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National Indigenous Australians Agency

**Indigenous Employment Program
Evaluation – Final Report**

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Deloitte
Access **Economics**

Acknowledgement

Deloitte acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. The country we live, work and travel on has been loved, celebrated and cared for over many millennia by their people and their spiritual and physical ownership has never been ceded. We thank them and pay our respects to them, to their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.

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Acronyms

| Acronym | Full name |
|----------------|--|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| AEC | Australian Employment Covenant |
| CDP | Community Development Program |
| CoP | Communities of Practice |
| CTG | Closing the Gap |
| DESE | Department of Education, Skills and Employment |
| EPI | Employment Parity Initiative |
| ESS | Employment Services System |
| ERG | Evaluation Reference Group |
| FMG | Fortescue Metal Group |
| IAS | Indigenous Advancement Strategy |
| IEC | Indigenous Evaluation Committee |
| IEP | Indigenous Employment Programs |
| JLEP | Jobs, Land and Economy Programme |
| JSCI | Jobseeker Classification Instrument |
| NIAA | National Indigenous Australians Agency |
| NATSIHS | National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey |
| NILF | Not in the Labour Force |
| PM&C | Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet |
| PPM | Post-Program Monitoring (survey) |
| RED | Research Evaluation Database |
| RTOs | Registered Training Organisations |
| SVA | Social Ventures Australia |
| TAEG | Tailored Assistance Employment Grants |
| VTEC | Vocational, Training and Employment Centres |

Executive Summary

In February 2020, Deloitte Access Economics was engaged by the NIAA to conduct a year-long¹ evaluation of the Indigenous Employment Program (see Box 1).

The context

Indigenous employment programs in Australia display a history of starting from Western conceptions. This coincides with a history of inadequacy in realising the outcomes sought, as previous reviews have established (see Appendix A for further details).

In line with the gaps in knowledge and investment success, it is also the case that these historical programs and models have not been systematically monitored nor evaluated. This has made it difficult for successive policies and stakeholders to truly feel confident of evidence-informed decision making and has heightened the risk of history repeating itself.

Noting the policy approach to Indigenous employment has been influenced by different factors over time, the in-scope sub-programs for this evaluation appear to have been most influenced by *Creating Parity: the Forrest Review (2014)* (the *Forrest Review*). The *Forrest Review* was deeply critical of the mainstream employment system's ability to suitably support Indigenous jobseekers and provide stability for employers and, in response, it promoted a demand-driven approach to employment services that focused on sustainable employment outcomes.²

This evaluation focuses on each of the in-scope sub-programs in their current form to the end of 2019, though draws on the historical context for each program prior to these dates to the extent this provides insight into design, implementation and impact. The in-scope sub-programs are:

- **Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC)** – seeks to connect Indigenous jobseekers with guaranteed employment by providing necessary support services to prepare jobseekers for long-term employment, as well as training through industry employers.
- **Employment Parity Initiative (EPI)** – works alongside large Australian companies, encouraging them to commit to Indigenous workforce targets and embed recruitment and retention strategies within their organisation.
- **Tailored Assistance Employment Grants – Employment (TAEG)** – provides activities that seek to support Indigenous jobseekers with commencing sustainable jobs and providing employer support to assist with attracting and retaining Indigenous Australians.³

Monthly commencements in these programs peaked in October 2017 at 726 and have trended downwards since to approximately 430 in the second half of 2019 (Chart i). The volume of employment commencements across the programs totals around 27,000 as at the end of 2019 (see 4.2.2 for a summary of the partial commencement targets that are available).

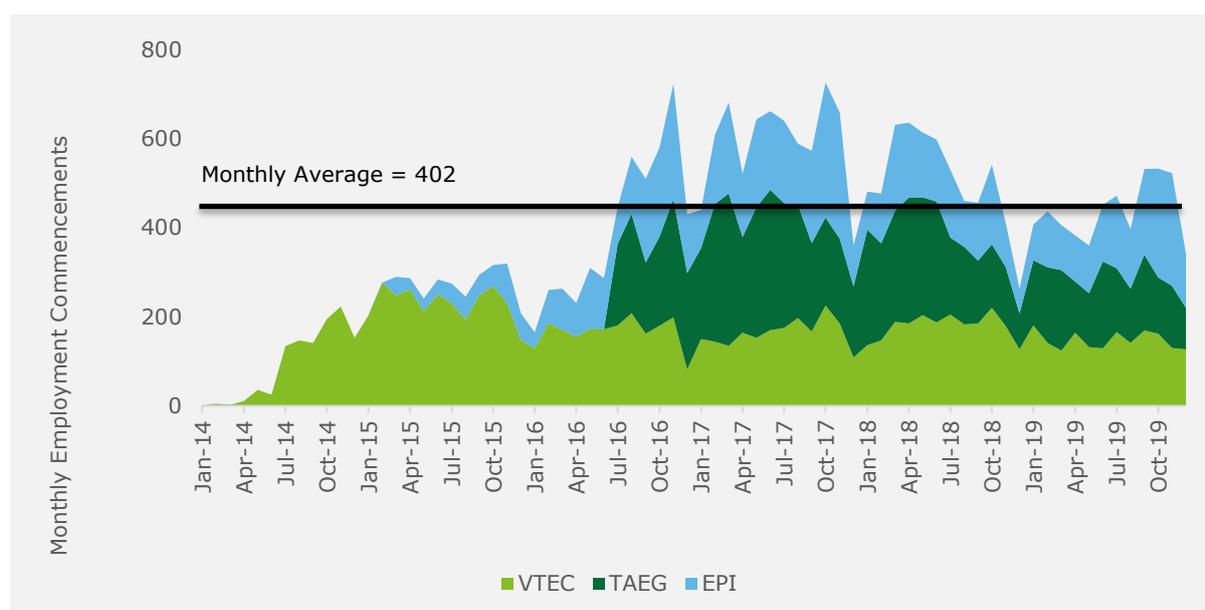
This evaluation has observed that the design of these in-scope programs broadly aligns with an accumulated evidence base of what works for disadvantaged jobseekers generally. However, there is limited evidence of Indigenous perspectives influencing the design of these programs, and no clear nor complete documentation of what success looks like nor how this was to be achieved. A consequence of this is that the evaluation has no clear benchmarks to judge whether the programs are 'on-track'.

¹ The events of 2020 resulted in the prolonging of the evaluation, ultimately to ensure the integrity of the Indigenous voice was not lost in response to a temporary inability to be with stakeholders in place.

² Commonwealth of Australia. (2015). 'The Forrest Review (2014): Creating Parity'.

³ Note that the TAEG program offers three streams of funding, related to employment, school-based traineeships and cadetships. The employment stream of funding is the only stream which is in-scope for this evaluation.

Chart i: Time-series of monthly employment commencements, by sub-program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019).

Box 1: A more balanced approach

Deloitte Access Economics proudly acknowledges that this evaluation has been guided by the Productivity Commission's *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (2020)*, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Evaluation Framework*. The overarching principle has been to have at the centre Indigenous Australian people, perspectives, priorities and knowledge.⁴

Core components of the evaluation's approach therefore include:

- governance structures that embed mechanisms to incorporate Indigenous cultural values, including an Indigenous-led evaluation team; and
- participatory approaches to gather Indigenous perspectives that may challenge the naturally Western frame of reference, such as how Indigenous values may conflict with mainstream assumptions of worker mobility and 'rational' incentives for employment

The evaluation conducted an extensive stakeholder consultation process around Australia, including program participants, providers, employers, community representatives and government officials. This was supplemented with a detailed literature scan, and analysis of three distinct datasets (see Section 1.3.4 for further information on the data sources used in this evaluation).

As a result, the evaluation is able to start to establish the linkages (and highlight the points of difference) between Western economic policy frameworks, and the sociological, cultural and economic frameworks that evidence Indigenous perspectives on, and lived experience of, these programs. It strives for this in recognition of the fact that a thorough understanding of both perspectives is required to support meaningful program understanding and improvement.

In the end, the findings and suggestions put forward are a holistic reflection on the evidence and concepts elaborated in the report, and other connections that can credibly be made based on the project team's expertise and experiences. It embodies a priority to present this evaluation in a way that will be more equal in its service of Indigenous Australians and Western policy frames, than previous endeavours.

⁴ Productivity Commission (2020), *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*, Australian Government.

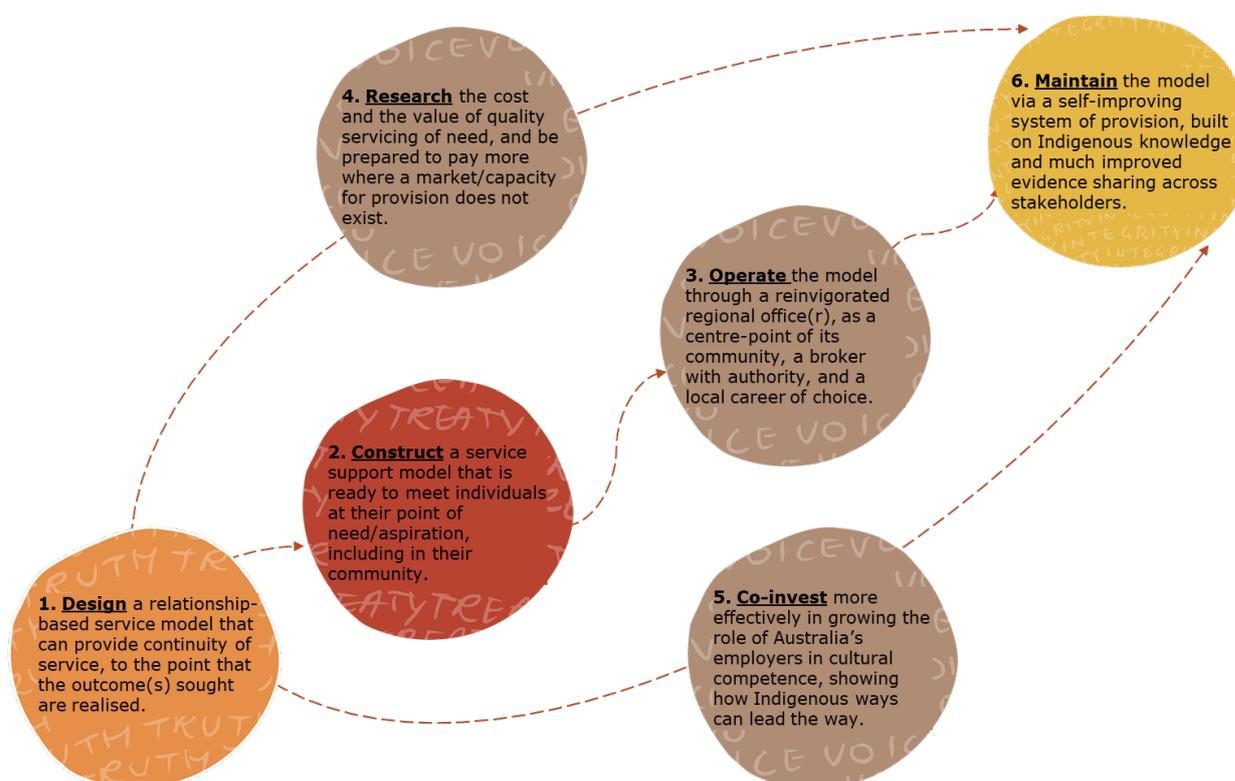
Key findings and recommendations

The findings and recommendations presented below are not a simple extrapolation of the evidence that has been reported in this evaluation – to do so would be to miss the essence of the challenges and opportunities the program (and broader policy) faces.

