



To **Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations**

Action Required **For Decision**

Employment Services Stakeholder Engagement – Establishing a User Lived Experience Panel

Timing Please action by **27 February 2026**. The reason is the need to receive and incorporate stakeholder feedback into upcoming policy processes.

Recommendation:

1. That you approve the formation of a department led User Lived Experience Panel.	Approved / Not approved / Please discuss
Minister Rishworth	Date: / /2026
Comments:	

<u>Clearing Officer</u> s 22(1)	<u>Contact Officer</u> s 22(1)
Signature _____ 10 / 02 / 2026 s 22(1) A/g Deputy Secretary Emp & W Ph: s 22(1)	 28 / 01 / 2026 s 22(1) A/g First Assistant Secretary Emp & W Employment Strategy and Policy Ph: s 22(1)

Executive summary:

- On 21 January 2026, you received correspondence from the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister approving the Employment Services Reform Engagement Strategy (the Engagement Strategy). The User Lived Experience Panel (the Panel) is one of 4 channels outlined in the Engagement Strategy, (**MS25-000815** refers).
- The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is seeking your approval to establish the Panel as the first step in implementing the approved Engagement Strategy. The Panel will help embed a user voice in the employment services system, fulfilling 2 engagement priorities, allowing users to influence policy for employment service reform, and as an enduring feature so we know how users are experiencing the system.
- This is the first brief in a series to gain your approval on the detailed elements and decision points for the engagement channels. A briefing on the Employment Services Advisory Group channel will follow this brief.

4. The Panel will aim to be a representative demographic group from the employment services caseload and used to select members for a User Lived Experience Reference Group, User Focus Groups, and other targeted engagement.

Key Points:

5. The Employment White Paper involved extensive consultation with stakeholders, including people with lived experience. It highlights that lived experience often reveals systemic issues and unique challenges faced by some cohorts in the labour market, including accessing employment services.
6. While the department engages with users, these activities are typically one-off or time limited research. There is no enduring mechanism to connect government and the department with system users to understand impacts or test reform ideas.
7. To strengthen the user voice in policy and program design, it is proposed the department establish a Panel to be drawn upon for engagement, such as a User Lived Experience Reference Group, User Focus Groups, and other targeted engagement.
8. The Panel will operate in an ongoing capacity, with regular recruitment to maintain relevancy.
9. The Panel will establish a direct link with employment system users to understand their experience of the current system and guide future reform. On an ongoing basis, and following implementation, the Panel will gather insights to support improvements to the design and operation of the system.
10. Panel members will be recruited through an online Expression of Interest (EOI), published on the department's website, and promoted through civil society peaks and community organisations.
11. We anticipate establishing a panel of approximately 80 members, depending on the volume and suitability of EOI responses. All applicants who submit an EOI will be appointed to the Panel, except where an applicant is assessed as inappropriate or unsuitable.
12. If responses from low-engagement cohorts are insufficient after one week of the EOI opening, a wave strategy will be implemented using targeted SMS and/or email, aligned with users' preferred communication methods. This approach is consistent with the department's established research recruitment practices, where randomised SMS or email is sent to targeted cohorts to boost participation.
13. Diversity of experience and location will be prioritised, including representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with disability.
14. The aim is to achieve broad representation across current and recent employment service users, drawing on experience from previous EOI recruitment initiatives such as the Parents Advisory Group, the Department of Social Services Carer Strategy, and similar government programs.
15. The department website will provide FAQs, a privacy notice, and background information for applicants.
16. The department will liaise with civil society peaks to implement the Panel, including leveraging their networks to generate awareness of the opportunities and feedback received.

User Lived Experience Reference Group

17. A User Lived Experience Reference Group (the Group) is proposed to:
 - share their lived experience related to employment services
 - provide advice on service reform, policy development, and program delivery
 - help develop inclusive, effective services that ensure lived experience perspectives are embedded in decision-making
 - strengthen accountability and transparency in government processes.
18. The Group will be formed by inviting 10–12 people from the Panel.
19. The Group will meet at least 3 times over 12 months. Members will be paid \$230 per 2–3-hour meeting. This rate is based on sitting fees in other external bodies.
20. Meetings will be facilitated by staff with backgrounds in psychology and group facilitation and members will receive onboarding, peer support, and wellbeing resources.
21. The Group's facilitators will implement a trauma-informed approach to ensure safe, respectful, and empowering engagement for people who have faced adversity. This approach will be guided by key principles: prioritising safety, maintaining clear communication and boundaries, fostering mutual support, recognising members as active contributors, and respecting diverse experiences. Trauma informed practice and duty of care arrangements will support member disclosures and distress.
22. Discussion topics will initially focus on barriers in the existing system, assessments, and mutual obligations.
23. Before presenting each topic to the Group, facilitators will follow the Protocol for the Ethical Conduct of Human Research by actively assessing ethics risks and ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, cultural safety and respectful engagement in all discussions and activities.
24. Members' privacy and data protection will also be ensured.
25. Terms of Reference will define the Group's role, decision-making, and confidentiality.
26. Following each Group meeting findings will be collated after being de-identified and shared with the expert Advisory Group and relevant stakeholders to inform future planning and decision-making.

User Focus Groups

27. People from the Panel may be invited to join User Focus Groups on specific topics to provide targeted feedback. Focus groups will be one-off groups.
28. User Focus Groups will include 6–8 participants, meet online for 1–2 hours, and be facilitated by the department.
29. Participants will receive a one-off \$150 gift card, consistent with current user research practices.
30. User Focus Groups facilitators will follow trauma-informed principles to ensure participants feel safe, respected, and empowered, especially when discussing sensitive topics.

31. Facilitators will follow the Protocol for the Ethical Conduct of Human Research by assessing ethics risks and ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, cultural safety, and respectful engagement.
32. User Focus Groups composition will be considered. For example, a CALD-only group may be formed to explore revised approaches to assessment, mutual obligations, and servicing for people with language barriers.

Other targeted engagement

33. Other targeted engagement with users, such as interviews, desktop research and quantitative research for example, short surveys may be used depending on priority and subject matter.

User Lived Engagement Outputs

34. After each Group meeting, focus group, or targeted engagement, the team will prepare a report summarising key insights and preserving user feedback.
35. These reports, or specific insights from the reports, will be shared with other engagement channels outlined in the Engagement Strategy. The feedback from user experience will be an important tool for the Employment Services Advisory Group, which will be comprised of policy experts, business representatives, peak bodies, unions, and leaders from civil society and the community. The ability for the group to consider lived experience/user feedback when considering policy settings, building on ideas, and identifying and addressing stakeholder concerns will support better outcomes for users.

Public Sensitivities:

36. The department will ensure support arrangements (interpreters, follow-up care) are in place to manage potential risks and to enable a diverse range of users to participate in discussions.
37. There is an expectation the information discussed by the Group and User Focus Groups will be confidential, but there is a risk that participants may choose to discuss information out of the confidential setting. To help manage this risk, all members will be asked to sign a Deed of Confidentiality.
38. Probity, conflicts of interest and public disclosure will be managed when engaging with civil society peaks and community organisations.

Consultation: Yes

39. The department has consulted with a range of agencies on their experiences in direct user engagement including the Department of Social Services, Services Australia, Office for Youth, Department of Health, and the National Indigenous Australians Agency.
40. The proposed Panel will operate similarly to the Department of Social Services lived experience process guiding Inclusive Employment Australia, with minor differences in recruitment and user representation.

41. Civil society peaks and community organisations will be consulted on the approach of the Panel, the Group, and the User Focus Groups to leverage their experience and knowledge of system users. They will not be involved in direct selection of Panel members but will be consulted on process and provided updates on progress and key findings.

Legal advice / Legislative impacts:

42. s 42(1)

Financial impacts:

43. The department will fund the Panel and ongoing user engagement. Costs will vary depending on the number of meetings and focus groups held. Estimated costs include: \$20,000 for 3 Group meetings and 3 User Focus Groups per year.

Background:

44. s 47C(1)

45. The department's priority will be engaging directly with people using employment services and their providers. Historically, engagement with individuals has occurred indirectly through civil societies, peaks, or providers. To shift this approach, appropriate arrangements must be established to support ethical, inclusive engagement and ensure individuals are remunerated for their time and effort.
46. The establishment of the Panel will support the government's commitment to ensure that employment services are tailored to individual needs and lead to enduring and meaningful employment.

Stakeholder Implications:

47. It is anticipated the proposed User Lived Experience Reference Group, User Focus Groups, and other targeted engagement initiatives will generate positive outcomes by strengthening stakeholder engagement and fostering inclusive collaboration.

Communications:

48. The department will continue to work with your office on a communication strategy for the engagement channels that ensures announcements are coordinated, messaging is consistent, and timing is appropriate.

Attachments:

Nil.



Australian Government

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Standard BriefTo **Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations**Action Required **For Decision**

Employment Services Reform Stakeholder Engagement – Establishing an Employment Services Advisory Group

Timing Please action by **3 April 2026**. The reason is to enable establishment and first meeting of the Advisory Group ahead of your public reform announcements.

Recommendations:

1. That you **approve** the Employment Services Advisory Group's (the Advisory Group) role as outlined in this brief and draft Terms of Reference (at **Attachment B**).

Approved / Not approved / Please discuss

2. That you **approve** the proposed members and **agree** to sign the letters inviting members to join the Advisory Group (at **Attachments A and C** respectively).

Approved / Not approved / Please discuss

Minister Rishworth

Date: / /2026

Comments:

Clearing Officer

s 22(1)

Signature _____ 26 / 03 / 2026

s 22(1), Deputy Secretary

| Emp & W |

Ph: s 22(1)

Contact Officer

s 22(1)

First Assistant Secretary

| Emp & W | Labour Market and

Industry Policy

Ph: s 22(1)

Executive summary:

1. This brief provides a detailed outline of the proposed Advisory Group, its role and proposed scope. The Advisory Group was approved as part of the Employment Services Reform Engagement Strategy (the Engagement Strategy) and endorsed by the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister in correspondence to you, dated 21 January 2026.
2. Proposed Advisory Group members are detailed in **Attachment A** and the draft Terms of Reference is outlined in **Attachment B**.
3. Should you agree to appoint members directly, a draft letter is attached for your approval and signature at **Attachment C**.

Key Points:

4. On 19 December 2025 you agreed to the Engagement Strategy and wrote to the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister for his endorsement (**MS25-000815** refers), which was granted on 21 January 2026 (**MC26-000259** refers).
5. The Engagement Strategy will be complemented by a public discussion paper inviting broader input from the community launched through a keynote address. Subject to your approval, the Advisory Group will be established prior to the 2026–27 Budget and your keynote address. Timing of the keynote and discussion paper launch is to be agreed with the Prime Minister but anticipated for shortly after the Budget.
6. The Advisory Group will be established as one of the 4 channels set out in the Engagement Strategy to engage key stakeholders in policy development. This brief is the second in a series of briefs to implement the engagement channels. The first brief outlines the proposed User Lived Experience Panel in detail (**MS26-000020** refers). The next brief will outline targeted engagement, including proposed roundtables and briefing on the First Nations engagement channel will follow.
7. The Advisory Group will be time limited to support policy development and will cease at the end of 2026. Key features proposed:
 - You may wish to chair the first meeting of the Advisory Group and then delegate to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Employment and Workforce to co-chair subsequent meetings with another invited member of the Advisory Group. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations will work with you and your office to select an appropriate co-chair.
 - The department will lead key discussions on design of reform, provide secretariat and support for the Advisory Group, and will work closely with you and your office on meetings and discussions.
 - The Advisory Group include up to 18 members and provide feedback on priority topics outlined in the Future Employment Services System Framework. It will provide advice and input but will not hold any decision-making powers.
 - As key policy elements of the new model are developed in consultation with you, the Advisory Group will provide an opportunity to test policy settings, build on ideas, identify competing objectives and trade-offs in the proposed model, and mitigate concerns on relevant settings.
 - There will be at least 6 meetings of the Advisory Group in 2026, with the ability to arrange others as needed. A schedule of proposed meetings and topics for discussion will be tested and agreed with your office.
 - It is proposed that a new fit-for-purpose group will be established to support implementation and continuous improvement in 2027 – this is likely to include some but not all of the members of the Advisory Group. The department will brief you further on this at the end of 2026.
8. The suggested Advisory Group members (**Attachment A**) are a diverse set of leaders from community, provider and employer peaks, civil society organisations, unions representatives and academics with lived experience and expertise relating to employment services. A list of potential members has been included, along with alternate suggestions across various cohorts and specialisations.

9. The proposed members have been selected to reflect the diversity of the Workforce Australia caseload, ensuring experts, representatives and those with lived experience are given a seat at the table. First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with disability are overrepresented on the caseload and need to be represented as policy is discussed. This depth of experience and insights is vital to better understand the needs of people using employment services. To strengthen the robustness of perspectives, the Advisory Group will also include representatives from employer and provider peak bodies. A snapshot of member expertise is outlined in **Attachment D**.
10. The Advisory Group will receive direct feedback from the other stakeholder engagement channels and in turn, the Advisory Group will inform topics considered by other stakeholders. The engagement channels (User Lived Experience Panel, Advisory Group, First Nations, and targeted engagement) are designed to support and complement one another. For example, the unique experience of users will be gathered through activities and settings designed to make people with lived experience feel comfortable sharing their insights (through the lived experience panel). This information will be provided to the Advisory Group as they consider broader systemic policy issues to better understand impacts of policy settings on job seekers. This approach also means there will be multiple ways that stakeholders contribute to employment services reform.

Engagement Channel	Purpose
Employment Services Advisory Group	Test the employment services system model and inform detailed design.
User Lived Experience	Test elements of employment services with users, feedback incorporated into design.
First Nations Engagement	Test elements of the employment services system model and its impact on First Nations peoples. Included in the design of the system.
Targeted Engagement (including Roundtables)	Test elements of the employment services system model and examine how reforms may affect different cohorts and issue-focused perspectives operationally.

11. Participation in the Advisory Group is voluntary, with no sitting fees provided (unless part of a hardship claim), consistent with the expectation that engagement with government forms part of the core business of peak bodies and academic representatives. Travel costs for face-to-face meetings will be funded by the department.
12. Meetings will take place online, but face-to-face meetings may be arranged as needed. The department will work with your office to confirm date and location of the first meeting and support your attendance.
13. The department proposes to publish high level topic discussion and outcomes from each Advisory Group meeting on the department's employment services reforms webpage, in line with standard government practice to provide transparency around the process and reduce the number of Freedom of Information requests in relation to the Advisory Group.
14. In line with your initial agreement, the Advisory Group will consider topics related to the employment services system from a whole of system perspective.

- The inaugural meeting would provide an opportunity for you to outline the government's commitment to reform, the framework and direction and to establish your expectations for the Advisory Group's role. You would have the opportunity to set the focus and work of the Advisory Group on the key design elements that are needed to deliver on the government's vision. This may assist the Advisory Group to remain forward-looking, rather than focusing on the problems with the current system canvassed in the Hill Inquiry. In this inaugural meeting you may wish to seek member's initial views on the key design features that a reformed system needs to address first, within the broad reform framework that you outline.
- Subsequent meetings would include discussion on specific aspects of employment services reform. Topics could include:
 - new assessment and triaging process
 - improving the quality of services
 - improved online servicing
 - market design elements for Stream 2 provider contracting
 - design of the new stream 3 services
 - how to deliver user choice, quality and sustainable employment outcomes.
- The Advisory Group is expected to want to raise mutual obligations and compliance settings. It is proposed these issues are addressed at later meetings once the system settings are clear.

Administrative obligations:

15. Advisory Groups appointed or approved by government are required to be tabled in Senate Order 15 and publicly listed on the Organisations and Appointments Register.
16. Senate Order 15 reports 3 times a year prior to each estimates hearing. The reporting includes data on appointments made during a defined period, remuneration, start/end dates and state/territory of residence and vacancies. Gender Balance reporting will also be required annually. The current list of potential members 60% is female.

Public sensitivities:

17. There is an expectation the information discussed by the Advisory Group will be confidential, but there is a risk that members may choose to discuss information out of the Advisory Group setting. To help manage this risk, it is proposed that high level discussion topics and outcomes be published on the department's employment services reforms web page, providing participants with an acceptable summary on which to engage their broader stakeholders. All members will also be asked to sign a Deed of Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration.
18. The size of the Advisory Group has been kept deliberately small to support focused engagement. Broader stakeholders will be engaged through targeted channels including ministerial roundtables and targeted consultations through existing departmental and government forums like the First Nations Reference Group and Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee.

Consultation: Yes

19. Learnings from the National Indigenous Australians Agency First Nations Reference Group, consultation undertaken by the Department of Social Services on the Disability Employment Services reform, and Services Australia's engagement with users have been applied in designing the stakeholder engagement approach and the Advisory Group.

Legal advice / Legislative impacts:

20. s 42(1)

Financial impacts:

21. Departmental funds will be used to facilitate member travel for in person Advisory Group meetings. Flights, airport transfer, and meals for members and staff are expected to cost approximately \$25,000 (for 15 travellers).

Background:

22. s 34(3)

23. The Advisory Group will provide:

- access to key stakeholders to seek feedback on policy issues
- an understanding of current stakeholder priorities and potential reactions to policy decisions
- robust discussion between stakeholders to directly oppose, support or build on ideas.

24. In developing these options, we have reviewed membership of other committees and advisory groups, including the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee and the First Nations Reference Group, to ensure some cross-representation, while not replicating existing groups. Where proposed members are on other committees, it is noted in their profiles (**Attachment A**).

25. Sector engagement and expert advisory panels have been a strong feature of previous employment services reform. In designing Workforce Australia, similar expert panels were created in 2018, 2019 and 2020 with responsibilities ranging from design, testing policy concepts and post-implementation.

Stakeholder implications:

26. Additional stakeholders may wish to be included as members on the Advisory Group. The Engagement Strategy includes 4 channels of engagement to ensure a range of views are heard.

Attachments:

- A:** Proposed membership of Employment Services Advisory Group
- B:** Employment Services Advisory Group Terms of Reference
- C:** Draft invitation - Employment Services Advisory Group
- D:** Proposed member matrix

Document 3 (Pages 11-23) deleted under sections 47C(1) and 47F(1) of the FOI Act.



Terms of Reference

Employment Services Reform Advisory Group

These Terms of Reference set out the role and objectives of the Employment Services Reform Advisory Group (the Advisory Group). They take effect from the establishment of the Advisory Group and will be reviewed as required to ensure the remit of the Advisory Group remains fit for purpose.

