

Evaluation of the Time to Work Employment Service

Final Evaluation Report

30 June 2021



Australian Government
National Indigenous Australians Agency



Australian Government
**Department of Education,
Skills and Employment**

Social Ventures Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future traditional custodians, and elders of this country on which we work. We also accept the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

About Social Ventures Australia

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a not-for-profit organisation that works with partners to alleviate disadvantage – towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive.

We influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning about what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives and advocating for change.

Acknowledgements

SVA acknowledges the participation and/or assistance of the following organisations and individuals in this evaluation: the National Indigenous Australians Agency; the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Services Australia; the Departments of Justice or Corrections for all states and territories in Australia; Time to Work Employment Service providers; management and staff at the 10 prisons where consultations were conducted; and current and past participants of the Time to Work Employment Service who were interviewed for the evaluation.

Professional Disclosure Statement

The Evaluation Team (Social Ventures Australia Limited, Karen Milward Consulting, the Australian National University, and contractors for stakeholder consultation Sorrell Ashby, Jayde Geia and Ralph Mogridge) have prepared this analysis and report in good faith on the basis of our research and information available to us at the date of publication (“Information”) without any independent verification. The Evaluation Team does not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the Information.

This Report was prepared by the Evaluation Team for the use and benefit of our client only and solely for the purpose for which it was provided. The Evaluation Team does not accept any liability if this Report is used for an alternate purpose from which it was intended, nor to any third party in respect of this Report.

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process or in any form by any third party without obtaining prior written consent from the Evaluation Team and our Client. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to: Social Ventures Australia: attention Director, Legal, Level 7, 1 Chifley Square, Sydney NSW 2000.

Additional statement

The Evaluation Team acknowledges the participation and/or assistance of the WA Department of Justice, prison management and staff and Time to Work Employment Service providers in Western Australia. Any material published or made publicly available by the Evaluation Team cannot be considered as either endorsed by the WA Department of Justice or an expression of the policies or views of the Department. Any errors of omission or commission are the responsibility of the Evaluation Team.

Table of contents

Executive summary	5
1. Introduction and Context	14
2. Evaluation Methodology	17
3. TWES Program Logic	23
4. Evaluation Findings	28
4.1 Objective 1: Understand the design and implementation of TWES	28
4.2 Objective 2: Understand the impact of TWES	55
4.3 Objective 3: Understand how to improve TWES.....	61
Appendix 1: Detail on Evaluation Questions	66
Appendix 2: Evaluation Team	68
References	69

Glossary

AIATSIS	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ALO	Aboriginal Liaison Officer
ANU	Australian National University
CDP	Community Development Program
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DES	Disability Employment Services
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
ESAt	Employment Services Assessment
ESS	Employment Services System database
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NEIS	New Enterprise Incentive Scheme
NP	Not provided – used when reporting small values (for particular regions or cohorts) to mitigate any data privacy risks
PM&C	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PtW	Prison to Work report
SVA	Social Ventures Australia
TtW	Transition to Work
TWES	Time to Work Employment Service

Executive Summary

The Time to Work Employment Service (TWES) is a voluntary in-prison program that supports incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to transition from prison to work. TWES targets adult, sentenced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners who are between one and four months from their earliest possible release date. TWES aims to assist participants through appropriate assessments and link them to post-release employment services.

TWES is designed to address some of the challenges identified in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2016 Prison to Work report, including Finding 5:¹

“there is a lack of timely, co-ordinated and quality engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners from employment and welfare services.”

This includes addressing issues such as the fragmentation of the service system and the difficulties associated with navigating welfare and employment systems in the transition from incarceration to community life and employment.

The report described how Indigenous prisoners often “fall through the cracks” as they navigate employment, welfare and other human service systems and how all levels of government can improve service delivery to these highly vulnerable and disadvantaged client groups. TWES seeks to address this by focusing on strengthening prisoners’ engagement with employment services. In order to achieve this, TWES requires collaboration and coordination across multiple stakeholders. This includes Commonwealth and state and territory agencies and contracted providers who are funded to promote, deliver and manage TWES in prisons (TWES providers). TWES is delivered through four key steps:

- Conducting the **Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI)** with participants to assess their level of disadvantage in the labour market.
- Arranging the **Employment Services Assessment (ESAt)** by Services Australia, which provides a biopsychosocial assessment of participants’ barriers to employment.
- Developing an **Employment Transition Plan** that includes the participant’s education and work experience, aspirations, support needs, medical information, and any parole requirements.
- Arranging a **Facilitated Transfer** with the participant and their post-release employment services provider, where possible.

The evaluation examined the capacity to deliver these steps to facilitate improved prisoner engagement with employment services and deliver the service across all Australian states and territories.

TWES is currently delivered across Australia through 21 TWES providers operating in 73 prisons. Between May 2018 and February 2021, over 4,500 prisoners have participated in TWES, at a cost of \$5.95m in payments to TWES providers for delivering the service. The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) administers the program in remote prisons through Community Development Program providers and the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) administers the program in non-remote prisons through contracted service providers.

¹ Council of Australian Governments, Prison to Work Report, 2016.

About this evaluation

NIAA commissioned the Evaluation Team, led by Social Ventures Australia, on behalf of NIAA and DESE, to conduct an evaluation of TWES. The purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and to highlight possible future program improvements. The evaluation of TWES aimed to achieve three objectives:

1. **Understand the design and implementation of TWES:** Understand what is working, what is notworking and why.
2. **Understand the impact of TWES:** Understand the outcomes (both intended and unintended) that TWES has created and the extent to which the underlying causal assumptions in the program logic are correct.
3. **Understand how to improve TWES:** Understand how TWES could be improved to increase impact and what the implications are for future program design and implementation.

Methodology

The evaluation involved a theory-based, mixed-methods approach. A program logic guided the evaluation design, including enabling the testing of key assumptions and the extent to which outcomes were achieved. Evidence was collected at a number of levels of the program logic to help understand success. However, the primary focus was on measuring short-term outcomes, with longer-term outcomes being difficult to measure due to low data availability.

The scope of the evaluation covered the delivery of TWES in remote and non-remote prisons nationally over three years (2018-2021) since commencement. This timeframe included a significant period of disruption to TWES servicing due to COVID-19 (March 2020 to October 2020).

Following the principle of mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected including:

- Semi-structured interviews with program stakeholders, providers and current and past participants of TWES.
- Data analysis of program level data as derived from the Employment Services System (ESS) database and program documentation.

The evaluation was limited by several factors including challenges in understanding and measuring long-term outcomes of the program. Only three past TWES participants could be interviewed (out of a target sample of sixteen – eight in prison and eight post-release) due to practical challenges in identifying and recruiting willing interviewees. The evaluation also attempted to compare employment outcomes data recorded on the ESS database between samples of TWES participants and non-participants (counterfactual), however the results were inconclusive due to limitations in the data available and invalidity of the anticipated counterfactual.

Evaluation Findings

Objective 1: Understand the design and implementation of TWES

Understand what is working, what is not working and why

Overall finding for Objective 1:

TWES was designed to address Finding 5 of the Prison to Work report: “there is a lack of timely, co-ordinated and quality engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners from employment and welfare services.” Broadly this report identified a need to better engage prisoners nearing release, with post-release employment services providers. The basic design is relatively consistent with the core values of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).

TWES is a voluntary program, with complex implementation and delivery requirements involving a number of government agencies, and which delivers to a highly disadvantaged cohort. This has resulted in lower than expected overall program completion rates.

The evaluation found that a number of design aspects could be improved to help increase completion rates. This includes building in higher rates of prisoner engagement, improving provider understanding of the program and improving levels of Indigenous input and involvement.

Key Finding #1: TWES was developed following extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders through the Prison to Work report, but the evaluation found limited evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders were consulted during its design and implementation. The overall design of TWES did align service provision to the core IAS values of respect, collaboration and being strengths-based.

TWES was designed directly in response to the national findings and actions identified by the Prison to Work report, and specifically Finding 5. These findings and actions were developed after extensive national consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and experts including service providers, peak bodies, academics and prisoners. However, the evaluation found limited evidence about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders were consulted to take the findings of Prison to Work and design the specifics of the TWES model, or to implement the TWES model to the unique operating context of each correctional facility.

Options for consideration:

1. NIAA and DESE to establish a national reference group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders who can advise both agencies on ensuring that the ongoing delivery of, and any modifications to TWES, are culturally competent and appropriate, and reflect a holistic understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners' experiences and needs.
2. NIAA and DESE to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders with local knowledge and expertise are engaged in a co-design process through the design and implementation phases of future programs that are similar to TWES, to ensure that implementation is effective, locally relevant and strengths-based.

Key Finding #2: Just over half of participants who join TWES do not connect with a post-release employment service provider within 13 weeks of their release. Increasing the number of participants

who do connect with post-release employment service providers is challenging under the current model.

TWES aims to improve the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners' engagement with employment services. However, just over 50% of participants do not commence with employment services in the 13-week period after their release. Analysis of data on exits finds that there are two major exit points. Firstly, 18% of participants exit TWES early while still in the service in prison. About 12% of participants exit TWES early because they stop engaging with TWES providers, and another 6% exit because they are transferred to another prison, or the terms of their sentence change meaning that they are no longer eligible (including early release, early parole or rejected parole).

Secondly, 22% of participants exit TWES after they have left prison, without commencing with a post-release employment service provider within 13 weeks of their release.

TWES providers would find it difficult to address these exits under the current model because it is a voluntary service, and prisoners may be transferred or released early without warning. Participants may also not engage with employment services after their release for a wide range of reasons.

Options for consideration:

3. NIAA and DESE to reconsider the current service design in light of high exit rates, including initiatives that potentially improve completion rates to ensure the program is value for money. (Refer to options for consideration under other Key Findings).

Key Finding #3: TWES providers would benefit from having more time with participants before they are released, to build a relationship with them and deliver all of the core service activities.

An individual becomes eligible to participate in TWES when they are between four months and one month from their earliest possible release date. The TWES provider then has up to four months to recruit them into the service, complete the JSCI and ESAt, complete the transition plan, and organise and hold the Facilitated Transfer Meeting, where possible.

Many TWES providers and state and territory corrections stakeholders noted challenges to delivering the service effectively in four months. These challenges included finding available meeting rooms and telephones to meet with participants, security lockdowns, competition for meeting rooms with other legal or welfare services, and delays in receiving participants' health records from state and territory health departments to complete ESAts. Some TWES providers also expressed that four months is not long enough to build relationships with participants.

Options for consideration:

NIAA and DESE to extend the timeframe for which TWES can be delivered to participants from four to six months prior to release, and increase the minimum number of contacts, so TWES providers can accommodate for the delays and complications involved in coordinating with multiple stakeholders to successfully deliver all of the core servicing activities within prison settings, and further build rapport with participants. *(See also the options for consideration under Finding #7 in relation to cultural competency and building rapport.)*

Key Finding #4: TWES providers inconsistently understood how some aspects of TWES work.

There were inconsistent understandings of the ESAt process, and the incorrect belief that if a facilitated transfer does not happen then the ESAt gets 'lost in the system' and cannot be seen and used by post-

release employment services. These misunderstandings are likely due to the complexity of TWES, staff turnover, and poor awareness of some of the changes and improvements that have been made to TWES over time. Workshops and webinars were held in each state and territory with providers and corrections agencies at the commencement of the service to inform and train stakeholders on service requirements. All TWES providers are given program guidelines that describe the servicing activities in detail. The evaluation did not include a review of what NIAA and DESE have done to help TWES providers understand how to deliver the service, but there may be opportunities to clarify misunderstandings and help new TWES provider staff understand the service.

Options for consideration:

4. NIAA, DESE and Services Australia to share improved, plain language guidance to clarify for TWES providers how to deliver the TWES servicing activities correctly, particularly arranging the ESAt process.
5. NIAA, DESE and Services Australia to provide further Q&A sessions or other opportunities for TWES providers to ask questions, raise concerns, or clarify aspects of the service to help improve understanding of the service activities.

Key Finding #5: Most TWES participants are not receiving an Approved Transition Plan or a Facilitated Transfer Meeting with their referred post-release employment service provider before they leave prison.

Prior to a participant's release, TWES providers are meant to organise a Facilitated Transfer Meeting where possible between the participant and the post-release employment service provider who they have been referred to by Services Australia. However, analysis suggests that 13% of all TWES participants attended a Facilitated Transfer Meeting with their TWES provider and a post-release employment service provider before their exit. The evaluation found that Facilitated Transfer Meetings are largely not occurring due to reasons outside of the TWES providers' control. These reasons include participants not having a known address after release, TWES providers not receiving sufficient notice from Services Australia about a participant's referred employment service provider, and challenges with scheduling meetings with employment service providers.

Options for consideration:

6. NIAA and DESE to increase employment service providers' knowledge of TWES, to help increase willingness and interest to attend Facilitated Transfer Meetings.
7. NIAA, DESE and Services Australia to explore other options for TWES providers to connect participants with post-release employment service providers. This could include changing the conditions so TWES providers keep participants on their caseload longer than the current 13 weeks to allow additional time for a referral.
8. NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to explore options to provide better, more coordinated support services to prisoners who do not have, or do not provide, a known address before they leave prison.

Key Finding #6: TWES has evolved to complement state-based prison programs, and has been shown in some jurisdictions to target highly disadvantaged prisoners who cannot access other training and employment opportunities.

TWES operates alongside many other state and territory-funded in-prison services which focus on employment and skills development. State/territory government stakeholders noted that TWES complements and adds value to these other in-prison services by providing a pathway for prisoners who may not be able to participate in other programs, due to literacy, numeracy or other challenges, and who would need increased support from employment services after release from prison. TWES was found to complement other services but evidence showed that service delivery could be better coordinated to assist particularly high risk prisoners.

Options for consideration:

9. NIAA, DESE and state/territory governments to undertake jurisdictional level (and potentially prison level) planning to ensure that TWES and future similar programs complement and integrate with other in-prison services.
10. NIAA and DESE to create opportunities for TWES providers, such as virtual workshops, to share good practices and success stories with each other about building relationships with prisons to deliver and promote TWES successfully, coordinating with other in-prison services, and building relationships with prisoners to encourage participation and deliver an effective service.

Objective 2: Understand the impact of TWES:

Understand the outcomes (both intended and unintended) that TWES has created and the extent to which the underlying causal assumptions in the program logic are correct

Overall finding for Objective 2:

The evaluation found that some of the assumptions underlying the TWES program logic have not been met, reducing the impact of the service. In particular, it was found that TWES providers struggle to complete all four stages of the program, with lower rates of completion of the final two stages. TWES was found however to complement other in-prison services by enabling job assessments to occur within a prison environment (JSCI and ESAt assessments).

Adjusting the TWES model and exploring more efficient methods of coordinating the program could increase impact. A key approach would be to improve program communication with participants and increase the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Key Finding #7: TWES providers could strengthen cultural appropriateness by improving how the program is communicated and delivered to participants including through an increased role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prison staff.

Interviews with TWES participants found evidence that higher levels of cultural competency would help participants better understand the purpose of the service, and increase participants' trust in the process and capacity to engage. Increasing the involvement of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff in delivering TWES could help. Several participants said they would have liked an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) present in the meetings, and others said that they were glad that their TWES provider was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. ALOs are informally involved in supporting the delivery of TWES in some prisons, and this is identified as valuable. However, they are not funded to provide this support.

Options for consideration:

11. NIAA and DESE to review requirements in funding agreements with TWES providers to prioritise the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to deliver TWES where possible,

demonstrate how they will invest in the cultural competence and awareness of their staff, and build the skills of their staff to build positive working relationships with prisons, and rapport with prisoners.

12. NIAA, DESE and state/territory governments to explore opportunities to formalise the involvement of ALOs in TWES (in jurisdictions where ALOs operate) to help support promotion of the service and to build rapport with participants. This should include consideration of whether NIAA and DESE should fund ALOs to support delivery of the program.

Key Finding #8: Some of the key assumptions underlying the TWES program logic do not hold in practice, which limits the potential for TWES to improve how employment service providers engage with ex-offenders.

The logic of TWES assumes that Approved Transition Plans and Facilitated Transfer Meetings are a critical step to help participants understand their next steps after they leave prison, and help service providers to build a connection with participants and understand their needs. Finding #5 noted some of the reasons why it has not been possible for TWES providers to organise Facilitated Transfer Meetings. Increasing the proportion of participants receiving Facilitated Transfer Meetings, from the current figure of 13%, will be important to increase the impact on TWES participants' connection with employment service providers, where this is possible.

Options for consideration:

See the options for consideration under Objectives 1 and 2 regarding how to improve the program and address these issues.

Objective 3: Understand how to improve TWES

Understand how TWES could be improved to increase impact and what the implications are for future program design and implementation

Overall finding for Objective 3:

TWES has involved the coordination of multiple government agencies within the complex operating environment of prisons. However, TWES has been impacted by challenges which are outside providers' control, including at the point that prisoners leave prison. The Commonwealth could consider a number of options for rethinking the TWES model to approach this coordination challenge. This includes also considering TWES within a wider context of how to address the issue of people 'falling through the cracks' in the transition from prison to life outside.

Key Finding #9: TWES is only partially successful in addressing the service coordination challenges identified by Prison to Work. The respective roles of Commonwealth and state/territory governments in supporting ex-offenders through the post-release transition period should be reconsidered.

Prison to Work identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders are let down by a lack of coordination between support services. "*No one agency or organisation has oversight of prisoner transition into post-release life,*" which makes it harder for ex-offenders to get back on their feet and (re)enter the labour market.

This is a large and complex problem. The specific problem of service coordination is much larger than a single service like TWES could resolve. TWES does involve significant coordination between multiple government agencies and contracted providers each playing a role in delivering different elements of the service within prisons. This is a positive outcome. However, TWES appears to face challenges in

coordinating services at the point that prisoners transition to life outside prison. Only 13% of TWES participants receive a Facilitated Transfer Meeting, which means results in insufficient continuity of employment supports at this critical transition point for many TWES participants.

Furthermore, as *Prison to Work* identified, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders experience multiple and complex factors of disadvantage that can present barriers to employment and reintegrating with community life – such as housing, mental health, and alcohol and other drugs. TWES includes mechanisms to identify these needs and document them in a transition plan, and TWES providers are encouraged to coordinate with complementary services in prisons to provide required supports. However, the extent to which TWES providers take a holistic view of TWES participants' needs, and how they coordinate with other support services to meet participants' needs, depends in part on providers' mindsets and knowledge.

These findings point to opportunities for governments to enhance TWES and future policy making to respond to the findings of *Prison to Work*.

