

4 Field testing

4.1 The purpose of field testing

Three rounds of field testing were undertaken during the redevelopment project, including testing with jurisdictions, funded agencies and service users. The overall aim of the field testing was to test:

- the meaning and relevance of the proposed data items in the field; and
- the feasibility of their collection.

For example, field testing with funded agencies enabled the project team and funding departments to gain an understanding of the business rules and practices of agencies, their data collection methods, current business and information technology systems, and the potential impact of the new data collection proposals. Testing with service users focused on the meaning and relevance of the proposed data items as well as seeking advice on the feasibility and acceptability of collecting proposed data items.

Field testing performed a vital role in each of the highly interrelated project components by, for example:

- informing data development (both data items and data principles for the redeveloped collection);
- facilitating communication between the major stakeholders in the project;
- enabling further information to be gathered about appropriate methods of data transmission; and
- enabling the AIHW and FIG to provide sound advice to the NDA about the redeveloped collection.

Field testing materials were developed by the AIHW in consultation with the FIG.

4.2 Round 1—preliminary field testing

Purpose of Round 1 field testing

The purpose of the Round 1 field testing was to:

- refine the list of data items developed in the preliminary stages of the CSDA MDS redevelopment project;
- obtain an understanding of agency systems and what ongoing collection and full-year service user numbers would mean to them; and
- obtain an understanding of the context in which any data transmission products would operate.

It was anticipated that the results from Round 1 field testing would refine the data items and collection materials before more extensive testing in Round 2, which would involve a wider range of CSTDA-funded agencies and jurisdictional staff.

Methodology of Round 1 field testing

Round 1 field testing began in September 2000 and was completed in February 2001. The field testing involved AIHW project staff visiting a small selection of funded agencies within a number of jurisdictions (in total, 22 funded agencies across five jurisdictions). The jurisdictions involved in the field testing were responsible for identifying funded agencies for participation. Jurisdictions sampled across:

- metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations;
- agencies with different service types and sizes;
- government and non-government funded agencies; and
- funded agencies with specific issues affecting service users of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and Indigenous origin.

For the purpose of Round 1 field testing the AIHW developed a short questionnaire in order to obtain a general understanding of:

- what information funded agencies need and use;
- how funded agencies handle information (i.e. obtain, record, store, update and retrieve it); and
- whether there are new service delivery models in use within the field and how they relate to funding arrangements.

The responses obtained from each visit were collated into an overall report on Round 1 field testing which informed the direction of data development and Round 2 field testing.

Main outcomes of Round 1 field testing

The first round of field testing provided valuable information, not only giving AIHW project staff a better understanding of agency systems and issues, but also in gathering ideas for the content and methodology of the redeveloped CSTDA NMDS collection. For instance, it became clear that throughout the project it would be possible to:

- build up a picture of agency practice, including in paper systems, to indicate how full-year client data can be produced without massive agency systems redesign; and
- develop ways of encouraging funded agencies to use the CSTDA NMDS data items on their administrative forms – to promote data quality and consistency throughout the process.

It also became clear that collection of certain data items, such as health condition/ diagnosis of service users, was unlikely to be feasible. All agencies visited in Round 1 felt that it was too difficult to collect accurate medical diagnoses from clients. This was either because a medical diagnosis had not been given to the agency or because agencies believed that asking clients about their diagnosis may be too intrusive. (For more information on the progress of specific data items following Round 1 field testing, see Chapter 5.)

4.3 Round 2—first pilot field test

Purpose of Round 2 field testing

The key objectives of Round 2 field testing were to:

- examine data collection methodology in each jurisdiction and in a range of funded agency environments within each jurisdiction; and
- discuss issues surrounding a range of key data elements via ‘reality testing’ with funded agencies and service user discussion groups.

During this round of field testing, beginning in July 2001, new data items were thoroughly tested nationally using standard materials developed by the AIHW. Information was also gathered about the current state of agency information systems and ways of minimising the impact of the redevelopment on administrative systems. Round 2 field testing also investigated the likely impact of planned changes on jurisdictional systems.