1. Purpose

- The Advisory Group will support the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations (the Minister) and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) by providing advice on the redesign and reform of the employment services system.
- The Advisory Group will provide ideas and feedback on key elements of a new employment service system and its implementation, and represent the perspective of users and key stakeholders in the system.

2. Roles and responsibilities

The department

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department):

- Will co-chair the Advisory Group meetings.
 - The Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Employment and Workforce will represent the department and act as Co-Chair alongside an invited Advisory Group member.
- Will provide secretariat services for the Advisory Group, including but not limited to facilitating meetings, preparing and distributing minutes of meetings, and any communication about the Advisory Group with members and other stakeholders.
- Will prepare relevant papers, analysis of data and a view of the services system to support the Advisory Group's deliberations and advice.
- Will facilitate the sharing of information, where relevant, between the Advisory Group, the Lived Experience Working Group and other departmental engagement forums related to employment services reform.

- May review the Terms of Reference and Advisory Group membership, including ending the term of a member or the Advisory Group, or altering the composition and structure of the Advisory Group with approval from the Minister.

The Co-Chairs

The Co-Chairs will:

- Set the agenda and where appropriate invite members to nominate items for discussion.
- Invite observers or guests to meetings of the Advisory Group from time-to-time, to provide specific knowledge, expertise or information on specific matters the group is considering.
- Ensure all members have an opportunity to contribute to discussion items.
- Summarise outcomes and proposed advice from the Advisory Group on key topics.
- Verify the accuracy of meeting minutes and discussion summaries prior to distribution to members and/or publication.

3. Membership

- Members will be selected for their technical expertise and practical experience across the employment services landscape and to reflect the diversity of the Workforce Australia caseload, ensuring representation from First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and people with disability.
- Members will also include representatives from relevant peak bodies, including employer and provider peak bodies.
- Membership of the Advisory Group is voluntary and no remuneration is attached to participation.
- Compensation for participation in the Advisory Group is not expected, but may be considered by the department if participation is likely to cause hardship. Written requests are required and will be received by the secretariat.

4. Scope

- The Advisory Group will work with the department to provide advice to the Minister on key elements of a reformed employment services system. The focus of the Group will be on the design of a future employment services system within the parameters set by Government and be guided by the directions outlined in the Australian Government response to the House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services Inquiry, the Working Futures White Paper and subsequent Government statements.

- The Advisory Group will not have authority to make decisions about employment services policy.
- Examples of work that is outside the scope of the Advisory Group:
 - reform of the welfare system, including income support arrangements,
 - decisions, commitments or announcements about employment services reform.

5. Conflict of Interest/Confidentiality

- As members will have access to confidential data and information, all members will be required to sign a Deed of Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration prior to attending their first meeting.
- Advisory Group members must not diverge from official meeting summaries provided by the department when discussing the work of the Advisory Group with external parties or stakeholders.
- Advisory Group members must seek approval from the co-Chairs before sending a delegate to represent them. If approved, the delegate will need to provide a completed Deed of Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration ahead of the meeting.

Confidentiality

- Where information is marked with confidential markings or is otherwise designated by the department as confidential, Advisory Group members will be taken to know or ought to know that the information is confidential and is considered Confidential Information for the purposes of the Deed of Confidentiality.
- If at any time a member is unsure if the information is considered confidential, they must seek clarification prior to discussing or disseminating information obtained as part of their role on the Advisory Group.

Conflict of Interest

- At the start of each meeting the co-Chairs will identify any conflict of interest declared and will ask members for any further declarations prior to the meeting commencing.
- Members will not be provided with the minutes for any agenda item they have declared a conflict of interest for.

6. Timing

- This Advisory Group will be established in April 2026. It will be reviewed at the end of 2026.

- At least 6 meetings of the Group will occur before the end of 2026. Additional meetings may be held as needed.
- The Advisory Group may be asked to review and provide feedback on documents out of session.
- Meetings are expected to take place primarily online, via Teams.

7. Administration

- Agenda and information papers will be circulated via email prior to the Advisory Group meeting, as required.
- A summary of the discussions will be recorded and where relevant circulated to participating members by the secretariat.
- A high-level summary of the discussion will be published on dewr.gov.au after each meeting.
- An issues and action register will be maintained and provided to members, where possible within one week of the meeting.

Contact details

Secretariat email – [s 47E\(d\) @dewr.gov.au](mailto:s47E(d)@dewr.gov.au)

8. Travel and Accommodation

- The department will reimburse reasonable costs for travel associated with in person meetings where members are required to travel interstate, in line with the [Whole-of-Australian-Government \(WoAG\) policy](#), and Australian Government the [ATO Travel Rates](#) as set out in *Table 2. Reasonable amounts for domestic travel expenses*.

9. List of Members

TBA

Document 5 (Pages 28-29) deleted under sections 22, 47C(1) and 47E(d) of the FOI Act.

Document 6 (Pages 30-32) deleted under sections 47C(1) and 47F(1) of the FOI Act.

Employment Services Advisory Group – 22/23 April meeting

Objective: To establish the Employment Services Advisory Group and hold the first meeting before Budget and the Ministers Press Club Address on 27 May 2026.

Considerations:

- Membership of the Advisory Group has yet to be finalised (**MS26-000060**)
- It can be beneficial for the first meeting of a new group to occur in person to allow for introductions, connections and to facilitate discussion.
- The Minister is available on 22/23 April to attend a possible first meeting of the Advisory Group.
- An in-person meeting will require some members to travel. The majority of members reside in Sydney, followed by Melbourne (locations are listed in **Attachment A**).
- Stakeholders have not been informed of their consideration as potential members of the Advisory Group. The meeting invitation will be the first point of contact.

Meeting Agenda: The first meeting is expected to include: introductions, discussion of Scope and objectives for the Advisory Group, Employment Services Reform strategy and framework, and input into critical inclusions for a public discussion paper.

Risks for in person meeting in April:

- The timeframes are tight, which may cause concern with stakeholders, especially as travel will be required. Best practice timeframes from invitation to meeting for an Advisory Group is 4 weeks (20 days). Subject to relevant approvals, the invitations will provide around 7 working days notice during a holiday period.
- Invitations will be sent during easter/ school holidays when people often out of office. School holiday dates are included in **Attachment A**.
- Travel to an in-person meeting needs to be considered in the context of current geopolitical factors, including fuel costs, concerns about fuel supply, and increasing costs of basic necessities.

Alternate options

- An online meeting is standard practice for Advisory Groups of this nature and would be a suitable alternative to an in-person meeting.
- An initial meeting could be held online with a follow up in person meeting with more substantive policy topics for discussion at a later date.
- An online meeting may improve the likelihood of attendance by members, noting that members will not be paid for their time under current funding arrangements for the Advisory Group.
- It also reduces the risk of criticism of the use of resources for the meeting.

Timeline in person meeting 22/23 April

Activity	Date
Brief Approval - Members confirmed - Location decided - Co-chair	3 April 2026 (public holiday – easter weekend) 7 April 2026 (action date)
Finalise Venue and catering (tea,coffee, etc)	8 April 2026
Invite members to be part of the Advisory Group - indicate first meeting date - ask to provide contact for travel arrangements - confidentiality and conflict agreement signed before first meeting	9 April 2026
Await response and answer enquiries	9 - 16 April 2026
Organise travel for members in line with APS policy	9 - 16 April 2026
Proposed meeting	22/23 April 2026
Press Club Address	27 May 2026

Attachment A - Background

Member locations

s 47C(1),s 47F(1)

Term 1 School Holidays 2026

Australian Capital Territory	3 April to 20 April
New South Wales	7 April to 17 April
Queensland	3 April to 19 April
South Australia	11 April to 26 April
Victoria	3 April to 19 April
Tasmania	18 April to 3 May



Terms of Reference

Employment Services Reform Advisory Group

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1. Purpose

- The Advisory Group will support the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations (the Minister) and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) by providing advice on the redesign and reform of the employment services system.
- The Advisory Group will provide ideas and feedback on key elements of a new employment service system and its implementation, and represent the perspective of users and key stakeholders in the system.

2. Roles and responsibilities

The department

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department):

- Will co-chair the Advisory Group meetings.
 - The Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Employment and Workforce will represent the department and act as Co-Chair alongside an invited Advisory Group member.
- Will provide secretariat services for the Advisory Group, including but not limited to facilitating meetings, preparing and distributing minutes of meetings, and any communication about the Advisory Group with members and other stakeholders.
- Will prepare relevant papers, analysis of data and a view of the services system to support the Advisory Group's deliberations and advice.
- Will facilitate the sharing of information, where relevant, between the Advisory Group, the User Lived Experience Panel and other departmental engagement forums related to employment services reform.

- May review the Terms of Reference and Advisory Group membership, including ending the term of a member or the Advisory Group, or altering the composition and structure of the Advisory Group with approval from the Minister.

The Co-Chairs

The Co-Chairs will:

- Set the agenda and where appropriate invite members to nominate items for discussion.
- Invite observers or guests to meetings of the Advisory Group from time-to-time, to provide specific knowledge, expertise or information on specific matters the group is considering.
- Ensure all members have an opportunity to contribute to discussion items.
- Summarise outcomes and proposed advice from the Advisory Group on key topics.
- Verify the accuracy of meeting minutes and discussion summaries prior to distribution to members and/or publication.

3. Membership

- Members will be selected for their technical expertise and practical experience across the employment services landscape and to reflect the diversity of the Workforce Australia caseload, ensuring representation from First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and people with disability.
- Members will also include representatives from relevant peak bodies, including employer and provider peak bodies.
- Membership of the Advisory Group is voluntary and no remuneration is attached to participation.
- Compensation for participation in the Advisory Group is not expected, but may be considered by the department if participation is likely to cause hardship. Written requests are required and will be received by the secretariat.

4. Scope

- The Advisory Group will work with the department to provide advice to the Minister on key elements of a reformed employment services system. The focus of the Group will be on the design of a future employment services system within the parameters set by Government and be guided by the directions outlined in the Australian Government response to the House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services Inquiry, the Working Futures White Paper and subsequent Government statements.

- The Advisory Group will not have authority to make decisions about employment services policy.
- Examples of work that is outside the scope of the Advisory Group:
 - reform of the welfare system, including income support arrangements,
 - decisions, commitments or announcements about employment services reform.

5. Conflict of Interest/Confidentiality

- As members will have access to confidential data and information, all members will be required to sign a Deed of Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration prior to attending their first meeting.
- Advisory Group members must not diverge from official meeting summaries provided by the department when discussing the work of the Advisory Group with external parties or stakeholders.
- Advisory Group members must seek approval from the co-Chairs before sending a delegate to represent them. If approved, the delegate will need to provide a completed Deed of Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration ahead of the meeting.

Confidentiality

- Where information is marked with confidential markings or is otherwise designated by the department as confidential, Advisory Group members will be taken to know or ought to know that the information is confidential and is considered Confidential Information for the purposes of the Deed of Confidentiality.
- If at any time a member is unsure if the information is considered confidential, they must seek clarification prior to discussing or disseminating information obtained as part of their role on the Advisory Group.

Conflict of Interest

- At the start of each meeting the co-Chairs will identify any conflict of interest declared and will ask members for any further declarations prior to the meeting commencing.
- Members will not be provided with the minutes for any agenda item they have declared a conflict of interest for.

6. Timing

- This Advisory Group will be established in April 2026. It will be reviewed at the end of 2026.

- At least 6 meetings of the Group will occur before the end of 2026. Additional meetings may be held as needed.
- The Advisory Group may be asked to review and provide feedback on documents out of session.
- Meetings are expected to take place primarily online, via Teams.

7. Administration

- Agenda and information papers will be circulated via email prior to the Advisory Group meeting, as required.
- A summary of the discussions will be recorded and where relevant circulated to participating members by the secretariat.
- A high-level summary of the discussion will be published on dewr.gov.au after each meeting.
- An issues and action register will be maintained and provided to members, where possible within one week of the meeting.

Contact details

Secretariat email – [s 47E\(d\)@dewr.gov.au](mailto:s47E(d)@dewr.gov.au)

8. Travel and Accommodation

- The department will reimburse reasonable costs for travel associated with in person meetings where members are required to travel interstate, in line with the [Whole-of-Australian-Government \(WoAG\) policy](#), and Australian Government the [ATO Travel Rates](#) as set out in *Table 2. Reasonable amounts for domestic travel expenses.*

9. List of Members

TBA

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Pre-brief meeting with the Minister – 4 pm, Thursday 23 April 2026

No	Item
1	Timeline for stakeholder engagement to support employment services reform Engagement across 2026 will use a multi-channel approach to feed into decision-making and phased reform development from Budget 2026–27 through to Budget 2027–28. A detailed timeline is included at Attachment A. Key items include: • April – First Advisory Group. Subsequent meetings would typically take place every 6 to 8 weeks from this point. • 12 May – Federal Budget announced with details of the specific Employment Services Reform measures to be included with Press Club Address in late May. ○ Decision point: Option to convene an Advisory Group meeting following Budget but ahead of Press Club Address to provide update on Discussion Paper. Alternatively, the second meeting could take place shortly after the Press Club Address to provide members with a detailed briefing on Budget measures following their announcement. • Late May – Press Club Address, Discussion Paper release • June – August – opportunities for community engagement through local members, meetings or providers when the Minister is travelling. ○ Minister to consider policy work packages to agree to greater detail on policy settings and directions and to inform to policy detail that the department discusses with Advisory Group. • October – November potential roundtables with employers, First Nations, Providers and community peaks and organisations (TBD). These would draw on Note: In parallel s 22(1)
2	Update on establishing the Employment Services Advisory Group and arranging first meeting Advisory Group membership: • All invitees have accepted the invitation to become members. • 4 members have advised they are unable to travel for the inaugural meeting (Robert Fitzgerald AM; Tristram Gray (Kmart); Deborah Cerasa (Amplify Alliance), and Huy Truong). Following advice from your office, dial-in arrangements will be provided to these members. Logistic arrangements for first meeting: • The meeting is locked in for Adelaide CPO office from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm on Thursday 30 April, with dial-in arrangements available. Light refreshments will be offered from 9:30 am ahead of the meeting. • Travel booking to support member attendance is underway. s 47C(1)

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	• s 47C(1) Note: a formal meeting brief with detailed talking points for each agenda item will be provided at the end of this week.
3	Proposed meeting outcomes and strategy Agenda to include the following items (full draft agenda at Attachment B; detailed briefing for each agenda item is at Attachment C): Agenda item 1: Minister's welcome • Use the Minister's welcome to build trust in the Government's commitment to employment services reform guided by genuine collaboration and set the scene for the Advisory Group's role in the reform process. • Provide clear framing on the purpose/scope of reform and the Advisory Group's advisory role, including the 2026–27 engagement timeline and how/when the Minister and Chair will engage, so expectations about influence and decisions are realistic. Agenda item 2: Chair's Opening Remarks • Outcome sought: Overview of operation of the Advisory Group, provide context on the approach to confidentiality, conflicts of interest, shared understanding of the Group's role, scope and ways of working to support delivery of objectives. • Seek agreement to the Terms of Reference. Agenda item 3: Member introductions • Outcome sought: Members given opportunity to briefly introduce themselves and state their interest in employment services reform. Agenda item 4: Vision for a reformed system (Minister to lead) • Outcome sought: Members understand the context/drivers for reform and provide members with a high-level overview of the context and drivers of reform and reform directions based on key elements of the Future Employment Services System Framework. ○ Include Case for change and reform context ○ Introduce the core ideals, service streams and key service elements of the new employment service under the Framework ○ Note that the Budget will includes some key steps towards achieving a reformed system with details to be announced in late May • Decision Point - a one-page version of the Framework could be shared in the room. PM authority being sought in the Budget Finalisation letter and may not

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occur in time to support sharing of the Framework (in person only and taken back at the end of the meeting)

Agenda item 5: Employment Services Reform Engagement Strategy (Chair to lead)

- Outcome sought: provide members with an overview of the overall engagement strategy and their role within it. Discuss how the different engagement channels (incl. lived experience and public consultation) will operate and connect with the Advisory Group.
- Provide outline of the public discussion paper including key topics it will cover based on the framework and questions it will seek feedback on. Note that due to timing, members will not be given an opportunity to provide feedback in drafting of the paper.
 - Note that submissions to the Discussion Paper process will be published on the department's website and that a thematic summary of responses will be published after the submission process closes and once analysis of submissions is complete.
- Paper on stakeholder engagement including key engagement channels to be provided to members to support this item.
-

Agenda item 6 – Next steps (Chair to lead)

- Outcome sought: maintain engagement and momentum with clear next steps, and indicative timing for the next meeting (likely June at earliest following the National Press Club address).

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Attachment B

Employment Services Advisory Group

DRAFT Agenda

LOCATION: Adelaide Commonwealth Parliament Offices (Level 27, Festival Tower, 20 Station Road, Adelaide SA).