Options for consideration:

13. NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to explore opportunities to a) redefine the scope of Commonwealth-funded services to focus specifically on bringing the JSCI and ESAt assessments within prisons, and b) fund state/territory governments to deliver the transition planning and facilitated transfer components of TWES through existing and new throughcare services within a case management model.
14. NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to explore opportunities to expand the scope of TWES to a throughcare model that extends contact with participants until after their release from prison, and includes supporting them to connect with and navigate the employment and welfare systems. This should involve revisiting relevant findings and actions of *Prison to Work*, in particular Finding 7, “there is insufficient transitional support and through care”, and Finding 8, “there is insufficient stable accommodation, including transitional housing”.

Key Finding #10: Commonwealth and state/territory governments need to address data limitations and data linkages to enable better monitoring and evaluation of employment, recidivism and long-term outcomes.

Measuring the impact of programs like TWES on long-term outcomes requires data from state and territory corrections departments, which was not available for this evaluation. This will require significant investment in linking data between Commonwealth and state/territory government agencies.

Options for consideration:

This finding reinforces the actions identified in *Prison to Work* for the NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to establish a data linkage project to link data from the prison, employment and welfare systems.

Conclusion

The evaluation identified a number of options for NIAA, DESE and Services Australia to consider engaging with state/territory governments to improve the performance of TWES within the current model. However, it also identifies that some of the government coordination challenges encountered in TWES may require a reconsideration of the TWES model, and the respective roles and responsibilities of Commonwealth and

state/territory governments in providing throughcare support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders after they leave prison.

Any improvements to the current TWES model, or development of new similar services or policy, should involve a co-design process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and experts from the outset, and explore opportunities for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to lead the delivery of service where possible (whether through contract providers or ALOs in the prison system). Furthermore, the Commonwealth agencies and state/territory governments should continue to pursue opportunities to improve data collection and linkages across service boundaries to help improve evaluation and measurement of long-term outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are incarcerated and nearing the end of their prison sentence are a particularly vulnerable group in the community. Services like TWES that aim to improve services at this transition point are therefore crucial. TWES has faced a number of challenges in improving coordination of services at the transition from prison to work, and the evaluation provides a number of options for consideration for how this could be improved.

1. Introduction and Context

Context of TWES

Ex-prison offenders face significant challenges in finding employment after their release from prison.² The stigma associated with incarceration often makes finding work difficult, and when ex-offenders do find jobs they often earn less than individuals with similar background characteristics who have not been incarcerated.³ The period when ex-offenders first engage with employment services is often post-release, at a time when they are forced to manage multiple, complex life issues.⁴ This includes accessing support payments to afford food (involving navigation of Centrelink services) and finding appropriate accommodation.⁵ Unrealistic demands are made of ex-offenders when they are at their most vulnerable, immediately following release.⁶

Literature suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders face additional barriers to finding work after their release.⁷ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the prison system: despite constituting only 3% of the Australian population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 27% of the total prison population in 2016.⁸ Over-representation is greatest in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland.

International literature provides clear links between lack of employment or educational attainment and entry into the criminal justice system.⁹ Researchers generally agree that recidivism is less likely for people in high-quality jobs, with higher wages, longer periods of time and experiencing job satisfaction.¹⁰ Such context provides insight into the complex nature of the problem.

The TWES Program

In 2016, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commissioned the Prison to Work report. This was a major national report which represented a *“collective commitment to creating positive pathways to employment from prison for all adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders.”*¹¹

Prison to Work found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders who were adjusting to life after prison were let down by poorly coordinated support services, which saw many people falling through the gaps. The report provided nine national findings and a set of actions for Commonwealth and state/territory governments to address these challenges.

² Christy A. Visher, Sara A. Debus-Sherrill, and Jennifer Yahner. 2011. “Employment After Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Former Prisoners.” Justice Quarterly, 699; Christy A. Visher, Laura Winterfield, and Mark B. Coggeshall. 2005. “Ex-offender employment programs and recidivism: A meta-analysis.” Journal of Experimental Criminology, 296; Christopher Uggen, and Jeremy Staff. 2001. “Work as a Turning Point for Criminal Offenders.” Corrections Management Quarterly, 2; Joseph Graffam, and Alison Shinkfield. 2012. Strategies to enhance employment of Indigenous ex-offenders after release from correctional institutions. (Resource Sheet no.11, Closing the gap clearinghouse), 4.

³ Visher, “Employment after Prison”, 699; Uggen, “Work as a turning point”, 3.

⁴ Council of Australian Governments, Prison to Work Report. Australia, 19; Andrew Griffiths, Fredrick Zmudzki, and Shona Bates. 2017. “Evaluation of ACT Extended Throughcare Pilot Program.” Social Policy Research Centre, 61.

⁵ Graffam, “Strategies to enhance employment of Indigenous ex-offenders”, 3.

⁶ Council of Australian Governments, Prison to Work Report, 5.

⁷ Graffam, “Strategies to enhance employment of Indigenous ex-offenders”, 4.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2016. “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Prisoner Characteristics”, 2016 Census.

⁹ Australian Law Reform Commission, “Pathways to Justice”, 63; Marilyn C. Moses. 2012. “Ex-Offender Job Placement Programs Do Not Reduce Recidivism.” Corrections Today, 106.

¹⁰ Council of Australian Governments, Prison to Work Report, 141; Visher, “Employment after Prison”, 699; Visher, “Ex Offender Employment Programs”, 295.

¹¹ Council of Australian Governments, Prison to Work Report, 2016.

The Time to Work Employment Service (TWES) is a voluntary in-prison program that seeks to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to help facilitate their transition from prison to work. TWES is designed to address Finding 5 of the Prison to Work report:

“there is a lack of timely, co-ordinated and quality engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners from employment and welfare services.”

TWES targets adult, sentenced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners who are between one and four months from their earliest possible release date. TWES assists participants through assessment and linking support to post-release employment services where possible.

TWES was designed to address some of the challenges identified in the Prison to Work report including issues with the fragmentation of the service system and difficulties associated with navigating welfare and employment systems as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners transitioned from incarceration to community life and employment. While TWES addressed the issue with engagement from employment services, the current scope of TWES does not entail case management, service coordination and assistance with the navigation of service systems.

The TWES program requires collaboration and coordination across multiple stakeholders, including Commonwealth and state and territory agencies and contracted providers who are funded to promote, deliver and manage TWES in prisons (TWES providers). TWES is currently delivered by 21 TWES providers in 73 prisons across all states and territories.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) administers the program in remote prisons through Community Development Program (CDP) providers and the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) administers the program in non-remote prisons through providers contracted to deliver the service.

To date the Commonwealth Government has allocated a budget of \$27.9m to fund the delivery of TWES. This included an original commitment of \$24m in the 2017/18 budget – \$17.6m in non-remote locations (managed by DESE), and \$6.4m in remote locations (funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, managed by NIAA) – and an additional \$3.9m for a 12-month extension (non-remote areas, managed by DESE) in the 2020/21 budget.

TWES is delivered through four key steps:

- Conducting the **Job Seeker Classification Instrument** (JSCI) with the participant, which assesses their level of disadvantage in the labour market and risk of becoming or remaining long-term unemployed. The JSCI is used to help determine what level of support a participant should receive from employment services – specifically whether they will be allocated to jobactive Stream A or B.
- Arranging the **Employment Services Assessment** (ESAt), a biopsychosocial assessment of participants' barriers to employment which is conducted by Services Australia. The ESAt is also used to determine what level of support a participant should receive from employment services, and is necessary for a participant to reach higher levels of support (jobactive Stream C or Disability Employment Services).
- Developing a **Transition Plan** that includes the participant's education and work experience, aspirations, support needs, medical information and parole requirements, where appropriate.
- Arranging a **Facilitated Transfer Meeting** with the participant and their referred post-release employment services provider, where possible. The participant is referred to a specific employment

services provider by Services Australia – the TWES provider is notified of the referral, and must then arrange the meeting in prison or over the phone.

To be eligible to participate in TWES, prisoners must be: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (self-identified), at least 18 years old, sentenced and within one to four months of their release from prison, and in an adult prison (no remand centres). Participation in TWES is voluntary, and participants can choose to quit the service at any time.

TWES providers are also responsible for promoting the service within prisons to sign-up eligible participants, coordinating with prisons and other service providers to coordinate service delivery, delivering all service activities with cultural competence and awareness, and managing data entry and administrative systems.

2. Evaluation Methodology

The TWES Evaluation Strategy was originally developed in 2019 and provided a guide for the evaluation including key evaluation questions and sub-questions (see **Appendix 1** for the full list of sub-questions).

The TWES evaluation aimed to achieve three objectives, by answering a set of evaluation questions under each objective (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Evaluation objectives and questions

Evaluation objectives	Evaluation questions
Objective 1: Understand the design and implementation of TWES Understand what is working, what is not working and why	1.1 How does the design of TWES address relevant findings in the <i>Prison to Work</i> report? 1.2 Does TWES address the IAS core values? 1.3 To what extent has implementation of TWES been successful in achieving its intended program outcomes - "timely, coordinated and quality engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Prisoners from Employment and Welfare Services"? 1.4 What has been learned through implementation?
Objective 2: Understand the impact of TWES Understand the outcomes (both intended and unintended) that TWES has created and the extent to which the underlying causal assumptions in the program logic are correct	2.1 To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes in the program logic, in the short, medium and long- term? 2.2 Why have the outcomes been achieved? Or why not?
Objective 3: Understand how to improve TWES Understand how TWES could be improved to increase impact and what the implications are for future program design and implementation.	3.1 What are the preconditions for TWES to be successful? 3.2 What changes could be made to TWES to increase impact?

The TWES evaluation methodology was informed by the principles of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Evaluation Framework Principles. As such, the choice of methodology was informed by:

1. Capturing the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. The evaluation sought to include the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
2. Adopting a pragmatic approach. The evaluation sought to balance rigour in the measurement and attribution of outcomes with the efficient use of time and resources.

3. Supporting improvement and decision-making. The evaluation aimed to generate insights and lessons learned to help inform how TWES could be improved. This included understanding set up and implementation, the factors that have influenced success, and the potential for future improvements.

Methodology

The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods evaluation methodology. A program logic was developed for TWES to describe the key components and activities of the service, the outcomes created for TWES participants and employment service providers, and the assumptions underpinning the service and outcomes. The program logic was developed as part of the TWES Evaluation Strategy in consultation with NIAA, DESE and state/territory corrections departments. See **Section 3** for the program logic.

The TWES program logic identified nine priority outcomes, which provided a focus for evaluation. These reflect short-term outcomes that are directly achievable by the program. Priority outcomes were selected in consultation with the above stakeholders. Criteria used for the prioritisation exercise included the importance of each outcome, feasibility of measurement, and the ability to attribute outcomes to TWES. Each priority outcome is described below, including the justification for prioritisation.

The program logic was used to structure data collection and analysis to answer the evaluation questions. Data collection methods (see below) were designed to collect data to validate whether TWES was being implemented as intended, whether assumptions were correct, and whether expected outcomes were being achieved. The evaluation report refers to the TWES program logic throughout, to ground the evaluation findings in this model of what outcomes TWES aims to achieve for participants and employment service providers, and how it aims to contribute to these outcomes.

Data Collection

The evaluation used the following quantitative and qualitative data sources:

- **Literature review:** Based on a purposive search strategy to identify the existing knowledge both in Australia and overseas for similar programs.
- **Document review:** Including the Performance Framework Guidelines for TWES providers and a sample of TWES provider Progress Reports.
- **Analysis of administrative data:** These data sources include: TWES caseload data entered by TWES providers into the 'Employment Services System' (ESS data) containing employment services data; TWES provider data providing the 6-monthly numbers of eligible prisoners for each remote/non-remote location; financial summaries of payments made to TWES providers; and analysis of employment outcomes data for TWES participants and non-participants to compare outcomes.
- **Semi-structured interviews** with key program stakeholders: including Services Australia, NIAA, DESE, state/territory corrections and health departments, TWES providers, past participants and small numbers post-release.

Table 2 summarises the target and actual sample sizes for all semi-structured interviews.

Table 2: Target and actual sample sizes for semi-structured interviews

Stakeholder group	Target sample size	Sample achieved	As a percentage
-------------------	--------------------	-----------------	-----------------

NIAA	2	2	100%
DESE	3	3	100%
Services Australia	2	2	100%
State/territory health departments	2	1	50%
State/territory corrections departments	8	8	100%
TWES providers	17	16	94%
Current participants	64	57	89%
Past participants – pre-release	8	0	0%
Past participants – post-release	8	3	38%

The evaluation faced limitations in interviewing current and past TWES participants:

- The evaluation achieved a sample of 57 interviews with current TWES participants (89% of target sample). The target could not be reached because some participants did not attend the scheduled interview, some declined to sign the consent form at the beginning of the meeting, and some were released from prison shortly before the scheduled trip.
- Past participants who had exited TWES, but were still in prison, were too difficult to recruit to interviews, as they had disengaged from the service. None of this cohort were successfully interviewed.
- Past participants who had completed TWES and had left prison were difficult to find and recruit due to logistical reasons. Three of this cohort were successfully interviewed (38% of target sample).

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using three primary methods:

- **Descriptive analysis of quantitative administrative data:** Aggregation, analysis and calculations of means and proportions. The primary data source for this analysis is the ESS data held by NIAA and DESE. ESS data was compiled, de-identified and provided to the Evaluation Team via a secure file transfer facility. The data period analysed was from the commencement of TWES in January 2018 to 28 February 2021.
- **Statistical analysis of outcomes:** Logistic regression analysis of the employment outcomes achieved by TWES participants, compared with a sample of non-participants. The results of this analysis were inconclusive as it was not possible to construct a valid counterfactual (see next page).
- **Thematic analysis of qualitative data:** The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews was analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and common themes to help answer the evaluation questions. All interview notes were entered into an Excel table, interview responses coded and organised into categories, and common patterns identified and grouped by stakeholder type and key themes.

The following assumptions were made to estimate the employment outcomes achieved by TWES participants who used jobactive or CDP services after being released from prison:

- **Inclusions in sample:** TWES participants were included in the sample for this analysis if (as of 28 February 2021) they had exited TWES, and their exit reason was either 'Participant moved to post-release employment services' or 'Voluntary early exit'. Participants who had not exited the program or who exited for any other reasons (see **Table 4**) were excluded from the analysis.
- **Employment programs:** Only employment outcomes achieved in jobactive or CDP programs were included. Other employment programs were excluded due to small sample sizes. A job placement was considered to have been achieved if the ESS dataset stated that a job placement was achieved in either jobactive or CDP.
- **Treatment of duplicates:** Where a participant had multiple interactions with jobactive and/or CDP, the analysis used their 'best' employment outcome and removed the others from the analysis. For example, if a participant used jobactive once and secured employment, but was no longer in employment before the 4-week mark, and then successfully used jobactive a second time to secure a job that they retained for over 26 weeks, the analysis counted them as achieving a 26-week outcome.

Ethics

This evaluation required ethics approval through a formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The Evaluation Team obtained ethics approval for this Evaluation from the AIATSIS HREC in August 2020. The corrections departments of WA and QLD required approval for the evaluation's stakeholder consultation, which was obtained in September and December 2020. The jurisdictions of NSW and NT did not require approvals.

Limitations

The findings of the TWES Evaluation should be considered in the context of the following limitations:

- **COVID-19:** COVID-19 had an impact on the capacity to collect data (see next page).
- **Self-disclosure:** Interviews relied on stakeholders and TWES participants to accurately self-disclose their perspectives on TWES, or their experiences or challenges with the program. The Evaluation Team were mindful of helping interviewees feel comfortable, but self-disclosure is always voluntary. Despite the Evaluation Team's expertise and efforts to help TWES participants feel comfortable to discuss the service, some participants did not engage extensively in interviews. This could have been due to shame or shyness, a lack of relationship with the Evaluation Team (as it was a one-off conversation), language barriers, or a lack of trust in the prison system, and therefore the nature of the interview. However, information gathered was sufficient to answer the evaluation questions alongside other data sources.
- **Semi-structured interviews:** Semi-structured interviews allowed the Evaluation Team to gather information using a guide of key questions, while leaving space to explore unexpected themes or issues that emerge. The limitation of this approach is that with limited time (usually one hour for stakeholders, and 45 minutes for TWES participants), it is not always possible or appropriate to answer every single interview question with every interviewee. There are therefore some gaps in data.

- **Recruiting past participants to interviews:** The evaluation faced challenges in recruiting past TWES participants for interviews, for some of the same reasons that TWES providers struggle to follow participants after they leave prison – individuals were hard to contact and reluctant to speak. Three past participants were interviewed, out of a target sample of eight.
- **TWES provider cultural competency:** The evaluation methods did not include a review of TWES providers' cultural competency policies or procedures. Evaluating the extent to which TWES providers delivered the service with cultural competency therefore relied on using semi-structured interviews with program stakeholders and TWES participants.
- **Value for money:** The evaluation did not attempt to assess the extent to which TWES represented value for money. During the development of the TWES Evaluation Strategy with NIAA and DESE, the decision was made to exclude an evaluation sub-question about whether TWES represented value for money. This decision was made because it would be too difficult to meaningfully compare the cost of TWES against a valid benchmark or comparison program. Furthermore, it was not possible to collect data from providers about their overhead and delivery costs to compare value for money within the program (i.e. comparing TWES providers).
- **Limitations in administrative data:** ESS data was affected by a number of limitations, including data on exit reasons and JSCI results.
- **Valid counterfactual:** The evaluation aimed to compare the outcomes achieved by TWES against a counterfactual scenario in which individuals did not participate in the service. To do this, the evaluation attempted to compare employment outcomes achieved by TWES participants after they left prison, with employment outcomes achieved by a sample of non-participants (who identified as ex-offenders and as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander), using administrative data from the ESS database. However, the results of this analysis were inconclusive as this dataset was insufficient to create a valid comparison group. A valid comparison group would require data on independent variables including participants and non-participants' sentencing history, release dates and other factors. This data is held by state/territory departments of justice or corrections and is not available on ESS.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Evaluation

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the delivery of TWES and the evaluation. Changes in the timeframe and plan for the evaluation included:

- Ethics approvals were delayed as AIATSIS and QLD Corrective Services extended their timeframes or stopped reviewing ethics applications for a period.
- Restrictions on travel across state/territory borders meant that SVA had to subcontract 3 new team members in NT, WA and QLD to ensure that there was a team of two opposite gendered, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander researchers in each jurisdiction.
- NSW consultations with TWES participants were moved to phone-only consultations, and two new prisons were added to the sample to achieve the desired sample size (as COVID-19 restrictions on prison visits meant it would not be possible to interview enough participants at a single prison).
- In response to the impact of COVID-19 on TWES, additional analyses were conducted to help understand the impact of COVID-19 on the number of participants commencing TWES and implementation

The TWES Evaluation Team was made of Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting, Karen Milward Consulting, Professor Nicholas Biddle of the Australian National University, and contractors Sorrell Ashby, Jayde Geia and Ralph Mogridge (see **Appendix 2**).