These findings and solutions have been formed through a holistic judgement of the evidence that has been collected - including quite critically the voice of Indigenous peoples - and the evidence that could not be found (though was expected).

Figure i depicts the six key recommendations, reflecting a deliberate sequence to an ultimate goal of a self-improving system of provision, built on Indigenous knowledge and much improved evidence sharing across stakeholders. It also deliberately depicts the research and co-investment that will need to occur in parallel, and that straight lines between these milestones should not be the expectation.

Figure i: High-level summary of key recommendations



Specific points of evidence and sub-findings are mapped across the chapter summaries, and in further detail in the body of the report. A number of 'suggestions' have been included throughout the report (and are eluded to in this section) to exemplify further detail on ways forward.

Figure ii (at page xviii) provides a summary 'Evaluation on a Page'. While this infographic visually positions the key findings, data sources, recommendations and perspectives from the evaluation, it is noted that no single infographic is capable of capturing the richness of this evaluation.

All readers are encouraged to engage with the full report and reflect on their own interpretations of what is and is not presented. It will provide different meaning and encouragement to different readers depending upon where they are starting from, contextually.

Finding 1 – Indigenous employment support is highly relational, and thereby takes time.

Successful approaches to job seeker support rely on positive relationships and connections between employers, trainers, job placement providers, job seekers and work opportunities.

Relationships and connections take time and require the personal investment of all parties. This is particularly true in the Indigenous context where Barlo et al. identify that “From an Indigenous perspective, we live our lives *through and as relationships*” (2021)⁵. The voice and experience of those consulted in this study has also underscored the importance of trusted networks and the strength of relationships.

Building a relationship, especially layered in the way of Indigenous engagement, takes time – often more time than the 26-week program outcome incentive and contract structure in the programs evaluated reflects. This is because there are typically many barriers to gaining trust and understanding between the individual and their service/support provider.

Sufficient time to build relationships, aspiration and ultimately to journey with the individual is the starting point for appropriate, effective and efficient investment in this area of policy. In successful models of employment support elsewhere, where need is similarly highly variable and complex, enduring timeframes are typically allowed/encouraged for service provision.

Recommendation 1 - Design a relationship-based service model that can provide continuity of service, to the point that the outcome(s) sought are realised.

History and the evidence presented in this evaluation suggest a genuine exercise in service design is now required. It would need to be led by experts in the process of human-centred service design, and closely involve an appropriate representation of those who have experienced (or are likely to need) this type of support, and of those who have seen (or delivered) success up close.

The design process can thereby better pinpoint the features of service that make the difference for Indigenous Australians, and ensure the current frictions are eased. This will include ensuring the connections the model supports these individuals to make are culturally appropriate and therefore (likely) highly localised, and (likely) either Indigenous-delivered or Indigenous-centred.

Given trust, learning, aspiration and matching all take time if they are to be robust, the service will need to be designed around an appropriate length of relationship. This will often be in excess of the current program 26-week incentives/parameters. In many instances success will take more than one attempt and may not be full-time employment. Success will also not be achieved through extended periods of inactivity, particularly where the participant is ready to re-engage⁶.

Refer to suggestions [two](#) and [seven](#) in the body of the report for further detail.

Finding 2 - ‘Meaningful’ employment is not predefined, though it is less likely to be outside of an individual’s community.

‘Meaningful’ employment cannot be judged in the absence of the aspiration of the individual. The operating assumption should therefore not be that any job will do, nor that areas of economy-wide skill shortage are necessarily enabling opportunities for participants. Moving away for work, or working in a role of no cultural significance, is typically less achievable for Indigenous Australians.

For Indigenous Australians, meaningful employment is less likely to be about individual financial benefits, and instead operate in a complex relationship to community, family and collective values

⁵ S. Barlo, W.E. Boyd, M. Hughes, S. Wilson, ‘Yarning as protected space: relational accountability in research’, *AlterNative*, 2021, Vol. 17(1) 40–48

⁶ Permanent disengagement from the workforce is the outcome that must be avoided, more so than some ‘churn’, in particular for those starting the furthest back from the finish line.

and obligations. Meaningful employment will therefore offer avenues to enhance social relationships and contribute meaningfully to community.

It's also true that the mainstream economy isn't equally present across the country, and any top-down view of what opportunities are available needs to be vetted against the on the ground presence of those opportunities. This heightens the complexity of the matching process, but also opens up the opportunity of strong matches in-place, particularly when thinking more broadly about the way public sector procurement in regional and remote communities could operate⁷.

Recommendation 2 – Construct a service support model that is ready to meet individuals at their point of need/aspiration, including in their community.

Contemporary approaches to social service are integrated, user-centred, and underpinned by a fit-for-purpose client management tool. That tool will operate as a single source of truth for all parties (the client, the provider and the administrator), as it relates to the need and the journey of the individual through the support system.

Going forward, it is incumbent upon this support system to better understand and help develop what 'meaningful' employment looks like for each individual. If the model held the view that any job is a steppingstone, then the career pathways from that job will need to be a clearly established for the participant – an individual needs to see their future and aspire to it.

The model should then ensure and assure it is providing 'reasonable' supports towards that end. This will require significant investment in new instruments, processes and capabilities, including data systems to help identify and map the individual journeys. As each client journey will involve steppingstones, the model should enable these to be broadly established in the early stages of relationship, and then tracked (and revised) to indicate progress over time.

The matching process itself will need to move more towards community-level needs, procurement models and job-creation. This will be enabled through greater cross-governmental and cross-agency collaboration (centrally and regionally), where different programs, organisations and pools of funding are managed and can ultimately be better aligned to achieve collective goals.

Refer to suggestion [four](#) in the body of the report for further detail.

Finding 3 – Greater subsidiarity is now required to assist the 'matching' with meaningful employment, including the 'aligning' of government programs and funding

The current operating model of the program is highly centralised and highly focused on contract management – reflecting a historical decision that the preconditions for devolution were not sufficiently in place. Analysis to this point suggests that the risks these current program settings are seeking to avoid may be lesser than the benefits they could unlock if reset.

The consequence of the centralisation was consistently reported in these regional consultations to be a loss of opportunity for individuals and communities, and a disempowered NIAA regional workforce. Many stakeholders consulted recall a time where Indigenous employment support was more devolved and, in their eyes, more effective, and/or are seeing successful devolution in other social service contexts in their communities.

While there were some examples of successful negotiation of contracts and opportunities, they appeared to be more a function of the ingenuity of key individuals than a function of the system. This evidence (among other evidence) suggests the weakness in the model is a reflection of a lack of place and person-based design, rather than a deficiency of the individual administrators.

⁷ That is, you could increase Indigenous labour supply and demand at the same time, if the participant could help service the local needs.

Subsidiarity is the direction of all appropriate, effective and efficient employment policy Deloitte Access Economics has evaluated over the last decade.⁸ With this can also come a way to reinvigorate the relationship with jurisdictionally-based programs, which are currently unknown to the NIAA or out of alignment with the program investment (a challenge for the participant, employer and provider to currently try and navigate largely on their own).

Recommendation 3 – Operate the model through a reinvigorated regional office(r), as a centre-point of its community, a broker with authority, and a local career of choice.

A 'high control' (centralised) approach is appropriate where the risks associated with program delivery are high, or where best practice design and implementation features are well-established. In this case a 'high trust' approach is more appropriate, noting what constitutes effective service provision is relatively localised, and adaptability and responsiveness in service delivery is required.

The NIAA regional office has the potential to play a highly influential brokerage role as part of this, one that can coordinate the best available opportunities to their contextual Indigenous employment challenges. This recommendation is made in recognition of the fact that this is a complex problem that will only be reduced through widespread improvements in relationships, capabilities and evidence, and through that less delayed (and better) decision making.

Subsidiarity can be expressed practically in many ways, as the NIAA would be considering in other aspects of its policy responsibilities. The role of the 'central office' in the model will need to be appropriately redesigned as part of this shift, noting it too has an important, higher-value formative role to play (where improved data systems take more care of the summative aspects). Subsidiarity (again) requires trust, capability building, and efficacious monitoring systems at all levels – as preconditions for its success – and (again) these will need to be adequately invested in, concurrent to the rollout of the next program.

Ultimately, the model needs to display the same trust towards stakeholders that it is asking stakeholders to display towards it. A practical expression of this is giving participants a 'second-chance' and providing ongoing opportunities for re-engagement – noting this is most reliably administered through on-the-ground engagement and relationship (client, provider, coordinator). This operating model thereby stands to create a more attractive career option for regional officers in and of itself, where it is a more meaningful role in those communities.

Refer to suggestion [five](#) in the body of the report for further detail.

Finding 4 – The funding of this program is not fit-for-purpose, as it is too tight in some areas and too loose in others, and overall unclear in its underpinnings and purpose.