DATE AND TIME: Thursday 30 April 2026, 10am –12pm, with light refreshments ahead of the meeting from 9:30am

Agenda Item	Description	Presenter	Time (min)
	WELCOME TO COUNTRY	Traditional Owner	15
1	Minister's Welcome - Acknowledgement of Country - Outline purpose, scope, objectives and responsibilities for this group and its role in reforming the employment services system - Provide overview of what is happening in 2026 - Outline of how Minister Rishworth will engage with the group and the role for the Co-Chairs	Minister Rishworth	20
2	Chair's Opening Remarks Discussion of how the group will operate including Terms of reference, conflicts of interest and confidentiality	Simon Duggan Secretary, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (Chair)	15
3	Member introductions	All members	15
4	Vision for a reformed system - High level discussion of approach to designing system with services based on people's distance to labour market, maintaining tension in the system, core ideals, etc. - Outline key guardrails and parameters set by government. - Soft introduction of elements to later be announced in Budget. - Outline of why these are the first steps – getting the online and government services right, better assessment and triaging to better target effective	Minister Rishworth	35

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	services, Stream 3 trial to take a different approach to those furthest from labour market. • <i>Allow time for some questions/discussion from the group</i> • Suggest a high-level version of the Framework is shared in the room (in person only and taken back at the end of the meeting)		
5	Engagement Strategy (Paper to be prepared) • Outline engagement strategy inc. different engagement channels and public engagement • Refer to NPC address to occur end May • Outline approach to discussion paper including key topics • <i>Allow time for some questions/discussion from the group</i>	Chair	30
6	Next steps/Close • Proposed cadence of work, timing of next meeting and what issues will be presented/discussed at the next meeting	Chair	5

Member meeting pack to include:

- Terms of Reference
- List of Members
- Engagement Paper

Advisory Group Members

Name	Organisation
Robert Fitzgerald AM	Age Discrimination Commissioner, AHRC
Tiarne Crowther	Australian Services Union
Jenny Crosbie	Centre for Inclusive Employment
Kylie Penehoe	National Indigenous Employment and Training Alliance
Tori McGregor	Community and Public Sector Union
Jeff Borland AO	University of Melbourne
Helen McCabe	Future Women
Tristram Gray	Kmart Group
Kate Allingham	Economic Justice Australia
Jessica Graham-Franklin	Paul Ramsay Foundation
Kathryn Mandla	National Employment Services Association
Jodie Trembath	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Travers McLeod	Brotherhood of St Laurence
Megan Lilly	Jobs and Skills Australia
John Stainsby	Australian Council of Social Services

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Attachment C

Detailed Agenda Notes

Agenda item 1: Minister's Welcome

Outcomes sought	Build trust in the Government's commitment to collaborate with stakeholders in the reform process. Set scene for the role of the Advisory Group
Key points	<u>Reform of employment services</u> - The government has committed to reforming employment services to better meet the needs of individuals, employers, communities, and the economy. - This is an important second term priority for government and want to ensure that we actively engage with critical stakeholders and broader public in ensuring the employment services system is fit for purpose. <u>Role of the Advisory group</u> - Contribute to the reforms of employment services by providing expert advice to support service design and test policy elements. - The focus of the Group will be on the design of a future employment services system within the parameters set by Government and be guided by the directions outlined in the Australian Government response to the House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. - Members will gain insights into system complexities, provide feedback, and directly contribute to the design of future employment services system. - Members will review and provide feedback on inputs received through other engagement channels including the new User Lived Experience Panel. <u>Overview of what's happening in 2026</u> - The department will undertake extensive consultations with stakeholders over 2026 to inform the design settings of key elements of the new employment service. - A wide range of stakeholder engagement will be launched by me after the May Budget and will be progressed through various channels, including through a public discussion paper - s 22(1)
Handling Advice	<u>Minister's engagement and role of Chair</u> Minister attending first meeting to talk through her vision for reform and demonstrate commitment to genuine engagement. Department will lead future meetings with the Group, though the Minister may attend further meetings, as required.

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	The Chair (Simon Duggan) will: • Set the agenda and where appropriate invite members to nominate items for discussion. • Invite observers or guests to meetings of the Advisory Group from time-to-time, to provide specific knowledge, expertise or information on specific matters the group is considering. • Ensure all members have an opportunity to contribute to discussion items. • Summarise outcomes and proposed advice from the Advisory Group on key topics. • Confirm the accuracy of discussion summaries prior to distribution to members and/or publication.
Sensitivities	• The Minister's attendance at meetings may elevate expectations that advice will directly translate into policy decisions; careful framing will be needed to manage stakeholder expectations.

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Agenda Item 2 – Chair’s opening remarks

Outcome sought	Agreement on the operational arrangements for the Advisory Group. Shared understanding of the Advisory Group’s role, scope and ways of working. Establish a collaborative approach among members to support delivery of the Advisory Group’s objectives.
Key messages	• The Advisory Group will work with the department to provide advice to the Minister on key elements of a reformed employment services system. • The Group will focus on future system design within Government-set parameters, guided by the Australian Government response to the House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services Inquiry, the Working Futures White Paper, and subsequent Government decisions. • The Advisory Group does not have decision-making authority on employment services policy, but your views are important and will be considered in the advice to government. • The Secretary will represent the department and serve as Chair. • Relevant information will be shared across the Advisory Group, the User Lived Experience Panel and other engagement forums. • Members have been appointed for their practical experience across the employment services landscape as well as the groups they represent. • Members must sign a Deed of Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Declaration before attending their first meeting. • Confidentiality is important as information shared will pertain to policy advice to be provided to the government ahead of future Budget processes. There may also be commercial interest in this that needs to be managed for probity purposes. • Confidential information will be managed in accordance with the Deed, and conflicts of interest will be declared at the start of each meeting; members may be asked to excuse themselves from some discussions where there is a clear conflict.
Sensitivities	• s 47G(1)(b) • The definition of Confidential Information outlined in the Deed is consistent with definitions included in departmental and government contracts. Members are expected to treat any information shared with the Advisory Group as confidential. • s 47C(1)

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Agenda item 4: Vision for a reformed system

Outcomes sought	Members understand the context and drivers of reform and are informed about the key elements of the proposed Employment Services System Framework.
Key points	• Introduction by the Minister of the vision for a reformed system including: ○ Case for change and reform context (e.g. referencing issues with the current system and government commitment for reform amid a fiscally constrained environment) ○ Core ideals, service streams and key service elements of the new employment service. This advisory group will be tasked with working through key aspects of this over its terms to ensure that reforms are well designed and effective. ○ Note that the Budget will includes some key steps towards achieving a reformed system with details to be announced in late May. • The department recommends providing a high-level summary of the Future Employment Services System Framework as a handout to Group members in the meeting, to be returned at the conclusion of the meeting (s 47C(1)).
Sensitivities	• This meeting takes place before the announcement of the 2026-27 Budget and the Minister's keynote speech so will not include detail on Budget measures. • Members may want more details on the new reformed service—potentially including the commencement date—than will be provided in this item. • Expectations to be managed through communicating opportunities to inform system settings in future meetings.

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Agenda item 5: Employment Services Reform Engagement Strategy

Outcome sought	Advisory Group members understand the engagement strategy and their role within the broader approach. Members feel assured that policy settings will be informed by real world experience and evidence. Further, that feedback will influence policy development, with transparency about how input has informed decisions.
Key points	• The Government is undertaking targeted and meaningful engagement to ensure employment services are effective, responsive, and focused on participant experience and outcomes. • Engagement is being undertaken through four targeted channels, tailored to different stakeholder groups: the Employment Services Advisory Group, a User Lived Experience Panel, First Nations engagement and targeted engagement with stakeholders. • The Minister will launch public consultation through an address scheduled for late May, followed by the release of a public discussion paper to invite feedback from the broader community.
Sensitivities	• Members may have differing views about the Advisory Group's role and level of influence. Clear messaging will be required to position the Group as advisory—not a decision-making body—and to set realistic expectations about how advice will be considered within government processes. • Members are likely to hold differing priorities on reform sequencing and design features. An outline of known stakeholder views and talking points will be provided.

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Agenda item 6: Next Steps

Outcomes sought	Retain momentum and engagement of Advisory Group members.
Key points	• Reinforce the role of the Advisory Group. • Establish clear and effective linkages between Advisory Group discussions and other engagement channels including the Lived Experience panel • Future topics for discussion will include: ○ Input to public discussion paper ○ Approach to Mutual Obligations ○ How to better engage with employers • Next meeting likely in June (TBC)
Sensitivities	• The Minister's attendance may raise expectations of ongoing, direct engagement. Clarity regarding the frequency of ministerial attendance beyond the inaugural meeting will be important. • Expectations regarding in-person attendance and regularity of meetings, including advance scheduling notice.

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Attachment D

Feedback on employment services

Stakeholder	Organisation	Views on Employment Services Reform
Debra Cerasa CEO of Amplify Alliance	Amplify Alliance	s 47G(1)(a)
Kathryn Mandla CEO of NESA	National Employment Services Association (NESA)	s 47G(1)(a)
Kylie Penehoe CEO of The Alliance	National Indigenous Employment and Training Alliance (The Alliance)	s 47G(1)(a)
Jodie Trembath Director for Skills, Employment and Small business at ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)	s 47G(1)(a)
Tiarne Crowther	Australian Services Union (ASU)	s 47G(1)(a)

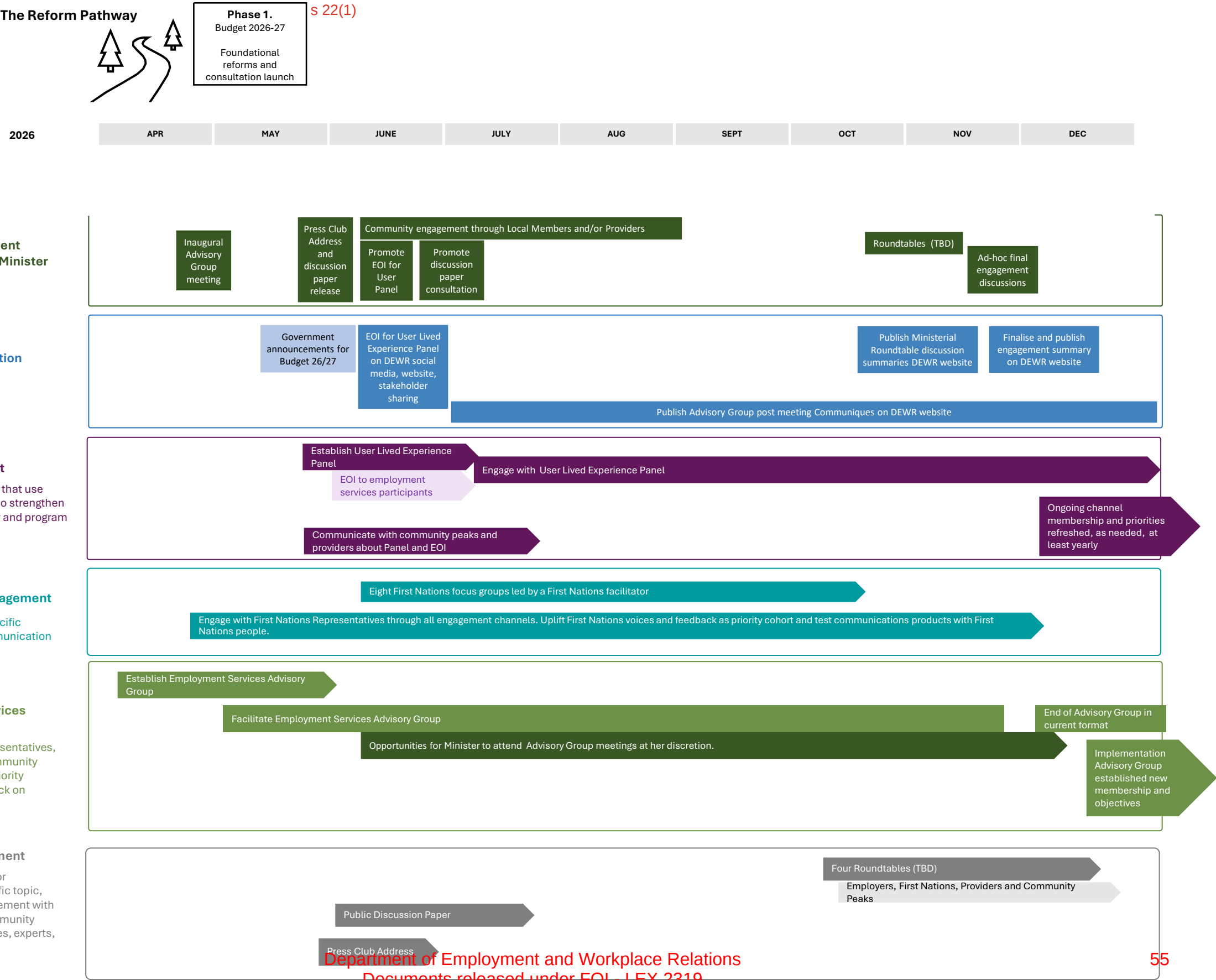
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National Policy and Advocacy Lead at ASU		
Tori McGregor Media Advisor at the CPSU	Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU)	s 47G(1)(a)
John Stainsby Senior Policy Advisor in Employment at ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)	s 47G(1)(a)
Kate Allingham CEO of EJA	Economic Justice Australia (EJA)	s 47G(1)(a)
Megan Lilly Deputy Commissioner at JSA	Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)	JSA is an independent statutory body that provides labour market and skills system advice to government.
Jeff Borland AO academic and labour economist at the University of Melbourne	University of Melbourne	s 47G(1)(a)
Jessica Graham-Franklin Lead, Economic Dignity at PRF	Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF)	s 47G(1)(a)

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Jenny Crosbie Interim Director, Centre for Inclusive Employment	Centre for Inclusive Employment	s 47G(1)(a)
Huy Truong co-founder and Executive Chairman of Thrive Refugee Enterprise	Thrive Refugee Enterprise	s 47G(1)(a)
Robert Fitzgerald AM Age Discrimination Commissioner	Age Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission	Support inclusive workplaces by reducing ageism and bias, promoting multigenerational workforces, and enabling people of all ages to participate in meaningful work to boost productivity and address skills gaps.
Travers McLeod Executive Director of BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL)	s 47G(1)(a)
Helen McCabe Managing Director of Future Women (FW)	Future Women (FW)	s 47G(1)(a)
Tristram Gray Chief People and Corporate Affairs Officer at Kmart Group	Kmart Group	s 47G(1)(a)

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Employment Services Reform Engagement Approach

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Consultation on directions for a new employment services model within the parameters set by the Government.

This builds on the reform principles outlined in the Employment White Paper and evidence drawn from the Select Committee Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services.

Embedding user voice in employment services, contributing to better outcomes for users.

Inclusive and flexible engagement mechanisms that consider needs of specific stakeholders.

Testing the Future Employment Services System Framework and incorporating stakeholder feedback, where appropriate.

Helping to build stronger and ongoing relationships as iterative reform is delivered.

ENGAGEMENT CHANNELS



User Engagement

Participants engage through a user lived experience reference group, focus groups, interviews and surveys on specific elements of employment services reform.



First Nations Engagement

First Nations facilitators will deliver dedicated focus groups across Australia to understand the experience and priorities of First Nations People.



Targeted Engagement

A flexible mechanism for engagement on a specific topic, cohort or region. Also using existing forums and groups to lessen the burden on stakeholders.



Employment Services Reform Advisory Group

Meetings with expert leaders on future employment services settings within parameters set by government.



Public Discussion Paper

Inviting informed stakeholder input on proposed employment services reform.

Employment Services Reform Engagement Approach

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Consultation on design and implementation for a new employment services model within the parameters set by the Government. This builds on the reform principles outlined in the Employment White Paper and evidence drawn from the Select Committee Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services.

Embedding user voice in employment services, contributing to better outcomes for users.

Inclusive and flexible engagement mechanisms that consider needs of specific stakeholders.

Building stronger and ongoing relationships with stakeholders in the reform process as it is designed and implemented.

Seeking contributions from across the community to realise the government's vision for reform of the employment services system.

ENGAGEMENT CHANNELS



User Engagement

Participants engage through a user lived experience reference group, focus groups, interviews and surveys on specific elements of employment services reform.



First Nations Engagement

First Nations facilitators will deliver dedicated focus groups across Australia to understand the experience and priorities of First Nations People.



Targeted Engagement

A flexible mechanism for engagement on a specific topic, cohort or region. Also using existing forums and groups to lessen the burden on stakeholders.



Employment Services Reform Advisory Group

Meetings with expert leaders on future employment services settings within parameters set by government.



Public Discussion Paper

Inviting informed stakeholder input on proposed employment services reform.



Australian Government
Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations

Employment Services Reform

Communication strategy

May – June 2026

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Overview of approach

Element	Summary
Purpose	Promote the Employment Services Reform engagement opportunities following Minister Rishworth's National Press Club address.
Objectives	• Build awareness of reform priorities • Deliver clear and timely communication • Be mindful of the broader communications landscape • Maintain a single source of truth through the reform webpage • Encourage participation in engagement opportunities
Strategic approach	Use coordinated, audience-focused communication to connect launch announcements with clear calls to action, drive audiences to the reform webpage, and support participation in consultation and engagement activities.
Key engagement opportunities	Discussion Paper, Lived Experience Panel expression of interest, Employment Services Reform Advisory Group, Minister-led community forums, and local Member events.
Channels and tactics	• Media: targeted media activity, supporting products and alignment with reform milestones • Website: reform landing page, new sub-pages, announcement content and homepage promotion • Social media: DEWR Facebook and LinkedIn, supported by Workforce Australia and Parent Pathways channels • Community engagement: Minister-led forums and local Member activities • Stakeholder and provider: correspondence, provider notices, forums and peak engagement • Internal: intranet content, Secretary messaging and executive updates
Success measures	Stronger awareness, timely and consistent delivery, increased traffic to the reform webpage, and participation in consultation and engagement activities.

Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this communication strategy is to promote the Employment Services Reform announcements in May 2026, starting with an address by Minister Rishworth at the National Press Club and subsequent public engagement.

This plan covers communication activities between 27 May and 30 June 2026. Activities outside this timeframe will be covered in subsequent plans to be provided mid-June.

Background

On 27 May 2026, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, will address the National Press Club (NPC) in a speech about Employment Services Reform. The Minister will announce the reform direction, several new budget measures as well as opportunities for the public to engage with the reform process.

This strategy covers the below engagement opportunities that will follow the Minister's NPC speech:

1. Discussion Paper
2. Lived Experience Panel Expression of Interest (EOI)
3. Employment Services Reform Advisory Group
4. Minister led Community forums
5. Local MP events/forums.

Objectives

1. **Build awareness of reform priorities:** promote the government's employment services reform agenda through clear and targeted key messages.
2. **Deliver clear and timely communication:** ensure communication activity is consistent, coordinated and released at appropriate times for each audience.
3. **Be mindful of the landscape:** deliver communication activity that is considerate of the timing of other employment communications.
4. **Maintain a single source of truth:** encourage target audiences to visit dewr.gov.au/employment-services-reform for current and accurate information related to employment services reform activities.
5. **Encourage participation in engagement opportunities:** clearly communicate the suite of engagement opportunities available to the public, including how and when to get involved, using the appropriate channels for each audience.

Audience

Primary audience/s	Secondary audience/s
• Job seekers • First Nations participants • Employers, businesses, civil society peaks and unions	• Employment services providers • Academics and experts

Strategy

Timing of each of the tactics covered in this strategy are incorporated into [Appendix A: Communication activities](#).

Stakeholder engagement

This engagement supports the design and delivery of employment services reform by creating structured, opportunities for users, First Nations peoples, providers, employers, peak bodies, experts and civil society to inform policy development, implementation and continuous improvement. It is delivered through four complementary channels:

1. A User Lived Experience Panel to test reform elements with service users
2. Dedicated First Nations engagement to ensure culturally informed input
3. A Ministerial Employment Services Advisory Group to provide high-level expert advice
4. Targeted departmental consultations to capture cohort- and issue-specific perspectives.
5. Community engagement by Minister Rishworth and local MPs

Together, these channels combine online and face-to-face methods to gather feedback at key points, demonstrate how input is used, and build durable relationships and confidence in the reform process.

