
NEXT STEPS IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

SUBMISSION



Orygen welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Social Services' Next Steps in Supported Employment: Consultation on the way forward.

ABOUT ORYGEN

Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. At Orygen, our leadership and staff work to deliver cutting-edge research, policy development, innovative clinical services, and evidence-based training and education to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the treatments and care provided to young people experiencing mental ill-health.

Orygen conducts clinical research, runs clinical services, supports the professional development of the youth mental health workforce and provides policy advice relating to young people's mental health. Our current research strengths include: early psychosis, mood disorders, personality disorders, functional recovery, suicide prevention, online interventions, neurobiology and health economics.

INCREASING INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT

Inclusive employment opportunities can be achieved through deploying proven employment support models within the supported employment sector. To action this, existing evidence-based models should be adopted and provided a place within the broader employment support networks. These services should not be limited to existing employment support services but also meet people where they are in healthcare, housing or social service settings they are already accessing.

INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT

The evidence-based Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model provides a ready to implement, scalable model for supporting people experiencing mental ill-health and high support needs into employment. A 2022 international review found a 'strong economic case' for supported employment, and IPS in supporting people with mental health conditions into competitive employment.(1)

The IPS model can be integrated into existing community programs and support services that will be provided through the new Inclusive Employment Australia program. The principles of the IPS model are aligned with the aims of inclusive employment, and specifically the recommendations set out in the Royal Commission. The eight core principles of IPS are:(2)

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| 1. A focus on competitive employment | 5. Targeted job development |
| 2. Zero exclusion from the program | 6. Integration of employment services (in this use case with disability support) |
| 3. Attention to client preferences | 7. Personalised benefits counselling |
| 4. Rapid job search | 8. Individualised long-term support. |

The IPS model is transferrable, which enables it to be integrated into a range of youth focused services. Currently implemented in youth mental health services, it is also suited to implementation in education and training, housing and substance use settings.(3, 4) In a study of the IPS model in a youth mental health service setting, almost half (48.2%) of the young people who completed the IPS program were placed in competitively obtained jobs (≥ 15 hrs/week); and 55.4 per cent sustained employment for at least 26 weeks.(5, 6)

REVOLUTION IN MIND

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Expand the provision of IPS in support services for young people

Increase funding for embedding supported employment services, such as IPS, in health, mental health, alcohol and other drug, and housing services to ensure young people can access tailored, expert and evidence-based employment support. Additional funding for piloting IPS services for other groups that experience high rates of exclusion from employment, including the identification of priority populations and geographical location.

In addition to an extensive evidence-base (see for example this meta-analysis and review (7)) resources have been developed to support workforce development,(8) and the Department of Social Services has developed operational guidelines for delivering IPS.(9) These existing resources would support implementation of IPS as part of the new Inclusive Employment Australia program.

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Inclusive Employment Australia service contracts require delivery of evidence-based models

Require as part of service delivery contracts that Inclusive Employment Australia employment providers embed evidence-based models that are effective for the people they support. In the case of people experiencing mental ill-health, IPS should be adopted. The National Standards for Disability Employment Services provides a mechanism for iterative program evaluation and improvement.

ROLE FOR EMPLOYERS

While employment specialists and service providers have a central role in implementing supported employment programs; employers and their existing employees are key stakeholders in the success of these programs (as evidenced through the IPS model). The Centre for Inclusive Employment has a remit to improve practice and employment outcomes for people accessing employment services. These changes include educating employers in the workforce potential of young people with disability.

This role in developing employer relationships is the fifth principle of the IPS model. An evaluation of the IPS model as a support for young people found that developing effective working relationships with employers is a key to improving outcomes.(10) The importance of employer involvement is recognised by the Department of Social Services and needs to be built into service approaches and models as part of the new Inclusive Employment Australia program.

Despite the central role of employers, they are often left out of the broader conversation and not provided with the resources they need to adapt their businesses in the open employment market to enable inclusive employment. In implementing recommendations from the Royal Commission, the Australian Government has an opportunity to build on existing expertise in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs). Businesses that have actively diversified their workforces also provide examples for ADEs as they transition to an open employment model.

ROLE OF VOCATIONAL SPECIALISTS

Employers have identified the supportive role vocational specialists play for both employer and employee in achieving successful outcomes.(10) For young people identified as needing additional support, providing vocational peer work support as part of an IPS program can support employment outcomes.(5) The potential benefits of providing peer support for people with disability was recognised in the increased NDIS funding for peer support announced in 2024.(11) The educative, supportive and job development role vocational specialists play has also been highlighted as a focus for Inclusive Employment Australia.

Vocational specialists need to be adequately equipped to embed themselves in their communities as the experts in creating opportunities for people accessing their services. Currently, there is no standardised or accepted approach across the industry which could impact employers' understandings of the support they can access when employing people with disability. Work in this area should look to

existing resources and training developed to ensure consistent and high-quality approaches, for example through the IPS Workforce Development Framework for headspace.

QUALITY STANDARDS

The Royal Commission recommended the development of an implementation plan to guide further reform in the supported employment sector. The available evidence base, together with resources for workforce development and support, and service delivery makes IPS implementation ready. The Centre for Inclusive Employment provides an organisational structure that could be applied to adapting and implementing IPS through the new Inclusive Employment Australia program. The development of quality standards to measure the impact of implementing IPS in other service settings would support this project. Quality assurance systems should also ensure people with lived experience are involved at all stages and that new specialist programs through Inclusive Employment Australia are delivering evidence-based supported employment models.

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Develop guidelines for adapting supported employment practices

The Department of Social Services commission the development of best practice guidelines to provide direction for the adaption of supported employment practices by the Centre for Inclusive Employment and Inclusive Employment Australia.

This submission was written on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to Country, which continue to be important to the First Nations people living today.

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