3. TWES Program Logic

The TWES program logic is central to the theory-based evaluation methodology used in the TWES evaluation. It describes what outcomes TWES aims to achieve for participants and employment service providers, and how it aims to create these – the causal pathways connecting activities and outcomes.

The TWES program logic was developed as part of the original TWES Evaluation Strategy in consultation with NIAA, DESE and state/territory corrections departments. TWES program logic summary version is presented in **Figure 1** which provides a summary of the key components of TWES. **Figure 2** presents detail on the priority outcomes created by TWES, which are the focus of the TWES evaluation.

Priority outcomes identified in the program logic

The TWES program logic identified nine priority program outcomes that provide a focus for evaluation (**Figure 2**). These reflect short-term outcomes that are directly achievable by the program. Priority outcomes were selected in consultation with the above stakeholders. Criteria used for the prioritisation exercise included the importance of each outcome, feasibility of measurement, and ability to attribute outcomes to TWES. Each priority outcome is described below, including the justification for prioritisation.

Short term (2-4 months pre-release)

1. **Participants have assessments while in prison:** A key component of TWES is that employment assessments take place while the participant is still in prison. The JSCI is carried out by the TWES provider, and the ESAt is carried out by Services Australia.
2. **Participants have TWES transition plans developed in prison:** Another key component of TWES is the transition plan, which documents a participant's education and medical information, barriers to employment as well as their skills, experience and aspirations, other commitments that may affect job search post-release and any vulnerabilities experienced by the participant. It is developed with the participant over the course of the meetings with the TWES provider. The transition plan is not the same as the job plan which would be developed with the post-release employment service provider.
3. **Participants connect with post-release provider while in prison:** This outcome relates to the key component of the facilitated transfer. It is intended that this is a meeting between the TWES provider, the participant and a post-release employment service provider while still in prison.
4. **Participants feel that the TWES services are culturally and gender appropriate:** The design of TWES is intended to ensure that the services are carried out with cultural competence and are appropriate for both men and women.
5. **Participants feel more comfortable answering assessment questions:** Flowing from priority outcome 4, the logic is that if participants feel that services are being appropriately delivered and feel comfortable, participants will answer the assessment questions frankly and accurately. It is expected that this will ultimately lead to receiving the appropriate level of support post-release.

Figure 1: TWES Program Logic Part 1 – Summary Version

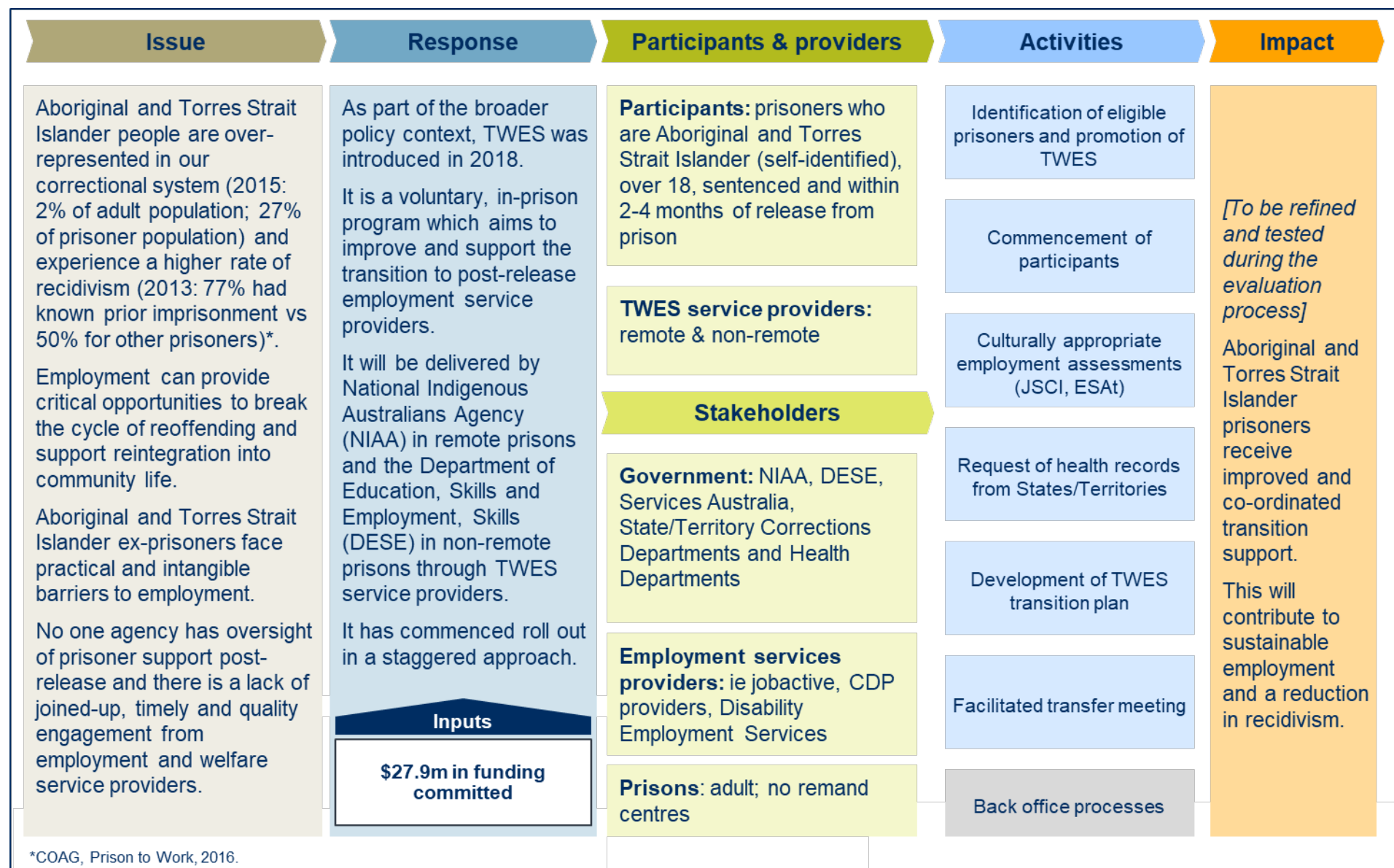
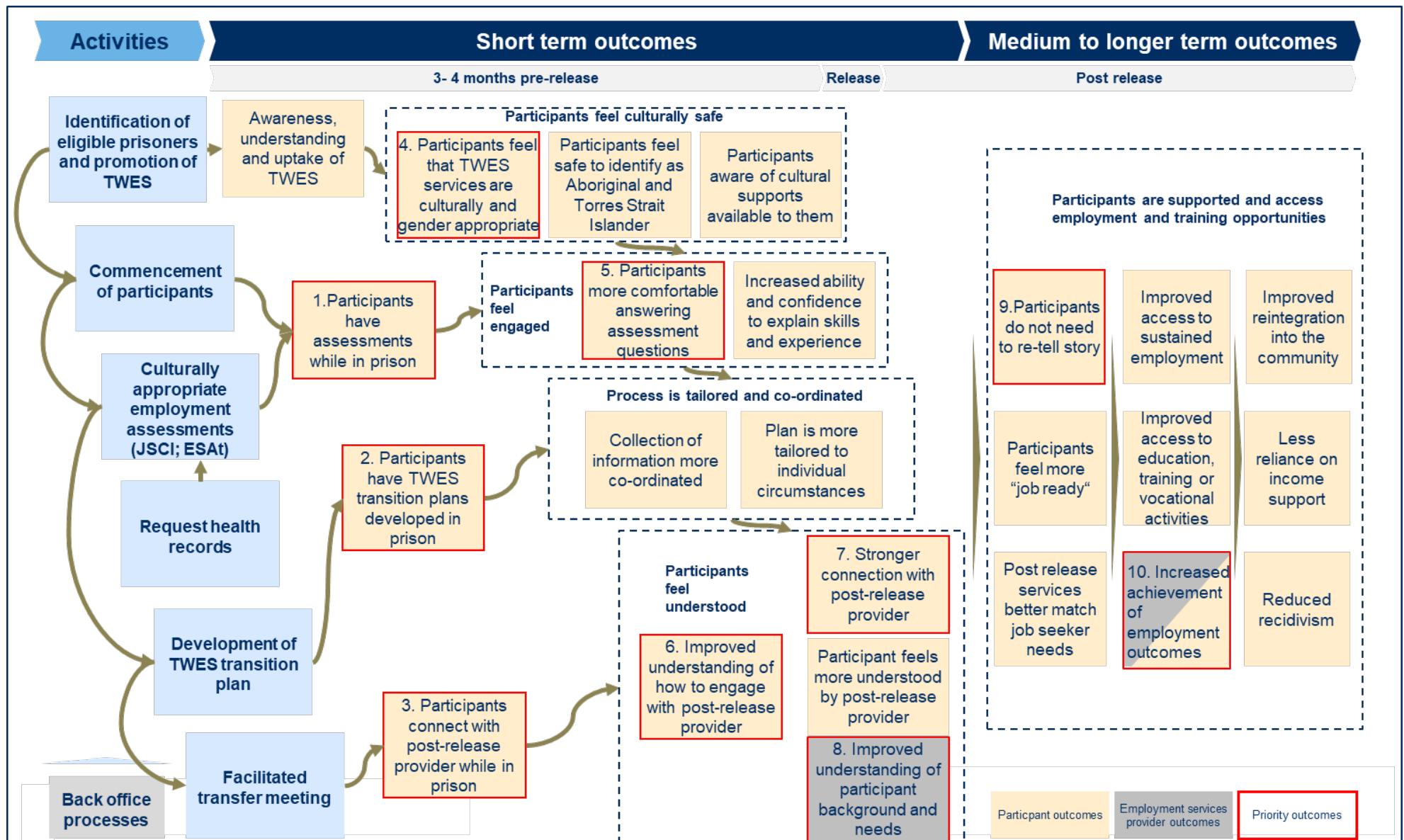


Figure 2: TWES Program Logic Part 2 – Detail on outcomes



6. **Improved understanding of how to engage with post-release provider:** Flowing from priority outcome 3, the logic is that if participants have met their post-release employment service provider while still in prison, they will have a clear understanding of the plan to meet the post-release employment service provider again post-release.

Short term (post-release)

7. **Stronger connection with the post-release provider:** Flowing from the above priority outcomes, the logic is that if participants have met the post-release employment service provider while still in prison, and are clear on the plan for meeting the employment service provider post-release, that the participant will make contact with (and continue to engage with) the employment service provider.
8. **Improved understanding of job seeker background and needs:** Flowing from priority outcome 2, it is expected that the transition plan incorporates relevant details about the participant and that it will assist the post-release employment service provider to quickly and effectively understand the background and needs of the participant.

Medium to longer term (post-release)

9. **Participants do not retell their story:** Flowing from priority outcomes 2 and 8, if the transition plan effectively captures and incorporates the relevant details about the participant, it is anticipated that participants will not have to retell their story on multiple occasions after they are released from prison and engage with employment service providers.
10. **Increased achievement of employment outcomes:** One of the priority longer term outcomes is that TWES participants will be more likely to secure and retain employment. While TWES was not intended to directly secure employment for prisoners, it aims to contribute to this outcome by supporting and improving their engagement with employment services post-release.

The program, as reflected in stakeholder aspirations also seeks to contribute to reduced recidivism particularly through the mechanism of gaining employment.

Key assumptions

The achievement of priority outcomes is underpinned by several key assumptions:

- **Access to prisons.** The program logic assumes that TWES providers can access prisons to deliver TWES to participants.
- **Prisoners continue to participate.** TWES is a voluntary program. The program logic assumes that 50% of eligible prisoners will agree to participate in TWES and will continue in TWES.
- **Prisoner willingness and ability to connect with their post-release provider.** After release, it is the decision of TWES participants to reconnect with their employment services provider (who they should have been introduced to through TWES, before release).
- **Jurisdictional differences.** The program logic assumes that the activities and outcomes are broadly aligned across jurisdictions and across remote and non-remote locations.
- **Employment assessments.** The program logic assumes that prisoners will agree to undertake the JSCI and ESAt assessments, that this takes place, that the assessment tools are effective in identifying needs, and that this leads to post-release services better meeting prisoner needs. A key rationale for delivering the ESAt in prison is that the ESAt assessor can access the participant's medical records more easily than if the ESAt is carried out post-release.

- **Staff recruitment and retention.** The program logic assumes that TWES providers can recruit and retain staff who are appropriately qualified and culturally competent to ensure continuity in quality delivery of TWES services.
- **Employment outcomes and external variables.** As noted above, the causal relationship between participation in TWES and the achievement of employment outcomes is affected by many different variables, including participant demographics such as their work experience prior to incarceration; the consistency of any such work experience; family and community relationships upon release.

The evaluation report refers to the TWES program logic throughout, to ground the evaluation findings in this model of what outcomes TWES aims to achieve for participants and employment service providers, and how it aims to contribute to these outcomes.

4. Evaluation Findings

This section presents the findings of the evaluation under each of the three evaluation objectives.

4.1 Objective 1: Understand the design and implementation of TWES

Objective 1 of the evaluation is to understand the design and implementation of TWES: what is working, what is not working and why. Findings on Objective 1 are presented under the following questions:

1. Does the design and delivery of TWES embody a strengths-based, collaborative and respectful approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders?
2. When did TWES roll out across states and territories and remote and non-remote locations?
3. What is the number and profile of TWES participants?
4. How was TWES promoted and what methods were used?
5. Why did participants exit TWES prior to completion?
6. Why were elements of TWES such as the ESAt or Facilitated Transfers not carried out?
7. How did TWES relate to existing services or programs and what were the implications of this?
8. What was the cost of delivering TWES?

Does the design and delivery of TWES embody a strengths-based, collaborative and respectful approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders?

Key Finding #1: TWES was developed following extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders through the Prison to Work report, but the evaluation found limited evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders were consulted during its design and implementation. The overall design of TWES did align service provision to the core IAS values of respect, collaboration and strengths-based.

Options for consideration:

1. NIAA and DESE to establish a national reference group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders who can advise both agencies on ensuring that the ongoing delivery of, and any modifications to TWES, are culturally competent and appropriate, and reflect a holistic understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners' experiences and needs.
2. NIAA and DESE to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders with local knowledge and expertise are engaged in a co-design process through the design and implementation phases of future programs that are similar to TWES, to ensure that implementation is effective, locally relevant and strengths-based.

The TWES Evaluation aimed to evaluate whether the design and delivery of TWES embodied the three core values of the Commonwealth Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). These values are:¹²

- **Respect:** programs and activities demonstrate cultural respect towards Indigenous Australians.
- **Collaboration:** programs and activities are designed and delivered in collaboration with Indigenous Australians, ensuring diverse voices are heard and respected.
- **Strengths-based:** programs and activities build on strengths to make a positive contribution to the lives of current and future generations of Indigenous Australians.

The IAS Evaluation Framework outlines that all Commonwealth-funded programs, services and policies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities should be evaluated against these values. The evaluation considered the extent to which these core values were embodied in 1) collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders during the design of TWES, 2) whether the components of TWES reflect these values, and 3) whether the delivery of TWES reflects these values.

1. Was TWES designed in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders?

TWES was designed to address findings of the *Prison to Work* report. This report was developed based on extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. TWES was designed specifically in response to Finding 5 of *Prison to Work*, and the actions identified for Commonwealth and state/territory governments under that finding. *Prison to Work*'s findings and actions were developed after extensive national consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and experts including service providers, peak bodies, academics, and prisoners. Consultations were led by Jeremy Donovan, a Kuku-Yalanji artist, leader and consultant, and the *Prison to Work* project team, which was based at NIAA.

However, the evaluation found limited evidence about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders were consulted at the implementation phase of TWES – for example, to help take the findings of *Prison to Work* and design the specifics of the TWES model, or to implement the TWES model to the unique operating context of correctional facilities.

Furthermore, the evaluation did not find evidence that TWES had established a mechanism to continue gathering independent advice and input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and experts on the ongoing delivery and improvement of the service – such as a cultural reference group.

2. Does the design of TWES embody the core IAS values?

The evaluation found that the design of TWES enabled service provision to align with the IAS core values through several mechanisms. First, the JSCI process was adapted by DESE and NIAA to be more culturally appropriate for use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners. In mainstream contexts, the JSCI is delivered as a highly structured questionnaire in a single sitting with a client. TWES providers were required to adapt the JSCI to be more culturally appropriate. This included using more accessible language and plain English, asking questions sensitively, and gathering the required information through a conversational style over multiple conversations as appropriate.

Second, while the ESAt format was not changed, Services Australia reported that they allocated dedicated staff to conducting ESAts with TWES participants who are more experienced, have received additional training around cultural competency, and have a better understanding of the context, language barriers, and post-release employment pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners.

Third, the tendering process aimed to select TWES providers who aligned with the IAS core values. This included: giving priority to Indigenous-led organisations; requiring non-Indigenous organisations to demonstrate

¹² Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet (2018) *Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework*

a connection with Indigenous communities; requiring successful providers to demonstrate cultural competence and a commitment to continued investment in cultural competence; and requiring successful providers to demonstrate a solid understanding of the justice system and the issues Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners might face (including specific issues that may relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in prison and after release).

Finally, the TWES Guidelines Performance Framework outlines performance requirements that TWES providers maintain high levels of cultural competence.¹³ The Performance Framework recommends that TWES providers invest in their cultural competence continually through staff training and implementing organisational policies.

3. Does the delivery of TWES embody the core IAS values?

The evaluation found that TWES providers could strengthen cultural appropriateness in the delivery of TWES by improving how the service is communicated to participants, and increasing the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

None of the participants interviewed for the evaluation reported that their TWES provider demonstrated disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour or attitudes in terms of gender or cultural respect. However, there was evidence that higher levels of cultural competency would improve the communication of program intent, improve participants trust in the process and capacity to engage. For example, some participants said that their TWES provider did not explain what the service was about, or spoke too fast or unclearly. Some participants said that they would have liked an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) present in the meetings, and others said that they were glad that their TWES provider was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. See page 55 for additional findings on TWES participants' experience of the cultural competence of TWES.

The vast majority of TWES provider staff appeared to demonstrate cultural competence in the interviews. Staff from 17 TWES providers were interviewed for the evaluation. The Evaluation Team's perspective during these interviews was that the vast majority of interviewees used language that reflected cultural competency, cultural respect and strengths-based attitudes towards TWES participants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners and ex-offenders more broadly. One interviewee used language that the Evaluation Team viewed as disrespectful and deficit-based and not aligned with IAS core values, however it should be noted that this interviewee does not necessarily represent their organisation, and the evaluation methods did not include a review of TWES providers' cultural policies or procedures.

