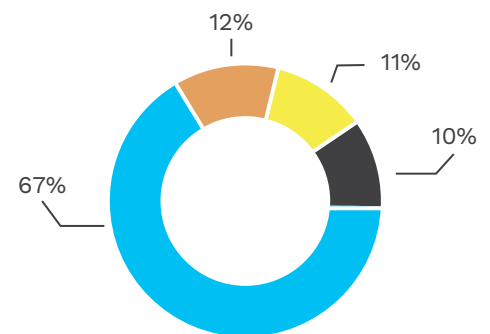
2 Over the six-year period, we found four distinct patterns in the way households use the IAP service:

Overall, 79% of households presented in one year only:

- 67% used the IAP service just once (only one support period in a single year and did not return)
- 12% had multiple support periods but only in one year

21% of households returned over a longer period:

- 11% opened single support periods in multiple years
- 10% returned in multiple years and had multiple support periods in those years



These two groups consumed nearly half of all the support periods (41%) and support days (43%).

3 Although patterns of service use varied between households, the association between household characteristics and the frequency of service use was weak. Indeed, in contrast to previous studies, we found no evidence that a single attribute or set of attributes will predict whether households will return or not.

Recommendations

1 Unison should trial a prioritisation approach based on past service use. Our findings provide strong evidence that this would be a more effective way of breaking the cycle of regular service use than existing approaches that typically prioritise clients with certain personal characteristics. By taking advantage of the rich historical information it holds on households who use the service regularly, Unison, in partnership with RMIT, can identify regular service users and then provide them with priority access to resources including financial assistance, transitional housing, Private Rental Assistance Program and transitional support.

2 Unison should develop a specific service stream that prioritises single-parent households who regularly use the service. Given that single-parent households have low support needs, a rapid rehousing-style intervention would be the most suitable response for this group.

3 Unison should explore a streamlined repeat access process for Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) and consider alternate service options in order to free up HEF resources for other groups.