Methodology of Round 2 field testing

Three types of field testing were conducted in Round 2, along with an additional strand of data development, relating to outcome indicators:

- Jurisdiction field testing with funded agencies
- AIHW field testing with jurisdictions
- AIHW and jurisdiction field testing with service users
- Outcome indicators development (service-specific and service user outcomes)

All Round 2 field testing materials were developed by the AIHW, with input from the FIG.

Jurisdiction field testing with funded agencies

Each jurisdiction was responsible for identifying funded agencies to participate in field testing, sampling agencies with a wide range of characteristics, including service type. The majority of jurisdictions conducted face-to-face interviews with funded agencies using a standard questionnaire developed by the AIHW. Issues discussed included:

- funded agency details and information management practices, such as:
 - definitions of outlet/service provider/organisation;
 - ability to provide information according to CSTDA NMDS service types;
 - current information management practices;
 - preferred data transmission methods; and
 - technology use and experience.
- a wide range of data items and concepts, such as:
 - numbers of service users over time and at points in time;
 - quantity of service for all service types;
 - indicators of support need for service users;
 - residential setting and living arrangements;
 - informal carer arrangements; and

- unmet needs of service users.

Two jurisdictions that did not conduct face-to-face interviews for Round 2 field testing, instead opted to gather feedback through information sessions involving groups of funded agencies.

AIHW field testing with jurisdictions

AIHW project staff conducted interviews with each jurisdiction using a standard questionnaire. The interview was designed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the processes involved in preparing and running CSTDA MDS collections in each jurisdiction, as well as exploring specific data development issues such as:

- service-related questions, including:
 - service type classification (and related output measures);
 - organisational unit level;
 - unique agency identifier;
 - CSTDA funding; and
 - agency role and sector.
- service user-related questions, including:
 - labour force status;
 - location of outlet (i.e. postcode and Statistical Local Area (SLA));
 - location of service user (i.e. postcode and SLA); and
 - main reason for cessation of services.

AIHW and jurisdiction field testing with service users

The AIHW, in conjunction with Disability Services Queensland and the consumer representative on the FIG, organised and conducted a service user discussion session as part of Round 2 field testing. Two other jurisdictions held similar discussion sessions, each discussing the following data item issues:

- residential setting and living arrangements;
- informal carer arrangements;
- individual funding identifier;
- equipment and environmental modifications identifier;
- indicators of service user support needs; and
- service user participation.

Outcome indicators (service-specific and consumer indicators)

As part of Round 2 field testing, all jurisdictions provided input on suitable outcome indicators for the CSTDA program and commented on the associated data items and methods required in order to generate these outcome indicators. This input contributed to the subsequent development by the AIHW of proposed service-specific outcome indicators for all CSTDA NMDS service types and individual service user outcome indicators.

Main outcomes of Round 2 field testing

The results of Round 2 field testing enabled the AIHW and FIG to make recommendations to the NDA about data items for inclusion in Round 3 field testing (see Chapter 5 for further details) and to progress work on outcome indicators (see Section 8.4).

Following Round 2 field testing it was agreed that the following items should *not* proceed to Round 3:

- main language spoken at home;
- unmet needs;
- need for equipment or environmental modifications;
- agency role; and
- outcomes: consumer participation.

It was agreed that the following data items be included in Round 3 field testing:

- date estimate flag (to indicate that date of birth has been estimated and to assist in the accuracy of the linkage key);
- whether or not interpreter services are required for a language other than English (instead of main language spoken at home); and
- snapshot date flag (at least for the first collection, to provide a method for comparing previous data with the one-month data being provided in the planned April 2002 live pilot and full-year data to be provided from July 2002).

A range of clarifications were also incorporated into the Data Guide and other collection materials following Round 2 field testing.