The evaluation identified two options for NIAA and DESE to improve collaboration and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and experts in the design and delivery of TWES and similar programs (see above).

4. When did TWES roll out across states and territories and remote and non-remote locations?

TWES was successfully rolled out to 73 prisons, in non-remote and remote locations, across all states and territories. COVID-19 had a significant impact on the ability of TWES providers to promote and deliver the service. However, overall new participants did continue to commence the service, and delivery has increased with the easing of restrictions.

The TWES program was rolled out across states and territories in a staggered approach. Non-remote sites were the first to be established with remote sites not commencing until mid-2019 (See Figure 3 and Figure 4). participants began commencing TWES in all jurisdictions before the impact of COVID-19 on service delivery in corrections facilities in March 2021. As of February 2021, TWES had been rolled out in non-remote sites within all six states and both territories, and in remote sites within three states and one territory (WA, QLD, SA and NT). The rollout of TWES first involved a 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MOU) agreed with each state and

¹³ Time to Work Employment Service, Guideline: Performance Framework, May 2018

territory, then a 'Contracted Service Start Date' with each TWES provider. Each prison has one contracted TWES provider to deliver the TWES service.

After two years of implementation (May 2018 to February 2021) TWES was being implemented in 73 prisons (65 non-remote and 8 remote), supported by 21 TWES providers (13 non-remote, 8 remote). TWES was initially rolled out to 70 non-remote prisons but this decreased to 65 by February 2021. TWES ceased being delivered in some non-remote prisons because those prisons became transit centres or were closed, or eligible prisoner numbers were too small to sustain TWES delivery.

Figure 3: Roll-out of TWES across states and territories (Non-remote)

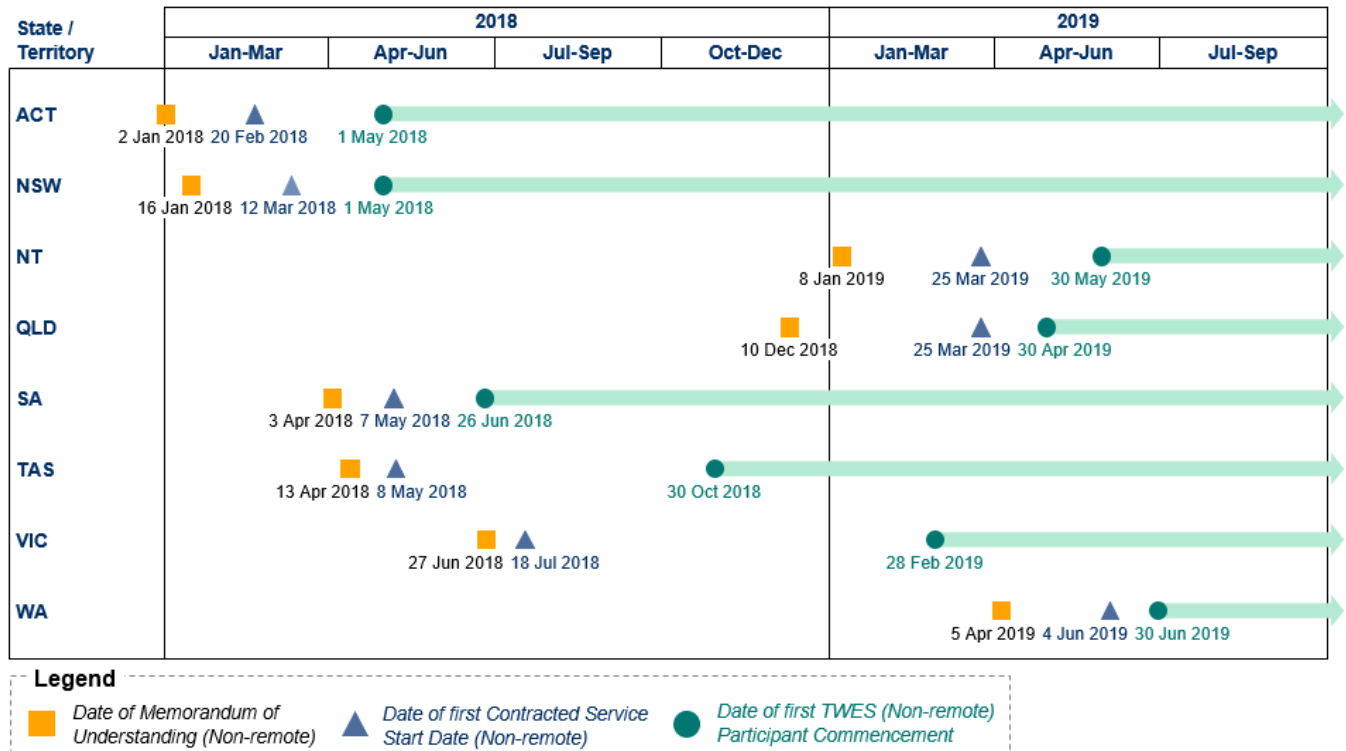
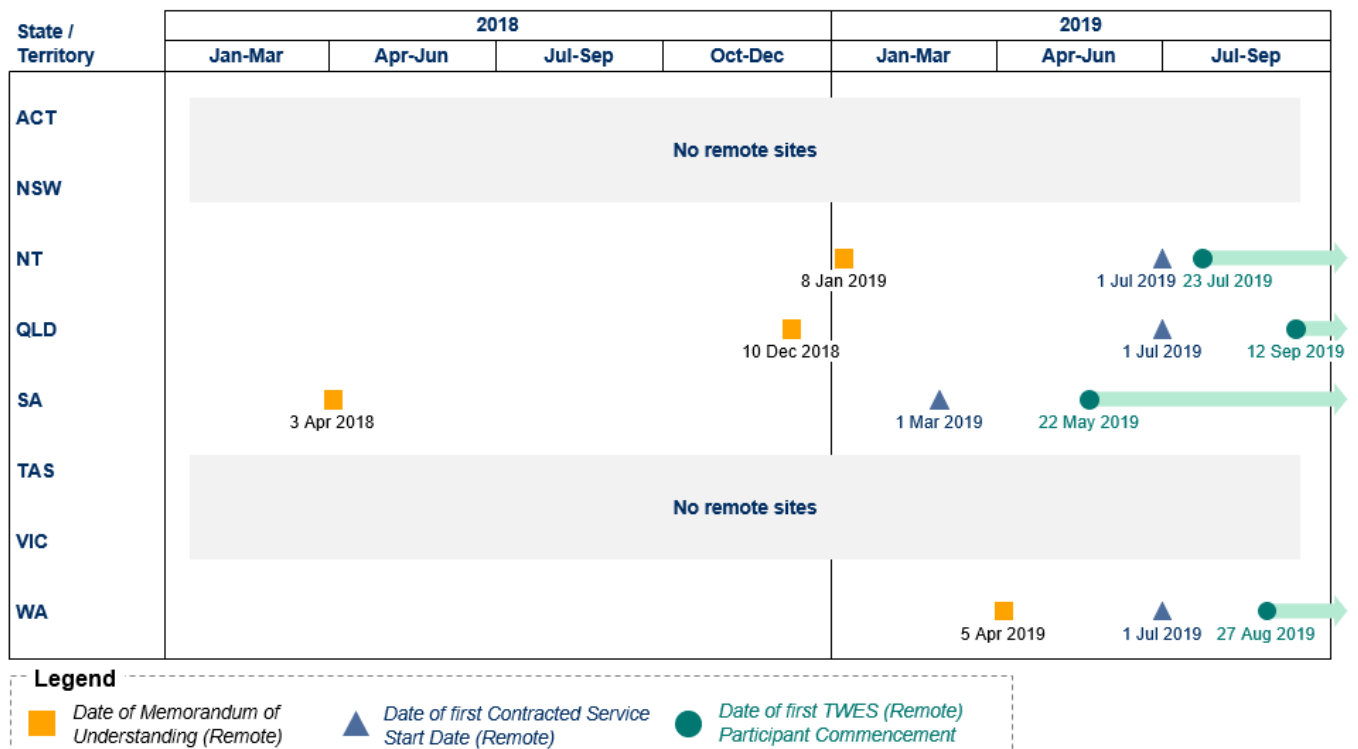


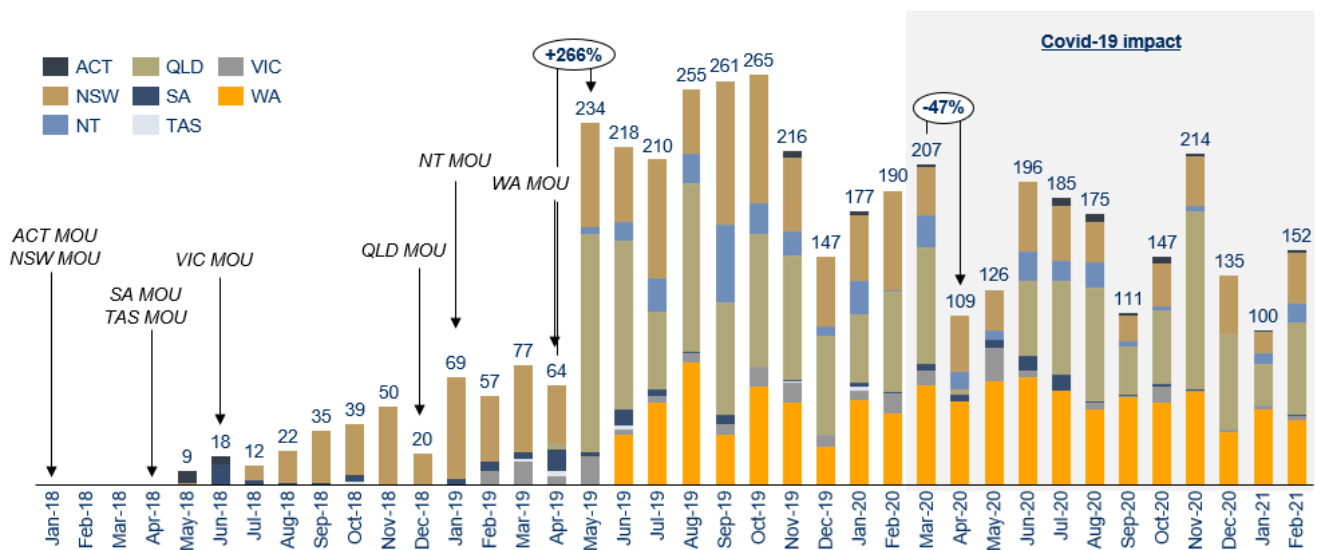
Figure 4: Roll-out of TWES across states and territories (Remote)



A total of 4,502 TWES participants commenced TWES since the service began. The number of TWES participants commencing the program every month peaked at 265 in October 2019 (Figure 3). The number of TWES participants commencing every month increased greatly between April and May 2019 (270%) including large numbers of TWES participants commencing in Queensland (141).

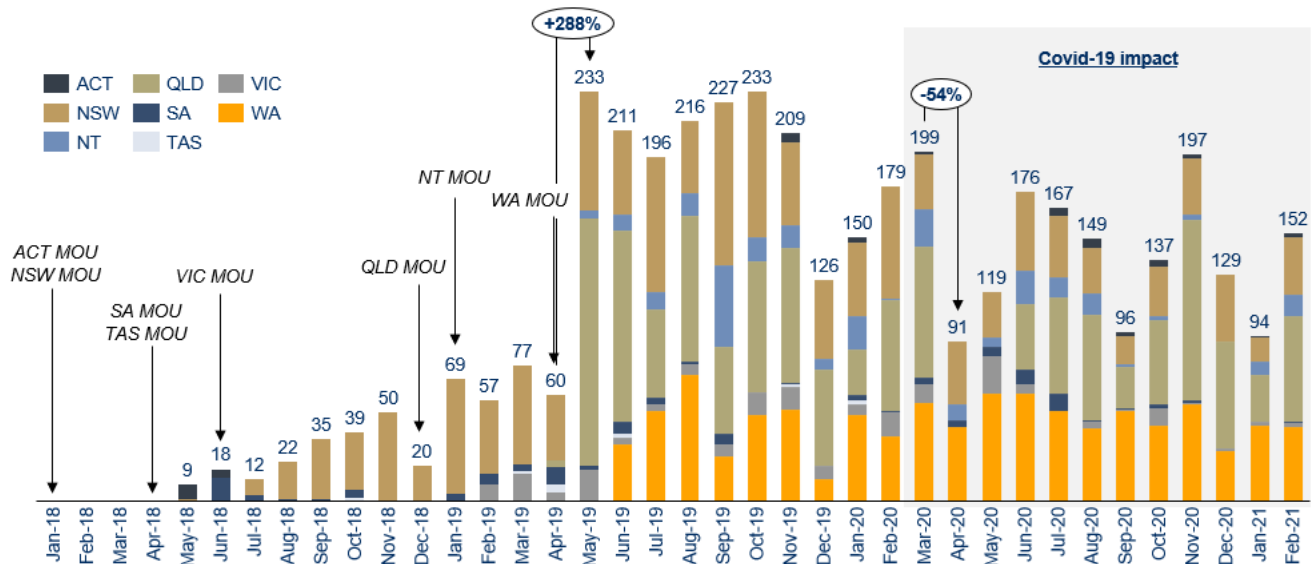
COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on the level of delivery of TWES. The number of TWES participants commencing every month decreased by 47% after March 2020, coinciding with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 5). Most prisons across Australia stopped almost all face-to-face visits, including from services such as TWES providers. Of note, QLD locked down all prisons and prevented programs and services from accessing prisons for approximately three months. This had an impact on the ability of TWES providers to promote the service, build relationships with eligible prisoners and corrections staff, and encourage new participants. In some cases, where facilities were available TWES providers moved their activities (including meetings and JSCI assessments) to telephone or videoconferencing. However, TWES providers had to compete with other services for these facilities (some of which were given priority over TWES, such as legal services).

Figure 5: TWES participants commencing over time (non-remote and remote)



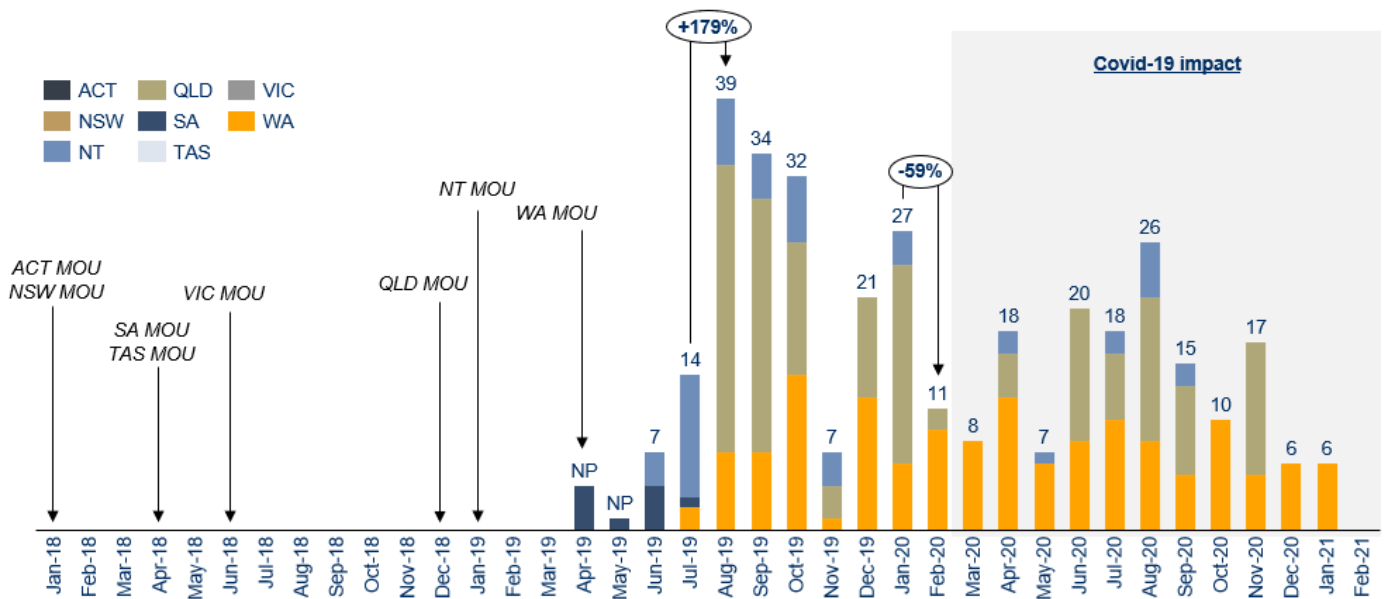
The number of new participants commencing TWES each month in non-remote sites began before remote sites (see **Figure 6**). There was a ~288% increase in new participants between April and May 2019 (again due to the 141 in QLD). There was a ~54% drop in new participants commencing each month after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

Figure 6: TWES participant commencing over time (Non-Remote)



As noted, new participants commencing TWES in remote areas began a number of months after non-remote sites, with an increase of 179%, between July and August 2019, coinciding with the first TWES participants commencing in QLD (total of 26). There was a decrease in the number of new participants each month of 59% between January and February 2020 (see **Figure 7**).

Figure 7: TWES participant commencing over time (Remote)

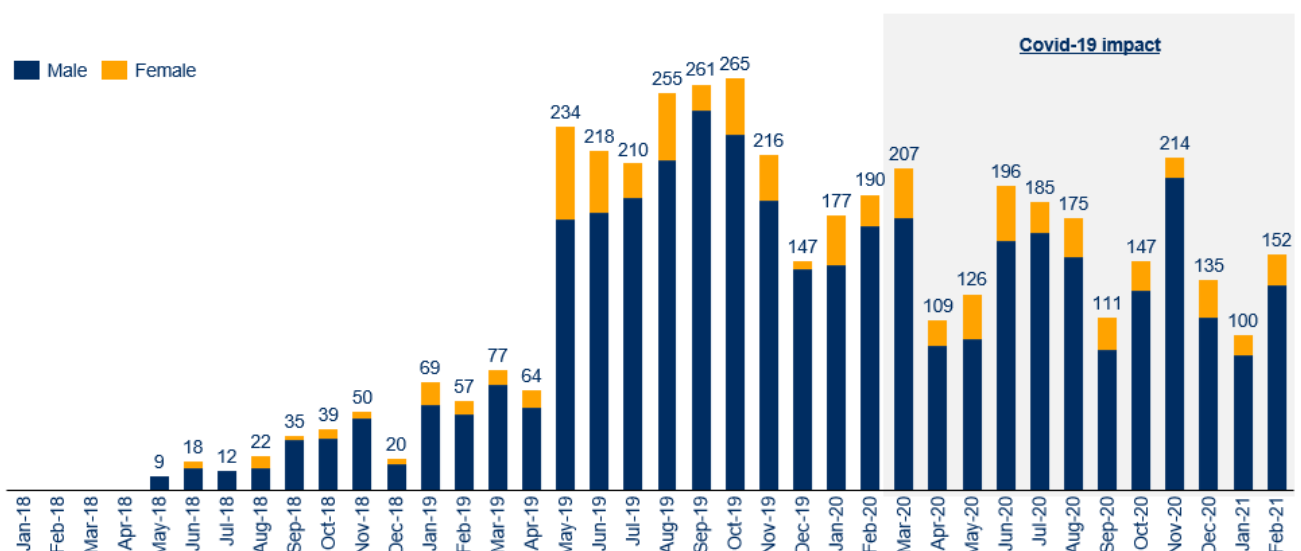


What is the profile of TWES participants?