Funding models do not determine success; they can support it and they can detract from it. However, to harness the productive potential of funding models they should be based on principles of design like adequacy, equity, incentive, sustainability and efficiency, and the practical expression of those design principles should reflect sound logic and evidence.

It's clear such a funding model design process has not occurred here. There has been no clear/quality work done to understand the cost of quality service provision against different levels of client need, nor what it would take to sustain these services over time and who should pay.

It is therefore not clear in how many instances the service is under or over-funded by the NIAA (or government more broadly where multiple funding pools are utilised). Ultimately this is an empirical question - guided by the best available practitioners and service models - and one that needs to be prioritised in the design phase of the next policy.

⁸ People and employment ultimately exist in place – this situation is not confined to Indigenous Australians, though it is often more acute for them.

It is also the case that other aspects of the funding contracts are not clearly fit for purpose, as it relates to their length, their quotas and whether they offer an appropriate amount of autonomy to the provider. The provider should be offered a level of autonomy that is consistent with the investment logic, the amount invested in the provider and/or a history of successful provision of support (for instance here, the contract structures seem too tight for TAEG, and too loose for EPI).

These matters, principally of eligibility of the participant and incentive for the provider, are difficult to get 'right', and do need to be mindful of budget and other constraints. However, the findings of this evaluation suggest the program parameters are inappropriately calibrated, particularly in areas where the need might be most acute.

Recommendation 4 - Research the cost and the value of quality servicing of need, and be prepared to pay more where a market/capacity for provision does not exist.

Without an understanding of the cost of 'reasonable' support against the different levels of need, it is difficult to be assured of appropriateness, effectiveness or efficiency of this program. Many other core services provided in the areas of social policy are underpinned by activity-based costing studies and needs-based funding models.

The absence here implies a foundation of effective investment is unlikely to have been achieved, certainly not systematically. As a new service design is finalised, according to levels of need, steps will need to be taken to cost that and reflect the degree to which Government is willing and able to fund to that standard, in a new funding model.

An alternative is to determine what an outcome is worth to the Australian public, and fund providers based on that rather than cost – though this may be inadequate to fund provision in the most high-cost constructs. This could imply a balance may need to be struck, with different components funded in different ways, where education and health funding in this country provides some instruction⁹.

The ways in which the payment flows are also critical. Small providers typically have less cashflow to manage the risk/delays of heavily outcomes-based payment, particularly where they might end up servicing the greatest needs¹⁰. Any genuine provider, building relationships, will have high up-front costs and may never recoup those if funded too much on outcomes – which might force more risk-averse approaches and see participants with greater needs discouraged from participation. Alternatively, it can lead to viability issues for these providers, risking discontinuous service, which in the end is just as problematic.

Where outcomes are complex and slow to be achieved, the model must ultimately reflect that in the payment amounts and timing. If efficiency becomes a concern (which should only be once the model is proven effective), then there are other means for controlling that, such as value-added assessments per provider (over time) and reward structures built around that, as is being pursued in other innovative policy contexts.

If we expect a proliferation of small providers in places across the country is a sign of a healthy support system, then some efficiency may ultimately come from the NIAA taking some of the service in-house. This is particularly the case where the NIAA can provide efficient and effective platforms that meet the broad operational needs of smaller service providers (e.g. a common and fit for purpose client relationship management tool, professional development etc.).

Refer to suggestions [three](#) and [nine](#) in the body of the report for further detail.

Finding 5 – The problem at large is the model, and its wider context, is not yet strengths-based

⁹ In some instances, you simply cannot rely on the market to meet the service need, and you need to provide/procure more directly.

¹⁰ In certain contexts they will be a more trusted/relational institutional structure.

While this program has taken steps towards a more inclusive model of employment for Indigenous Australians, it is ultimately still operating in (and perpetuating) a deficit-based environment. It is implicitly (and at times explicitly) assuming the gap runs from Indigenous to non-Indigenous when it comes to meaningful employment, and it has undertones of the need to 'fix' Indigenous people such that they fit the way business is done in this country.

Where large employers have been invested in to improve their understanding and culture towards Indigenous employment and ways, with a small number of commendable exceptions, the achievement of this vision has been slow, uneven and largely unmonitored. Racism is seemingly ever-present in many Australian workplaces, reinforced by consultations undertaken in this work and other contemporary evidence accessed.

A key opportunity remains for Australian businesses to see Indigenous ways not only as the way to invite the talent and value-creation of Indigenous Australian's into the productive capacity of the business/region/economy, but also to better engage other Australians who aren't bringing their best-selves to their work. In essence, the opportunity is to find ways to utilise Indigenous culture to demonstrate to Australian workplaces how they can adapt their culture and practice more towards their employees' strengths.

Recommendation 5 – Co-invest more effectively in growing the role of Australia's employers in cultural competence, showing how Indigenous ways can lead the way.

Employment policy must always be investing in both the demand side and supply side of the labour market. It is also true that where the economy is growing quickly, at face value there is less need to stimulate demand for workers.

However, where some members of the population are systematically excluded from the opportunities¹¹, there is strong motivation for greater demand side investment even in times of significant growth. In this context it takes the form of changing the understanding and attitudes of more Australian employers (and their employees), by building their cultural competencies to provide more inclusive and thereby engaging workplaces.

The next attempt in this space needs to be more than symbolism, and not default to wage subsidies. It's not to say these don't have some part to play, where they can be appropriately calibrated, it's just to say they're not enough in isolation. It should be anticipated that an effective co-design process will reveal some of what is working at small scale in different contexts across the country, for consideration in a careful (high quality, and appropriately paced) scaling exercise.

The concept of co-investment here is also important. Co-investment should be considered on the basis that while the public value is largely immeasurable, it is ultimately likely to be immense, if the investment is effective. It is also the case that where we can see the change in attitudes and competencies, it is not happening quickly enough, and on economic and social grounds there is a strong rationale for government seeking to accelerate it.

Refer to suggestion [eight](#) in the body of the report for further detail.

Finding 6 – Indigenous delivered and Indigenous centred provision models are a critical grounding for this program, and have further potential.

If we accept effectiveness starts with relationships, then it is more likely to end with Indigenous providers and/or Indigenous ways of providing support. It is not to say this is the only way, or indeed achievable at widescale in the short-to-medium term, but it is ultimately the clearest path we can see to appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency in this area of policy.

¹¹ And where we assess that our rate of 'full-employment' is beyond what we have previously achieved, as is currently being contemplated by many of Australia's leading economists.

The evaluation has identified successful Indigenous and non-Indigenous providers, on the metrics available. Consultations revealed that many of the non-Indigenous providers who were having more success were culturally trained and displaying those practices in their approach.

While the current system is allowing many Indigenous Australians to be supported into a job, it is not clear that it is establishing meaningful and sustainable employment (see Box 2). It is also not clear what the social (and economic) costs are of inappropriate work/employment outcomes.

Until these are clear, we cannot have confidence in the net value creation from these programs. At this point we must also lend sufficient weight to the view of many consulted, among wider evidence, that Indigenous approaches are more likely to create a net improvement in welfare because of the cultural understanding and obligation typically underpinning them.

Finally, this evaluation has observed that a provision requirement (i.e. Indigenous ownership) in the absence of support towards its achievement, is only a partially effective response. Providers and the system alike, must each display sufficient care and capability, which is to say this program can't just be a side-project for a provider or for Australian public policy.

Recommendation 6 - Maintain the model via a self-improving system of provision, built on Indigenous knowledge and much improved evidence sharing across stakeholders.

Indigenous ownership and Indigenous centred provision can be achieved more widely. This will require consideration of new components to effective investment under this policy, for example ensuring Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs have the ability (and financial and cultural incentive) to build their culture in other providers (and employers), for collective success.

It should also be imagined that any high performing provider has something to offer the network of providers, and those connections should be established by the NIAA to encourage genuine catch-up for some and innovation for others.¹² This has the capacity to quickly empower providers to become the evidentiary authority on best-practice across various contexts.

If coupled with strong service relationships, this could support a cycle of system improvement embedded in local responses. It achieves this by encouraging organisations to focus more on the efficacy of their models of professional practice, with the NIAA assisting with administration, monitoring and linking to other programs, where this can be done in a broadly fit-for-purpose way.

If the operating model can move away from contract compliance and closer to a 'high trust' approach, this continuous improvement system can supplement the accountability mechanism. Regional oversight will become more critical, centred on the needs and experience of the participant, and adequate autonomy for providers and communities to self-regulate (with the assistance of good information and relationships).

In the end, any rules around who can be a provider will need a clear and careful process for exceptions, administered through a balance of central and community view.

Refer to suggestions [one](#), [six](#) and [ten](#) in the body of the report for further detail.

¹² This is also important to minimise reinvention or worse still, deficient approaches, which can often occur in unmonitored/unevaluated grants-based programs.

Box 2: A statistical view of the outcomes achieved by the in-scope investment

This evaluation utilised participant-level program data and income support data from the Research Evaluation Database (RED) to analyse the statistical outcomes achieved by the IEP sub-programs.

26-week outcomes

At a basic level, the effectiveness of the sub-programs was examined using the 26-week milestone completion rate - the share of participants who remain engaged in the programs for 26 weeks as a share of all commencements. While this is an imperfect measure of program effectiveness, it is currently the most consistently reported outcome measure across the sub-programs.

This analysis reveals that the EPI program has the highest and most consistent (i.e. smallest standard deviation) 26-week milestone completion rate of the sub-programs (Chart ii). Further, econometric analysis that controls for basic participant characteristics re-affirms this finding, suggesting that EPI participants are 14 percentage points more likely to achieve the 26-week milestone than VTEC participants, while TAEG participants are marginally less likely (-3 percentage points).