The stakeholder engagement approach is available at [Appendix B: Stakeholder engagement](#).

Media

The media team will develop a targeted media approach to support the Employment Services Reform announcements following the Minister's National Press Club address. This will be undertaken in close consultation with relevant policy areas and the Minister's Office to ensure messaging is clear, accurate and aligned with government priorities, timing sensitivities, and broader reform milestones.

Media activity will focus on raising awareness of the engagement channels announced at the National Press Club, including the Discussion Paper, the Lived Experience Panel expression of interest process, and the establishment of the Employment Services Reform Advisory Group. Media planning will be aligned with the Minister's Employment Services Reform community forums and key program milestones to maximise reach and impact at critical points in the reform process.

Media will identify and progress appropriate opportunities, which may include media releases, opinion pieces, talking points, question and answer material, and other supporting products as required. Media

activity will be coordinated with broader department and ministerial communications and will remain responsive to emerging issues and evolving announcements as the reform program progresses.

Social media

Social media activity following the Minister's National Press Club address will cover the opportunities to engage the public in the reform process, including the Discussion Paper and Lived Experience Panel EOI. Social posts will also inform the public of the Advisory Group.

The department's Facebook and LinkedIn accounts will serve as the primary channels for all communication. Supporting communication will be published on the Workforce Australia and Parent Pathways social media channels.

Social media activity, including date and subject have been incorporated into [Appendix A: Communication activities](#).

Website

Updates will be made to the [Employment Services Reform page](#)¹ to align with the announcements made in Minister Rishworth's Press Club Address.

New sub-pages are being created to cover:

- Discussion paper, with a link to the department's Consultation Hub, Auslan videos and Easy Read versions
- [Lived Experience Panel](#)², linking to the EOI form and including [FAQs](#)³
- Employment Services Reform Advisory Group.

A mock-up of proposed landing and Discussion Paper pages design is at [Appendix C: Website content](#).

Following the Minister's speech, there will be an Announcement published on the department's website and Employment Services Reform will be added to the Featured tiles on the dewr.gov.au homepage.

Minister-led community forums

Following the Press Club Address, Minister Rishworth and Assistant Minister Gorman will engage with local communities in town hall style events across the country. Minister-led community forums will present the Government's vision for the future mainstream employment service and invite stakeholders to contribute to the design settings for this future service within the parameters set by Government.

Minister Rishworth will (TBC) hold events in:

¹ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-services-reform>

² <https://www.dewr.gov.au/preview-link/node/17600/b77458fd-9054-4e84-953e-5cffb18bb77f>

³ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/preview-link/node/17609/1cd71932-2d2a-4504-b2b0-443b83a96fc5>

- Newcastle/Hunter
- Wollongong/Illawarra
- Northern Tasmania

Assistant Minister Gorman will hold events in:

- Logan/Brisbane
- Broadmeadows/North-Western Melbourne
- Broome
- Mirrabooka/Perth-North

Responsible Minister for the following locations is to be confirmed:

- Darwin
- Cairns

To support the Ministers' attendance at these events, the department is developing a kit of assets including fact sheets/explainers covering FAQs, case for change, budget measures and engagement opportunities, letter head, PowerPoint template, social media tiles, digital forum invitations, forum agenda and Teams background.

Local Member events

In addition to the town halls, Minister Rishworth will invite local Members to engage with their communities and electorates to promote the engagement opportunities around employment services reform.

These events will allow a significant community outreach program to support and promote awareness of the reforms in communities around Australia.

The department will create materials for Minister Rishworth to provide to local Members to support their activities and promotion. This will include fact sheets/explainers, social media tiles and generic promotional images.

The specific locations are to be confirmed by the Minister's Office.

Provider communication

Provider communications activities will ensure employment services providers receive clear, timely updates on the Government's reform agenda and information on how to engage with the process. Together, they build awareness of key announcements and maintain a consistent line of sight to next steps as the reform program progresses. Provider communication activities include:

- **CEO letter** (employment services provider CEOs and peak body CEOs) issued 13 May will outline Budget measures to improve the employment services system and support for future reform. The letter will also reference further announcements to be made at the Minister's NPC speech.

- Provider communications including a **CEO letter**, **General Provider Correspondence** and **Provider Portal notice** detailing the announcements made regarding employment services reform during the Minister's NPC speech. Provider Portal communication will specifically promote the Discussion Paper and the opening of the Lived Experience Panel expression of interest, and encourage individual submissions to ensure frontline workers have their say on the reforms
- A **Workforce Australia Virtual Forum** will be held to provide updates to providers and peaks on recent announcements.
- **Regular individual Peaks CEO meetings** with senior departmental executives are held monthly. These meetings will be used to reinforce messaging, further promote the engagement channels, and discuss elements of the reforms where relevant.

Peaks/other communication

Correspondence will ensure employment services providers, peak bodies and unions receive clear, timely updates on the Government's reform agenda and how to engage with the process.

Planned communication activities include:

- Civil society peaks (EJA, ACOSS and the APC) and Business Peaks (ACCI, BCA, COSBOA) will receive **departmental correspondence** highlighting the Budget measures, the Minister's NPC announcements specific to reform and a call-to-action request to assist the department in promoting the Discussion Paper and EOI Lived Experience Panel.
- Correspondence to Jobs and Skills Councils that includes information on the Budget Measures, Minister's NPC announcements specific to reform and a call to action to assist the department to promote the Discussion paper to their members.
- The department's job coordinators and local state/territory office network will be utilised to promote the call to action for regional and community stakeholders.

Other Government agencies

- In line with the Prime Minister's authority letter (MC26-000219), the department has established mechanisms to ensure our engagement approach leverages existing engagement mechanisms to ensure consultations are streamlined and minimise consultation fatigue in the sector and stakeholders. This includes engagement through monthly IDC forums, which brings together Deputy Secretaries from key agencies to support a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to employment services reform. This is complemented by fortnightly cross-agency meetings at the SES Band 1 and 2 level, with participation from DEWR, DSS, NIAA, Services Australia, Treasury, Finance and Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- The Agency Heads Interdepartmental Committee (AHIC) on Employment Services Reform, comprising the Secretary of DSS and the CEOs of Services Australia and NIAA provides

overarching strategic direction, system stewardship, and consideration of cross-portfolio impacts.

- In agreement with the Minister's Office, as per the authority instructions, the department is sharing the draft of the public discussion paper and key messages before they are released with PM&C.

Visual identity

To support the communication of Employment Services Reform, a new visual identity has been created. This uses colours and elements from the department's brand, while ensuring Employment Services Reform has its own unique identity.



The visual identity will be used across all communication materials relating to the Reform, including on the department's website.

Key messages

These will be updated following the Minister's Press Club address on 27 May 2026.

Risks and sensitivities

Risk	Mitigation
Stakeholders and the public may perceive the pace of reform as too slow, leading to frustration or disengagement.	Provide clear, regular updates through owned channels, particularly the Employment Services Reform webpage, outlining what has been announced, what consultation is underway, and next steps in the reform process.

Providers and provider peaks will have expectations of clarity on timing of reforms to take effect, particularly contract extensions and proposed start date of a new model to support their own workforce and business planning.	Careful consideration to timing of announcements of contract extensions at a suitable time to reduce risk of conflating contract extensions with reforms. This is important as reform is still subject to decisions of government.
Stakeholders may have unrealistic expectations about the level of co-design or immediate policy change available through consultation activities.	Clearly articulate the purpose, scope and limitations of each engagement activity, including what decisions feedback will inform and what decisions have already been made. Reinforce this messaging consistently across all materials, events and correspondence.
Other engagement related announcements may compete with or dilute reform messages, particularly for job seekers.	Closely coordinate communication timing across branches and with the Minister's Office to minimise overlaps and ensure appropriate spacing between sensitive communication.
Some stakeholders may expect immediate or indefinite changes to mutual obligations as part of the reform process.	Be upfront and consistent about current policy settings, while clearly explaining how consultation feedback will inform future system design. Avoid language that implies immediate change where it is not intended.
Low awareness of, or engagement with, consultation opportunities among key audiences.	Use targeted promotion through trusted channels such as providers, peaks and state networks. Reinforce calls to action throughout the consultation period and extend submission timeframes where required.
Media or stakeholders may misinterpret reform announcements, resulting in inaccurate or negative coverage.	Prepare and align clear key messages, Q&As and supporting materials in advance, and ensure rapid coordination across media, social and stakeholder communication following the National Press Club address.
Some audiences, including First Nations peoples, may face accessibility or inclusion barriers when engaging with consultation materials.	Ensure approaches are culturally appropriate and inclusive by providing accessible formats (such as Easy Read and Auslan) recognising diverse communication preferences, and supporting culturally safe engagement methods. Clearly promote multiple pathways for participation and ensure accessibility and inclusion information is consistently signposted across all channels.

Evaluation

- Increased traffic to the Employment Services Reform web page from 27 May to 31 July 2026 compared with the two preceding months.
- Key messages included in all communication materials
- Click through rate from communication activities to the reform webpage
- Engagement rate on social media communications.

Document version control

Version number	Date	Author
0.1	8 May 2026	Strategic Communication
0.2	15 May 2026	Strategic Communication

Approvals

Name	Title	Date
s 22(1)	Assistant Secretary, Communication and Media Branch	11 May 2026
s 22(1)	Assistant Secretary, Employment System Strategy Branch	12 May 2026
s 22(1)	First Assistant Secretary,	18 May 2026

Appendix

- [Appendix A: Communication activities](#)
- [Appendix B: Stakeholder engagement strategy](#)
- [Appendix C: Website content](#)

Appendix A: Communication activities

Date	Item	Activity	Channel	Delivery team	Clearance	Status
11 May 2026	Pre-Budget	Social media	DEWR Facebook and LinkedIn	Social Media team	s 22(1), Director, Campaigns and Social Media	Live
13 May 2026	Budget outcome	Social media linking to overall departmental budget measures.	DEWR Facebook and LinkedIn	Social Media team	s 22(1), Director, Campaigns and Social Media	Live
13 May 2026	Budget	CEO letter	Letter	Customer Experience and Engagement Division	Customer Experience and Engagement Division	Sent
14 May 2026	Budget wrap up	Social media linking to overall departmental budget measures.	DEWR Facebook and LinkedIn	Social Media team	s 22(1), Director, Campaigns and Social Media	Live
27 May 2026	Press Club Address	Speech	Press Club	Minister Rishworth's office	Minister's Office	In development
27 May 2026	Press Club Address	Media release	Media centre	Media team	Minister's Office	In development
27 May 2026	Reform general, NPC Address, Discussion Paper, Panel EOI, Advisory Group	Web updates to ESR page and creation of new sub-pages for each item. Feature tile on DEWR homepage.	DEWR website	Digital Content team and Strategic Communication team	Employment Services Reform Taskforce	In development
27 May 2026	Discussion paper	PDF published	DEWR website	Digital Content team and Strategic Communication team	Minister's Office	In development

Date	Item	Activity	Channel	Delivery team	Clearance	Status
27 May 2026	Discussion paper	Converlens consultation opens	Converlens	Employment Systems Reform Policy team Digital Content team	Employment Services Reform Taskforce	In development
27 May 2026	Lived Experience Panel EOI	Submission form live	DEWR website and Qualtrics	Digital Content team and Strategic Communication team Group User Experience team	Customer Experience and Engagement Division	In development
27 May 2026	Reform general, NPC Address, Discussion Paper, Panel EOI, Advisory Group	Social media Post to include a synopsis of the main announcements made by Minister Rishworth. Link to ESR webpage	DEWR Facebook and LinkedIn. Reshare on Workforce Australia and Parent Pathways	Social Media team	Minister's Office	To be developed
28 May 2026	Reform general, NPC Address, Have your say	Encouragement of individual submissions	CEO letter, General Provider Correspondence and Provider Portal notice	Customer Experience and Engagement Division	Customer Experience and Engagement Division	In development
28 May 2026	Reform general, NPC Address, Discussion Paper, Panel EOI	Civil society peaks and Business Peaks correspondence	Email	Reform Governance and Engagement team	Employment Services Reform Taskforce	In development
28 May 2026	Reform general, NPC Address, Discussion Paper, Panel EOI	Jobs and Skills Councils correspondence	Email	Reform Governance and Engagement team	Employment Services Reform Taskforce	In development
28 May 2026	Reform general, NPC Address Discussion Paper, Panel EOI, Advisory Group	Announcement	DEWR website	Strategic Communication team	Minister's Office	To be developed
28 May 2026	Reform general	Intranet article	DEWR Intranet	Corporate Communication team	Employment Services Reform Taskforce	To be developed

Date	Item	Activity	Channel	Delivery team	Clearance	Status
29 May 2026	Reform general	Executive video update	DEWR Intranet	Corporate Communication team	Employment Services Reform Taskforce	To be developed
1 June 2026	Lived Experience Panel EOI	Social media	Separate posts on: DEWR Facebook and LinkedIn Workforce Australia Facebook & LinkedIn Parent Pathways Facebook	Social Media team, Design team, Strategic Communication team, Communication and Media Branch	Minister's Office	In development
3 June 2026	Discussion paper	Social media	DEWR Facebook and LinkedIn Workforce Australia Facebook and LinkedIn	Social Media team, Design team, Strategic Communication team, Communication and Media Branch	Minister's Office	To be developed

Appendix B: Stakeholder engagement

Employment Services Reform Engagement Approach

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

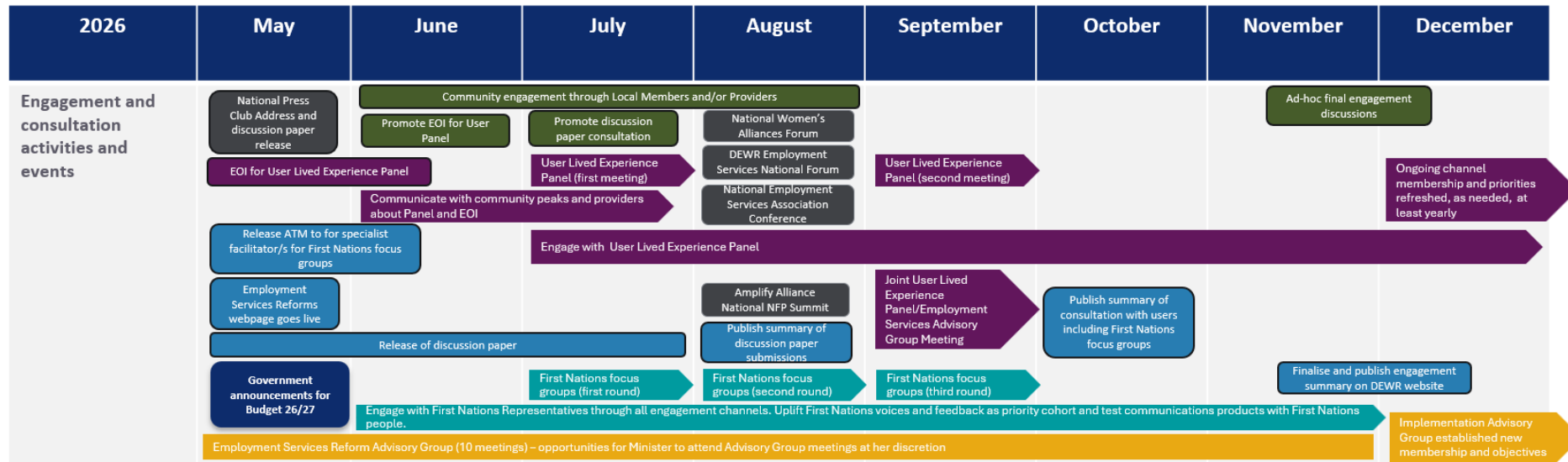
Consultation on design and implementation for a new employment services model within the parameters set by the Government. This builds on the reform principles outlined in the Employment White Paper and evidence drawn from the Select Committee Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services.

Embedding user voice in employment services, contributing to better outcomes for users.	Inclusive and flexible engagement mechanisms that consider needs of specific stakeholders.	Building stronger and ongoing relationships with stakeholders in the reform process as it is designed and implemented.	Seeking contributions from across the community to realise the government's vision for reform of the employment services system.
---	--	--	--

ENGAGEMENT CHANNELS

 User Engagement Participants engage through a user lived experience reference group, focus groups, interviews and surveys on specific elements of employment services reform.	 First Nations Engagement First Nations facilitators will deliver dedicated focus groups across Australia to understand the experience and priorities of First Nations People.	 Targeted Engagement A flexible mechanism for engagement on a specific topic, cohort or region. Also using existing forums and groups to lessen the burden on stakeholders.
 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group Meetings with expert leaders on future employment services settings within parameters set by government.	 Public Discussion Paper Inviting informed stakeholder input on proposed employment services reform.	