Most TWES participants are male, in urban and regional areas of QLD, NSW and WA, and almost half (43%) are below 29 years old. TWES achieved an approximate uptake rate of 22% in prisons in non-remote areas.¹⁴

Figure 8 presents the number of male and female TWES participants commencing every month up until 28 February 2021. The majority of TWES participants were male (across remote and non-remote sites). The increase in women commencing TWES in May 2019 coincides with the first participants commencing in the QLD prisons of Townsville Correctional Complex and Southern Queensland Correctional Centre.

Figure 8: TWES participants commencing over time (Male and Female)

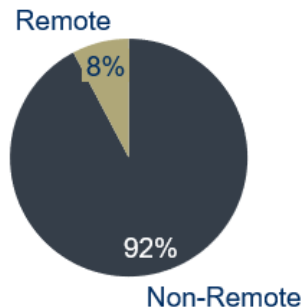


¹⁴ It was not possible to estimate the uptake rate for TWES in remote prisons because data on the number of eligible prisoner for each prison was not provided to the Evaluation Team.

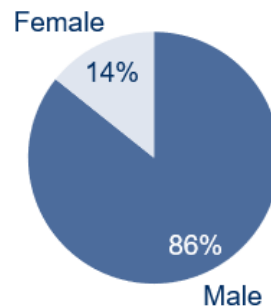
Most TWES participants are in urban and regional areas of QLD, NSW and WA. A wide range of age groups participate in TWES, with ~43% under 29 years old (**Figure 9**).

Figure 9: Various demographics of TWES participants

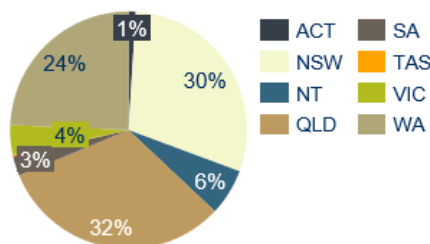
TWES Participants by Non-Remote & Remote



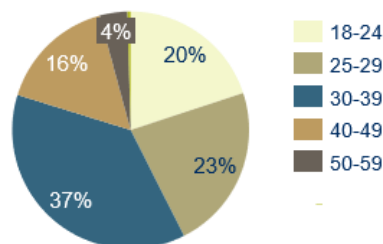
Reported Gender of TWES Participants



State / Territory of TWES Participants



Commencement Age of TWES Participants



TWES is a voluntary program, and not all eligible prisoners choose to participate in the service. The total number of TWES participants commencing TWES up until 28 February 2021 was 4,502 (4,154 in non-remote prisons, and 348 in remote prisons). The total number of eligible prisoners in prisons where TWES was operating in this period was 27,551, across non-remote and remote (**Table 3**).

Taking into account how the total number of eligible prisoners is reported over time, the estimated uptake rate achieved by TWES in prisons in non-remote areas is 22%.¹⁵ It was not possible to estimate uptake rates achieved in remote areas as prison-level data on the number of eligible prisoners was not provided to the Evaluation Team. As a consequence, this may underestimate actual uptake rates in non-remote areas due to limitations in the data.¹⁶

Nevertheless, this uptake rate appears to fall short of original program expectations: the original TWES Request for Tender document states that the Upfront Payment to TWES providers is based on the expectation that 50% of eligible prisoners would participate in the service.¹⁷ While this benchmark may have been used for the purposes of estimating payment levels, it is indicative of expected uptake of the voluntary service among eligible prisoners.

¹⁵ Note that it is not possible to arrive at this percentage by simply dividing the total number of TWES participants by the total eligible prisoner population. See the next footnote.

¹⁶ The number of eligible prisoners in each prison is reported to NIAA and DESE on a six-monthly basis, and in many cases TWES providers were only providing services for part of that 6-month period – so some eligible prisoners reported in the prison in that 6-month period may have left the prison or become ineligible before TWES was available. Therefore, the uptake rate is estimated by only including the number of eligible prisoners reported in 6-month periods where a TWES provider's service contract covered the whole 6-month period. Furthermore, some TWES providers had a delay of multiple months between when their contract commenced, and when actual service delivery commenced. This might mean that the calculated uptake rate is underestimated for some prisons.

¹⁷ Australian Government (2017) Time To Work Employment Service Request for Tender 2018-2021

Table 3: TWES participants and eligible prisoners (non-remote and remote areas)

Jurisdiction	# of providers	# of prisons	Total # of eligible prisoners (data up to 30/06/21)	Total # of participants commencing TWES (data up to 28/02/21)**
ACT	1	1	293	44
NSW	4	24	10,352	1,336
NT	4	4	4,913	286
QLD	4	13	4,778	1,429
SA	3	6	1,387	120
TAS	1	1	409	13
VIC	1	13	1,956	179
WA	7	16	3,463	1,095
Total	25	78	27,551	4,502
Non-remote	13	70*	24,159	4,154
Remote	8	8	3,392	348
Total	25	78	27,551	4,502

* Number of non-remote prisons includes those where TWES ceased activity in the evaluation period.

** The total number of participants excludes duplicates

Analysis of ESS data shows that 135 TWES participants engaged with the service multiple times.¹⁸ This includes where the participant:

- was transferred to another prison before completing TWES, and recommenced in the program at the new prison;
- was no longer eligible for release and therefore exited TWES and recommenced at a later time; or
- was released from prison and then re-entered prison at a later time, and recommenced with TWES.

TWES participants represent a cross-section of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoner population, however the uptake rates achieved appear to have fallen short of original expectations that 50% or more of eligible prisoners would participate in the service.

How was TWES promoted and what methods were used?

TWES providers have used a variety of methods to promote the service. TWES providers were more able to effectively promote the service in prisons that had lower security levels and additional resources

¹⁸ For the purposes of the analysis of TWES participants below, we have treated each interaction with TWES as a separate participant commencing TWES.

to coordinate in-prison services, and where TWES providers had the skills to build relationships with eligible prisoners and prison management.

The TWES Guidelines note that providers “must work with the prison to promote the service and attract eligible prisoners,” through a variety of possible promotional methods.¹⁹ NIAA and DESE provided promotional materials including flyers and posters to TWES providers that they could use in prisons.

Interviews with TWES providers and state/territory corrections stakeholders found that TWES providers are leading the promotion of the service in some cases, and corrections staff are leading it in others. Most TWES providers reported that they were leading promotion efforts (seven out of the eleven TWES providers who answered this question); three said that prisons were leading promotion efforts; and one other reported that promoting TWES was shared by the TWES provider and corrections staff. State/territory corrections stakeholders, on the other hand, were more likely to report that they were leading TWES promotion rather than providers (four out of the six stakeholders who provided this information).

The MOUs signed by some state/territory governments to collaborate with the Commonwealth in delivering TWES stated that prisons would promote the service, in addition to TWES providers. State/territory corrections stakeholders shared positive and negative views regarding the reliance on prison staff to promote the program, as demonstrated by the quotes below:

The TWES program has placed extra administrative burden on prison staff who are required to help identify eligible prisoners, promote the service to them and organise rooms and resources for the provider meetings to take place. They're having to do a lot of the work for the providers but they aren't funded for it.

- Corrections stakeholder

The Employment Coordinators in prisons are very onboard with the program and take on that role of promotion – they have existing relationships with the participants and are aware of what training and learning they require so can tap the prisoners that are eligible to encourage them to join the program. They also run an overall information session that sees every Aboriginal prisoner due for release in four months getting brought to an information session for all programs available.

- Corrections stakeholder

Promotional methods used by TWES providers have included holding information sessions for groups of prisoners, chatting to prisoners informally while walking through prisons to recruit participants, handing out information flyers and using prison radio to broadcast information. Interviews suggest that information and perspectives about TWES also spreads by word-of-mouth among prisoners, which may increase or decrease interest and participation, depending on participants' experiences of the service and the TWES provider.

Promotional posters and flyers provided by DESE appear to have been used to varying levels of effectiveness. Two TWES providers reported using these without issue. One other provider, and one corrections stakeholder, reported that the materials were not appropriate because the language used was too complex, and the artwork on posters and flyers was not relevant to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Both stakeholders reported they were not permitted to edit these materials, so did not use them widely. DESE reported testing these promotional materials with providers and corrections agencies initially before being provided by use, however the comments above indicate some stakeholders viewed the materials as inappropriate or not locally

¹⁹ Australian Government (2018) Guideline: Time to Work Employment Service

relevant. As identified under Key Finding #1, continued consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and experts could help improve the delivery of the service, including promotional materials and methods.

Interviews with TWES providers and stakeholders suggest that promoting TWES is facilitated where:

- **Prisons have additional resources to coordinate participants' engagement in TWES and other complementary services:** Jurisdictions and prisons with greater resourcing to support participants' transition to life after prison were more able to coordinate the promotion of TWES within prisons, as the above quote demonstrates.
- **Prisons have lower security levels and greater accessibility:** Prisons with lower security levels and fewer constraints on accessibility to prisoners allow TWES providers to move about the prison, talk casually with prisoners and build informal relationships. This promotional method is more difficult in prisons with strict lockdown times, and limitations on TWES providers' ability to access and move about the prison or interact with prisoners. The TWES program logic notes that access to prisons is a key assumption underpinning the success of TWES (see Section 3).
- **Providers with strong local knowledge and ability to build rapport:** TWES provider staff who were Indigenous, and particularly from the local area (or had knowledge of the local area and Indigenous communities), and/or had the personal style and skills to build rapport with prisoners, were more effective in promoting the service and recruiting participants.
- **Providers and prisons that build a positive relationship:** A positive working relationship between TWES providers and prisons was identified as a key success factor for successfully promoting TWES. Positive relationships were demonstrated where: providers were clearly communicating with prisons about what TWES aimed to achieve and how it operated; providers and prisons worked together to overcome barriers to promotion, recruitment and delivery; and providers and prisons worked together to coordinate promotion and delivery across services.

TWES providers have very little control over many of the conditions and procedures that they encounter in the prisons where they operate. The TWES providers can put themselves in the best position to navigate these conditions and procedures to promote and deliver TWES effectively by recruiting staff who have the skills to promote the service and sign up eligible prisoners, and build positive relationships with prisons to work through problems.

Why did participants exit TWES early?

Key Finding #2: Just over half of participants who join TWES do not connect with a post-release employment service provider within 13 weeks of their release. Increasing the number of participants who do connect with post-release employment service providers is challenging under the current model.

Options for consideration:

3. NIAA and DESE to reconsider the current service design in light of high exit rates, including initiatives that potentially improve completion rates to ensure the program is value for money. (Refer to options for consideration under other Key Findings)

TWES aims to improve the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners' engagement with employment services. About 44% of all participants who commence with TWES connect with a post-release employment service provider in the 13-week period after they leave prison – these participants are reflected on

the first row in **Table 4**. While it was not possible to compare TWES with other in-prison voluntary services, seeing almost half of TWES participants complete the service and connect with post-release employment service providers is a positive outcome in these circumstances.

These results mean that 56% of participants commencing TWES exit the program without commencing with a post-release employment service provider. Participants exit TWES early for a range of reasons, many of which are beyond the control of TWES providers and even participants themselves. The TWES program logic identified the continued participation of prisoners as a key assumption (see **Section 3**). Administrative data (ESS database) shows why participants exit from TWES and the reasons why (**Table 4**).

Table 4: TWES participant exit reasons

Exit reason	Number of participants	Percentage of total exits
Participant commenced with post-release employment services after exiting TWES*	1,446	44%
Participant did not commence with post-release employment services after exiting TWES, of which:	1,870	56%
Participant not connected with post-release ESP	720	22%
Participant exited early because they disengaged from	388	12%
<i>Participant not participating, not contactable</i>	331	10%
<i>Participant requests exit</i>	50	2%
<i>Participant is not compliant</i>	7	0%
Participant exited early because the terms of their sentence changed	203	6%
<i>Participant transferred to another prison</i>	94	3%
<i>Exit due to no longer eligible for release</i>	109	3%
Participant not eligible for / have exemption from employment services	140	4%
<i>Participant not eligible for employment services</i>	104	3%
<i>Participant has Services Australia exemption post-release</i>	36	1%
Other exit reasons	419	13%
Total	3316	100%

* Post-release employment services include jobactive, CDP, Disability Employment Services (DES), Transition to Work (TtW), ParentsNext, and the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS)

Table 4 identifies two major exit points from TWES: the first is when participants are not transferred to a post-release employment service provider (22%); the second is when participants exit TWES early while still in prison. TWES providers have limited opportunities to reduce these early exits because it is a voluntary program delivered in prisons that participants can choose to leave at any time. Further, participants may not engage with

employment services after their release for a wide range of reasons – including that they may seek employment independently of employment services, or not have access to employment services in a remote community.

Why were elements of TWES such as the ESA or Facilitated Transfers not carried out?

The TWES Guidelines state that TWES providers must engage participants to undertake four core servicing activities: conduct the JSCI, organise Services Australia to conduct the ESA, develop the Transition Plan, and where possible organise a Facilitated Transfer Meeting between the participant and the post-release employment service provider that they have been referred to by Services Australia.

The TWES program logic assumes that completing these activities is important to achieve subsequent outcomes for participants, including improved engagement with employment services after they leave prison (see **Section 3**).

Administrative data from the ESS database was analysed to understand the number of TWES participants who received each of these core servicing activities, and therefore is considered to have ‘completed TWES’.²⁰ Data on the number of participants receiving JSCIs could not be used in this analysis, and it was assumed that all participants with an Approved Transition Plan have a completed JSCI.²¹ This section presents the results of this analysis, together with findings from stakeholder interviews on why core servicing activities may not have taken place.

Data on overall number of participants ‘completing TWES’

As of February 28, 485 (11%) of TWES participants had completed all four core services. Remote sites had a slightly higher proportion (14%) compared to non-remote (see **Table 5**).

Table 5: Participants commencing and completing TWES (non-remote and remote)

Region	All TWES participants	‘Participants completing TWES’	As a percentage
Non-Remote	4,154	438	11%
Remote	348	47	14%
Total	4,502	485	11%

Analysing by state/territory, NT and VIC had the highest percentage of participants completing TWES at 19% and 13% respectively (**Table 6**). Notably, TAS had no participants completing TWES as of 28 February 2021 despite 12 of its 13 participants having exited TWES. ACT also had a very low proportion of participants completing TWES (not provided below for privacy reasons) and SA had six participants completing TWES.

Table 6: Participants commencing and completing TWES (states/territories)

Region	All TWES participants	Participants completing TWES	As a percentage
ACT	44	Not provided	5%

²⁰ For the purposes of the analysis, a participant is defined as completing TWES if ESS data indicates that they have a completed ESA, an Approved Transition Plan and a Facilitated Transfer. Note that it is sometimes not possible for TWES providers to arrange a Facilitated Transfer for participants (e.g. if they have no known address on release and cannot be referred by Services Australia).

²¹ Note regarding ESS data on JSCI completions. The ESS data on TWES participants provided to the Evaluation Team included participants with ‘blank’ data on JSCI completions, suggesting that a JSCI was not conducted. However, DESE advised the Evaluation Team that data on JSCI completions may be blank if a more recent JSCI was conducted by another service (after a participant leaves TWES), which over-rides data on any JSCI completed during TWES. The Evaluation Team was also advised that it is compulsory for a participant to complete a JSCI in order to have an Approved Transition Plan. As such, this analysis ignores the JSCI field and assumes that a JSCI has been completed if a participant has an Approved Transition Plan.

NSW	1,336	166	12%
NT	286	53	19%
QLD	1,429	151	11%
SA	120	6	5%
TAS	13	0	0%
VIC	179	24	13%
WA	1,095	83	8%
Total	4,502	485	11%

When looking at the completion of core TWES servicing activities, ESS data shows that 61% of participants complete an ESAt, 36% complete an ESAt and an Approved Transition Plan, and 11% complete these two activities and receive a Facilitated Transfer (see **Table 7**).²²

Table 7: TWES participants completing each of the core servicing activities (Non-remote and remote)

Region	TWES Participants	Participants who complete an ESAt	AND complete an Approved Transition Plan	AND receive a Facilitated Transfer 'Participants completing TWES'*
Non-Remote	4,154	2,548	1,493	438
Remote	348	178	123	47
Total	4,502	2,726	1,616	485
% of all participants		61%	36%	11%

* Participants who complete all core servicing activities are called 'Participants completing TWES'

Comparing across states and territories, analysis of ESS data demonstrates that TAS had relatively fewer participants complete ESAts and Approved Transition Plans than all other states (**Table 8**).

Table 8: TWES participants completing each of TWES core servicing activities (states/territories)

State / territory	TWES participants	Participants who complete an ESAt	AND complete an Approved Transition Plan	AND receive a Facilitated Transfer 'Participants completing TWES'*
ACT	44	30	20	2

²² Note we have not included the ESS data on participants who completed a JSCI as per the footnote above.

NSW	1,336	666	397	166
NT	286	175	150	53
QLD	1,429	987	514	151
SA	120	58	12	6
TAS	13	Not provided	0	0
VIC	179	102	39	24
WA	1,095	705	484	83
Total	4,502	2,726	1,616	485

How many TWES participants have completed JSCI and ESAt assessments?

As noted above, we have assumed that a JSCI has been completed for all those participants with an Approved Transition Plan. ESS data shows that 61% of TWES participants had a completed ESAt. Non-remote sites had a higher ESAt completion rate at 61% compared to remote sites at 51% (see **Table 9**).

Table 9: TWES participants with completed ESAt (Remote and non-remote)

Region	TWES participants	Completed ESAt	% participants with ESAt
Non-Remote	4,154	2,548	61%
Remote	348	178	51%
Total	4,502	2,726	61%

QLD and ACT had the highest completion rates of ESAts. As noted above, TAS had the lowest completion rate of ESAts, followed by SA (see **Table 10**).

Table 10: TWES participants with completed ESAt (states/territories)

State / territory	TWES participants	Completed ESAt	% participants with ESAt
ACT	44	30	68%
NSW	1,336	666	50%
NT	286	175	61%
QLD	1,429	987	69%
SA	120	58	48%
TAS	13	Not provided	23%
VIC	179	102	57%
WA	1,095	705	64%
Total	4,502	2,726	61%

Why may JSCI and ESAt assessments not be completed?

