



Wesley Mission's response to the Transition to Work Consultation Paper

June 2021

Do all the good you can
because every life matters

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1 Wesley Mission overview

Guided by the vision to "Do all the good you can", Wesley Mission is a community services organisation with the primary purpose to develop and deliver services and programs that support people who are most in need. Working alongside people experiencing poverty and vulnerabilities has always been a priority for us and can be traced back to our work in the early 19th century. Our diversity is our strength. We support people at every stage of life and in many ways, from housing and accommodation, to counselling, child and parenting support, education and training, preventing suicide at a local level, providing professional mental health services, supporting people with disability, to our work in retirement living, home care, aged care, foster care and beyond. In doing so we reach all facets of Australian communities. In 2020 we assisted 161,438 clients throughout NSW through:

- **Wesley Training and Jobs:** 'In charge of your money' financial literacy training, Wesley Vocational Institute, ParentsNext, Disability Employment Services, and Opportunity Pathways
- **Wesley Mental Health:** Financial counselling, gambling counselling, Emergency Relief, inpatient and outpatient clinical care, LifeForce suicide prevention networks and training
- **Wesley Housing:** Specialist homelessness support programs, transitional housing, Edward Eagar Centre crisis accommodation, community housing, and Homes 4 Heroes veterans homelessness program
- **Wesley Families:** Early intervention, family preservation, foster care, Mums and Kids Matter, and Young Healthy Minds
- **Wesley Seniors:** In-home community care, Veterans Home Care program, residential aged care, independent living villages, and social support
- **Wesley Disability Support:** supported accommodation, living skills, respite, and Australian Disability Enterprises.

Our work in employment services guides our thinking around engagement approaches and strategies for changing life trajectory through learning and work:

- We worked with 5,184 participants across 31 sites between Sydney and Northern NSW in 2020. During this pre-employment program we support parents to improve confidence and work readiness skills to maximise their options for long term career success. In six out of seven Employment Regions we achieved higher than the national average in our Key Performance Indicators in 2020.
- Our Disability Employment Service in the Manning Employment Region worked with 165 people with disability to access suitable and meaningful employment opportunities in 2020. Wesley Mission has delivered employment services in this region for 21 years. Our Tuncurry site achieved a 4 star rating in September 2020.
- We implemented the new Opportunity Pathways Program in October 2019 in the Illawarra, Central Coast and Mid North Coast of NSW. Last year we worked with 586 participants who were living in social housing to establish and work towards their individual education and employment goals.

2 Response to the Consultation Paper

2.1 What primary risk factors that contribute to young people disengaging from work or education should be used to determine eligibility for Transition to Work services?

Wesley Mission encourages the Transition to Work program to continue to support young people who experience difficulties with mental health, homelessness and substance abuse. In addition, there are several highly relevant factors related to long-term employment stability that should be considered in the eligibility process:

- Young people leaving Out of Home Care
- Poor educational achievement - limited learning success, poor peer relationships, low school attendance rates and high levels of discipline (such as suspensions)
- Financial instability or poverty
- Lack of family support
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Geographic disadvantage.

Eligibility should also be given to First Nations young people, young people who have had a refugee experience, and young people with language barriers.

2.2 What characteristics should be used to determine whether a young person has complex, non-vocational barriers and requires the maximum of 24 months of servicing?

Wesley Mission provides a broad range of services to young people. Our data indicates that young people from certain cohorts have complex, non-vocational barriers. This includes:

- Young people leaving Out of Home Care - Research on the outcomes and experiences of young people leaving care reveal: 35% were homeless within a year of leaving; 29% were unemployed (compared to the national average of 9.75% for the comparative age group) and 75% were not in full time work or study four years after leaving care.
- Young people with poor mental health - About 75% of mental disorders will have developed by the age of 25¹ and young people (aged 16–25) have the highest prevalence rate of mental illness². The requirement for Transition to Work providers to deliver a service which embeds care for a young persons' mental health as part of their default service offer is welcome.
- Young people who are First Nations - The employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians narrows as education levels increase. Among those with a Certificate III or IV qualification as the highest level of educational attainment, there is a gap of 12 percentage points between employment rates for Indigenous Australians (69.3%) and non-Indigenous Australians (81.6%). Among those with a Certificate Level I or II qualification, there was a larger gap of 17%, with employment rates of 32% and 49% respectively³.
- Young people experiencing homelessness - Wesley Mission has found that most youth cannot concentrate on employment while their primary focus is on where they will sleep and eat. The amount of stress that financial scarcity creates hampers cognitive function (decision-making, behaviour, self-control and memory). Low income earners can experience a drop of nine IQ points or the equivalent of losing one night's sleep when faced with financial stress. By