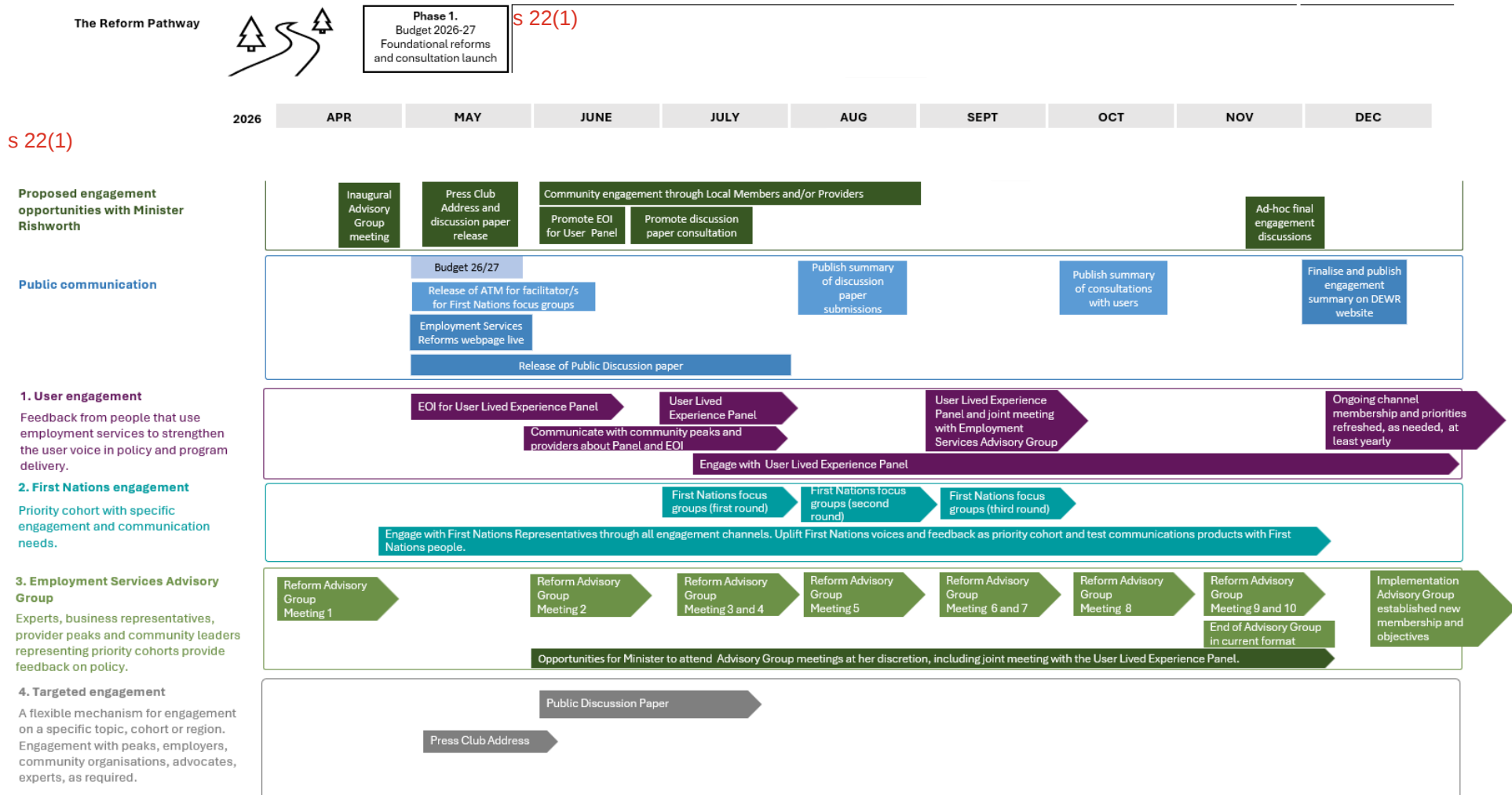
Overview of key events and Ministerial touchpoints across policy and stakeholder engagement: May-December 2026



s 22(1)



Detailed outline of stakeholder engagement for Employment Services Reform to December 2026



Appendix C: Website content

*Website content shown here is a placeholder only, and website content will be provided for review and clearance at a later date.



Australian Government

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

[Consultations](#)
[Ministers](#)
[Programs and initiatives](#)

Note: Images are placeholders only and subject to change

[Home](#)
[About us](#)
[Skills and Training](#)
[Employment](#)
[Workplace Relations](#)

Employment services reform

Employment services reform

Announcements

Articles

Resources

Introductory paragraph regarding the Australian Government's commitment to reforming employment services lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

This page provides information and updates on the progress of employment services reform and links to further information.

On this page:

- Employment services reform (what's changing)
- Employment services reform discussion paper
- Stakeholder engagement
- Expressions of Interest: Lived Experience Panel
- Employment Services Advisory Group
- Steps towards reform



Employment services reform (what's changing)

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Minister Rishworth's National Press Club speech →

How to get involved

[Minister Rishworth's National Press Club speech →](#)

How to get involved

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Employment services reform discussion paper

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[Read the discussion paper →](#)
[Make a submission →](#)

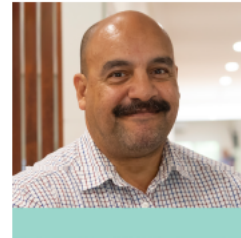
Stakeholder engagement

To support our reform work, we continue to engage with people who use employment services.

Our engagement is designed to ensure the voices and experiences of people who use employment services are central to shaping a system that is simpler, more effective, and responsive to community needs. Employment services will have a user voice, in its design, implementation, and continuous improvement.

Community organisations, academics, policy experts, employment services providers, and peak body representatives will also help shape future employment services.

Throughout the year, we will seek views on directions and potential settings for a future system through targeted consultation.



Expressions of Interest: Lived Experience Panel

We are seeking people who use Workforce Australia services, including those who have recently left, to join a Lived Experience Panel. The opportunity is open to those who are interested in sharing their experiences to help improve employment services for the future.

The government is committed to building more inclusive and responsive employment system. This Panel will bring together the insights of people from many different backgrounds who have used employment services.

[Find out more about the Lived Experience Panel →](#)
[Submit your Expression of Interest →](#)

Employment Services Advisory Group

The Employment Services Advisory Group will provide expert advice as the reform work progresses.

The Group has diverse experience and expertise across a range of industries. They will provide feedback on policy design, offer strategic insights and directly share their points of view.

[Visit the Employment Services Advisory Group web page for more information on its members, role and terms of reference →](#)

Steps towards reform

The government has taken several steps to improve the system and has begun testing different approaches to delivering employment services that build on an evidence base to inform future reform. This includes major reform efforts across government.

Inclusive Employment Australia	Remote Australia Employment Service	Parent Pathways pre-employment service for parents
Complaints service for Parent Pathways and Workforce Australia Employment Services	Supporting First Nations people through the Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL) Program	Real Jobs, Real Wages program
WorkFoundations program	MYEFO and Budget Announcements	Workforce Australia Inquiry White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities

Announcements

Budget 2025-27

12 MAY 2025 | EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REFORM

Announcement

12 MAY 2025 | EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REFORM

Announcement

12 MAY 2025 | EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REFORM

Show all →





Australian Government

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

MS26-000316

Standard Brief

To Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations

Action required For Decision

Employment Services Reform – Public Discussion Paper

Timing Please action by **25 May 2026**. The reason is to enable the public discussion paper to be released for public consultation on 27 May 2026, alongside the National Press Club speech.

Recommendations:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. That you approve the employment services reform public discussion paper titled 'Shaping the Future of Employment Services' (Attachment A refers) | Approved / Not approved / Please discuss |
| 2. That you agree the public discussion paper will be released for public consultation on 27 May 2026 for a period of 9 weeks, with submissions to close on 31 July 2026. | Agreed / Not Agreed / Please discuss |

Minister Rishworth

Date: / /2026

Comments:

Clearing Officer

s 22(1)

Signature _____ 22 / 05 / 2026

s 22(1) First Assistant Secretary
| Emp & W | Employment Services Reform Taskforce
Ph: s 22(1) | Mob: s 22(1)

Contact Officer

s 22(1)

Assistant Secretary
| Emp & W | Employment Services
Reform Taskforce
Ph: s 22(1)
Mob: s 22(1)

Executive summary:

- 'Shaping the Future of Employment Services' is the government's public discussion paper (**Attachment A** refers) for consultation on employment services. The public discussion paper details the government's case for change and vision for a new employment service and seeks stakeholder feedback on the design choices of the new service including the service streams and service elements, and foundational reforms announced in the 2026–27 Budget.

Key points:

- s 34(3)

3. It outlines the government's case for reforming employment services, its vision for a new employment service, and the 3 servicing streams and reformed service elements.
The discussion paper also explains how the foundational reforms to employment services announced in the 2026–27 Budget support this vision.
4. The public discussion paper invites input from the broader community, seeking feedback focusing on detailed design choices.
5. We are working with your office on the Minister's foreword in the public discussion paper.
6. The public discussion paper will be announced on 27 May 2026 as part of your National Press Club keynote speech on the government's reforms, including relevant 2026–27 Budget measures.
7. The public discussion paper will be open for consultation for a period of 9 weeks. This will allow sufficient time for you to undertake targeted engagement and community consultation before stakeholders provide their submission.

Public sensitivities:

8. Stakeholders have previously provided feedback on employment services reform through the government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities (Employment White Paper), and the House Select Committee inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services (the Select Committee) consultation processes. Due to this, there is likely to be a strong interest in the timing for implementation of reforms and how the reforms relate to the findings from these earlier processes.
9. Issues regarding the Targeted Compliance Framework (TCF) are out of scope for the public discussion paper. Stakeholders may provide feedback related to the TCF in response to the discussion paper given the level of public interest in this issue.

Consultation: Yes

10. Consultation occurred with areas across the Employment Services Reform Taskforce, the Labour Market and Industry Policy Division, Quality Strategy and Improvement Division, and Customer Experience and Digital Services Division. The Secretary of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has also been involved in the drafting of the public discussion paper.
11. The department also consulted the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Social Services, Services Australia and the National Indigenous Australians Agency on redline issues.

Legal advice / Legislative impacts:

12. Nil

Financial impacts:

13. The department has engaged Auslan Consultancy to develop Auslan and easy read versions of the public discussion paper. The expected cost for these services is approximately \$32,100 (GST inclusive). Auslan and easy read versions will be provided to your office at a later date for approval.

Background:

11. s 34(3)
12. The development of the Framework was informed by extensive stakeholder consultation undertaken through earlier reform processes, including the government's Employment White Paper and the Select Committee.
13. The public discussion paper was included as part of the Employment Services Reform Strategy considered in the 2026–27 Budget. The Strategy details how the government will deliver employment services reforms, consistent with the reform objectives of the Future Employment Services System Framework.
14. The government announced a total package of measures in the 2026–27 Budget with funding of \$312.1 million including \$285.6 million over 5 years from 2025–26 (and \$35.9 million per year ongoing) towards employment services reform and \$26.5 million over 3 years for the National Customer Service Line. The package includes:
- a. \$27.5 million over 5 years from 2025–26 (and \$0.5 million per year ongoing) to improve the quality of assessment and triaging processes.
 - b. \$52.6 million over 5 years from 2025–26 to support the early targeted rollout of a new Stream 3 service.
 - c. \$205.5 million over 5 years from 2025–26 (and \$35.4 million per year ongoing) to uplift the capability and capacity of support for people in online servicing.
15. The public discussion paper complements the government's broader strategy to undertake targeted engagement to allow for insights and expertise to feed into policy development and implementation for a new employment services model within the parameters set by government.

Communications and media strategy:

16. A broader communications and media strategy has been developed in collaboration with your office to support your speech to the National Press Club on 27 May 2026.

Stakeholder implications:

17. Stakeholders remain very interested in employment services reforms and the government's reform direction. The Government response, tabled in July 2024, was the last major public statement employment services reform. The response provided early guidance to stakeholders on the policy directions of reforms but did not explicitly rule in or out acceptance of specific Select Committee recommendations. As such, stakeholders may still have expectations the government will adopt the recommendations of the Select Committee in full, including significant co-design of the reformed system.

Attachments:

- A:** Employment Services Reform Public Discussion Paper



Australian Government
Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations

Shaping the Future of Employment Services

Discussion Paper



Acknowledgement of country

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia, their continuing connection to land, water and community.

We pay our respects to the people, the cultures, and Elders past and present, including within the department, in our communities and those we engage and partner with to deliver our work.



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, the Department's logo, any material protected by a trade mark and where otherwise noted all material presented in this document is provided under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) licence.

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The document must be attributed as the *Shaping the Future of Employment Services: Discussion Paper*.

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Minister's foreword

Work gives people more than an income. It provides confidence, connection and purpose. It helps people participate in their communities and share in Australia's prosperity. As Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, my job is to make sure as many Australians as possible can access the benefits and dignity of work.

Australia's labour market has been strong in recent years. Unemployment is low by historical standards and participation has been high. But not everyone is benefiting equally from these opportunities. Too many Australians still struggle to find and keep secure, meaningful work. Some have been out of the labour market because of caring responsibilities, illness or other personal circumstances. Some face discrimination because of age or disability. Some have limited digital skills, lower educational attainment, or lack the confidence to take the next step. Others may be retrenched after many years in the same job and need help to transfer their skills into new work.

Our employment services system should help people overcome these barriers. It should give people the right support at the right time. It should also work closely with employers, communities and training providers to connect people with real jobs.

But the current system is not working as well as it should. Too often, it takes a one-size-fits-all approach to people with very different circumstances. Some people receive more support than they need. Others, particularly those furthest from the labour market, do not receive enough.

The Albanese Government is determined to change this. This discussion paper sets out our vision for a more responsive, effective and dignified employment services system. A system that helps people into suitable, meaningful jobs. A system that recognises different pathways to work. And a system that delivers better outcomes for participants, employers, communities and the economy.

At the centre of these reforms are 3 new service streams. These will provide online and brief intervention services for people closest to the labour market, targeted provider services for people who need extra support, and intensive services for people facing more complex barriers. We will also introduce better assessment and triaging, a new Employment Goal Plan, more meaningful mutual obligations, stronger employer engagement, and improved commissioning to support high-quality services.

This is major reform. That is why we want to hear from participants, employers, providers, First Nations people, community organisations, advocates and the broader public. Your feedback will help shape the detailed design of the future system. Together, we can build an employment services system that helps more Australians share in the dignity and benefits of work.

The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations

Executive Summary

Reform vision and the case for change

The Australian Government is reforming mainstream employment services to better meet the needs of individuals, employers, communities and the economy. Based on extensive community feedback, the government has developed a vision and framework for the future employment services system. The future system aims to give people the best opportunity to secure a meaningful well-paid job.

The government is consulting on the design of key aspects of the new system consistent with the reform directions set out in this discussion paper. Questions in relevant sections of this paper invite feedback on particular aspects of the design of a new employment services system.

Successive governments have made changes to employment services over the last 30 years, with the current system, Workforce Australia, being introduced in 2022. While the current system works for some, others are spending more time than necessary on employment services or falling through the cracks. Each iteration of employment services over the last 30 years has shared the same key feature of applying a one-size-fits-all approach to support a caseload of diverse needs and varying distances from the labour market.

Disadvantaged cohorts are finding it increasingly difficult to secure stable and well-paid work and people accessing online services do not have access to any tailored support. Mutual obligation requirements are disconnected from practical steps that participants with vastly different degrees of job-readiness need to take to secure suitable work. Additionally, the current system is not well-g geared to ensuring that those who lose their job due to economic or other circumstances are able to move quickly into their next suitable job opportunity. The future system will need to be more responsive to both the labour market of today and tomorrow.

Future service model

Underpinned by 4 core ideals, the new employment service will be built around a service model that matches the level and type of support to the circumstances of different job seekers. It will introduce 3 new, distinct service streams, reflecting the need to support people with differing characteristics and distance from the labour market:

- **Online and brief intervention services** for people closest to the labour market.
- **Targeted provider services** for people moderately close to work.
- **Intensive services** for people furthest from the labour market, including people with complex barriers.

Key service settings, including service intensity, provider expertise, mutual obligations, and incentives, will differ across the streams to align with participant need. Targeted provider services will focus on job coaching, employability support, skills and training, while intensive services will focus on sustained engagement, mentoring, and pathways that build confidence and work readiness. Social enterprises will play a strong role within intensive services as a pathway to open employment.

Key service settings

To realise this model, key service settings will be reformed.

Assessments and triaging processes will be redesigned to ensure participants are connected to the right support at the right time. Reassessments will ensure supports remain relevant.

A new Employment Goal Plan will formalise pathway planning across all services, informing the activities and supports received by participants to directly address their barriers to employment. This will replace the current Jobs Plan.

Mutual obligations will be redesigned to support engagement and progression towards and into work. Requirements will differ by stream to align with capacity and job readiness.

Employer engagement will be strengthened, as the current service does not consistently meet employer needs. The new employment service will use national industry partnerships, local employer engagement, and tailored services to provide better support for employers. Supports for employers to hire and retain job seekers will also be reviewed. Wage subsidies will be reviewed to ensure they are simpler, better targeted, and paired with effective post-placement support

There will be a greater focus on improving the drivers of high-quality servicing, including clearer expectations of frontline staff capability, more effective support for diverse cohorts, and better connections to local services and labour markets.

Provider incentives will be redesigned and will differ across service streams, recognising different pathways and time needed to move into employment. Incentives will place greater emphasis on active support, progress towards employment and sustainable employment.

Commissioning will also change. Traditional employment services providers will continue to play a role, particularly in targeted provider services. Commissioning for intensive services will place greater weight on community-based organisations with strong local relationships, labour market knowledge, and relevant workforce capability.

The new employment service will embed continuous improvement, including through active monitoring, enhanced feedback loops, and the sharing of insights to improve service quality and responsiveness.

Taken together, these reforms will create a more responsive, effective system that helps people benefit from the dignity of work.

Chapter 1:

The consultation process

The Australian Government is committed to reforming employment services to better meet the needs of individuals, employers, communities, and the economy.

This discussion paper presents the government's vision and framework for the future mainstream employment service that will be achieved through the introduction of 3 new service streams and underpinning service elements. This consultation builds on previous input to the Employment White Paper¹ and the House Select Committee Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services². The government is now inviting stakeholders to contribute to the detailed design of settings for this future service within its vision and framework.

Reforms to mainstream employment services will build on the steps already taken by government to reform the broader employment services ecosystem, including:

- the introduction of Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA), reforming specialist disability employment services
- the introduction of Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES), reforming the operation of employment services in remote areas of Australia
- the introduction of the Parent Pathways program, reforming pre-employment support for parents of children under 6 years
- the introduction of the Reconnection, Employment, and Learning (REAL) program, reforming the support for First Nations people on remand or in prison to build pathways to employment, education and training.

How to provide a submission

Interested stakeholders are invited to submit their feedback on this paper, including in response to the questions listed. Stakeholders can provide a submission by visiting the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Consultation Hub at consultations.dewr.gov.au

The closing date for submissions is 5:00pm AEST on 31 July 2026.

¹ Department of the Treasury, *Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*, Australian Government, 2023, p 224. treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report.

² Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), *Australian Government Response to the House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services reports*, Australian Government, 2024. dewr.gov.au/employment-services-reform/resources/australian-government-response-house-select-committee-workforce-australia-employment-services.

Further information about how to make a submission is available at the Consultation Hub:
consultations.dewr.gov.au

Submissions will be published on the Consultation Hub website. Please indicate when lodging your submission if you wish for your submission to not be published, or for it to be published anonymously.

Broader employment services reform stakeholder engagement

In addition to seeking stakeholder feedback through responses to this discussion paper, the government will be undertaking targeted stakeholder engagement on specific topics and cohort-based focus areas to inform the final design of the future mainstream service. This includes targeted engagement with users of employment services, First Nations people, communities and representative bodies, providers, employers, and other organisations.³

³ For more details on these engagements see dewr.gov.au/employment-services-reform.