Key Finding #3: TWES providers would benefit from having more time with participants before they are released, to build a relationship with them and deliver all of the core service activities.

Options for consideration:

4. NIAA and DESE to extend the timeframe for which TWES can be delivered to participants from four to six months prior to release, and increase the minimum number of contacts, so TWES providers can accommodate for the delays and complications involved in coordinating with multiple stakeholders to successfully deliver all of the core servicing activities within prison settings, and further build rapport with participants. (See also the options for consideration under Finding #7 in relation to cultural competency and building rapport.)

Key Finding #4: TWES providers inconsistently understood how some aspects of TWES work.

Options for consideration:

5. NIAA, DESE and Services Australia to share improved, plain language guidance to clarify for TWES providers how to deliver the TWES servicing activities correctly, particularly arranging the ESAt process
6. NIAA, DESE and Services Australia to provide further Q&A sessions or other opportunities for TWES providers to ask questions, raise concerns, or clarify aspects of the service, to help improve understanding of the service activities.

Interviews found that TWES providers have largely conducted the JSCI without issue. Only two of the 16 TWES providers interviewed noted any concerns with the JSCI – that the language used could be more relatable and understandable (such as replacing ‘family bereavement’ with ‘sorry business’) – but these providers did not state that this prevented JSCIs from being conducted.

Interviews found that many TWES providers faced challenges in organising ESAts to be completed. The ESAt is conducted by Services Australia allied health professionals – TWES providers cannot conduct the assessment. However, TWES providers do play a critical role in supporting the ESAt to be completed by making arrangements in the prison for a phone call between Services Australia and the TWES participant, supporting the participant through the ESAt and requesting that the participant’s medical records from state/territory health departments be shared with Services Australia, which are required to complete the ESAt.

The ESAt is a biopsychosocial assessment of a TWES participant’s barriers to employment and capacity to work after release. As the TWES program logic defines, the ESAt is important for improving participants’ engagement with post-release employment services because the ESAt is necessary to be allocated to job active Stream C or Disability Employment Services (see **Section 3**).

Of 27 interviews with Commonwealth Government, corrections stakeholders and TWES providers, 18 reported that they had experienced or observed challenges with completing the ESAt for TWES participants. These challenges were:

- Receiving required medical records in a timely manner. Five TWES providers, one government stakeholder and one corrections stakeholder noted challenges in accessing medical information and sharing this with Services Australia to enable ESAts to be completed. Medical records must be accessed

from state/territory health departments, and each jurisdiction has different requirements, processes and timeframes for sharing records. Medical records may take 6 weeks to be shared, which poses a challenge when TWES is intended to be delivered over a 3-4 month period.

We have never been able to get medical records, so we have never been able to get the ESATs done. We've tried to resolve the issue with obtaining medical information but are yet to get a response or acknowledgement to their inquiry.

- TWES provider

- Scheduling phone calls with Services Australia to conduct ESATs. One TWES provider, one government stakeholder and one corrections stakeholder reported that scheduling calls between participants and Services Australia posed significant challenges. Common reasons included: prison lockdowns requiring rescheduling and increasing demand on phone-based services once essential services are allowed back into prisons; certain prisons' security restrictions on receiving external calls including from Services Australia, or letting guards listen in to calls; participants not turning up; and the time zone difference between WA and the east coast (reported by WA TWES providers).
- COVID-19. Two TWES providers stated that COVID-19 also made it difficult to conduct ESATs due to the impact on access to prisons and participants.

Booking rooms for ESATs has been in reality quite circuitous and labour intensive due to the incompatibility between the processes to book an ESAT with Services Australia, and prisons' own rules and regulations: prisons require the exact time, name and details of the person calling in to book a phone call, while Services Australia uses a phone queue and wouldn't at first guarantee who would be calling the participant. There was a lack of understanding and awareness from Services Australia that their model would need to be adapted to work within the prison's existing restrictions. This has resulted in a huge delay on top of COVID.

- Corrections stakeholder

DESE and Services Australia representatives noted in interviews that several improvements are being made to the ESAT process to respond to these challenges:

- Developing a process to conduct 'file-based assessments' so that ESATs can still be completed for participants when a scheduled phone call with Services Australia staff is not possible.
- Clarifying that while TWES providers must request medical records from state/territory health departments and send to Services Australia when received, if they are not received within six weeks, the ESAT should be held without this information and it is permissible that these records are shared with Services Australia after the ESAT is conducted.
- Allocating dedicated Services Australia staff to conducting ESATs with TWES participants, who are more experienced, have received cultural competency training and have a better understanding of the context, language barriers, and pathways post-release for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners.

These are positive changes being rolled out from July 2021 to simplify and improve the ESAT process. Interviews with TWES providers indicate that some providers are unaware of these changes and understanding

about the process remains inconsistent. Improved communication about the ESAt process could help address misunderstandings and increase the number of ESAts completed.

How many TWES participants have Approved Transition Plans and Facilitated Transfer Meetings?

After the JSCI and ESAt are completed TWES providers complete an Approved Transition Plan for participants. A Transition Plan can be approved once all TWES program components have been completed. Where a Facilitated Transfer Meeting is not possible, Transition Plans can still be approved where the Transition Plan has been prepared with the participant. Providers receive a payment for each Approved Transition Plan (see page 51 for further details on funding).

Providers arrange a Facilitated Transfer Meeting with an employment services provider to introduce the participant to the post-release provider, discuss their barriers to employment and available services and opportunities, discuss the participant's Transition Plan, and confirm the first post-release meeting between the participants and post-release provider.

Table 11 shows that 1,815 TWES participants had completed an Approved Transition Plan (40% of all TWES participants). Of those with an Approved Transition Plan, 575 (13% of all TWES participants) had a Facilitated Transfer Meeting to a post-release provider or alternative employment service such as DES.

Remote sites had a higher rate of participants with an Approved Transition Plan (50% of participants) as compared to non-remote (39% of participants).

Table 11: TWES participants with an Approved Transition Plan and Facilitated Transfer (Non-remote vs Remote)²³

Region	TWES participants	Approved Transition Plan	With Facilitated Transfer
Non-Remote	4,154	1,640	503
Remote	348	175	72
Total	4,502	1,815	575
% of all participants		40%	13%

Comparing across states and territories, NT had the highest percentage of commenced participants with an Approved Transition Plan (~57%), however ~38% of these then had a Facilitated Transfer (see **Table 12**).

Table 12: TWES participants with an Approved Transition Plan with Facilitated Transfer (states/territories)

State / territory	TWES participants	Approved Transition Plans	Approved Transition Plan with Facilitated Transfer
ACT	44	20	Not provided
NSW	1,336	429	182
NT	286	163	62

²³ As noted in this table, 13% of all TWES participants received a Facilitated Transfer Meeting. The figure of 11% in Table 7 is the proportion of TWES participants who received a Facilitated Transfer and all other core servicing components. The reason why the latter figure is slightly smaller is most likely due to a small number of participants who have incorrectly not received an ESAt from their TWES provider (despite this being required under the servicing guidelines).

QLD	1,429	586	185
SA	120	24	15
TAS	13	0	0
VIC	179	52	34
WA	1,095	541	95
Total	4,502	1,815	575

About 26% of participants who received an Approved Transition Plan were not referred to employment services (**Table 13**). This applies where a participant has not been referred to post-release employment services, and no Facilitated Transfer Meeting is required.

Table 13: Reasons for Approved Transition Plans

Region	Approved Transition Plans	Approved with Facilitated Transfer	Approved with no Facilitated Transfer	Approved, participant not referred to Employment Services
Non-Remote	1,640	503	725	412
Remote	175	72	49	54
Total	1,815	575	774	466
% of Approved Transition Plans		32%	43%	26%

Why may Approved Transition Plans and Facilitated Transfer Meetings not be completed?

Key Finding #5: Most TWES participants are not receiving an Approved Transition Plan or a Facilitated Transfer Meeting with their referred post-release employment service provider before they leave prison.

Options for consideration:

7. NIAA and DESE to increase employment service providers' knowledge of TWES, to help increase willingness and interest to attend Facilitated Transfer Meetings.
8. NIAA, DESE and Services Australia to explore other options for TWES providers to connect participants with post-release employment service providers. This could include changing the conditions so TWES providers keep participants on their caseload longer than the current 13 weeks to allow additional time for a referral.
9. NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to explore options to provide better, more coordinated support services to prisoners who do not have, or do not provide, a known address before they leave prison.

The TWES program logic identifies the completion of Transition Plans and Facilitated Transfer Meetings as priority outcomes of TWES. The program logic states that these steps are critical for improving participants' understanding of how to engage employment services after they leave prison, strengthening participants' connections with employment services, and improving employment service providers' understanding of participants' background and needs (see **Section 3**). If these steps are not being achieved, this is likely to reduce the positive impact on engagement with post-release employment service providers, and improved employment outcomes in the long-term.

To arrange a Facilitated Transfer Meeting, TWES providers are notified by ESS (via a system message) when Services Australia refers the participant to an employment services provider, and the name of the provider (TWES providers do not select the employment services provider). TWES providers then schedule a Facilitated Transfer Meeting between the participant and employment services provider with the TWES provider also present.

It is a primary opportunity for TWES providers to connect participants with a nominated provider, and handover the relationship and information gathered through the Transition Plan. The aim of the Facilitated Transfer Meeting is to provide participants with an opportunity to meet and relationship build with their provider (see **Section 3**).

The evaluation found that Facilitated Transfer Meetings are largely not occurring due to reasons outside of the TWES providers' control. For example, participants cannot be referred to an employment services provider if they have no known address. In some cases, TWES providers reported that they have not been given sufficient notice by Services Australia about a participant's referred employment service provider to organise a Facilitated Transfer Meeting before the participant leaves prison. In other cases, TWES providers encountered challenges in scheduling facilitated transfers due to lack of meeting rooms, or employment service providers being unwilling to attend a Facilitated Transfer Meeting with a potential client.

Most of the stakeholders interviewed reported challenges with conducting Facilitated Transfers successfully (17 out of 27 interviews). Issues raised were:

- TWES participants cannot be referred to a post-release employment service provider by Services Australia if they have no known address (if they do not know where they will live, are homeless or will not have a fixed address on release), or choose not to provide their address. In these cases, a Facilitated Transfer Meeting is not possible. (This was noted by five TWES providers, one Commonwealth stakeholder and one corrections stakeholder.)

If participants don't go where they say they were planning to go it can be difficult to find that person – we have to figure out where the participants have gone because if they don't make contact with the external jobs services provider they are left as 'pending' on the system, which means their ESAt result and Transition Plan is locked in the system and can't be transferred to the right person. This means they have lost all the benefits of TWES. People who stay in the local area are easier because they have a contact with Throughcare services and we can coordinate with this person.

- TWES provider

A major issue is that half the time there isn't much certainty around where the participants are going and therefore, they get linked to the wrong provider or they get lost from the system.

- Corrections stakeholder

- In some cases, TWES providers may not be given sufficient notice about who a participant's nominated employment services provider is, in order to organise a face to face or phone meeting between participants and the provider. This was noted by five TWES providers, one Commonwealth stakeholder and three corrections stakeholders.

A major issue is that half the time there isn't much certainty around where the participants are going and therefore, they get linked to the wrong provider or they get lost from the system.

- Corrections stakeholder

We have never been able to hold the facilitated handover prior to release. It is usually hard enough to get the other contact appointments scheduled, and we also normally don't get notified who the employment services provider is, which makes the logistics difficult.

- TWES provider

- Some stakeholders report that scheduling Facilitated Transfer meetings with post-release employment service providers in prisons has been difficult due to lack of facilities and meeting rooms, security or access issues, and provider unwillingness to attend meetings in prisons or to connect over the phone (in part due to a lack of awareness among employment service providers of TWES). (This was noted by four TWES providers, one Commonwealth stakeholder and one corrections stakeholder).

Half the time there is no Facilitated Transfer prior to release, for a range of reasons. Many external providers aren't aware of TWES and are therefore not cooperative – some won't visit prisons to do the Facilitated Transfer or refuse to see people prior to them being on their books. During COVID- 19 jobactive providers haven't been seeing people in person at all.

- Corrections stakeholder

Employment service providers have not been very responsive when we reached out to them... Participants sometimes aren't being informed of who their employment services providers are until 2 days before release, this makes it extremely difficult to arrange a Facilitated Transfer Meeting.

- TWES provider

The handover interview sometimes isn't done or done properly due to various reasons both caused by the prison and their restrictions but also logistic issues.

- TWES provider

The analysis and interview data presented above suggests two key findings. The first is that many TWES providers have inconsistent or incorrect understandings of how some aspects of TWES work, despite these processes being documented and shared in service guidelines and other communications. The second is that TWES providers would benefit from having more time with participants before they are released, to build a relationship with them and deliver all of the core service activities.

How did TWES relate to existing services or programs and what were the implications of this?

Key Finding #6: TWES has evolved to complement state-based prison programs, and has been shown in some jurisdictions to target highly disadvantaged prisoners who cannot access other training and employment opportunities.

Options for consideration:

10. NIAA, DESE and state/territory governments to undertake jurisdictional level (and potentially prison level) planning to ensure that TWES and future similar programs complement and integrate with other in-prison services.
11. NIAA and DESE to create opportunities for TWES providers, such as virtual workshops, to share good practices and success stories with each other about building relationships with prisons to deliver and promote TWES successfully, coordinating with other in-prison services, and building relationships with prisoners to encourage participation and deliver an effective service.

The TWES Guidelines recommend that TWES providers should coordinate with existing complementary services and programs delivered in prisons to promote TWES. Furthermore,

“the provider must work with the other in-prison service providers to prepare the participant for their release from Prison. The provider should seek to build relationships with the organisations and Prison staff who offer these services to complement the service and manage any overlap.”²⁴

The types of employment, welfare and other throughcare services delivered in prisons varies widely across jurisdictions. In many prisons, TWES operates alongside other in-prison services with a focus on employment and skills, most of which are funded by state and territory governments. Compared to TWES, the other employment services identified in the evaluation appear to offer longer periods of support, and focus on improving prisoners' skills and job readiness. They do this by providing opportunities for training, work experience or paid work, rather than improving prisoners' engagement with Commonwealth-funded employment services after leaving prison (the focus of TWES). Some state/territory corrections stakeholders noted that these differences can make other services more attractive to some prisoners than TWES.

However, it was also noted by stakeholders that TWES complements and adds value to other employment services by providing a pathway for prisoners who may face barriers to participating in other programs due to literacy, numeracy or other challenges, and who would need increased support from employment services after release from prison.

Bringing the JSCI and ESA assessments into prisons means that these participants will automatically receive the 'right level' of support from employment services after their release (for example, Stream B or C, or DES), and do not have to undertake these assessments outside prison when they will be adjusting to life straight after their release (noted by three corrections stakeholders, three Commonwealth Government stakeholders, and six TWES providers).

²⁴ Australian Government (2018) Guideline: Time to Work Employment Service

The good thing about TWES is getting the participants category assessed as that takes a huge burden from them having to do it on the outside.

- Corrections stakeholder

It is brilliant that you can now connect prisoners with services prior to them being released so they are less likely to be lost... This enables them to register them with Jobactive and lets them get fast tracked to employment.

- Corrections stakeholder

Ideally TWES makes sure that they are getting into the right job seeker stream. Anything that you can do to reduce the list of to-do things for prisoners when they leave prison – the difference is the assurance that they don't have to think about it when they leave. One of the greatest difficulties when leaving is the sense of being overwhelmed by how many things have to do when they leave.

- Commonwealth Government stakeholder

I think TWES is very important. The attention and working with them has been encouraging to the participants. It makes them think that the step when they get out is not as scary, encourages them to keep having a go and makes them feel seen and like there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

- TWES provider

Interviews with corrections stakeholders identified several other in-prison services with a focus on employment that are offered in some jurisdictions. These are summarised below. Note that it was not in the scope of this evaluation to evaluate the relative effectiveness of other in-prison services operating alongside TWES.

Northern Territory

The NT has a transition to employment program called Sentence to a Job, delivered in minimum security prisons. This involves providing accredited vocational training within prisons and connecting prisoners with employers who they can visit and work with while still serving their sentence in prison. Sentence to a Job is a mainstream program – it is open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous prisoners.

A TWES provider in a prison work camp reported that TWES can be more difficult to deliver in prisons where Sentence to a Job is offered because many eligible prisoners may choose to undertake accredited training or paid employment rather than participate in TWES. Furthermore, as TWES meetings are conducted during working hours, eligible participants who are undertaking training or paid employment may not be available for TWES meetings in prison during that time.

Nevertheless, the TWES provider interviewed noted that where Sentence to a Job is run, TWES provides a solution for prisoners who face greater barriers to employment than those who participate in Sentence to a Job.

South Australia

The SA government funds an in-prison employment service called Work Ready, Release Ready. This program has similar eligibility criteria to the TWES program, and engages participants as early as 6 months prior to release. It is delivered as a 'core program' in South Australia which is mandatory for all prisoners to participate and the South Australian Department of Corrections reported that prisons tend to prioritise encouraging prisoners to participate in Work Ready over TWES where both programs are available to prisoners. Work Ready, Release Ready focuses on working with participants on their job readiness through accredited training, building job readiness skills, connections with work experience and employment service providers. The SA Department of Corrections noted that prisoners with very low levels of numeracy and literacy may be streamed into the TWES program instead of Work Ready so they can complete a JSCI and ESAt and access additional help and support after leaving prison.

Western Australia

The WA Department of Justice has Employment Coordinator and Transitional Manager roles who are responsible for overseeing the transition of prisoners to life after their release. WA Department of Justice stakeholders reported that TWES complements the work of Employment Coordinators and Transitional Managers well: they reported that these staff have a holistic view of prisoners' participation in all employment and other throughcare services, and that they have been able to help TWES providers promote services and connect TWES participants with other services. In particular, the Department of Justice noted that the added value of TWES is bringing the JSCI and ESAt within the prison, which complements other existing services.

ACT

The ACT justice system has employment workers who work with prisoners after they are released, whose role is to provide resume support and connect with employment opportunities. Interview findings suggest that these employment workers and TWES providers are not sharing information that might help achieve better outcomes for participants.

Most prisoners would benefit from both supports to improve their skills and job readiness while they are in prison, as well as access to greater support from employment services after they leave prison, should they use employment services.

The above findings provide some evidence that TWES complements other services, and that service delivery could be better coordinated to assist particularly high risk prisoners. The evaluation identifies options for how the Commonwealth and state/territory governments could help improve coordination between TWES and other services (see above).

What was the cost of delivering TWES?

TWES is underspent, due to delays in the roll-out of TWES in some jurisdictions and the low proportion of participants receiving an Approved Transition Plan. Some, though not all, TWES providers raised concerns that funding levels were insufficient to cover the actual costs of delivering the program effectively.