Chart ii: Average participant 26-week milestone completion rate, by sub-program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019)

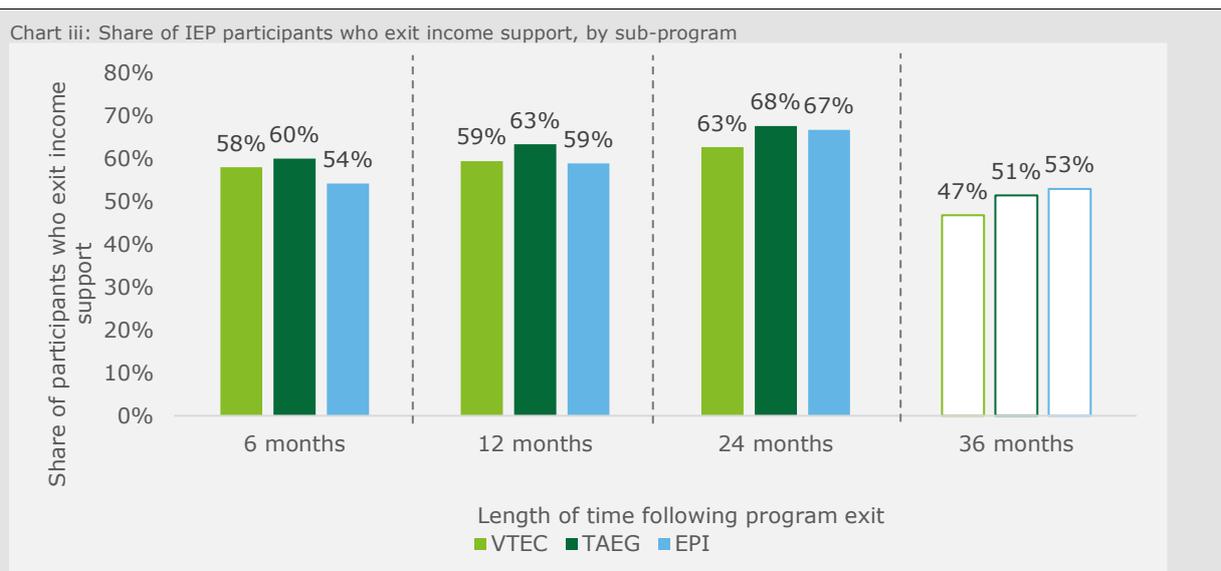
A preliminary scan of publicly available research suggests that the 26-week milestone completion rate for the IEP sub-programs is higher than that of comparable initiatives such as Jobactive, CDP and the Jobs Victoria Employment Network.

However, there is considerable variation in the 26-week milestone completion rate across participant and provider characteristics. Preliminary analysis suggests that female participants and participants aged 46 years and over have a statistically significant and higher milestone completion rate than average. Similarly, providers with the top quintile of commencements have a significantly higher milestone completion rate than average.

Towards sustainable outcomes

Moving beyond the 26-week outcomes, data from the Research Evaluation Database (RED) was used to examine the income support status of IEP participants after exiting the program – as a proxy for whether they are engaged in paid employment or not.

Preliminary analysis suggests that 6+ months following program exit the effectiveness of the sub-programs in supporting participants to exit income support changes over time (Chart iii). That is, in the earlier periods TAEG appears to outperform EPI by six percentage points, but this difference closes to only one percentage point 24 months from program exit.



Source: Research Evaluation Database (2015-2019). Note: As an example, 52% of VTEC participants who were receiving income support payments when they commenced the program were not receiving income support payments when they exited the IEP (i.e. at '0 months').

Note: the cohorts listed above are not strictly comparable (as indicated by the dividing lines) as the sample sizes across each of the time periods vary, reflecting the fact that, for example the '36 month' outcome only examines those participants who commenced in the program prior to 2016. The 36-month outcomes are shaded differently, highlighting that these results appear to be inconsistent with earlier time periods. Preliminary analysis has not been able to identify the drivers of this difference.

Further econometric analysis reveals that 12+ months following program exit there is no statistically significant difference in the sub-programs ability to support participants to exit income support. This finding suggests that while the EPI program appears to outperform the other sub-programs in its 26-week milestone completion rate, the longer-term relative effectiveness of the sub-programs is more indistinguishable.

On balance, analysis from the RED suggests that younger participants who have been unemployed for less than 52 weeks on program commencement appear to be more likely to exit income support. This result does not necessarily mirror that of the findings from the analysis of 26-week outcomes.

These inconclusive results highlight the need for further econometric analysis to explore the possible long-term dynamics of the sub-programs.

The status of program effectiveness and efficiency

Given the limited data that was made available for this evaluation, the quantitative analysis in this report does not sufficiently control for differences in the IEP participant cohorts, or other potential confounding factors. A level of caution should be taken when interpreting, and no overall judgement on the effectiveness of the programs is formed as a result of the quantitative analysis conducted. Furthermore, as efficiency is a function of effectiveness, it is not appropriate to judge the efficiency of the program or its subcomponents where effectiveness cannot be established.

Final thoughts

This evaluation set out to present a tightly mapped process of cause and effect. After 16 months of intense, multidisciplinary work, and a truly balanced Indigenous and Western-economics led project governance, it is clear that this was not achievable.

This is not a failing in the project, but instead an important finding that causality may not be clearly definable in the highly contextualised environment of employment for Indigenous people. It might also not be advisable as a simplistic policy goal for the future.

This report adds to the findings of both the Productivity Commission (PC) and the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), which have both established that we do not know enough about how these outcomes are caused. The key implication of this is that we – researchers and public policy advisers – do not have sufficient measurement systems to reveal prescriptions for their resolution.

Instead the best that can presently be achieved is to draw the evidence together using our collective wisdom (as a community), and place supporting and conflicting arguments side-by-side, to offer formative insights for public policy and investment. This speaks to the criticality of the process of co-design, including who is involved and how, and that it is not just point-in-time¹³.

This program exists in a system of public processes and public funds, and every decision is highly scrutinised. Formal public reviews, such as those conducted by the ANAO and the PC, continue to suggest that these processes are not fit-for-purpose, and while they may create a feeling of compliance at a point in time, they are ultimately not producing the outcomes they commit to.

Going forward it is therefore essential that we do not seek to maintain or recreate a model where only those who can navigate bureaucracy are able/prepared to participate – it is highly exclusionary for many Australians. The system must be centred on people and place and be prepared for this to take time.

By extension, this will also require adaptations to the way the expenditure is publicly reviewed, ensuring appropriate timing and focus against a clear and strategic policy intent.¹⁴ Improved collective intelligence will enable more stakeholders to find the confidence required to maintain the course, where outcomes take time and are more variable than can immediately be explained.

An improved collective view can only be achieved through tighter clarity of purpose and supporting investment logic. It will also require a better day-to-day platform for relating to providers and participants, and ongoing evaluation from experts who can be truthful and effectively navigate the different constructs and constraints.

The ownership of the program and participant data will need to be better negotiated (within and beyond government), and it will need to be shared often with those to whom it belongs. This will better ensure participants, providers and communities too are empowered to act upon the lessons the data holds and contribute to the ideas and inspiration that refine policy. It is a collective responsibility to refine this area of public policy, and it will only be refined collectively.

This next phase of careful design, implementation and evaluation must be a 10+ year pursuit. Experience suggests this is how long it takes an effective small organisation in this space to move from inception to broad success, and here we are talking about many more organisations and layers of complexity. It is also the case that it takes a minimum of five years to have a sense of whether outcomes are truly being achieved for any wave of participants, and this system needs to observe a minimum of five waves to find confidence and instruction.

As each review that has come before this has positioned, it is time for more than incremental change. History has a tendency of repeating itself until a sufficiently bold leadership emerges to 'flip the script'. Even where that shift occurs at the edge of a system it can be transformational.

Deloitte.

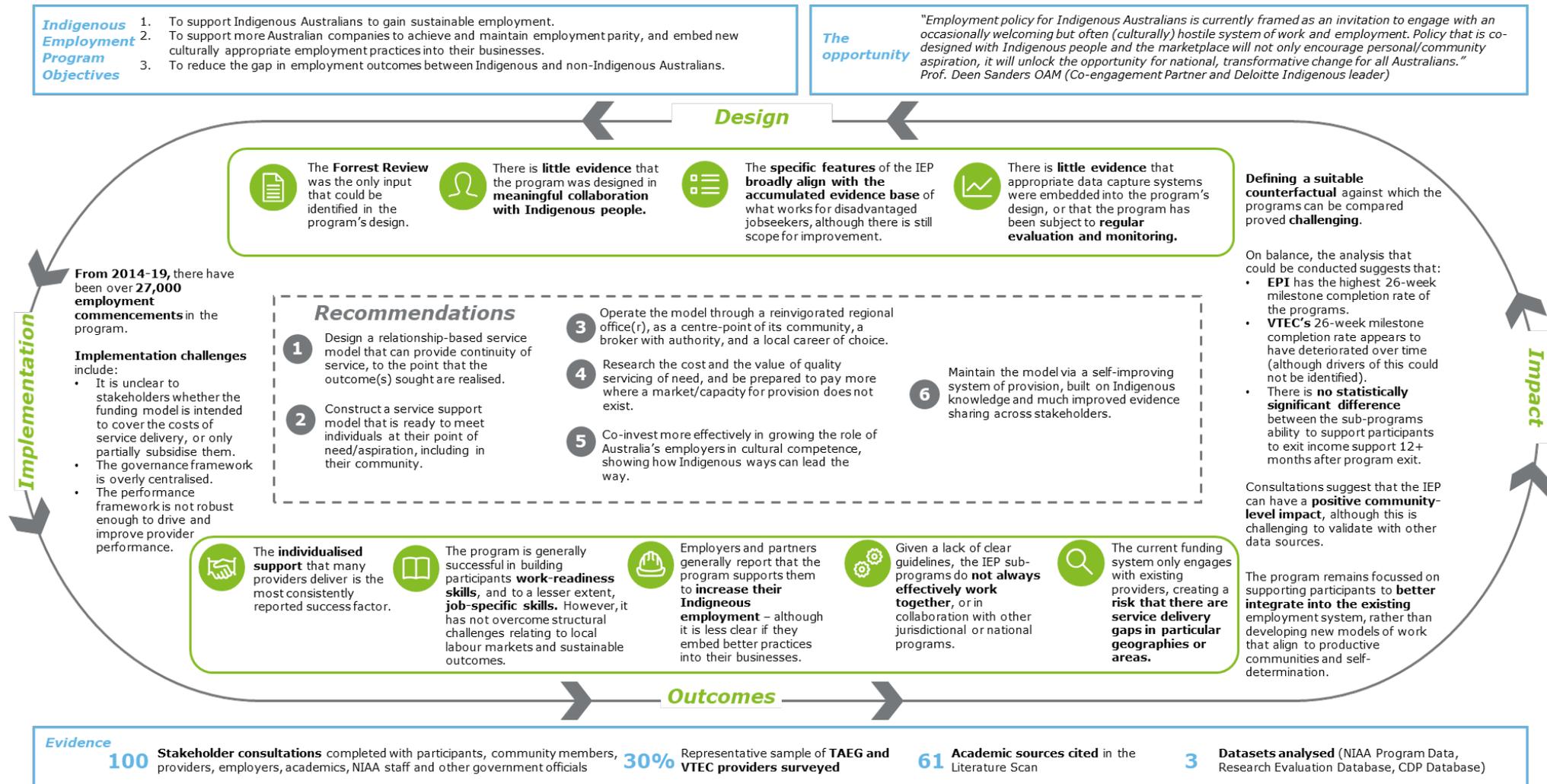
¹³ At a minimum, a healthy cross-section of past, current and potential future participants and providers, employers and the regional and central brokers – in a balanced way, so positions of power do not compromise the process.