¹ McGorry P, Goldstone S (2011) Is this normal? Assessing mental health in young people. Australian Family Physician Vol 40 No.3. p94-97

² Transition to Work 2022–2027 Consultation Paper p.25

³ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-employment>

removing the problem of scarcity, you can design a program that increases the cognitive capacity of participants⁴.

- Young people living in regional areas - There continues to be a lack of employment opportunities for young people in regional and rural areas.

These cohorts should have access to 24 months of servicing.

2.3 What is your preferred approach to achieving commencement and why?

Wesley Mission remains opposed to the theory stated in the Transition to Work Consultation Paper that “stronger compliance measures in the service, particularly for the initial appointment so that more eligible young people can successfully commence in the service”. This statement from the Consultation Paper: “the Government considers it both useful and appropriate to use the mechanism of temporary income support payment suspension to help ensure attendance at the initial appointment”, is not supported by the evidence. In the Government’s Transition to Work evaluation it was found that, “currently, more than three-quarters (77%) of all young people referred to Transition to Work commenced in services, and the proportion of referrals leading to commencements increased over time. Moreover, Transition to Work providers had more success in commencing young people in services during the first 30 days (93%) than did jobactive providers (83%). Despite the voluntary nature of Transition to Work, its referral and commencement processes are more efficient”⁵.

There is no need for punitive measures to be introduced in this service. Compliance measures reflect deficit based thinking, where unemployment is considered to be the fault of the young person rather than entrenched structural and societal factors. A program that treats unemployment as a structural and societal problem, instead of an individual deficit, will foster hope, promote dignity of risk, empower decision-making and provide fault-tolerance (minimising impacts of human errors through service model design).

It is particularly concerning that the proposal includes a provision to suspend payments where the young person cannot be contacted by the Transition to Work provider to facilitate attendance at the first appointment despite the provider’s best efforts. The potential to harm vulnerable young people who are homeless or experiencing mental health issues are significant.

Wesley Mission’s preferred approach to engagement includes:

- Involving young people in decision-making processes on issues that affect them
- Working closely with schools to identify young people at risk or at heightened risk of not making a successful transition from education into work (early intervention)
- Working collaboratively with the local service infrastructure to conspire with and link young people to the services and opportunities from which they stand to benefit
- Working from a strengths based framework and upskilling staff to use positive engagement strategies (such as motivational interviewing).

The fact that young people fail to engage with a program initially does not necessitate that we default to stricter compliance. This approach is not strengths based and may lead to a range of unintended consequences. Those young people may be better served by being offered alternatives (delayed access to Transition to Work, or holistic support from another community or government service, for example). Finally, forcing disengaged young people to participate, may reduce time with fully engaged young people with detrimental effects for overarching program outcomes.

⁴ Sendhil Mullainathan, Economics Professor at Harvard University, presentation to the 2013 Global Empowerment Meeting.

⁵ Transition to Work Final Evaluation Report May 2021, p16.

2.4 Are there any other meaningful measures that could be included in the Provider Performance Framework

Wesley Mission is committed to service excellence and measurement of outcomes. We are committed to building robust outcomes frameworks. Our experience with the delivery of employment services, indicates that rewarding high performing providers while removing contracts from other providers has not greatly improved the overall outcomes or quality of the system. Wesley Mission contends that is better to create a collaborative approach where providers were not in competition but driving better performance in a community of practice. Joint service provision meetings should be encouraged where performance is shared and monitored. In this environment, poor performance does not produce sanction but shared learning and service improvement. Good performance is celebrated and the processes that contribute to these outcomes are implemented across the network of services.

Wesley Mission



Wesley Mission is a part of the Uniting Church in Australia.

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