To date the Commonwealth Government has allocated a budget of \$27.9m to fund the delivery of TWES. This included:

- An original commitment of \$24m in the 2017/18 budget – \$17.6m in non-remote locations (managed by DESE), and \$6.4m in remote locations (funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, managed by NIAA).
- An additional \$3.9m for a 12-month extension (non-remote areas, managed by DESE) in the 2020/21 budget.

DESE and NIAA make two payments to TWES providers: the Upfront Payment and the Transition Plan Fee. The Upfront Payment is based on the number of expected participants and expected servicing percentage and is paid every six months. This is calculated using state/territory figures provided for the preceding six-month period or the numbers from the Request for Tender (whichever is higher). Providers' commencement rates in the preceding six-month period are used to predict their expected servicing percentage in the upcoming six-month period and upfront payments are paid accordingly.

The Transition Plan Fee is paid for each participant that has an approved Transition Plan (the plan must be approved by the participant). A payment is made each time a plan is approved in the IT system.

Payment amounts are different between non-remote and remote regions (Table 14). DESE increased the Upfront Payment for non-remote regions in 2020, from \$335 to \$550 per expected participant, which was further increased following an indexed increase to both payments for non-remote providers of 4.4 per cent in July 2020.

Table 14: TWES provider payment structure (all figures GST inclusive)

Region	Payment 1: Upfront Payment	Payment 2: Transition Plan Fee
Non-remote	\$574.20 per expected participant	\$229.68 per Approved Transition Plan
Remote	\$333 per expected participant	\$666 per Approved Transition Plan

Since the commencement of TWES to 28 February 2021, a total of \$5.95m has been paid to TWES providers in Upfront Payments and Transition Plan fees (Table 15). The large majority of this (~92%) are Upfront Payments.

Table 15: TWES provider payments from 2018 to 28 February 2021 (Non-remote and Remote)

Financial year	Upfront Payments	Transition Plan Fees	Total
2017-2018	\$122,275	\$0	\$122,275
2018-2019	\$749,629	\$16,132	\$765,761
2019-2020	\$2,118,475	\$269,360	\$2,387,835
2020-2021*	\$2,484,612	\$190,293	\$2,674,905
Total	\$5,474,990	\$475,785	\$5,950,775
% of total	92%	8%	

**Provider payments data for FY2020-2021 is current up to 28 February 2021, so figures for this financial year do not include the total value of provider payments made in the rest of this financial year*

This analysis indicates that TWES is underspent, with \$5.95m spent on provider payments (as of 28 February 2021) out of an initial commitment of \$24m over four years. These provider payments represent approximately 25% of the original committed budget. The underspend appears due to a combination of delays in the implementation and commencement of service delivery in some states/territories (see page 30), and the lower than expected proportion of TWES participants receiving an Approved Transition Plan (40% of all participants), which must be achieved to receive the Transition Plan Fee. However, the underspend has decreased with each financial year as uptake of the service and provider payments have increased (**Table 15**). Furthermore, this analysis excludes other costs and payments, including payments to Services Australia to conduct ESATs with TWES participants.

The evaluation identifies options for how the Commonwealth and state/territory governments to increase the successful completion of servicing activities, including Approved Transition Plans.

Stakeholder views on TWES provider payment levels

TWES providers' views on whether payment levels were sufficient to cover actual delivery costs varied. Six out of the 17 TWES providers interviewed stated that funding was insufficient to cover actual delivery costs, and two stated that it was sufficient (the other eleven TWES providers provided no information or comment). Those raising concerns about costs stated:

- While the TWES servicing guidelines suggest three separate visits over a three to four-month period, some TWES providers and corrections staff expressed that more visits and/or a longer timeframe would help to build a better relationship with participants and successfully deliver the service, and that current payment levels are insufficient to cover the cost of additional visits.
- Five providers identified several unexpected or additional costs that they need to bear to deliver TWES. This included work required to organise visits, book rooms and facilities, reschedule visits in the event of lockdowns or other disruptive events, travel, security clearance times, writing up hand-written notes (where laptops cannot be taken into prisons) and managing the ESS database.
- Four TWES providers stated that funding was not sufficient to cover a single salary, which makes it difficult to resource and some providers feel like their other programs are 'subsidising' TWES, including the use of vehicles. Furthermore, some face an opportunity cost as a business in allocating staff to spend time on TWES compared to spending time on delivering other services such as CDP. Some providers also noted that the need for two staff to effectively deliver TWES – one male and one female – further stretches funding.

The funding doesn't fund a single salary, so it is hard to adequately resource. The servicing guidelines suggest 3 visits, but some participants need more to build the relationship and get the information needed to develop a transition plan. In terms of numbers and funding, other activities (like CDP) are a higher business priority.

- Government stakeholder

The window of opportunity engagement with the prisoners is too hard. 3 months is too small, you can't build rapport. Normally it takes 3 months just to have a job seeker have trust in you. You would need more touchpoints and therefore would need a full-time consultant. And for TWES to liaise more with wraparound services would require a dedicated resource.

- TWES provider

Government stakeholders' perspectives on costs also varied. Comments offered included:

- Payment levels may never be large enough to fund a full-time position in smaller prisons with a smaller population of eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisons, so the expectation that funding could cover a full-time position in these prisons is not realistic.
- Payment levels were determined by DESE and NIAA through analysis prior to the tender process.

However, some government stakeholders did express concerns about payments. These included:

- That some TWES providers perceived that they were not getting sufficient funding to deliver TWES, to cover the initial set up costs including conducting police checks for staff, building relationships with prisons and recruiting the right staff with a unique skill set (particularly in remote areas).

- The relative weighting of the Transition Plan Fee in non-remote areas should be considered – because this fee is significantly smaller than the upfront payment, the financial incentive for getting a participant to the point of an Approved Transition Plan may be seen as insufficient for some TWES providers (interviews with TWES providers did not gather sufficient data to test this specific point). This may help explain why fewer TWES participants in non-remote areas receive Approved Transition Plans than those in remote areas (39% vs 50% of TWES participants, respectively see **Table 11**).
- Two government stakeholders shared some TWES providers' concerns about the timeframe and number of meetings required to build a good relationship with participants, as well as concerns over funding levels being insufficient to cover a full-time position.

TWES providers can miss out on the Approved Transition Plan fee – they can put a lot of effort into a person, and then they're transferred to another prison, and we don't know where.

- Government stakeholder

The evaluation did not gather financial data from TWES providers to analyse and compare the actual operational and overhead costs that they have incurred to deliver the service. However, interview findings do provide some indication that delivering TWES successfully, in the complex prison environment, and with a participant cohort where building relationships is key to success, involves unexpected costs that some TWES providers feel are not covered under the current payment levels.

Summary

TWES was designed to improve the supports provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners. It was designed following extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and experts conducted through the *Prison to Work* report. Overall, TWES was implemented well and is delivering services nationally in prisons in remote and non-remote locations, despite service delivery being heavily impacted by COVID-19 in 2020. The evaluation found indications that TWES is complementing other in-prison services that focus on employment by providing a service that is particularly valuable for highly disadvantaged prisoners. The findings presented above identify opportunities for NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to improve the design and implementation of TWES and future similar programs.

4.2 Objective 2: Understand the impact of TWES

This section presents findings on whether TWES achieved priority outcomes for TWES participants and employment service providers. These priority outcomes are identified in the TWES program logic (**Section 3**). Findings in this section come from interviews with TWES participants (current and past), TWES stakeholders, and analysis of ESS data.

Findings on Objective 2 are presented under four questions:

1. To what extent do participants feel that the TWES services are culturally and gender appropriate?
2. To what extent has TWES strengthened the connection between participants and post-release employment service providers?
3. What evidence is there that TWES contributes to longer-term outcomes for participants, including improved employment outcomes and reduced rates of recidivism?
4. Do the underlying assumptions in the program logic hold?

To what extent do participants feel that the TWES services are culturally and gender appropriate?

Key Finding #7: TWES providers could strengthen cultural appropriateness by improving how the program is communicated and delivered to participants including through an increased role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prison staff.

Options for consideration:

12. NIAA and DESE to review requirements in funding agreements with TWES providers to prioritise the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to deliver TWES where possible, demonstrate how they will invest in the cultural competence and awareness of their staff, and build the skills of their staff to build positive working relationships with prisons, and rapport with prisoners.
13. NIAA, DESE and state/territory governments to explore opportunities to formalise the involvement of ALOs in TWES (in jurisdictions where ALOs operate) to help support promotion of the service and to build rapport with participants. This should include consideration of whether NIAA and DESE should fund ALOs to support delivery of the program.

The TWES program logic includes the priority outcome 'participants feel that the TWES services are culturally and gender appropriate'. According to the program logic, this outcome leads to participants feeling more comfortable to answer the questions included in the JSCI and ESAt assessments, which leads to more accurate assessments that help participants receive the right level of support after they leave prison (see **Section 3**).

None of the participants interviewed for the evaluation reported that their TWES provider demonstrated disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour or attitudes in terms of gender or cultural respect (57 participants were interviewed). However, there was evidence that higher levels of cultural competency would improve the communication of program intent, improve participants' trust in the process and capacity to engage. Feedback from participants included:

- Three participants stated that they found it difficult to understand the TWES provider and that the worker did not explain the TWES process or purpose of meetings clearly enough, and one other participant found it difficult to understand because English was not their first language.

- Two participants stated that an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) was able to attend meetings with the TWES provider to assist and provide an additional layer of cultural security, which may offer support where a TWES provider is non-Indigenous. Six participants noted that there was no ALO involvement in the TWES process, and that this would have been helpful.
- Two participants stated that they were glad that their TWES provider was Indigenous.

The quotes below illustrate some of the challenges that some TWES participants faced in understanding different aspects of the service.

I wasn't sure what it [TWES] was about, I was just trying to do everything I could to set me up for when I get out, so I said yes. He [the provider] talked fast and like he was reading off a list... he didn't give enough information or explain what would happen ... I'm quite shame [shy] so I am often not comfortable asking other people questions.

- Participant

I wasn't sure what would be the benefit [of the program], I just played along in case it could be beneficial.

- Participant

I couldn't understand the person [ESAt assessor] because of their foreign accent. So I just said yes to everything.

- Participant

Prisoners also lose interest because the process is not client friendly – they get bored of it because it's too process driven.

- TWES provider

One TWES provider also noted that any eligible prisoners abiding by strict cultural practices would have been less likely to participate in TWES in the first place if the TWES provider staff was the opposite gender. Similarly, it is likely that eligible prisoners who were not comfortable speaking English are likely to have not signed up for TWES in the first place where provider staff are unable to accommodate them. It is also important to note that participants may have not felt comfortable telling the Evaluation Team if they did find TWES services were not culturally or gender appropriate, given the interview was a one-off conversation.

Taking the time to carefully communicate, describe the purpose and processes of TWES, and build a relationship with participants, is particularly important given that many participants have a low level of trust in the prison system, and in the prison context they lack a lot of information and control over their own lives.

These findings suggest that increasing the involvement of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff in delivering TWES could strengthen the cultural appropriateness of the service.²⁵ This includes increasing and supporting the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff among TWES providers, and considering options to

²⁵ Note that the selection criteria for selecting TWES providers did require tendering providers to describe their organisation's commitment to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deliver the program, and their organisation's cultural training for current and new employees, working within this program.

formalise (and fund) the involvement of ALOs in supporting the promotion and delivery of TWES, in jurisdictions and prisons where ALOs are available.

To what extent has TWES strengthened the connection between participants and post-release employment service providers?

The TWES program logic assumes that the core servicing activities are important to achieving subsequent outcomes for TWES participants and employment service providers (see **Section 3**). In particular, the Facilitated Transfer Meeting is an important opportunity for participants to meet their referred employment service provider and understand their next steps after they leave prison, and an opportunity for employment service providers to build a connection with participants and understand their journey and needs. The TWES program logic identifies four short and medium-term outcomes that flow from the Facilitated Transfer Meeting:

- Participants have an improved understanding of how to engage with post-release providers
- Participants have a stronger connection with a post-release provider
- Participants do not have to re-tell their story
- And employment service providers have an improved understanding of participant background and needs

Because only 40% of TWES participants receive an Approved Transition Plan, and only 13% receive a Facilitated Transfer Meeting, it can be assumed that TWES makes a limited contribution to the above outcomes. The reasons why most Facilitated Transfer Meetings do not occur are largely outside of TWES providers' control under the current model of TWES (see page 46).

What evidence is there that TWES contributes to longer-term outcomes for participants, including improved employment outcomes and reduced rates of recidivism?

'Increased achievement of employment outcomes' is a priority outcome in the TWES program logic (see **Section 3**). The program logic notes that while TWES does not directly aim to secure employment for prisoners, it does indirectly contribute to this outcome by supporting and improving engagement with employment services after their release.

Analysis of data from ESS on employment outcomes for a sample of TWES participants found that 7.8% achieved an employment outcome.²⁶ The evaluation attempted a logistic regression to compare employment outcomes achieved for TWES participants with non-participants using the ESS administrative database. However, the results of this analysis were inconclusive, as the administrative data on ESS was insufficient to create a valid comparison group. A valid comparison group would require data on independent variables such as participants and non-participants' sentencing history, release dates and other factors. This data is held by state/territory departments of justice or corrections and is not available on ESS.

While a comparative analysis was not possible, the low employment outcomes achieved indicate why a service like TWES is needed, and the challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders face in finding work.

It was not possible to measure the direct impact of TWES on recidivism rates. Reduced recidivism is a long-term outcome that is influenced by a multitude of factors, as identified in the TWES program logic (see **Section 3**). Overall, the literature review conducted for the TWES evaluation found evidence of clear links between employment and reducing offending and reoffending.²⁷ However, the literature review also found that existing

²⁶ See **Section 2** (Evaluation Methodology) for detail on the method behind this calculation.

²⁷ Australian Law Reform Commission, "Pathways to Justice", 63; Marilyn C. Moses. 2012. "Ex-Offender Job Placement Programs Do Not Reduce

evaluations of specific employment-focused programs are inconclusive about their effectiveness in reducing recidivism.²⁸

The evidence base on the effectiveness of programs like TWES is still growing. There are few Indigenous-specific programs that aim to improve ex-offender employability, and few evaluations of their effectiveness in improving employment and reducing recidivism. Improving data quality and enabling the evaluation of long-term outcomes will require continued investment in data linking across Commonwealth and state/territory governments to track participants' journey through employment and prison systems over time. (See Key Finding #10 on page 61.)

Do the underlying assumptions in the program logic hold?

Key Finding #8: Some of the key assumptions underlying the TWES program logic do not hold in practice, which limits the potential for TWES to improve how employment service providers engage with ex-offenders.

Options for consideration:

- See the options for consideration under Objectives 1 and 2 regarding how to improve the program and address these issues.

The TWES program logic (**Section 3**) identifies several key assumptions about how the service needs to be implemented in order to achieve its intended outcomes. The findings presented above highlight where these assumptions do not hold:

- **Access to prisons.** The program logic assumes that TWES providers can access prisons to deliver TWES to participants. However, the evaluation found that in practice TWES providers can face considerable difficulty in accessing prisons to deliver TWES. This includes the process of obtaining the relevant security clearances and the ability to attend planned appointments which may be disrupted by prison lockdowns or other unforeseen events.
- **Prisoners continue to participate.** TWES is a voluntary program. The program logic assumes that 50% of eligible prisoners will volunteer to participate in TWES (based on the TWES Request for Tender documentation shared with potential providers), and will continue to participate. However, analysis of data on the number of participants suggests that the uptake rate may be closer to 20-25% (see page 34). Furthermore, analysis of reasons why participants exit TWES indicates that almost 20% exit the service while still in prison, and another ~20% exit TWES after leaving prison but before commencing with a post-release employment service provider within 13 weeks of leaving (see page 38). These exits reduce the likely impact of TWES on improved engagement with employment services after participants are released.
- **Participant willingness and ability to connect with their post-release provider.** After release, it is the decision of TWES participants to reconnect with their employment services provider (who they should have been introduced to through TWES, before release). Analysis of ESS data found that 44% of TWES participants commence with a post-release employment service provider within 13 weeks of their release from prison (see page 38). While it was not possible to compare TWES with other in-prison

Recidivism." Corrections Today, 106; Uggen, Christopher, and Jeremy Staff. 2001. "Work as a Turning Point for Criminal Offenders." Corrections Management Quarterly (Corrections) 1-16; Visser, "Employment after Prison", 699; Visser, "Ex Offender Employment Programs", 295.

²⁸ Andrew Day, Lynore Geia, and Armon Tamatea. 2019. "Towards effective throughcare approaches for Indigenous people leaving prison in Australia and New Zealand". Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse, 1; Boris Beranger, Don Weatherburn, and Steve Moffatt. 2010. "Reducing Indigenous Contact with the Court System". Issue paper no. 54, Crime and Justice Statistics, 3; David B. Wilson, Catherine A. Gallagher, and Doris L. MacKenzie. 2000. "Meta-analysis of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, and Work Programs for Adult Offenders." Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 361.

voluntary services, seeing almost half of TWES participants complete the service and connect with post-release employment service providers is a positive outcome in these circumstances. It is worth noting that ~20% of all participants exit TWES after leaving prison without being connected with a post-release employment service provider within 13 weeks of leaving.

- **Jurisdictional differences.** The program logic assumes that the activities and outcomes are broadly aligned across remote and non-remote locations and jurisdictions. However remote and non-remote locations differ in a number of key characteristics: TWES is administered by two different Commonwealth departments, the labour market and community contexts are different, and the TWES funding model differs across remote and non-remote locations. State and territory prison systems also differ in a number of key characteristics: prisons are administered by their relevant state or territory corrections department, health records are held by different departments in each jurisdiction, and the other in-prison and throughcare support programs offered to prisoners differ across jurisdictions and prisons. This variation helps to explain differences seen across TWES implementation and outcomes (for example see page 49).
- **Employment assessments.** The program logic assumes that prisoners will agree to undertake the JSCI and ESAt assessments, that assessments take place, that the assessment tools are effective in identifying needs, and that this leads to post-release services better meeting prisoner needs. The evaluation identified several challenges that providers have faced with the ESAts in particular, and a poor understanding among many TWES providers about how the ESAts should be conducted effectively (see page 43). Improving provider understanding of these assessments and addressing some of the issues identified could help increase the number of participants receiving ESAts.
- **Staff recruitment and retention.** The program logic assumes that TWES providers can recruit and retain staff who are appropriately qualified and culturally competent to ensure continuity in quality delivery of TWES services. Feedback from participants suggests that there are opportunities to improve the cultural appropriateness and competence of some TWES providers, increase the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff among providers, and increase the role of ALOs (see page 55).
- **Employment outcomes and external variables.** TWES does not aim to support participants into employment, but to improve their engagement with employment service providers, who can then support them into employment. There are many external factors that influence the likelihood of TWES participants finding employment after release from prison. These factors include participant demographics such as their work experience prior to incarceration, the consistency of work experience, and family and community relationships and obligations after release. Analysis of employment outcomes for TWES participants found that 7.8% of participants achieved a job placement (see page 57) – however it was not possible to compare these outcomes against a sample of non-participants, or to understand the influence of external factors.