¹⁴ Where this enables an expansive and more personalised view of 'meaningful and sustainable' employment, this too will demand new approaches to measurement and assessment. It reiterates the importance of all reviewers and evaluators taking a longer-term, more participant-centric view in their work. This in turn will also continue to depend on vast improvement in the measurement systems of government, which underpin/reinforce much of the way the assessments have been conducted to date.

Figure ii: Evaluation Summary

Evaluation on a page

This visual presents a high-level summary of the evaluation’s key findings, data sources and recommendations. The sections around the circular-flow describe the key findings relating to the design, implementation, outcomes and impact of the evaluation (aligning with the key chapters of this report). The centre presents the direction of the recommendations.



Preamble

I set out to do this project differently.

It would be too simplistic to say that I wanted the project to be Indigenous led because this can often become a proxy for shifting responsibility and exposing projects to other forms of challenge. Instead I deliberately set out to challenge us as a project team, and the Agency as a client, to model the much more complicated path of 'walking in two worlds'.

I didn't always know how difficult or how rewarding that would be, or what different methodological approaches it might generate and how different the results would be. That though is the point.

I learned that I needed to listen more and recognise that there is more to the measurement and evaluation of government policy than the traditional tools of Western economic evaluation I might typically consider. I learned to ask – how do I 'evaluate' when my ideas of policy implementation are framed through Western experience?

This project was co-led by Professor Deen Sanders OAM, himself an Indigenous man (of the Worimi nation) but also an eminent systems theorist and expert in his transdisciplinary fields of psychology, law, regulation and Indigenous Knowledge systems. Together with Susan Moylan-Coombs (of the Gaimaragal Group and a Woolwonga and Gurindji woman) this leadership shaped not just the project's working structure but every element of the project, including the individual team members and the nature of the relationship with the Agency.

This report is better, and my approach is now better, because of the work they did with us on this project.

The practical consequence is that this project and the report itself crosses lines, incorporates mixes of methodological approach and analysis. This journey wove a sometimes complicated and necessarily indirect path to get to the outcome, not least because COVID threw the process into disarray, but also because there were fundamental flaws in data access and transparency that shifted timetables and demanded flexibility and concessions from everyone.

Ultimately, I learned that walking in two worlds is not easy, and that to really walk in two worlds means we need to do the work of catching up. Employment is a pathway into self-determination but how we frame self-determination, how we understand the nature and value of employment and how we build policies, tools and incentives to encourage it need to be considered.

Walking in two worlds should not just be the challenge for Indigenous people but for every Australian – this means to match their pace, to learn from their systems and to see Australia through their eyes.

Matt Wright, Economist and Partner, Deloitte Access Economics

Indigenous culture, as a form of systems theoretical framing, recognises that systems are a 'whole' where every element, no matter how small or how excluded and invisible it is from the primary variables, plays a vital part in either the wholeness of that system or its decay.

Australia is a complex system, and employment is the dominant lens through which we understand people's economic participation in that system. We see this in the way "employment", and its heavily loaded opposite "unemployment", comes burdened with expectation and historic experience for most people. We saw this directly in the lived experience of participants in this project where we heard descriptions of racism, inclusion, joy, frustration, pain and fulfilment in different measures.

Even though these were features of Indigenous employment discussions, they are only echoes of Indigenous life in Australia, a complex system, where employment and work have become proxies for success and where employment often means 'adopting' or 'adapting to' a corporatised, commercial setting. In a complex system linearity and direct causal claims are to be questioned when seeking to evaluate, so where we land in this project is that, for most people, employment is not only about success and money but also about recognising opportunity and achieving agency.

Current models of employment, and incentives targeting employment assume that most people want to be employed, because this is how we choose to measure social contribution and success. As Elders remind me, the separation of work from life, from culture, from family activity is a peculiar idea for traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. We remain challenged by work that in itself is not intrinsically rewarding and contributory to the greater good of a wider conception of community. Whether it be health work, social work, land management, digital innovation, finance work, running an organisation or the myriad other work being done by Indigenous Australians – there is usually a driving connection to the maintenance of community and the expression of cultural obligations.

For us, there is an added dimension of value when employment allows us to meet our community/family obligations and live truthfully with our cultural expectations (small or large). If not, work and/or the person can suffer, which then is more typically measured in things like health, welfare, GDP, criminality, family stability, civic participation, inclusion and myriad others, all of which are elements of the same complex system.

This is not a cultural curio. It is an enlivening of a gift that we want for everyone in this country. Every person deserves to be encouraged into work that fits them and/or to be developed into work that will fit them and allow them to achieve the full expression of themselves. Turning that into a direct employment policy recommendation or identifying causal triggers and direct levers to pull to get that outcome cannot be the goal because that claim would deny the complexity of the system.

There are few straight lines in Aboriginal culture because the histories of our people move with the natural landscape and nature abhors a straight line. Straight lines are lifeless, and this has been a living project. It is about living people and their relationship to human issues of employment, social value, connection to community and personal agency. It has been a complex journey.

The Deloitte team have been challenged to walk in two worlds – with us – and with the many participants that gave their time in consultation and engagement through this process. We have also worked closely with the Agency and their excellent staff and as a consequence some important new learnings and recommendations flow from this report. Indeed, many have already been recognised in the policy work of the Agency.

We offer the results of this work in the spirit of an economic evaluation of government policy genuinely done by walking in two worlds. The strength of Indigenous voices and the centrality of Indigenous leadership has been a standout, but so too has the willingness of the Deloitte team to learn and be changed. The effort they have put in to catching up to our culture, rather than assuming they were ahead, and their commitment to carry that forward into inventing new tools of economic consideration is an example of how we might move forward as a country.

Professor Deen Sanders OAM, Partner, Deloitte: Integrity

It was a privilege to travel the country and listen to the voices of community who are either directly or in directly affect by employment programs funded by NIAA. The questions; “what is meaningful employment?” and “how do we get there?” were responded to differently across the different geographical locations.

One of the disappointing realisations was the level to which racism and discrimination are still a causal factor for people not entering the workforce and not being able to engage in the economy. Employment and earning money allow people to feel good about themselves, contributing to society, providing a sense of fulfilment and feeling useful. When people couldn’t find jobs, their lives, their social emotional wellbeing were critically affected.

The four main points that left an indelible imprint on me:

- Education system
- Racism
- Disempowerment of the Regional Office & Staff
- Local Solutions by local people and communities.

Education System: For First Nations children, the education system is failing to cater for their unique needs and to provide relevant and meaningful information to engage them in and provide pathways to employment. If local First Nations people and community were invited in to provide two-way education then the children would be better catered for and their localised education can be scaffolded from their mother tongue and culture to English and the dominant culture being taught.

Racism: (Overt/covert) Sadly, this is still a major factor in how young people make it through the education system and into employment opportunities. One young adult commented on the fact that they couldn’t even find entry level employment, which caused them to lose hope and become suicidal. Another young person who was employed was having a hard time and was asking for assistance and when that wasn’t forthcoming had indicated she was going to leave. They were informed that they couldn’t leave because they were their best money earner. This caused distress and they too became suicidal and then had issues with the health system as the wait list meant it was two months before they could be seen by a counsellor. Another example which caused the team to become distressed was when a young person was faced with an employer who was going to terminate their employment because they didn’t care about the person’s background and needs, they simply wanted someone who would do the work. The employer was not prepared to take into consideration the person’s lived experience of trauma and anxiety, or even recognise that they had it, and were quick to inform us all the things they had done wrong whilst failing to recognise they had a duty of care to them. In short, racism and isolation pose huge barriers for individuals. Also, a lack of understanding of complex trauma by agencies and employers is impacting on outcomes.

Regional Staff: Empowering the regional staff to be more than merely contract managers will give the regions better response times, creating better relationships with community and programs with local solutions. We heard stories from a range of different communities about ideas they had and the regional staff would send through the paperwork to Canberra, but the delay in the turnaround time meant more often than not, missed opportunities. The inflexible nature of the contracts prevented any innovation that local agencies were presenting to the regional offices.

Local Solutions: Across the country, meaningful employment meant different things to different people. Working with family members for some was confidence building, for others it was wanting to do something more with their lives different to their peers. The communities themselves also found ways to create successful outcomes when local leaders, Elders and entrepreneurs saw opportunities to make a difference and create local employment opportunities. In a case in the south coast of NSW, the engagement of young people who were struggling to find employment in the small coastal town, and the older people who weren’t getting a good aged care service, both got to be the beneficiaries to good outcomes when one Elder and visionary saw an opportunity and partnered with a mainstream organisation to get different needs met.

Susan Moylan-Coombs, Founder at the Gaimaragal Group

1 Context to the evaluation

This chapter establishes the rationale for the Commonwealth funded Indigenous Employment Programs (IEP), provides a high-level overview of past policy responses and where the in-scope IEP sit within the employment policy and program landscape as well as outlining the evaluation approach and report structure.

1.1 Indigenous employment outcomes in Australia

When it comes to traditional employment outcomes, Indigenous Australians are among the most disadvantaged groups within Australian society. Sources of this disadvantage are numerous and systemic. Indeed a 'systems theoretical' approach that allows us to recognise the complexity of the context and the system itself proves a most useful way to understand the complex intersections between unemployment and Indigenous experience.