Chapter 2:

The current employment services system

The core purpose of Australia's employment services is to assist people to find and keep a job, while supporting employers to find the workers that meet their workforce needs.

Employment services help job seekers via a range of assistance, including help with job search, resumes, skills development, employer connections, and other non-vocational assistance. Most people in employment services are required to participate in it and meet mutual obligation requirements as a condition of receiving financial support through the income support safety net.

Employment services also support employers to recruit staff, connecting them with suitable candidates from the employment services caseload. Employers can access a variety of free services, including assistance with job advertisements, candidate screening, and shortlisting. Wage subsidies⁴ and other supports may also be available to employers to provide the additional initial support that some new workers require to meet the needs of the job and succeed in the long-term.

The Australian Government's employment services system was first outsourced to contracted service providers in 1998, when the government-run Commonwealth Employment Service was replaced with *Job Network*, which featured a strong focus on job search and mutual obligation requirements and different levels of service depending on need. *Job Services Australia*, introduced in 2009, sought to address job seeker disadvantage through increased skills development. Introduced in 2015, *jobactive* placed greater emphasis on a work-first approach for job seekers, with a strong focus on mutual obligations, job search requirements and participation in mandatory activities.

Workforce Australia

Workforce Australia commenced on 4 July 2022. Participants in Workforce Australia are supported in two ways. Some receive support by a provider to prepare for and find work through **Workforce Australia Services**. Others self-manage their job search activities and mutual obligation requirements through **Workforce Australia Online**, a basic online platform, with administrative assistance available through a contact centre. The introduction of an online platform for those who are most job ready provided an opportunity to reduce the cost of the employment services system, while provider delivered services were maintained for those who require more assistance.

⁴ Wage subsidies involve providing financial incentives to businesses to hire and retain specified participants under certain terms. They are intended to alleviate some of the initial onboarding, induction and training costs involved in recruiting new employees. Wage subsidies have been a staple of employment services since the 1970s and as such have been subject to various policy (including eligibility) changes over time.

The government invests around \$2 billion each year to run Workforce Australia. It is currently used by around 720,000 Australians, the largest employment program administered by the Australian Government. It operates across 51 employment regions across metropolitan and regional areas of Australia, with 56 providers operating out of 1866 sites.⁵

Workforce Australia comprises a largely standardised core service model, alongside a range of complementary services and programs that provide more tailored supports for specific cohorts. The key services within Workforce Australia model are:

Complementary services and programs

The additional complementary services and programs aimed at responding to distinct cohort needs, or to provide targeted supports include:

- **Transition to Work**, a specialist service for disadvantaged youth aged 15 to 24 who need additional help moving into work or further education. It delivers intensive, pre-employment support to build skills, confidence and connect with job and education opportunities.
- **Parent Pathways**, a voluntary pre-employment support service for parents or carers of children under 6, preparing to enter or re-enter the workforce. This includes an Australian Public Service delivered pilot site
- **Reconnection, Employment, and Learning (REAL) program**, a voluntary program for First Nations people who are on remand or in prison to build pathways to employment, education, and training opportunities
- **Local Jobs Program**, a collaborative, place-based initiative focused on local labour markets, working in partnership with business and communities to support tailored, local approaches to skilling individuals to meet local workforce needs
- **Self-Employment Assistance**, support to develop, start and operate a small business
- **Career Transition Assistance**, support for people aged 45 years and over to build their skills and confidence to re-enter the workforce or change career
- **Employability Skills Training**, a program to help people explore career options, develop job search, workplace and industry specific skills to be more competitive in their local labour market
- **Work for the Dole**, a program that provides participants with work-like experience to contribute to their local community and build skills to help find secure work
- **Launch into Work**, a program supporting pre-employment projects to prepare participants for specific entry-level positions within a business
- **WorkFoundations**, a program delivering funding for social enterprises and businesses to deliver paid employment placements for up to 6 months
- **Real Jobs, Real Wages**, providing financial incentives and ongoing support to employers to hire a person experiencing long-term unemployment (those on Workforce Australia caseload for 2 or more years) into a permanent job

⁵ Includes Workforce Australia Services, Transition to Work and Broome, Yarrabah and Norfolk Island employment services. Multiple services can be delivered from the same physical site.

- **Place-based and regional employment service initiatives**, including the Dandenong Employment Hub and Thrive Hubs, and the Broome Employment Services, Yarrabah Employment Services, and Norfolk Island Employment Support Program.
- **Early access initiative**, providing immediate access to tailored support through Workforce Australia Services to retrenched workers and their partners.

The broader ecosystem

The Australian Government is responsible for the delivery of employment services, determining the policy settings, contractual arrangements, and funding of services across the country. The Australian Government's role is grounded in constitutional powers over social welfare, taxation and external affairs, which support national employment services and income support settings.

Workforce Australia is part of a broader employment services ecosystem. It sits alongside the new Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) a specialist disability employment program that assists people with disability, injury or health conditions to prepare for, find, and maintain work and grow their career; and Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES) program that provides participants in remote communities with a flexible employment service that supports them to upskill, find pathways to work, and contribute to their community. Both IEA and RAES commenced in November 2025. People in Workforce Australia may also interact with other Australian Government systems, such as the broader human services, and the skills, training and education systems.

The employment services system is part of a broader labour market supports ecosystem. It operates alongside many other employment, skills and training programs, delivered by all levels of government.

State and territory governments may run employment programs, but these programs are generally not targeted towards people on income support who comprise the majority of the caseload for Australian Government employment services. State and territory governments also provide skills, training, youth programs, employer partnerships and place-based initiatives, which may complement Australian Government's employment services. State and territory programs often target priority industries, disadvantaged cohorts, local labour shortages and link in with health, housing, justice and social services.

Local governments have no formal responsibility for employment services, but often support local jobs through targeted employment programs, economic development, infrastructure projects, and local networks and partnerships.

Chapter 3:

The case for change

Workforce Australia has supported more than 1.6 million individuals since it commenced in July 2022. Of these, approximately 1 million were supported through Workforce Australia Services, with 22.7% achieving a sustainable employment outcome (26 weeks or more). Over 800,000 individuals have commenced in Workforce Australia Online, with 79.7% exiting employment services before the 12-month maximum time in service was met.⁶ However, while the current employment services system has worked for some, it is not working as well as it should for all participants on the caseload, employees or the broader economy.

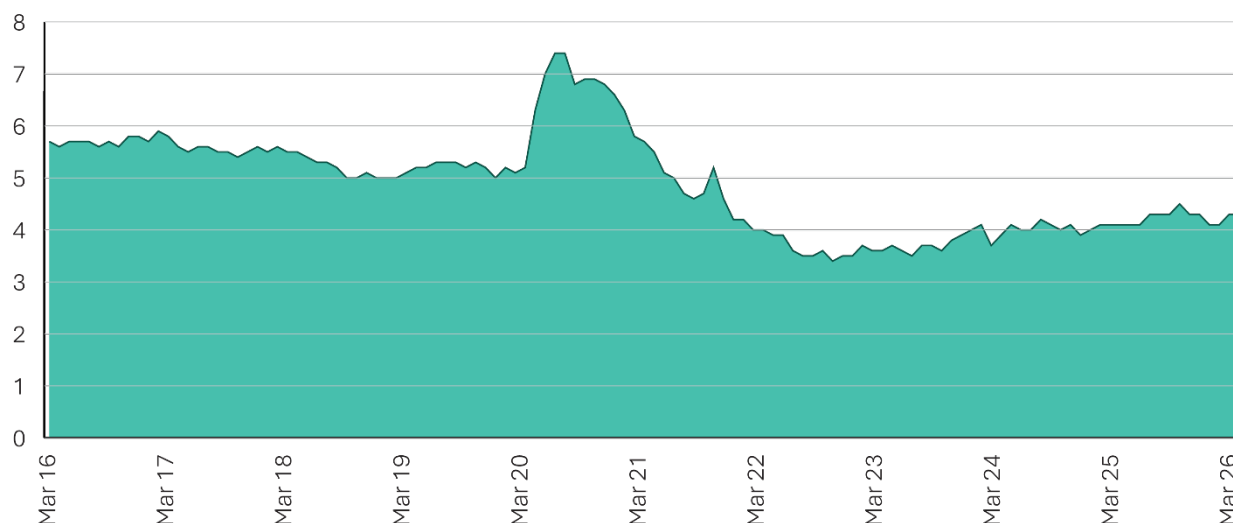
Consultations for the Employment White Paper and the House Select Committee Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services identified deep-seated shortcomings with Workforce Australia that provides a strong impetus for reform. Addressing the issues discussed throughout this chapter will create a more personalised and responsive employment service that can better support job seekers depending on their distance from the labour market. At the same time, it would effectively respond to employer demands, adapt to local labour markets and meet the workforce needs of the future.

Not everyone is benefiting from the favourable labour market

Labour market conditions have been good in recent years. While Workforce Australia has been operating (since July 2022), the unemployment rate has been low by historical standards. Additionally, the labour force participation rate has been around all-time highs, with a record number of Australians in work.

⁶ DEWR administrative data, 30 April 2026.

N.B. '22.7% achieving a sustainable employment outcome' refers to the number of participants that achieved a 26-week outcome as a proportion of those that could have achieved one.

Figure 1: Unemployment rate

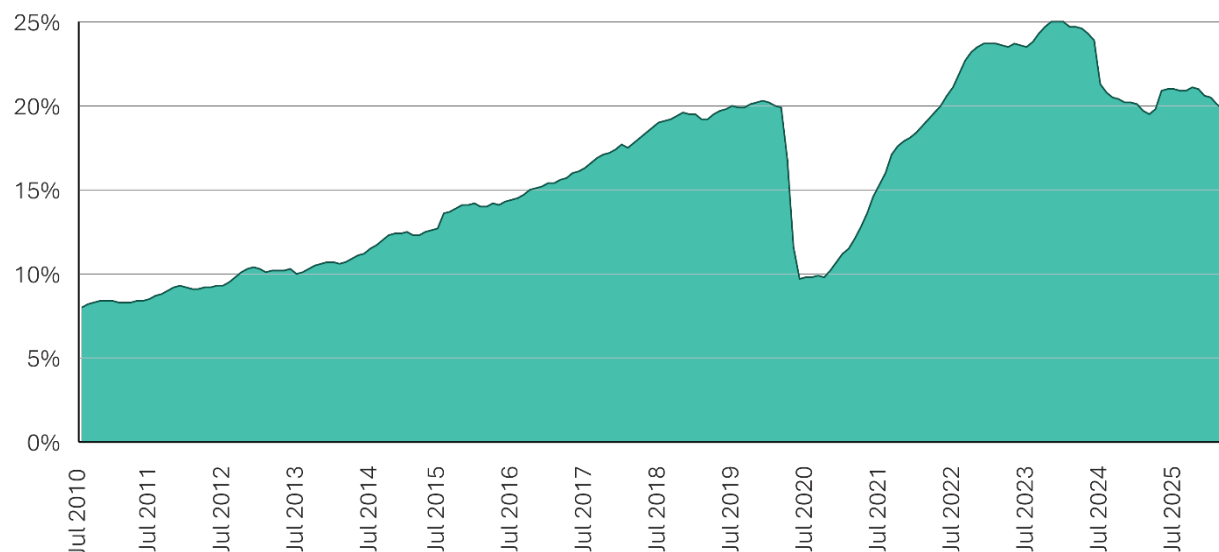
Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, March 2026, seasonally adjusted data.

However, not everyone is benefiting from the opportunities of a strong labour market. Some people face greater challenges in gaining employment, for example youth, mature aged people (particularly women), First Nations people, single parents, and people with disability. The Workforce Australia caseload includes a disproportionate representation of disadvantaged groups who experience employment outcomes below the national average, including people with disability (24.7%), First Nations people (16.0%), ex-offenders (12.7%), and people experiencing homelessness (11.0%).⁷

Employment services have a critical role to help people find sustained, meaningful employment. Despite strong labour market conditions in recent years, people closest to the labour market have not always found the online service to be effective at helping them move into work. A lack of tailored support is seeing around 1 in 8 people reach the maximum time allowed in online services and then be referred to a provider, impacting their confidence and moving them further away from a job⁸. In addition to this, the proportion of people who are in employment services for 5 years or more is significantly higher than a decade ago. It is usually people with multiple and complex barriers who are making up this larger proportion of the caseload.

⁷ DEWR administrative data, 30 April 2026.

⁸ DEWR administrative data, 30 April 2026.

Figure 2: Proportion of caseload in service for 5+ years

Source: DEWR administrative data, 31 March 2026.

N.B. Data incorporates Job Services Australia (2010-2015), jobactive (2015-2022) and Workforce Australia (2022 onwards).

One-size-fits-all approach is not leading to sustainable outcomes for everyone

These concerns were highlighted in the government's Employment White Paper and echoed in the final report by the House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services, drawing on the evidence of hundreds of submissions and witnesses. The Employment White Paper and Final Report of the Select Committee found that from the moment someone enters the employment services system, they are faced with a blunt, one-size-fits-all approach. This is driven by the 5 fundamental shortcomings described below.

1. Does not always connect people to the right supports

The current assessment and triaging processes do not always reliably and quickly refer people to the service that is right for them. Assessment processes do not adequately support people to understand what their information will be used for and feel comfortable enough to disclose personal circumstances affecting their employment services needs. Triaging processes also heavily rely on numerical scoring to refer people to services. As a result, many people experience inappropriate referrals which can lead to poorer employment outcomes and disengagement from the service. The current system also fails to ensure that as people's circumstances change, they continue to receive the right service and supports for them.

2. Not agile enough to respond to diverse needs

The people who enter employment services have highly diverse circumstances and support needs. Some people are 'job ready' and need relatively little support to find employment. Others face barriers such as limited connections to the labour market or lower levels of education. Some experience complex personal circumstances, including multiple social or health issues, that means they are significantly distanced from the labour market and require more tailored supports.

Despite this diversity of needs, the current system has been designed and delivered in ways that result in a standardised servicing approach – 'one-size-fits-all'. It lacks any formal tools or servicing strategies that set out a participant's pathway to work and this has contributed to inconsistent service quality and outcomes across the system.

While Workforce Australia Online works well for many job-ready job seekers, some people need important but relatively modest additional support. These people are currently unable to get this support due to limitations in the digital platform functionality and constraints in the APS support available. Around 1 in 9 people in online services choose to opt out and be referred to a provider, which may offer a lot more support than they need, including face to face support, while others remain in online services for a long time without finding work.⁹

Current provider incentives tend to encourage rapid job placements, sometimes without enough regard for job suitability or quality. This can contribute to poor job fit and, for some participants, repeated movement in and out of employment services, with around 1 in 6 people who have exited Workforce Australia Services re-entering within a year.¹⁰ Higher re-entry rates to employment services may indicate many participants are not being supported into suitable or sustainable employment. This is a poor outcome for job seekers and increases costs for government.

Limited recognition and reward for service quality, intermediate progress, and longer pathways encourages providers to disproportionately focus resources on participants that are more likely to get an employment outcome at the expense of those further from the labour market. These settings result in servicing that overlooks people's strengths, aspirations and individual barriers to sustainable employment, and limit meaningful progress and goal setting, which are key to effective active servicing. In addition, provider frontline staff may not always have the capability to respond to the full range of job seekers' needs, including delivering culturally capable and trauma-informed practice.

Taken together, these issues point to the need for a more tailored and agile service. A new service should better recognise and respond to differences in individual circumstances and connect people with the right mix of supports at the right time to support progression into sustainable employment.

⁹ DEWR administrative data, 30 April 2026.

¹⁰ DEWR administrative data, 30 April 2026.

3. Mismatch between mutual obligation settings and distance from the labour market

Mutual obligations reflect the longstanding community expectation that people who receive income support and are assessed as capable of working, have an obligation to actively look for work. Fair and proportionate mutual obligations are a key part of an effective employment service as they keep people engaged in the job search process.

The current mutual obligations system, however, is overly complex and compliance-driven, applying an approach that often does not account for individual circumstances or distance from the labour market. As a result, people are engaging in activities that are not relevant or effective in moving them closer to, and into employment. Imposing overly onerous requirements, not accompanied by high-quality support, can cause harm and lead to adverse effects as people disengage or leave income support without securing work.

4. Employer engagement remains low

Employer engagement with the current employment service remains persistently low. Employers often perceive employment services to have limited value and prefer to use other recruitment channels. The current employment service has not put sufficient focus on employers and the support they need to identify how to utilise employment services to meet their workforce requirements, consider job design, recruit, train, and successfully retain new employees. Instead, employers find it confusing and difficult to navigate across multiple points of contact and many programs with different requirements. They report high administrative burden, large volumes of unsuitable applications, poor candidate matching, and limited post-placement support as barriers to using employment services.

5. Commissioning can better respond to need

The current commissioning approach has limited flexibility, contributing to services that do not always adapt well to different regional and local labour market conditions. The number of employment service providers has also declined significantly over time, leading to greater provider concentration and more standardised approaches to service delivery within each program. This limited provider diversity has contributed to capability gaps, with providers not always aligned to participants needs. In some cases, providers may also lack strong links to local communities or have workforces that do not reflect the cohorts they support. There are also opportunities to increase the role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in delivering employment services to provide trusted, culturally attuned support to First Nations job seekers.

Chapter 4:

Overview of the new employment service

This chapter provides an overview of the government's framework for reforming employment services, outlining its vision, core ideals, structure and service elements.

Vision for reform

The government's vision for employment services reform is to deliver a system that gives people the best opportunity to secure a well-paid job.

These reforms will create a more responsive, effective and dignified system. Three new service streams with different service offerings depending on an individual's distance from the labour market will be introduced, replacing the current model. The way people are matched to supports both from the start and while in employment services will be overhauled, to ensure they are connected to the right supports at the right time. Closer connections to employers, other local supports and the labour market will ensure participants more quickly benefit from the dignity of work.

Core ideals for the new service

To realise its vision for reform, the government will deliver an employment service built around 4 core ideals, guiding the approach to detailed design and implementation. These are:

1**Core ideal 1**

Employment is the primary goal. Meaningful engagement moves participants into work or closer to jobs. Services help them become capable, confident, and qualified and the settings for mutual obligations are designed to enable this.

2**Core ideal 2**

Supports are meaningful to the participant and are tailored and proportionate to a participant's needs and distance from the labour market.

3 Core ideal 3

The system is easy to navigate and provides a high-quality, consistent service offering that also has the flexibility to respond to individual needs, local labour market conditions and emerging labour market trends.