Summary

Evidence shows that TWES providers could strengthen the cultural appropriateness of the program by communicating with participants clearly and taking the time to build relationships with participants. Building relationships and rapport with participants takes time, and other evaluation findings presented in the report note the importance of TWES providers having more time and more meetings with participants. The evaluation also found that increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in TWES providers, and formalising the role of ALOs in prisons where available, could support the cultural appropriateness of the service.

The impact of TWES on strengthening the connection between participants and employment service providers was found to be limited by the challenges faced in organising Facilitated Transfer Meetings (covered further on page 45). Furthermore, measuring the impact of TWES on employment outcomes by comparing outcomes between TWES participants and non-participants was not possible due to lack of a valid comparison group.

Finally, the evaluation found evidence that several key assumptions underpinning the success of TWES faced challenges in practice. Key assumptions that did not hold in some cases included the assumptions that TWES providers could gain access to prisons to promote the service and meet with participants, that prisoners continue to participate in the service, and that participants are willing and able to connect with post-release employment service providers after they are released from prison.

4.3 Objective 3: Understand how to improve TWES

This section of the report presents evaluation findings under the third objective of the evaluation: to understand how TWES could be improved to increase impact, and to identify the implications for future programs.

What are the implications for the design and implementation of future prison to work programs?

Key Finding #9: TWES is only partially successful in addressing the service coordination challenges identified by Prison to Work. The respective roles of Commonwealth and state/territory governments in supporting ex-offenders through the post-release transition period should be reconsidered.

Options for consideration:

14. NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to explore opportunities to a) redefine the scope of Commonwealth-funded services to focus specifically on bringing the JSCI and ESAt assessments within prisons, and b) fund state/territory governments to deliver the transition planning and facilitated transfer components of TWES through existing and new throughcare services within a case management model.
15. NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to explore opportunities to expand the scope of TWES to a throughcare model that extends contact with participants until after their release from prison, and includes supporting them to connect with and navigate the employment and welfare systems. This should involve revisiting relevant findings and actions of Prison to Work, in particular Finding 7, *“there is insufficient transitional support and throughcare”*, and Finding 8, *“there is insufficient stable accommodation, including transitional housing”*.

As noted above, Finding 5 of Prison to Work noted that there was “a lack of timely, coordinated and quality engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Prisoners from Employment and Welfare Services”. More broadly, Prison to Work also identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders are let down by a lack of coordination between support services. “No one agency or organisation has oversight of prisoner transition into post-release life,”²⁹ which makes it harder for ex-offenders to get back on their feet and (re)enter the labour market.

This is a large and complex problem, and an issue of service coordination, which is much larger than a single service like TWES could resolve. TWES does involve significant coordination between multiple Commonwealth and state/territory government agencies and contracted providers each playing a role in delivering different elements of the service within prisons. This is a positive outcome. However, TWES appears to face challenges in coordinating services at the point that prisoners’ transition to *outside* prison. With only 13% of TWES participants receiving a Facilitated Transfer Meeting, coordinating the continuity of employment supports at this critical transition point appears to fall short for many TWES participants.

Furthermore, as *Prison to Work* identified, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-offenders experience multiple and complex factors of disadvantage that can present barriers to employment and reintegrating with community life – such as housing, mental health, and alcohol and other drugs. TWES includes mechanisms to identify these needs and document them in a transition plan, and TWES providers are encouraged to coordinate with complementary services in prisons to provide required supports. However, evaluation findings suggest that the extent to which TWES providers take a holistic view of TWES participants’ needs, and how they coordinate with other support services to meet participants’ needs, may depend on the providers’ mindset, values and knowledge.

²⁹ Council of Australian Governments, *Prison to Work Report*. Australia,

Key Finding #10: Commonwealth and state/territory governments need to address data limitations and data linkages to enable the evaluation of employment, recidivism and other long-term outcomes.

Options for consideration:

16. This finding reinforces the actions identified in Prison to Work for the NIAA, DESE, Services Australia and state/territory governments to establish a data linkage project to link data from the prison, employment and welfare systems.

This evaluation attempted to measure the impact of TWES participation on employment outcomes by comparing employment outcomes between samples of TWES participants and non-participants (see page 57). The analysis was not successful.

Creating a valid counterfactual would require accessing data to create a control group of pre-release prisoners who were eligible for TWES, but did not participate in the service. It was not possible to access this data – data on prisoners and prisons is owned by state/territory governments and could not be accessed. As a substitute, the comparison was attempted using data available to the Commonwealth Government on the ESS database, but the results were inconclusive as the comparison group was not directly comparable. Measuring the impact of programs like TWES on long-term outcomes will require significant investment in linking data between Commonwealth and state/territory government agencies.

What are the enablers and barriers of success for TWES?

The findings presented in this evaluation report identify a number of enablers and barriers that have affected the ability of TWES providers to implement TWES successfully and deliver outcomes for participants. The identification of these enablers and barriers has informed the development of options for consideration under each Key Finding presented in this report. The enablers and barriers are brought together and summarised below.

Enablers

Enablers are defined as success factors – factors that enabled TWES providers to deliver the service successfully. The evaluation identified enablers related to the prison context and TWES providers themselves. The successful delivery of TWES was enabled in prisons where:

1. Prisons have fewer security restrictions that prevent TWES provider access: TWES providers found it easier to deliver the service where they had greater ability to access prisoners and promote and deliver the service more easily. This also entailed lower costs due to less time required to navigate security protocols. Delivering TWES may always be more challenging in higher security prisons.
2. Prisons have more facilities available for TWES: this includes meeting rooms, phone lines and videoconferencing facilities. Particularly after the impact of COVID-19, TWES often competed with other professional services for these facilities, including calls with lawyers and courts, as well as calls with family members.
3. Corrections services have resources dedicated to overseeing prisoners' engagement in throughcare services: Jurisdictions that have resources dedicated to coordinating throughcare services may help improve overall coordination of TWES alongside other services, which may support promotion and engagement.

TWES providers who demonstrated the following characteristics appear to have implemented TWES more successfully:

1. **Strong skills in building positive relationships with prisons:** TWES was enabled where providers built positive relationships with prisons. TWES is challenging to implement and deliver within prisons, and each prison is different. Overcoming the challenges to implementation and delivery rested on building positive working relationships, clearly communicating the value and processes of TWES to prisons, and constructively solving problems to make the service work.

Prisoners also lose interest because the process is not client friendly – they get bored of it because it's too process driven.

- TWES provider

The level of access he [TWES staff member] receives and what facilities he is able to utilise at each centre depends on the level of access he has been granted which relies on the relationships he is able to build.

- TWES provider

The process was made easier because of the time and relationships developed by us with staff and prisoners. However, the structure of TWES particularly the timeframes did not allow for barriers typical for prison settings such as movements of prisoners, escorts available, prisoners going into behavioural areas, lockdown and so on. There might also be barriers in making the initial appointment with the prisoners due to rooms available, and now COVID-19 has provided an extra barrier because you're not meeting face to face but virtually.

- TWES provider

2. **A holistic view of participants' strengths and needs:** TWES was enabled where providers took a holistic approach to servicing TWES participants – identifying what other supports they might need and connecting them with relevant service providers. Early findings suggest that Indigenous-led organisations or providers in smaller, remote towns may have been better placed to do this.
3. **Experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff may help participants feel more comfortable and culturally safe, build stronger relationships / rapport with participants to support outcomes, especially where staff have strong knowledge of and/or connection to local culture and communities.

There are challenges in recruiting local people. It's not appealing for many people to work in prisons and security processes can cause delays in recruiting. We wanted local Aboriginal people in the roles but there is potential for staff to have relationships with people inside which is a problem. And really you need two staff – male and female.

- Government stakeholder

4. **Experience delivering other services in prisons:** This helps to cover the costs of delivering TWES – including splitting staff across TWES and other service delivery – and leveraging existing relationships with prisons and other services.

Barriers

Barriers are defined as the challenges that make it difficult for providers and others to implement TWES successfully. Key barriers identified in the evaluation are:

1. **Time constraints:** Some TWES providers and corrections stakeholders noted that more touchpoints and/or a longer timeframe is needed to effectively build a relationship and deliver TWES with some participants.
2. **Challenges in the ESAt process:** The evaluation found a number of challenges that providers have encountered in organising ESAts. DESE and Services Australia reported several changes have been made to improve the ESAt process since TWES commenced, however interviews with TWES providers suggest further communication is needed to address continued misconceptions about the ESAt process.
3. **Cultural competence within corrections system:** State and territory governments are key stakeholders in delivering TWES, and their support is critical to the success of the service. Interviews with representatives of all state/territory government stakeholders found one case where an interviewee expressed views that the Evaluation Team felt were highly disrespectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. The views expressed were at odds with the intent of the IAS Evaluation Framework. While the existence of such attitudes is beyond the scope of TWES, or NIAA and DESE, they reflect a barrier to the success of a service like TWES in creating better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners. NIAA and DESE could consider opportunities to influence state/territory governments through mechanisms such as the MOU.
4. **Constraints on prison facilities:** Many prisons face constraints on the availability of facilities and resources needed for TWES providers to deliver core servicing activities – including private meeting rooms, phone lines and videoconferencing facilities. TWES often competes with other in-prison services and legal services for these facilities, which posed a greater challenge to delivering TWES within a three to four month window.

Organising the prison facilities is always a problem. TWES is not a high priority for the prisons as such, they are usually quite resource constrained and we often aren't able to get rooms. Sometimes we have to do appointments in the employment coordinators' office, sometimes in the visits areas, it depends on the individual prison and its infrastructure.

- Corrections stakeholder

5. **Coordination challenges across Commonwealth and states/territories:** Because TWES is a Commonwealth Government-funded program being delivered within prisons that are managed by state/territory governments, this poses challenges to coordinating TWES with other services, and TWES being given sufficient priority by corrections alongside other services.
6. **Recruitment of effective TWES staff:** TWES providers need to have a diverse skillset to deliver the service effectively – including an ability to collaborate and problem solve within the constraints and systems of each prison, building relationships and rapport with prisoners, and effectively using data and administration systems. Staff also need to be comfortable to work in a prison environment. Staff who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are also well placed to service this cohort of prisoners. Some TWES providers noted that recruiting for the role is challenging, especially in remote areas, and particularly given funding levels may not be enough to cover a whole salary.
7. **Poor awareness of TWES:** Some stakeholders reported that awareness of TWES remains low among some post-release employment service providers and corrections staff, which has made it difficult to promote the program and bring employment services to Facilitated Transfer meetings.

Because TWES is a relatively new service not a lot of the key stakeholders are actually aware of it, including corrections and employment services. This can create confusion.

- TWES provider

8. **COVID-19:** The restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had a significant impact on all aspects of TWES delivery, particularly between March and October 2020. In response to COVID-19, most prisons across the country stopped almost all visits including from professional services visits such as TWES providers. In some cases, TWES servicing moved to telephone or videoconferencing where prisons had these facilities, but servicing was significantly affected.

Summary

The evaluation identifies opportunities to enhance the impact of TWES within its current design approach. However, given the challenges in implementation and limited impact there is merit in re-thinking the TWES model and reconsidering how the Commonwealth and state/territory governments could respond to the findings of *Prison to Work*.

Appendix 1:

Detail on Evaluation Questions

The table below presents the evaluation questions and sub-questions defined in the original TWES Evaluation Strategy.

Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions
Objective 1: Understand the design and implementation of TWES	
1.1 How does the design of TWES address relevant findings in the <i>Prison to Work</i> report?	a) How does the design of TWES respond to the findings of the <i>Prison to Work</i> report, in particular Finding 5?
1.2 Does TWES address the IAS core values?	a) How does the design of TWES respond to the findings of the <i>Prison to Work</i> report, in particular Finding 5?
1.3 To what extent has implementation of TWES been successful in achieving its intended program outcomes - "timely, coordinated and quality engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Prisoners from Employment and Welfare Services"?	a) When did TWES roll out across states and territories, and across remote and non-remote locations? b) What is the number and profile of participants who commenced and completed the TWES activities? c) How was TWES promoted and what methods were used? d) Why did participants exit TWES prior to completion? e) Why were elements of TWES such as the ESAt or a facilitated transfer not carried out? f) Were TWES providers able to access prisons and participants, when required, and promote the TWES program, as required? If not, then why? g) How did TWES relate to existing services or programs and what were the implications of this? h) Did the TWES program provide an opportunity to improve timeliness and quality of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners from Employment and Welfare Services? i) Did the TWES program result in a better coordinated engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners from Employment and Welfare Services?
1.4 What has been learned through implementation?	a) What are the barriers and enablers to success stakeholders have experienced in implementing and delivering TWES? b) How much funding has been spent and what has it been spent on? c) What are the other costs (in addition to the funding from NIAA and DESE) of implementing and delivering TWES?
Objective 2: Understand the impact of TWES	

Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions
2.1 To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes in the program logic, in the short, medium and long-term?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d) To what extent do participants feel that the TWES services are culturally and gender appropriate? e) To what extent do participants have an improved understanding of how to engage with post-release employment services providers? f) To what extent do participants have a strong connection with their post-release employment services provider? g) To what extent do post-release employment service providers have an improved understanding of the participant's background and needs? h) To what extent do participants feel that they do not have to retell their story? i) What evidence is there that TWES contributes to longer-term outcomes for participants, including improved employment outcomes and reduced rates of recidivism?
2.2 Why have the outcomes been achieved? Or why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Do the underlying causal assumptions in the program logic hold? b) Have any unintended outcomes occurred (positive or negative)?
Objective 3: Understand how to improve TWES	
3.1 What are the preconditions for TWES to be successful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What are the factors that drive an increased likelihood of achieving the intended outcomes?
3.2 What changes could be made to TWES to increase impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What changes should be made to the current TWES model? b) What funding or other support is required to increase the impact of TWES? c) What are the implications for the design and implementation of future prison to work programs?

Appendix 2: Evaluation Team

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting

SVA is a social purpose organisation that works with partners to improve the lives of people in need. SVA's services are designed to scale social impact, helping business, Government, and philanthropists to be more effective funders and social purpose organisations to be more effective at delivering services. SVA Consulting is a specialist consulting practice that partners with social purpose organisations to strengthen their ability to address social issues and achieve results. For more information about SVA, please see:

www.socialventures.com.au

Karen Milward Consulting

Headed by Yorta Yorta woman Karen Milward, Karen Milward Consulting provides cultural solutions to businesses and community groups all over Australia. Based in Melbourne, Karen is well known for being a strong advocate for developing culturally appropriate solutions to addressing the issues confronting Indigenous people. She has extensive experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at grass roots and organisational levels and up to peak body representative level. For more information about Karen Milward Consulting please see: <https://www.karenmilward.com.au/>.

Australian National University (ANU)

ANU is a research-intensive university with research priorities that reflect the challenges facing the world today. Dr Nicholas Biddle is an associate director and professor at ANU's centre for Social Research and Methods. For more information about Nicholas Biddle please see here: <https://csm.cass.anu.edu.au/people/professor-nicholas-biddle>.

Subcontractors

Sorrell Ashby

Sorrell is a Gamilaroi woman and Social entrepreneur based in Darwin in the NT. The Founder and Managing Director at Guumali, a social enterprise that works to support First Nations self-determination by unlocking the Indigenous estate to create the opportunity for nations and economies to rebuild. Sorrell has a wide range of experience in facilitating genuine partnerships and effective collaboration. In her previous roles Sorrell has extensive experience in Management Consulting with companies such as PWC's Indigenous Consulting. For more information about Sorrell Ashby please see here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sorrell-ashby/>.

Jayde Geia

Jayde's family are Bwngcolman, Gunggandji and Mualgal and she is previously a lawyer by trade. Highly experience in management consulting through her previous role as Consulting Manager at EY, Jayde has gained extensive experience undertaking culturally appropriate and extensive stakeholder consultation with Indigenous communities and individuals through EY's Indigenous Sector practice. For more information about Jayde Geia please see here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jayde-geia-b8731181/>.

Ralph Mogridge

Ralph is a Noongar man from WA. Ralph is a Director of his own Independent Consulting service R. Mogridge & Associates. He has extensive experience in community and stakeholder engagement with Indigenous communities and people. He also has previous experience in undertaking reviews and evaluations of Aboriginal specific programs across Western Australia. For more information on Ralph Mogridge see here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ralph-mogridge-986583121/>

References

- Andrew Day, Lynore Geia, and Armon Tamatea. 2019. "Towards effective throughcare approaches for Indigenous people leaving prison in Australia and New Zealand". *Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse*
- Andrew Griffiths, Fredrick Zmudzki, and Shona Bates. 2017. "Evaluation of ACT Extended Throughcare Pilot Program." *Social Policy Research Centre*
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2016. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Prisoner Characteristics", *2016 Census*.
- Australian Government. 2017. Time To Work Employment Service Request for Tender 2018-2021
- Australian Government. 2018. Guideline: Time to Work Employment Service
- Australian Government. 2018. Time to Work Employment Service, Guideline: Performance Framework, May 2018
- Australian Law Reform Commission. 2017. "Pathways to Justice - Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples."
- Boris Beranger, Don Weatherburn, and Steve Moffatt. 2010. "Reducing Indigenous Contact with the Court System". Issue paper no. 54, *Crime and Justice Statistics*
- Christopher Uggen, and Jeremy Staff. 2001. "Work as a Turning Point for Criminal Offenders." *Corrections Management Quarterly*
- Christy A. Visher, Laura Winterfield, and Mark B. Coggeshall. 2005. "Ex-offender employment programs and recidivism: A meta-analysis." *Journal of Experimental Criminology*
- Christy A. Visher, Sara A. Debus-Sherrill, and Jennifer Yahner. 2011. "Employment After Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Former Prisoners." *Justice Quarterly*
- Council of Australian Governments. 2016. *Prison to Work Report*
- David B. Wilson, Catherine A. Gallagher, and Doris L. MacKenzie. 2000. "Meta-analysis of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, and Work Programs for Adult Offenders." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 361.
- Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet. 2018. Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework
- Joseph Graffam, and Alison Shinkfield. 2012. Strategies to enhance employment of Indigenous ex-offenders after release from correctional institutions. (Resource Sheet no.11, Closing the gap clearinghouse), 4.
- Marilyn C. Moses. 2012. "Ex-Offender Job Placement Programs Do Not Reduce Recidivism." *Corrections Today*

End of report