Rather than traditional perspectives of work motivation and supply and demand levers, systems theory is well established¹⁵ in recognising that systems are a 'whole' where every element plays a vital part in either the wholeness of that system or its decay. In this way Indigenous experience of unemployment is a microcosm of the Indigenous experience of Australia as a system, where policies of encouragement and incentivisation to work, need to also be held in the same context with practices of discrimination and policy perspectives that continue to support the ongoing removal of Indigenous children.

The past practices and policies of Australian governments ripple through current community. No matter the intention of those actions, the past affects the relationship we, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and truthfully every citizen, has with policy motivations and political priorities. The past stories still haunt dinner tables and the present evidence of ongoing removal of children from their families or Aboriginal deaths in custody are continuing pebbles with ever expanding ripples."

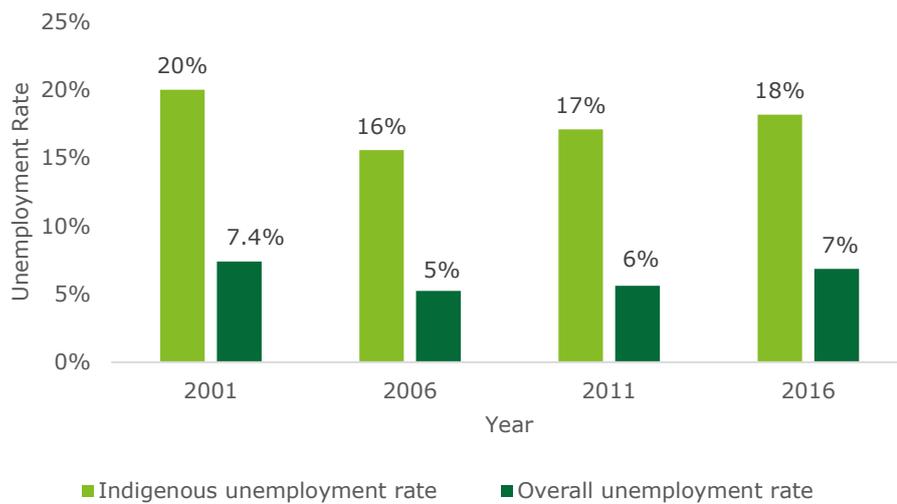
Professor Deen Sanders OAM
(Deloitte Partner and Worimi man)

For these reasons, Indigenous unemployment rates have persistently remained above the national average. ABS census data, presented in Chart 1.1 below, suggests that high levels of Indigenous unemployment have remained close to triple that of non-Indigenous Australians for the past 20 years. More contemporary data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) suggests that in 2018/19 Indigenous unemployment rates remained at 18 percent.¹⁶

¹⁵ Parra-Luna, F. (2020). The role of systems theory in political science: The case of unemployment in Spain. *Acta Europaea Systemica*, 7(1), 137-152.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019), 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey'. Accessed from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4715.0Explanatory%20Notes12018-19?OpenDocument>.

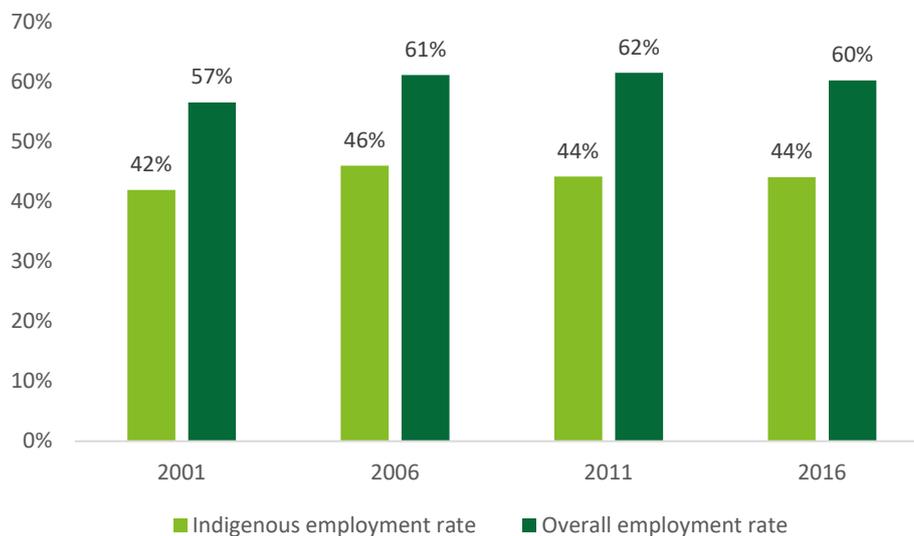
Chart 1.1: Time-series of Indigenous and overall unemployment rates in Australia



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016. Note: ABS census data prior to 2009 classified jobseekers participating in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) as being employed, likely overstating the employment rates in this period.

As seen in Chart 1.2 below, the employment-to-population rate gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in 2016 (16 percentage points) is larger than the unemployment rate gap (11 percentage points). This is a result of Indigenous Australians having a lower labour force participation rate than the broader population. In 2016, approximately 44% of Indigenous people were not in the labour force, compared to 35% for the non-Indigenous population.

Chart 1.2: Time series of Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment-to-population rates.



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016. Note: ABS census data prior to 2009 classified jobseekers participating in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) as being employed, likely overstating the employment rates in this period.

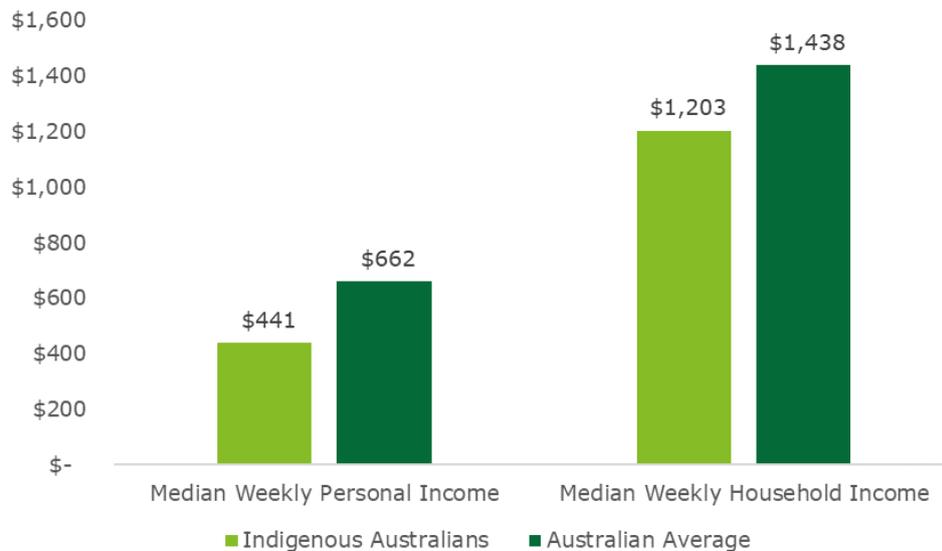
These employment disparities mean that Indigenous Australians generally have lower levels of income and higher rates of financial insecurity than non-Indigenous Australians. The average

weekly household income for Indigenous Australians is approximately 16% lower than non-Indigenous Australians.¹⁷

This figure considers the impact of government transfer payments, with 52% of Indigenous Australian’s reporting their primary source of income as being government payments compared to 25% of non-Indigenous Australians. This suggests that the difference in income from employment is likely to be even greater than that presented below.

Further, this income disparity contributes to financial insecurity. In 2014/15, 48 percent of Indigenous Australians reported that no one in their household could raise \$2000 for an emergency in a week, compared to 13 percent of non-Indigenous Australians.¹⁸

Chart 1.3: Median weekly income of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016.

While consistently above the national average, Indigenous unemployment rates vary significantly across different regions in Australia. For example, Deloitte Access Economics estimates of the 12 NIAA regions suggests that in 2016 the Central Australia region had the highest Indigenous unemployment rate in the country (35%), while the Victoria and Tasmania region had the lowest (14%).

These national and regional figures do not tell the full story of employment trends, with employment rates likely being influenced by a complex range of economic, social and demographic variables. For example, Indigenous employment rates vary by gender (with employment rates for women increasing in recent years compared to a slight decline for men), age (with there being a significant share of young people not in employment, education or training) and remoteness (with more remote areas generally having lower employment rates than metropolitan).¹⁹

¹⁷Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), 'Indigenous income and finance '. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-income-and-finance>

¹⁸Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), 'Indigenous income and finance '. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-income-and-finance>

¹⁹Venn, D. and Biddle, N. (2018). 'Recent trends in indigenous employment' *Journal of Australian Political Economy*.

1.1.2 Current Indigenous Employment Program delivery

The Commonwealth government's current approach to working with Indigenous Australians is outlined in the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* – the framework that consolidates the many different Indigenous policies and programs the government delivers into five overarching programs, including:

- Jobs, Land and Economy
- Children and Schooling
- Safety and Wellbeing
- Culture and Capability
- Remote Australia Strategies

Within the 'Jobs, Land and Economy' stream, the current Commonwealth government approach to increasing Indigenous employment, which includes the in-scope programs for this evaluation, is heavily shaped by the *Creating Parity: the Forrest Review* (2014) (the *Forrest Review*). The *Forrest Review* was deeply critical of the mainstream employment system's ability to suitably support Indigenous jobseekers and provide stability for employers. As such, the review promoted a demand-driven approach to employment services that focused on sustainable employment outcomes, as opposed to training outcomes.²⁰

jobactive and CDP are the mainstream employment services that are currently in operation in non-remote and remote Australia. The Australian Government announced in March 2019 that from the 1st July 2022 the new employment services model will replace jobactive.

Further, in the 2021-22 Federal Budget the government announced that the new Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP) will replace the VTEC, TAEG and EPI programs from the 1st July 2022, as well as reforms to CDP from 1 July 2023.