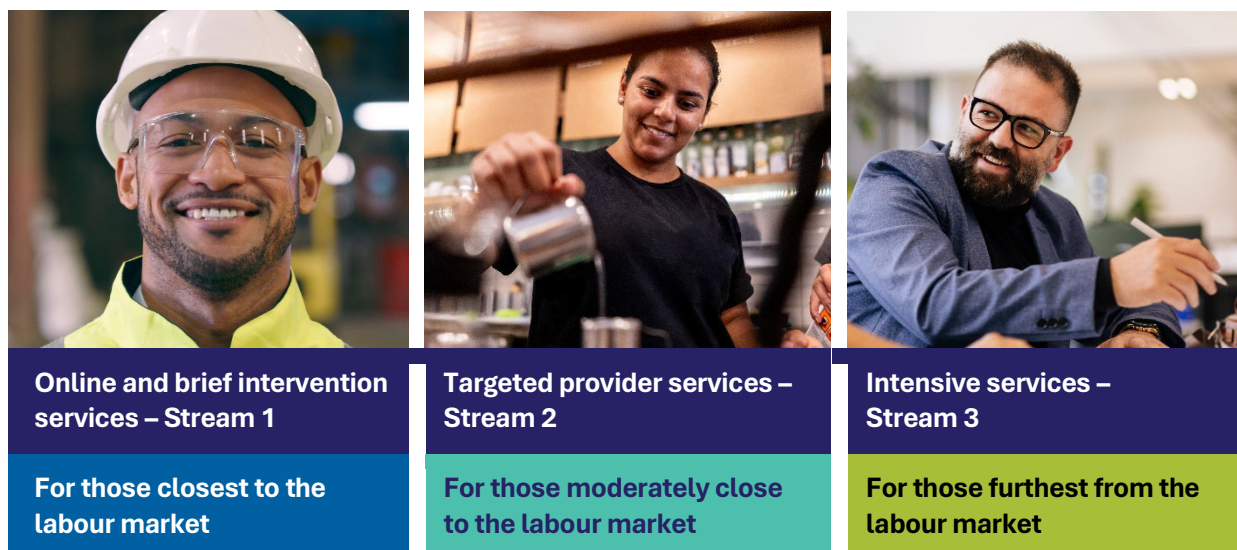
4 Core ideal 4

The system is designed and stewarded by the Australian Public Service to continuously improve in order to respond to users' needs and an evolving labour market.

Service streams to meet different needs

Underpinned by the core ideals, the new employment service will comprise 3 distinct service streams. The service streams will be calibrated to respond to a participant's distance from the labour market and how complex their barriers are. This recognises that people who use employment services need different types and different intensities of support.

Figure 3: The 3 service streams



In **online and brief intervention services**, job seekers are closer to the labour market and will receive targeted support and brief interventions, focused on rapid reconnection to employment.

In **targeted provider services**, job seekers are moderately close to the labour market. For them, personalised servicing will focus on active job coaching, employability support and stronger connections to skills development and short-term training that align with local labour market demand.

In **intensive services**, job seekers have more complex employment barriers. More intensive servicing will place greater emphasis on sustained engagement, mentoring and staged pathways that support job seekers to build confidence, capability and readiness for employment over time.

Further detail on each service stream is set out in Chapter 5.

Service elements

A number of underpinning service elements will support the delivery of high-quality, tailored services as part of the new employment service.

These service elements include:

Improved initial assessment and triaging processes to ensure people's barriers to employment are clearly identified and better understood at the point of entering employment services, so that they are connected with the right service at the right time. Reforms will also include a more targeted reassessment processes to ensure that as individuals' circumstances change, they continue to get the right support.

A new Employment Goal Plan will set meaningful and individualised employment goals and outline a tailored servicing strategy and pathway. It will be central to a participant's experience and will inform the range of supports participants will have access to.

An effective and more targeted approach to applying mutual obligations that encourages engagement to support people into work. Mutual obligation settings will be calibrated to an individual's distance from the labour market and designed to be more effective in getting them into an employment pathway.

A new approach to engagement with employers to meet workforce demands and lift recruitment and retention capabilities.

Clearer expectations on providers to deliver high-quality personalised services for participants, including empowering user choice and agency in the servicing supports they receive.

Redesigned provider incentive settings, including consideration of blended funding models to reflect caseload, risk and achievement of longer-term employment outcomes.

Improved commissioning to lift provider diversity, capability, experience, and local labour market connections. While there will continue to be a role for traditional employment services providers, there is a need to diversify the service delivery landscape.

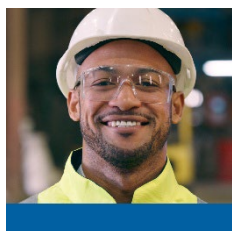
Chapter 5:

Key policy settings for the new service

Realising the government's vision for employment services will require detailed policy and program design of core elements of the new system. The sections that follow set out the core elements and key questions for stakeholder feedback on how to ensure the success of the new employment service. They also outline the investments made by government in the 2026-27 Budget to undertake design work and develop some of the key features that will underpin the new employment services system.

Three service streams to respond to different needs

As outlined in Chapter 4, the new model will be comprised of 3 distinct service streams calibrated to respond to a participant's distance from the labour market.



Online and brief intervention services – Stream 1

The new employment service system will introduce a new high-quality, participant-led online and brief intervention service that offers more personalised and targeted supports to make it easier for participants to move into sustainable employment without the need for a provider.

This service will be predominantly delivered by government via an enhanced digital platform and Australian Public Service led support, with uplifted capability to ensure participants receive timely, high-quality and tailored support to prevent disengagement. Mutual obligations requirements will be simpler, with participants focusing on searching for jobs and undertaking other vocational activities.

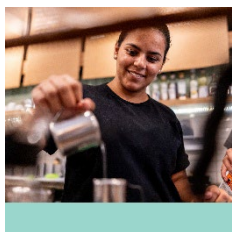
In the 2026-27 Budget, the government made early investments of \$205.5 million over 5 years to take first steps towards the new online and brief intervention service by:

- improving the accessibility, personalisation, and usability of the digital platform, including introducing new career mapping and guidance tools that draw on a person's employment history, skills and education to generate career pathways and skilling advice.
- shifting the Australian Public Service-delivered Digital Services Contact Centre towards providing proactive support for online participants, including increased capacity to meet demand and improved capability to provide personalised advice and brief interventions based on individual needs.

- trialling a fully virtual digital advisory service for parents to help build confidence, capability and connections to the labour market.

In designing the future online and brief intervention service, government is considering how best to target online support. This includes distinguishing between people who may be able to self-manage their job search using digital tools with brief and targeted support, and those who may benefit from earlier access to more direct, provider delivered assistance. In periods of regional labour market transitions and higher overall unemployment than in recent years, providing a higher-quality online and brief intervention service will ensure those with recent work experience are able to get the support they need from employment services to find their next job quickly.

Another key consideration is how to balance efficiency, engagement and activation in a digital-first, self-managed service environment. This includes using the right mix of digital messaging, proactive contact and human support to sustain motivation and momentum, without creating unnecessary burden or complexity. The new online and brief intervention service needs to recognise and build on people's skills, experience and aspirations, and support agency. It also needs to promote meaningful engagement focused on moving into employment quickly, rather than compliance-driven activity.



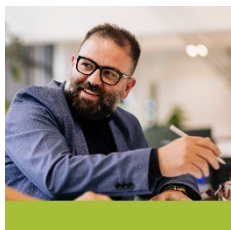
Targeted provider services – Stream 2

In the new employment service, targeted provider services will be delivered by a network of contracted service providers and support a narrower group of job seekers who are moderately close to the labour market. This includes people with employment gaps, lower educational attainment, or cycling patterns of work. Having a narrower group of job seekers allows for more focused servicing.

Participants will receive active coaching, employability support, skills development and training linked to in-demand jobs. Support will address skill gaps and connect participants with education and training that prepares them for vacancies. Servicing will reflect each person's circumstances and goals, with new pathway planning tools supporting clearer steps into work. Mutual obligation requirements will prioritise job search as employability improves.

The government is considering how provider settings can incentivise quality, job suitability and employer engagement. Providers will be expected to prioritise activities that are proven at getting people into jobs and adopt best practice service methods. Providers will also need strong links with employers and training systems to match participants to local labour market needs rather than generic options.

In the new employment service, another key consideration is how targeted provider services can also provide important support to retrenched workers and their eligible partners. Most people who lose their jobs will be able to re-enter the workforce quickly, including through the new online and brief intervention service. However, some workers will need additional support. Early access to targeted provider services will be available for these workers, regardless of their eligibility for income support. For example, people affected by major business closures or structural transitions who need additional help to identify how their existing skills transfer and what additional skills they may need to secure their next job quickly.



Intensive services – Stream 3

Intensive services will be a new service for people who are furthest from the labour market. It responds to gaps in the current system that takes a one size fits all approach, where job seekers with the most complex needs are not receiving the level or type of support they need and are falling through the cracks.

The government is investing \$52.6 million over 5 years to support the early targeted rollout of intensive services. Expected to commence in late 2026, the rollout will be delivered in selected locations across Australia. Testing the new intensive service ahead of national implementation will provide valuable evidence on what works best and support refinement of the final design of intensive services.

Intensive services are for people with complex and interconnected barriers to employment that often impact their confidence and capacity to look for work. Many will require coordinated supports that go beyond what employment services can provide. Intensive services will likely be delivered by community organisations with a strong local presence and established connections to local services, supports, employers and communities. This place-based approach will help participants to access the broader supports they need alongside employment assistance.

Support in intensive services will be tailored to individual circumstances, needs and readiness to engage. Activities available in intensive services may include mentoring, work-like experience, volunteering, skills development, and support to navigate and engage with local services to address barriers to employment.

Participant pathways to employment may not be linear, so services will recognise this and support them to reconnect and make sustained progress towards work. Mutual obligations will focus on meaningful engagement, with requirements adjusted to reflect each participant's capacity and distance from the labour market.

Frontline staff requirements will also reflect the need for skilled case managers with relevant qualifications and experience to deliver high quality services for those furthest from the labour market.

A key opportunity for the new system is to connect with social enterprises to provide people with an opportunity to gain work or work experience where there are wrap around supports both prior to and after placement into a job. Social enterprises will play an important role within intensive services to provide this opportunity, including the potential to deliver services directly. Social enterprises can provide a bridge between employment services, skills training, and the open labour market for people who need more support. They are well placed to offer flexible, wrap-around support such as supervision, mentoring and job design and many have strong connections to local communities and industries. These features support work-like experiences and help create pathways into employment that align with local demand.

Questions

1. What are the key factors that should place a person in online and brief intervention services versus targeted provider services versus intensive services?
2. What types of support should be offered under each of the service streams?

Quality initial assessments and triaging

Many people engaging with employment services are balancing caring responsibilities, health conditions, or other personal circumstances alongside searching for employment. A quality initial assessments and triaging process that considers the range of factors that influence a person's capacity to look for work and move closer to employment is crucial to ensuring people receive the appropriate support from the moment they enter employment services.

A new approach to assessments will help people feel comfortable to share information about their circumstances and ensure those circumstances are better understood. The information collected through this process will inform the employment pathway in a participant's Employment Goal Plan.

The new assessments approach will apply across the whole employment services system, including those referred to Inclusive Employment Australia and Remote Australia Employment Service.

Targeted reassessment processes will also be introduced, to ensure that as individuals' circumstances change, their supports are updated.

In the 2026-27 Budget, the government is investing \$27.5 million over 4 years to develop and trial a new initial assessment and triaging process. As an early step, this will include improvements to the current assessment processes and development of new assessment tools. The new tools will be designed to improve people's experience of entering the system through:

- ensuring people are quickly referred to the right service for their circumstances
- simplifying the pathway from entry to services
- increasing responsiveness to individuals' circumstances and needs
- improving the capability of assessors
- increasing job seekers' understanding of the service, ensuring they can make informed choices in entering services
- collecting the appropriate information to inform a job seeker's Employment Goal Plan and servicing strategy.
- allowing job seeker information to follow people across providers and services supporting the 'tell it once' principle

Feedback is sought to help shape the detailed design and implementation of these new tools.

Moving between service streams

Participants' circumstances can change over time. In the new employment service, the government is considering how targeted reassessments can help ensure participants are in the right service or service stream most suited to their current needs. Participants may need reassessment for a range of reasons. For participants in the new online and brief intervention service, this could be the emergence of additional barriers to employment, such as housing instability, requiring additional support from a provider. For participants in targeted provider services, a reassessment could be required due to a significant deterioration in mental health. For participants in intensive services, this could be significant progression towards employment or the overcoming of complex barriers to employment.

A reassessment may also result in a participant transitioning to other services across the whole employment services system, for example, Inclusive Employment Australia. The new employment service will carefully consider participant movement across streams and different employment services, to ensure a participant experiences a smooth transition with minimal disruptions to their servicing experience, and participant movement between services does not add additional complexity to system settings.

Imposing time limits on each service stream may be worth considering as a safety net, prompting a review of whether a job seeker needs different supports. A time limit can also act as a catalyst for engagement and progression. For example, in the Transition to Work program, most participants can receive up to 18 months of servicing, with a smaller cohort (those with more complex non-vocational barriers) able to receive up to 24 months of servicing.

Questions

3. What factors should be considered to support the development of a new, high-quality assessment and triaging process?
4. What information should be collected during the assessment process to support better identification of barriers to employment and triaging to the right service?
5. What factors or circumstances should result in a participant moving between service streams?

Introducing an Employment Goal Plan

The new employment service includes a new Employment Goal Plan – an individualised pathway planning tool that sets out a clear servicing strategy and pathway to work, aligned with a participant's employment goals and the local labour market.

The Employment Goal Plan will bring together a person's employment goals, agreed activities and mutual obligation requirements into a clear and practical pathway to work. It will make explicit the steps and timeframes for servicing and how services, supports and activities will move a person into employment. This approach places stronger emphasis on employment goals and pathway planning in service delivery, and to ensure that people are connected to tailored supports to help address barriers to work. The Employment Goal Plan will replace the current Job Plan.

The Employment Goal Plan will be mutually agreed by provider and participant. Providers will be expected to work with job seekers to develop and maintain the Employment Goal Plan. Recognising that people's circumstances change over time, the Employment Goal Plan should be updated regularly to reflect changes in personal circumstances and distance from the labour market. A simplified online Employment Goal Plan will be available in online and brief intervention services.

The introduction of a government pathway planning tool will allow job seeker information to follow people across providers and services. This supports the tell-it-once principle and improves service continuity.

As part of the 2026-27 Budget measures, the government is piloting the Employment Goal Plan in the early targeted rollout of the new intensive service. Insights from this testing will inform the final design and national rollout in the new employment service.

Questions

6. What elements will be important to capture in the Employment Goal Plan?
7. How can the system encourage effective use of the Employment Goal Plan by participants and providers to ensure it is meaningful, timely and relevant?

A new approach to mutual obligations

The government is considering how the new employment service can change how mutual obligations are applied to better incentivise progress towards employment and activities that directly link to a participant reaching their employment goals. Activities and requirements will look different depending on the service stream and an individual's distance from the labour market. Requirements will be fair, proportionate and based on individual circumstances and will be scaled as people move closer to work.

Mutual obligations will be clearly connected to the steps outlined in a participant's Employment Goal Plan, with activities and supports to complement their servicing strategy and employment aspirations. A participant will undertake activities that are better suited to their circumstances, to directly address identified barriers to employment and lead towards work. As a person makes progress in their Employment Goal Plan, the types of activities associated with their mutual obligation requirements will adjust to reflect this.

As mutual obligations are further designed and developed, the government will consider the appropriateness of application to other services in the employment services ecosystem.

Different mutual obligations for each stream

Online and brief intervention services

For those closer to the labour market, the government is considering how mutual obligations can be simpler for participants with requirements primarily focused on job search and other vocational activities set out in an Employment Goal Plan. Participants will be actively monitored to ensure they are engaging with services, with early signs of disengagement triggering timely intervention, including movement to a more intensive level of support where required.

Targeted provider services

For those in targeted provider services, the government is considering how mutual obligations can focus on building their capacity for work by connecting them to in-demand skills and training opportunities and work-ready supports, combined with job-search activities. Mutual obligations will be set out in a participant's Employment Goal Plan and expectations and activities will change as a participant's employability improves.

Intensive services

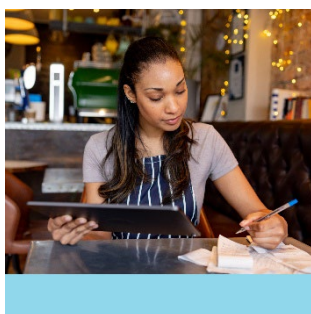
For those furthest from the labour market, the government is considering how mutual obligations can be calibrated to individual circumstances, focused on meaningful engagement and progressing a participant towards employment. Mutual obligations will be adjusted in alignment with a person's work-readiness, including participation in activities such as volunteering and work experience and with social enterprises.

A new approach to compliance

Another key consideration is how the new employment service will adopt more contemporary regulatory approaches by shifting the focus towards encouraging active participant engagement rather than enforcing reactive compliance measures. Appropriate safeguards will ensure compliance powers are exercised lawfully and fairly, supporting more effective employment services that better enable progress towards work.

Question

8. How do we change the way that providers and participants engage with mutual obligations to focus on positive engagement that helps people move towards employment?



New approach to employer engagement

The government is considering how the new employment service can make it easier for employers to engage with the system, be more responsive to local labour market conditions and offer supports that better meet employer needs.

Engaging with employers is central to an effective employment services system. It aligns services to real vacancies, improves job matching and retention, and lifts productivity by placing people into roles suited to both their skills and the needs of the business hiring them.

Employers are diverse in size, capability, location, and industry, and their willingness and capacity to engage with government-funded services can vary significantly. International evidence suggests that integrating demand-side strategies into employment services by actively engaging employers as partners in jobs and skills pathways is required to strengthen employer engagement.

Strategic engagement of industry and large employers

The new employment service will be guided by a stronger national focus on building strategic partnerships with industry and large employers to create jobs and skills pathways for job seekers. This approach will support more structured and consistent engagement with industry and large employers.

Strategic partnerships will provide a foundation for aligning government, employer, and industry bodies to create clearer jobs and skills pathways, improve workforce diversity and inclusion, and simplify how employers access employment and skills supports.