Round 2 field testing confirmed that a flexible approach to the collection of national CSTDA funding data would be required. It was proposed from the outset that this information would be provided by jurisdictions, drawing from administrative or contract databases, rather than directly from funded agencies or service type outlets. Round 2 field testing revealed that relating CSTDA funding to service type outlets would be easy for some jurisdictions (e.g. Western Australia and the Commonwealth) where contracts are specifically designed in terms of CSTDA NMDS service types and harder for others (e.g. Victoria, where contracts are generally written in terms of service activities, which do not relate clearly to CSTDA NMDS service types). The continued use of block grants for some large organisations was a complicating issue for a number of jurisdictions.

Some more general issues were also raised following Round 2 field testing.

First was a twofold general reaction of funded agencies to the redeveloped CSTDA NMDS collection:

- on the one hand, funded agencies did not really seem to have absorbed the fact that the collection was to become ongoing, essentially from April 2002 when the live pilot was planned to commence. This identified the need for jurisdictions to ensure that communication newsletters were getting through to the appropriate people within funded agencies;
- on the other hand, there were also consistent comments about the need for funded agencies to be adequately supported and resourced for any new collection (for instance in terms of computers and training). This resulted in a recommendation to the NDA representatives to explore options in their jurisdiction for supporting funded agencies in the transition to the new collection.

Second, there was a keen interest in and awareness of issues surrounding consumer consent and the collection principles for the new collection. Both service users and funded agencies regularly raised the issue of consumer consent and the comments received were useful in refining the data principles for the CSTDA NMDS collection.

Third, a greater understanding was obtained of the information management methods currently in place as well as the preferred information management methods for funded agencies:

- the dominant information management method in all jurisdictions except Western Australia and the Commonwealth was paper based, sometimes in conjunction with local databases, usually in Microsoft Excel and less often in Microsoft Access. This reinforced the earlier findings in relation to the data transmission strategy, namely that the new collection would need to continue to support a variety of data transmission methods;
- the preferred method of transmission for agencies in most jurisdictions was data entry and transmission software, as long as the costs of such software (e.g. software, training and possibly hardware) were met by the funding department.

Finally, an indication was obtained of the proportion of CSDA-funded agencies that complete the HACC and the CSTDA minimum data set collections. The proportion of funded agencies sampled in Round 2 who also received HACC funding (and therefore participate in the HACC MDS collection) varied from 14% in New South Wales to 50% in the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland.

4.4 Round 3—second pilot field test

Purpose of Round 3 field testing

The goals of Round 3 field testing were to:

- confirm and refine the proposed data items in the new CSTDA NMDS;
- confirm their feasibility of collection; and
- refine their definitions and the wording of associated questions.

Methodology of Round 3 field testing

During Round 3 field testing (November 2001), funded agencies were asked to test the new CSTDA NMDS collection documentation by completing paper forms in relation to a small number of service users. Service user input was also sought during the testing.

Testing with funded agencies

Each jurisdiction was asked to sample CSTDA-funded agencies to ensure that those with varied service types, location, service user characteristics, etc, were included in Round 3 field testing. AIHW analysis of jurisdictions' sampling plans indicated that all service types were represented and a number of service types not adequately represented in Round 2 had been picked up in this field test.

The AIHW developed special field testing forms to enable funded agencies to complete forms, using the associated Data Guide. The field testing forms encouraged agencies to identify issues relating to questions, definitions, and response options, and whether or not

the information requested was routinely recorded and retrievable by funded agencies. Jurisdictions then reported to the AIHW using a specified reporting template.

Methods for undertaking Round 3 field testing varied nationally and included:

- inviting funded agencies to attend workshops based around Round 3 field testing materials;
- mailing out the field testing materials to funded agencies, asking them to complete the forms and mail them back; and
- conducting one-on-one interviews between the funding department and the funded agency, working through the field testing materials.

To maximise agency input, particularly in regional areas, jurisdictions were encouraged to use freecall telephone numbers and/or other accessible feedback methods.