1.2 Overview of the IEP

The three sub-programs in-scope for evaluation are all initiatives within the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Jobs, Land and Economy Program (JLEP). They are stand-alone programs, which are complementary to mainstream employment services, with each having a different focus. The three programs include:

- **VTEC** – this initiative seeks to connect Indigenous jobseekers with guaranteed employment by providing necessary support services to prepare jobseekers for long-term employment, as well as training through industry employers. This program model was originally designed by Fortescue Metal Group, championed by GenerationOne, and then adopted by the Commonwealth Government.
- **EPI** – this initiative works alongside large Australian companies, encouraging them to commit to Indigenous workforce targets and embed recruitment and retention strategies within their organisation. This program was included as part of the Forrest Review's recommendations.
- **TAEG** – this program provides supports activities that seek to support Indigenous jobseekers with sustainable jobs and providing employer support to assist with attracting and retaining Indigenous Australians.²¹ Refinements to this program, which was previously a part of the Indigenous Employment Programme, were recommended as part of the Forrest Review.

This section gives a high-level overview of the programs and their design. This discussion is then built upon in subsequent chapters, where program design and implementation are considered more fulsomely.

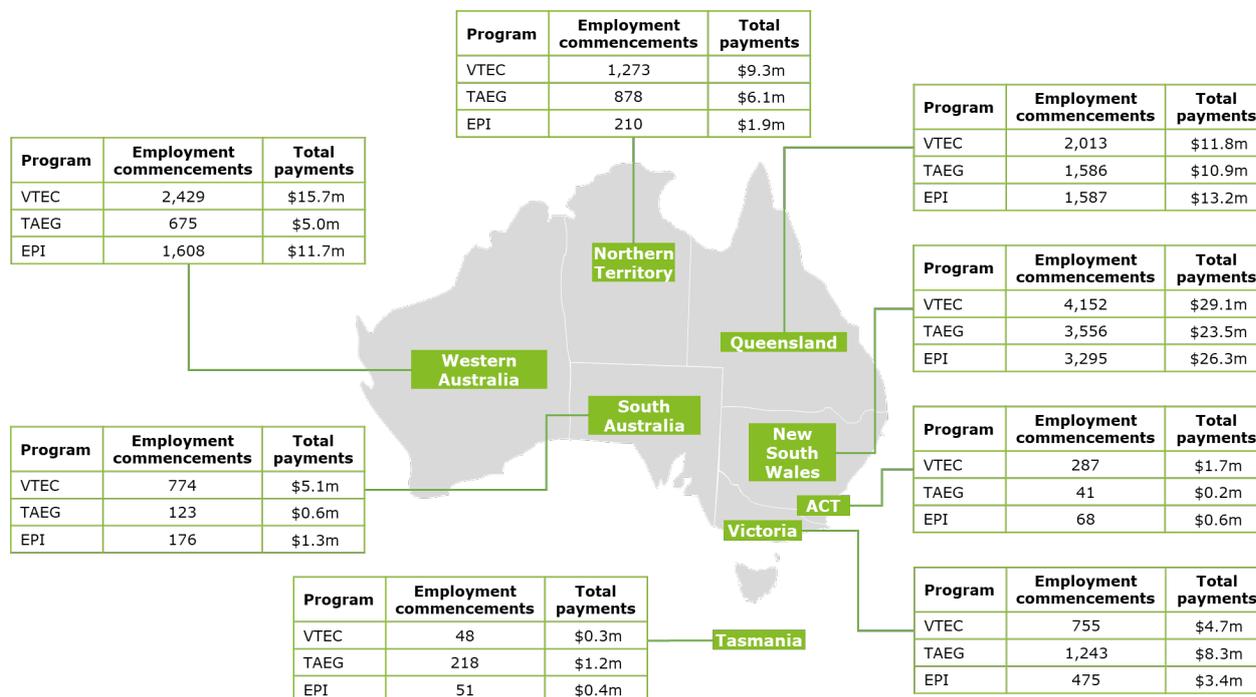
The three programs have collectively had over 27,000 employment commencements during the scope of the evaluation timeframe – with activities operating across every state and territory in

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Note that the TAEG program offers three streams of funding, related to employment, school-based traineeships and cadetships. The employment stream of funding is the only stream which is in-scope for this evaluation.

Australia (Figure 1.1). An overview of the program objectives, key features and summary statistics is provided below.

Figure 1.1: Summary of IEP participation (from project inception to December 2019)



Source: NIAA Program data (2014-2019). Note: 'Employment commencements' refers to the total number of instances where a participant commenced an employment placement (irrespective of whether they ultimately met specific employment milestones or not). This figure includes instances where a single participant has commenced employment multiple times. 'Total payments' refers to the total outcome payments that have been recorded in a given state. Total outcome payments include those made until mid-2020, to allow for participants who commenced in late 2019 to achieved employment milestones in 2020.

While the high-level design features of each program are articulated below, the programs share several commonalities including:

- All three programs are targeted exclusively towards Indigenous jobseekers.
- The programs all use outcomes-based funding to incentivise provider performance. Providers must meet performance milestone payments, primarily linked to retention of participants in employment.
- Insofar as possible, the programs are intended to be complementary to one another, and to other employment and community services.

1.2.2 VTEC

The VTEC initiative was launched in 2014 to match Indigenous jobseekers with guaranteed jobs. The overarching objectives of the VTEC program are to reduce the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and to place more Indigenous Australians in sustainable employment.

VTECs are specialised training providers that deliver pre-employment training that is linked to guaranteed job opportunities for Indigenous Australians. The approach is intended to be 'demand-driven' in that it matches jobseekers to available employment opportunities in the labour market, as opposed to 'supply-driven' models that prioritise first supporting participants to overcome their barriers to employment and then attempt to find a suitable employment opportunity (if it exists).²² To further promote engagement with Indigenous Australian communities, a requirement was introduced in 2018 for VTEC to either be, or have a joint venture with, an Indigenous organisation.

²²Andrew Forrest (2014), *The Forrest Review: Creating Parity*.

1.2.3 TAEG

The TAEG program was initially launched in 2009 but has existed in its current form since 1 July 2016.

TAEG connects Indigenous Australians with real and sustainable jobs via three streams of flexible grant funding, including 'Employment', 'School-based traineeships' and 'Cadetships'. However, only the Employment stream is in-scope for this evaluation.

The overarching objectives of the TAEG Employment program are the same as the VTEC program: to reduce the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and to ensure that more Indigenous Australians are in sustainable employment.

TAEG Employment funds projects that seek to deliver sustainable employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians (including high school students transitioning into the workforce) and meet job market demands. TAEG Employment offers a flexible avenue for providers to assist Indigenous Australians into employment, when access to VTEC funds is either unavailable or inappropriate. TAEG providers have the ability to deliver a wide range of pre-employment and employment support activities that are broadly similar in nature to that of VTEC providers.

1.2.4 EPI

The EPI was launched in March 2015. The program aims to increase Indigenous employment in large Australian companies (ASX Top 200) to reflect the proportion of the Indigenous population nationally – approximately three per cent.

The overarching objectives of the EPI are to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, moving towards employment parity for Indigenous Australians and improved cultural inclusion strategies among Australian companies. The EPI funds participating employers (EPI partners) to recruit, train and support Indigenous jobseekers.

1.3 This evaluation

1.3.1 Evaluation scope and questions

This evaluation is concerned with three distinct sub-programs and considers each program's implementation, effectiveness and impact individually as well as within the broader Indigenous employment system. Utilising a nested evaluation approach, the programs are considered holistically, with comparisons drawn across each. This facilitates a strategic assessment of how the programs are operating together to support Indigenous Australians to gain, and retain, sustainable employment. Further, it is intended that this assessment can be used to help inform the development of the future Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP).

As outlined in Section 1.3, the IEP includes a suite of three sub-programs: VTEC, TAEG and EPI. While TAEG includes three streams of funding across programs for employment, school-based traineeships and cadetships, only the employment funding is in-scope for this evaluation.

Both TAEG Employment and the VTEC initiatives have undergone significant changes since their establishment, and previous iterations of the programs are out of scope for this evaluation. This evaluation will consider each of the in-scope programs in their current form, which includes:

- VTEC – January 2014 (launch date) onwards
- TAEG Employment – January 2016 (revised program date) onwards
- EPI – March 2015 (launch date) onwards.

The evaluation will examine these programs from the dates listed above until the end of 2019. In doing so, this evaluation will not systematically examine the impacts of COVID-19 on these programs. This is because the consequences of COVID-19 are still unfolding, and there is insufficient information available to effectively evaluate the impact that the pandemic has had on the programs. Further, this evaluation seeks to understand how these programs have operated in comparatively stable conditions, as opposed to during the unforeseen circumstances of the pandemic, which has required a suite of exceptional new policy measures.

1.3.2 Overview of analytical approach

This evaluation of the IEP has been undertaken in accordance with a defined evaluation framework, which has provided a robust and structured foundation for this analysis (Appendix D). The domains of the analytical plan align with the scope and objectives of this evaluation, as described below.

Appropriateness of program design and implementation:

- analysis of program design considers the extent to which the program design process and design of the IEP reflects best practice in employment assistance programs and alignment with Indigenous Australian perspectives and values
- analysis of program implementation considers whether the programs have been implemented as intended, how the programs have been administered and governed and to what extent Indigenous Australians perceive the programs to be respectful and strengths-based.

Program effectiveness and impact:

- effectiveness analysis considers the extent to which the intended objectives have been met (or are on track to being met) for the time period relevant to this evaluation and the contexts in which the programs are more or less effective.
- impact analysis considers the additional (relative to a counterfactual) workforce participation and employment attributable to the IEP the drivers of those impacts.

The above series of evaluation objectives were developed in collaboration with the NIAA, including from the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) and the Indigenous Evaluation Committee (IEC). These high-level evaluation objectives are tied to a series of evaluation questions that focus the evaluation process and ensure the relevancy of the findings and analysis. These evaluation questions are included in Table 1.1 below, alongside the relevant sections of the report where they are each considered.

Table 1.1: Key evaluation domains, headline questions and relevant sections of this report

| Evaluation objective | Headline evaluation questions | Relevant sections of this report |
|---|---|--|
| Appropriateness of program design and implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the program design based on evidence? • To what extent has the program been implemented by NIAA (/PM&C) in line with its design parameters? • To what extent have the programs been delivered in a respectful, strengths-based and place-based way? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Chapter 2: Program design</i> • <i>Chapter 3: Program implementation</i> |
| Program effectiveness and impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term? • In what contexts has the program been more or less successful? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Chapter 4: Program effectiveness</i> • <i>Chapter 5: Impact</i> |
| Policy implications and potential for future impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do program outcomes tell us about effective and ineffective investment? • How can the value of each program be optimised within the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Chapter 4: Program effectiveness</i> |

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020).