Local labour market approach for small and medium enterprises

Local labour market coordination can reduce the friction that employers, especially small and medium businesses, can face in trying to engage with employment services, fostering greater trust and a shared understanding of employer needs across services at the local level. Recognising the diverse needs of different economic regions is critical to effective service delivery. Local labour markets vary significantly in industry composition, workforce availability, and economic conditions. By considering local labour market conditions, the engagement, training and supports available to employers will be relevant, responsive, and effective.

The government is also considering how place-based mechanisms can implement local labour market coordination. These mechanisms will enable strong local involvement from employers, providers, skills organisations, and community stakeholders, supported by regional coordination. The place-based mechanisms will also reduce duplication of supports, strengthen intelligence sharing, and enable faster, more coordinated responses to emerging workforce opportunities, structural change or economic disruption.

Connecting employer vacancies with job seekers

Advertising vacancies on online jobs platforms is the main way employers connect with a large, diverse pool of job seekers. In the current system, employers can use the Workforce Australia Online job board. The platform offers features such as candidate matching and shortlisting tools to provide a streamlined way for employers to attract and engage suitable job seekers. However, employer engagement with this service is low, with many job vacancies sourced from private sector platforms. Given there are many similar services offered by the private sector, the need for a government jobs matching platform will be examined as part of reform to ensure employers have efficient and effective ways to connect with people in mainstream employment services.

Range of targeted supports

To develop an employment service that meets the expectations of employers in a broad range of industries and locations, the current suite of supports will be reviewed and better targeted. These include pre- and post-placement support and financial assistance to support hiring and retention. Supports available should be tailored to job seeker need, with greater assistance for employers to engage those who are further from the labour market.

Employers remain concerned that job seekers may not have the skills they are seeking. The new service will need to consider how to continue supporting job seekers to access training, equipment, and other supports needed to enter into employment. Once in a job, participants and their employer will receive better targeted support to undertake onboarding, training, and workplace adjustments that foster lasting employment outcomes.

Wage subsidies will be reviewed. Wage subsidies function as a financial incentive to businesses to hire and retain specified participants under certain terms. They are intended to alleviate some of the initial onboarding, induction and training costs involved in recruiting new employees. There is an opportunity to simplify the current arrangements, ensure they are appropriately targeted to need, and better combine them with effective post-placement support to better provide support to employers.

Questions

9. How can employment services best partner with industry and large employers?
10. How can employment services best support small to medium enterprises?
11. What is the value of having a government job matching platform? How can we increase this value?
12. What supports do employers need to recruit and retain people?

Delivery of high-quality services

As outlined in Chapter 3, the current system does not consistently deliver high-quality services to individuals and employers, particularly for people with more complex needs who are further from the labour market. Hallmarks of a quality service include frontline staff (whether from the Australian Public Service or contracted providers) who deliver personalised services, the capability to respond to a diverse range of needs, and strong connections to employers and other services.



Frontline staff capability

Meeting the diverse needs of people in employment services will require frontline staff with the right skills and capabilities to respond to the diverse needs of job seekers.

In the new employment service, across all service streams, the government is considering how frontline staff can play a more active role in guiding participants through employment services and connecting them with skills and training options, and other relevant supports. This may include requiring providers to build stronger connections to skills development, training, and pre-employment activities to improve sustainable employment outcomes. It may also involve providers more actively supporting participants on progress towards employment goals.

Another key consideration is how the required capabilities of frontline staff can better align with the different service intensity and circumstances of participants across all streams, including those services delivered by the Australian Public Service. Some ways this could be done include reflecting differences in the skills, qualifications, experience, cultural competence, the types of supports and how they are delivered, and the depth of engagement required by frontline staff across each stream.

Supporting diverse cohorts

The employment services caseload is highly diverse and includes many groups who experience lower employment outcomes relative to the average person seeking work.

Some groups, such as young people, may have different pathways into work and limited prior employment experience, and employment services have often taken a distinct approach to servicing this cohort. Distinct servicing to meet young people's needs include early and flexible investment, a focus on both education and employment, and strong links to education, training and apprenticeship pathways.

Other groups, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, may require support that focuses on building local work experience, networks, or English language proficiency. First Nations stakeholders often describe cultural safety as a key marker of service quality, with practical enablers including workforce capability and First Nations representation, accessible communication, and service settings and practices that uphold dignity and reduce disproportionate harm.

This short summary of only some of the groups in employment services highlights the importance of a responsive system that can effectively support the distinct needs of different cohorts. It reinforces the need for flexible, culturally capable and trauma-informed practices. The new employment service will need to consider how the needs of specific cohorts are best responded to, to ensure people receive inclusive and trauma informed supports that are relevant to their circumstances. It will also need to ensure providers have the capability and expertise to effectively support the unique needs of different cohorts to ensure more equitable outcomes and a positive service experience for people accessing support.

Better connections to other services

People engaging with employment services often have a range of needs. These may relate to education and skills, health, disability, housing, caring responsibilities, language, transport or social needs, and are frequently interconnected. For some job seekers, progress towards employment depends on having multiple needs addressed at the same time, rather than through employment services in isolation.

Strong connections between employment services and other local services are therefore critical. There are inconsistencies in how providers currently support participants to navigate other services. Providers will be expected and incentivised to play a more active role in guiding and supporting participants to connect and engage with relevant services. This includes not only referring participants to services, but actively supporting and coordinating their engagement with services, skills and training opportunities, and employers.

The government is exploring stronger links to the skills and training system which will be critical in an effective employment services system, particularly for those who need additional support. For these participants, coordinated access to local services can be critical to addressing vocational and non-vocational barriers and building confidence, capability and readiness for employment.

Providing local solutions

In reforming employment services, a key challenge is striking the right balance between ensuring a consistent high-quality service for everyone that relies on employment services support across Australia and maintaining a flexible service that can be tailored to the needs of individuals, businesses and local labour market conditions. Experience from Workforce Australia and earlier employment service contracts shows that often local solutions, led by local service providers, engaging local businesses and community partners can achieve strong outcomes by tailoring services to local needs.

The government will consider how the new employment service can have an effective local labour market approach that responds flexibly to the specific conditions, needs and opportunities of local communities. It will build on the approach and operational experiences from the current Local Jobs Program¹¹, to draw on the knowledge of local employers and communities to identify emerging trends and practical solutions.

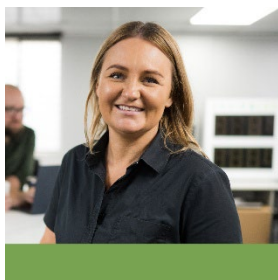
Embedding a flexible local approach will also support rapid responses as local communities are reshaped by the broader changes to Australia's labour market, such as the transition to net zero and a growing care economy.

Equity of access will also be critical, as not all participants can easily access the same array of supports. The new employment service must aim to consistently support those facing transport barriers, those in regional areas with fewer services nearby, and those unable to access online supports, for example.

Questions

13. What qualifications and experience should be expected of frontline staff within each stream?
14. How could the future service accommodate the needs of diverse cohorts, including better linkages to other services?
15. How can a nationally consistent service respond to local circumstances?

¹¹ Jobs and Skills Australia, *Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1*, Australian Government, 2025. jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/jobs-and-skills-roadmap-regional-australia-phase-1.



Redesigned system incentives for service providers

The government is considering how the new employment service will be designed to incentivise providers to deliver supports that meet the needs of all participants and employers.

A key challenge in ensuring all participants and employers receive the appropriate support for them is aligning service providers' goals and behaviours with the government's objectives for employment services. There are several frameworks which can incentivise or influence provider behaviour, including payments and performance frameworks. The design of settings within these frameworks, and the interplay of separate settings in conjunction with other administrative arrangements and contractual requirements, can influence the ways that providers operate and the choices they make in how they deliver their services.

Incentives for quality servicing and outcomes

Getting the balance of settings right to ensure that appropriate objectives are being met while minimising unintended consequences will be important to ensure participants and employers receive the high-quality services they deserve.

Under the new employment service, there will be a greater expectation on contracted providers to deliver high quality services that are tailored to supporting an individual to reach their employment goals. For the targeted provider services and intensive services, the government can use several frameworks to influence provider behaviour, including payments and performance frameworks. Contractual arrangements will also make providers accountable for meeting this high standard, with options available to the government to amend or terminate provider contracts in the event of sustained underperformance.

Provider payments

Ensuring all participants receive active, personalised support that is proportionate to their needs and distance to the labour market is a core part of the government's vision for the new employment service. Payment settings which effectively reward providers for these behaviours will be critical in achieving this.

Different types of payments and payment structures can influence how providers deliver services. Types of payments used to incentivise providers across different employment service models include:

- *upfront payments* when a person commences with a provider to ensure the provider has resources to support the person immediately
- *progress payments* when it can be demonstrated a job seeker's employment prospects have improved even if an employment outcome has not yet been achieved. These payments are intended to support ongoing servicing and support.

- *employment outcome payments* when a job seeker has commenced in a job and remains employed for a period of time. A range of time periods are often included in this type of payment, for example up to 26 week or 52 week payments, to incentivise providers placing people into sustainable employment.
- *bonuses or loadings* on top of the base level of a payment. These can be used to respond to circumstances such as more challenging labour market conditions or where a person has been in employment services for a long time.¹²

Different payment structures can offer different mixes of payment types to incentivise different behaviours. Getting the balance between payments right has been a challenge in previous iterations of employment services.

Local labour market conditions can impact provider and participant ability to achieve employment outcomes. This can include housing costs and shortages, local infrastructure, limited employment and training opportunities, and availability of social services. Providers delivering services in thin labour markets where there are lower volumes of job seekers and job vacancies also tend to have higher fixed costs relative to the number of participants on their caseload, with implications for provider viability and service continuity. Higher payment rates may be one way to reflect the regional challenges experienced in delivering high-quality services.

Performance measures

Monitoring service quality is a core government responsibility and reflects the Australian Public Service's stewardship role in assessing the effectiveness and quality of employment services. Strong performance measures help the government ensure services meet the needs of users and the labour market. Performance monitoring can also support early intervention where issues emerge.

Performance measures must set clear baseline expectations for service quality and the supports provided to participants and employers. At the same time, they can also reward providers that exceed minimum standards and achieve strong outcomes. Such an approach can help lift overall performance without encouraging compliance-only behaviour.

Under Workforce Australia, provider performance can directly influence a provider's ability to retain or extend their licence to deliver services. This increases the consequences of poor performance and rewards sustained quality delivery.

Some aspects of performance, such as progress towards employment, are challenging to measure consistently. Improvements in a participant's confidence, skills, or work readiness may not translate immediately into a job placement, which is much easier to measure. The performance framework needs to recognise these intermediate outcomes without weakening the focus on sustainable employment outcomes.

¹² Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), *Workforce Australia Employment Services Provider – Payments*, Australian Government, 2025, accessed 11 May 2026. dewr.gov.au/workforce-australia/resources/workforce-australia-employment-services-provider-payments.

Different provider incentives for targeted provider services and intensive services

The contracted servicing streams will have different incentive settings reflecting they are supporting job seekers with different characteristics and support needs.

Targeted provider services incentives need to encourage tailored assistance and coaching, with short-to-medium term interventions and employment outcomes within shorter timeframes.

Intensive services incentives need to encourage intensive and wrap around support, with progress to employment often incremental and non-linear. Significant coordination with other services and specialist workforce skills will be required. Employment outcomes still need to be a key goal.

It will be important for final incentive frameworks and specific stream settings to reflect the diversity of a job seekers pathway to employment, while maintaining fairness and a clear focus on supporting people to move into suitable employment.

Questions

16. How should providers be incentivised to support participants into suitable, sustainable jobs, not just any job across both provider-led service streams?
17. How should employment outcomes and progress towards employment be measured? How should this differ between targeted provider services and intensive services?

Improved commissioning and contracting

The government recognises the need to improve commissioning and contracting to lift provider diversity, capability, experience and local labour market connections. In the new employment service, commissioning will focus on engaging organisations best placed to support job seekers, with approaches varying by service stream. This includes placing greater weight on provider capability, local connections and the ability to deliver integrated and tailored support.

This represents a shift from the current system. Commissioning will move away from standardised models towards more flexible and targeted approaches that support a broader and more diverse provider market. This will include a stronger role for community-based organisations and First Nations organisations, where appropriate, and will create opportunities for a wider range of organisations to participate in the system. Traditional employment services providers will continue to play an important role, particularly for targeted provider services. However, commissioning will place a stronger emphasis on ensuring providers reflect the local communities they service and have appropriately skilled workforces and service delivery approaches.

For intensive services, commissioning will place a stronger focus on engaging community-based organisations with deep local connections, reflecting the need for services that are better aligned to participant needs and local labour market conditions. It will also create opportunities for different types of organisations to play a role in the system, including social enterprises. This may include engaging organisations that also deliver other social services in the local community or those with strong connections to such services where that leads to a better and more holistic experience for participants.

Question

18. What commissioning approaches will best support increased provider diversity?

Driving continuous improvement

As outlined in Core Ideal 4, the new employment service will be designed to continuously improve in order to respond to users' needs and an evolving labour market. This will require mechanisms that encourage learning, innovation, and adaptation, as well as active monitoring of how the system is performing, identifying emergent issues, and responding to them.

The current employment service does not have the flexibility to quickly and effectively respond to changing individual needs, dynamic local labour market conditions, and emerging labour market trends. Contractual arrangements can act as a barrier to services adapting to changes, with lengthy contract review processes limiting government's ability to quickly address poor provider behaviour and longer contract periods limiting its ability to manage any unintended consequences arising from such arrangements. Weak feedback loops can also limit user input and scrutiny of services. The government has been taking steps to address this, including through the implementation of a new complaints dispute resolution process which investigates complaints and takes action with providers where appropriate. However, the ability of users to actively influence how the service works can still be improved.

Embedding continuous improvement will be achieved through stronger stewardship of the mainstream employment service. This will include more active oversight and monitoring to ensure providers are delivering quality services and to identify potential gaps in jobs and skills pathways, improvements to complaints mechanisms and feedback loops to enable increased user input and influence over how the service works, and development and sharing of insights and best practice approaches to improve the capability of frontline staff to tailor supports to users.

Questions

19. How can employment services foster continuous improvement? For example, what strategies would improve the sharing of best practice?



Australian Government
Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations

Employment Services Reform Plan for 2026

Overview of plan and key deliverables

June 2026

Employment Services Reform Plan for 2026

Purpose

Outlines key events and Ministerial policy development and engagement touchpoints with the department and external stakeholders in 2026. s 22(1)

s 22(1)

The Employment Services Reform Plan includes:

1) Engagement and consultation activities and events.

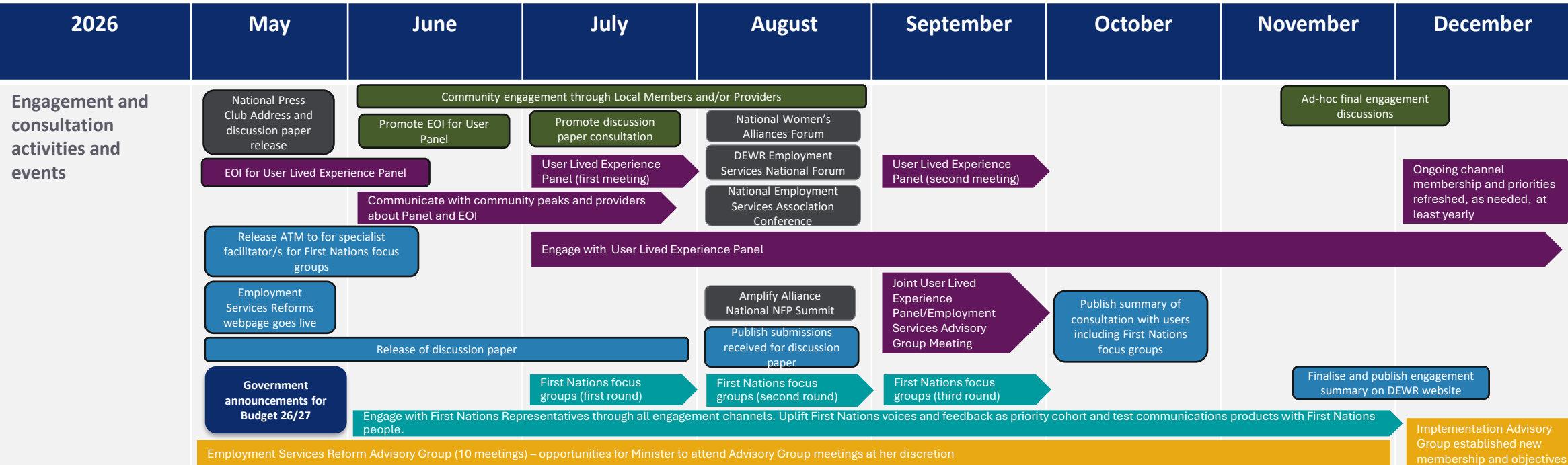
s 22(1)

Contents overview

- Employment Services Reform Plan
 - Purpose and outline
- High level diagrammatic overview mapping the key events and Ministerial touchpoints across policy and stakeholder engagement between May and December 2026.
- Detailed outline of stakeholder engagement approach and timings across various fora and channels.

s 22(1)

Overview of key events and Ministerial touchpoints across policy and stakeholder engagement: May-December 2026



s 22(1)

Sequencing of Key Work Packages for Employment Services Advisory Group Consideration

- This approach involves testing broad policy positions with the Minister ahead of consideration by the Employment Services Advisory Group. This provides a two-way feedback loop to test and refine policy positions based by stakeholder feedback and reaction.
- s 22(1)

2026	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February
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s 22(1)

Employment Services Advisory Group Meetings	Week 3 – Meeting 2 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group. Discuss: • Budget announcements and future work schedule	Week 1 – Meeting 3 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group. Discuss: • “High quality and consistent service offering” work package	Week 3 – Meeting 5 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group. Discuss: • “Supporting employer demand and the labour market” work package	Week 1 – Meeting 6 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group. Discuss: • “Effectively meeting the needs of unique cohorts” work package	Week 4 – Meeting 8 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group. Discuss: • Outcomes from consultation process	Week 1 – Meeting 9 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group. Discuss: • “Provider incentive” work package			
		Week 4 – Meeting 4 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group • Discuss “Meaningful engagement and mutual obligations” work package		Week 4 – Meeting 7 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group • Discuss “Market design and commissioning approach” work package		Week 4 – Meeting 10 Employment Services Reform Advisory Group • Discuss “compliance settings” and “activities” work packages			

s 22(1)

Part of Document 16 (Pages 120) deleted under section 22 of the FOI Act.