Service user involvement

Three methods for obtaining service user input for Round 3 field testing were proposed:

- jurisdictions could ask agencies to fill out the service user forms in partnership with at least one service user and/or advocate during the field test (a question was included on collection forms to reflect whether or not this was done);
- jurisdictions could conduct service user groups to discuss the collection and forms; and/or
- jurisdictions could ask service user groups to field test with funded agencies and/or service users.

All States and Territories encouraged agencies to complete at least some test forms along with a service user and/or their advocate (i.e. Method 1).

Main outcomes of Round 3 field testing

The main outcomes resulting from Round 3 field testing revolved around two key areas:

- suggestions for improving the collection materials (i.e. Data Guide and collection forms); and
- timing and resources.

Collection materials

While no data items were deleted as a result of Round 3 field testing, the testing did result in a number of other recommendations to clarify data items and simplify and re-order questions on the forms and in the Data Guide.

For example, Round 3 field testing forms enabled funded agencies to record multiple service types for an individual service user on a single service user form. This method was designed to reduce responder burden and essentially mimicked the way a simple database enables a single service user record to be 'attached' to various service types received by the service user. On paper forms, this method in fact proved too complex to be helpful to agencies and was therefore not incorporated into the final collection materials.

Round 3 field testing also resulted in some modification to the range of data items requested for each service type. For instance, a range of service types such as therapy services for individuals, early childhood intervention and counselling would not be asked questions about the hours of service received by service users.

Following Round 3 field testing there were still some items or issues that were problematic where FIG consensus remained difficult. For the problematic data items or issues the AIHW proposed solutions based not only on jurisdiction input from Round 3 field testing but also on technical considerations. The AIHW followed the broad principle of national minimum data sets that a solution be found that is reasonable to all jurisdictions, rather than offering a 'state of the art' solution that is only possible for implementation in one or two jurisdictions. One motivation of the proposed solutions was to avoid the risk of overloading agencies and creating a situation where the entire collection is jeopardised by a small number of controversial data items. At the same time, the solutions represented progress in terms of the information available from the CSTDA NMDS.

The problematic data items or issues were:

- staff hours;
- quantity of service received by service users for each service type (i.e. service quantity measure);
- how to collect information about brokerage and individual funding (relates to questions on service type and individual funding flag); and
- total CSTDA funds.

The agreed solutions to these items are detailed in Sections 5.2 to 5.4 of Chapter 5 (staff hours and total CSTDA funds) and Section 8.4 (quantity of service received and how to collect information about brokerage and individual funding). Solutions were agreed with the possibility that they could be developed further or implemented across a broader range of service types over time.

Sections 5.2 to 5.4 detail changes and amendments made to the final data items as a result of Round 3 field testing. These changes, together with clarifications to the Data Guide, were made to the collection materials prior to national training.

Timing and resources

Following Round 3 field testing a number of jurisdictions expressed the concerns of their funded agencies about the proposed live pilot scheduled for April 2002. Through Round 3 field testing many funded agencies stated that they needed more time to amend collection procedures and prepare for the new CSTDA NMDS. In addition, a number of jurisdictions had experienced delays in developing appropriate optional CSTDA NMDS software for use by funded agencies. In light of these issues the National Disability Administrators asked the AIHW to revise the redevelopment project timetable, the proposed April 2002 live pilot was abandoned, and a new implementation date of 1 October 2002 was set.

4.5 Post field testing—national training

Between April and June 2002, each jurisdiction received training in the new CSTDA NMDS—both data item training and train-the-trainer training, which would enable them to train their funded agencies. In nearly all jurisdictions, a range of service providers and jurisdiction staff attended these training sessions. Training involved participants progressing through a data workbook of exercises, including case scenarios, using the Data Guide. Thus, the training sessions provided a final opportunity to test the clarity of data item definitions and explanatory text. Key collection materials were reviewed and explanatory text refined in light of this training experience.