In addition to directly addressing the evaluation framework questions, the consultation processes and thoughtful timelines for this project allowed for different pathways of inquiry to be investigated, adding usefully to the evaluation framework. Through this approach the key findings of 'relationality' and 'governance' emerged as consistent self-initiated themes from consultations with stakeholders. In particular, we have created a specific topic on 'governance arrangements' as a result of stakeholders repeated emphasis on this point being a critical element in the program's overall implementation.

1.3.3 Evaluation principles

This evaluation has been informed by best-practice principles of Indigenous evaluation, including those outlined by both the Productivity Commission and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Most notably, the Productivity Commission's report sets out the following principles, which have heavily influenced this evaluation:²³

- Indigenous policies and programs should prioritise Indigenous peoples, perspectives, priorities and knowledges. This principle is the core of the Productivity Commission strategy, and suggests that Indigenous perspectives and lived experiences need to be reflected in how policies are designed, implemented and evaluated.
- Indigenous evaluations should be credible, useful, ethical and transparent. These principles suggest that Indigenous evaluations should be analytically rigorous, culturally competent, practical (in the sense they guide real-world decision making), open for critique and continuously ethical.

Further, these principles strongly align with those set out in *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Evaluation Framework*. This framework emphasises that effective evaluation should be relevant, robust, credible and appropriate, and that this should be underpinned by core values of respect, collaboration and building on strengths.²⁴

In this project we have taken steps to reflect these principles, while bringing our own dedication to innovation and Indigenous-led evaluation. Specifically, we have achieved this by:

- Involving Indigenous leaders (from both Deloitte and the Gaimaragal Group) in every stage of the evaluation journey.
- Consulting with a broad range of Indigenous stakeholders, including employers, participants, community members, community leaders and academics.
- Emphasising and highlighting Indigenous perspectives throughout the evaluation and ensuring that these views are not marginalised or deprioritised in favour of traditional Western-economic frameworks.
- Consistently engaging with stakeholders in a culturally competent manner, by empowering Indigenous team members to lead consultations and ensuring that all evaluators display basic cultural competency skills.
- Working closely with the NIAA to ensure the relevancy and usefulness of the evaluation findings.
- Committing to sharing the key results from this evaluation back to key stakeholders and communities that were consulted in a meaningful and accessible way.
- Incorporating the conventional elements of robust evaluation, such as a program logic, clearly defined evaluation questions and impact-focus.

1.3.4 Data collection

The evaluation has been informed by a variety of primary and secondary data sources, including:

- IEP participant, activity and funding level data
- Primary data collected from the VTEC and TAEG provider survey
- Data from the Research Evaluation Database (RED)

²³Productivity Commission (2020), *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*, Australian Government.

²⁴Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018), *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Evaluation Framework*.

- Stakeholder consultations with participants, providers, employers, community representatives, NIAA staff and other government officials
- Broader academic literature, as synthesised in the literature scan
- publicly available data sources, such as those published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Stakeholder consultations

During this evaluation, Deloitte Access Economics and the Gaimaragal Group have undertaken an extensive stakeholder consultation process. This has included consultations with a diverse range of stakeholder groups, as outlined in Table 1.2.

Chart 1.4: Summary of stakeholder consultation progress

| Stakeholder group | Consultation purpose | Consultations completed |
|---|--|--|
| State and territory government stakeholders | Understanding existing state and territory Indigenous employment programs, their interaction with commonwealth programs and potential ideas for improvement. | 5 |
| NIAA representatives | Understanding the design and implementation of the IEP, their interaction with other employment programs and potential ideas for improvement. | 18 (NIAA Regional Offices) ²⁵ 4 (DESE/ NIAA central staff) |
| VTEC/TAEG providers | Understanding the programs implementation, outcomes and potential areas for improvement. | 12 (VTEC) 8 (TAEG) |
| EPI partners | Understanding the programs implementation, outcomes and potential areas for improvement. | 12 |
| TAEG/VTEC employers | Understanding employers' motivations, outcomes (both participant and employer) and improvement ideas. | 20 |
| Program participants | Understanding participants' lived experience, the programs outcomes and their improvement ideas. | 17 |
| Indigenous community members | Understanding an Indigenous perspective on the role of employment and employment policy. | 2 |
| Academic consultations | Understanding academic views on the appropriateness of the design of the IEP. Indigenous perspectives will be prioritised for these consultations. | 2 |

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020).

Provider survey

An online survey of VTEC and TAEG providers was developed and deployed to obtain information on the implementation, effectiveness, success factors and areas for improvement for the programs. The survey was sent to 116 TAEG and VTEC providers, with 18 TAEG, 17 VTEC and 2 providers that deliver both programs completing the survey. The survey asked providers questions about the specific activities they deliver, the proportion of participants they deliver these activities to, as well as questions about the effectiveness of these activities.

²⁵Note: This includes one initial consultation with each of the 12 NIAA Regional Offices, and a second follow-up consultation with six of the regions that were selected for deep dives (i.e. further provider and participant consultations).

In total, the survey collected 37 responses, covering approximately 25 percent of all current and historical providers. As with all surveys that sample a portion of the total population, caution must be exercised when generalising these results.

IEP Program Data

As part of the evaluation process, the NIAA has provided participant, activity and funding level datasets. These datasets form the basis for the majority of the quantitative analysis contained in this report. Principally, the participant-level dataset has been used to analyse the characteristics of program participants, their ability to meet specific employment milestones, and the funds spent to support them.

All program data analysis that has been conducted is subject to the reliability of the data that has been provided. It is understood that elements of this data may be inputted by individual providers, and therefore influenced by the accuracy of their data entry.

Research Evaluation Database

The RED contains detailed information on the income support history of welfare recipients. This dataset is used to obtain additional information on the characteristics and long-term employment status of IEP participants (i.e. beyond the employment milestones that are captured in the NIAA program data).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data

ABS data was used in the analysis to undertake descriptive analysis of employment outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous unemployed cohorts. This analysis gives an indication of regional variation across Australia.

Literature scan

At the commencement of the evaluation, a literature scan was undertaken to identify the key design and implementation features of an effective Indigenous employment program. This research focused on understanding:

- key learning from past Indigenous employment programs
- the perspectives of Indigenous Australian jobseekers and employees as well as employers regarding their IEP experience
- key success factors and principles underpinning successful initiatives for Indigenous Australians

The detailed literature scan is included in Appendix A.

Program documentation

Program documentation provided by the NIAA informs an understanding of how the programs have been designed, implemented and changed over time. These documents include the program factsheets, application kits, handbooks, operational guidance documents, health checks and previous evaluations.

1.4 This report

This report presents the method and findings relating to the evaluation of the IEP. The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2:** provides a high-level overview of the three in-scope sub-programs for this evaluation, including their design, intended purpose and key characteristics.
- **Chapter 3:** considers whether the program has been implemented as originally intended, as well as any challenges faced by providers and partners in implementing the sub-programs.
- **Chapter 4:** examines the effectiveness of the sub-programs in meeting their intended short, medium and long-term outcomes as defined by the program logic. This includes analysis of the contextual factors associated with outcomes realisation.
- **Chapter 5:** extends this effectiveness analysis to consider the impact of the sub-programs in generating benefits above and beyond what would be expected under a counterfactual scenario.

- **Appendix A:** provides the accompanying literature scan.
- **Appendix B:** provides a high-level summary of the State and Territory Indigenous employment programs.
- **Appendix C:** provide an overview of the econometric methods and RED data analysis included in the report.
- **Appendix D:** includes the Evaluation Strategy for this project, in its original form as finalised in November 2020.

2 Program design

This chapter considers the appropriateness of the design of the IEP, specifically, responding to the following evaluation question:

- *to what extent is the program design based on evidence?*

In answering this evaluation question, this chapter draws on insights gained through the literature scan and stakeholder consultations, to analyse the following elements:

- the evidence that informed the design of the IEP programs,
- the extent that the design of the programs has changed over time to reflect new evidence, and
- the extent that the programs have been designed in collaboration with Indigenous Australians and refined with feedback from Indigenous Australians.

Chapter 2: Program Design

Focus

- This chapter considers the appropriateness of the design of the IEP, specifically responding to the evaluation question: *to what extent is the program design based on evidence?*

Data sources

- Previous evaluations, such as *The Forrest Review* (2014) and the *Progress Evaluation of the Vocational Training and Employment Centre Programme* (2015).
- The literature scan completed for this evaluation (Appendix A).
- Provider consultations.

Key findings

Program design

- There is little evidence that the Forrest Review itself, and its associated program design recommendations, were developed using a comprehensive evidence-based process.
- Beyond the Forrest Review (2014), which informed the program design of VTEC and EPI, the available data did not reveal what evidence was utilised to design the programs.
- The design of the IEP broadly aligns with an accumulated evidence base of what works for disadvantaged jobseekers. However, literature pertaining specifically to Indigenous Australians and employment services is weak and there are limited Indigenous perspectives in the research to date.

Changes over time

- There is limited evidence to suggest these programs have been subject to regular, rigorous evaluation and data-informed refinement.

Collaboration with Indigenous people

- There is limited evidence to suggest that the process for originally designing and then continually refining the IEP has involved deliberate collaboration with Indigenous Australians.

Suggestions

1. Future programs should establish clear evaluation principles and procedures prior to their inception, and implement rigorous evaluation on an ongoing basis from that point.
2. Future iterations of the program should be genuinely co-designed with Indigenous Australians

2.1 Best Practice Guidelines for program design and evaluation

We note that best practice principles for evaluation, which also bears on policy design, have only recently been articulated by the Productivity Commission and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and were not available as a basis of policy testing at the time of the IEP program formation.²⁶

2.2 Evidence-based program design

Key finding

- *There is little evidence that the Forrest Review itself, and its associated program design recommendations, were developed using a comprehensive evidence-based process.*
- *Beyond the Forrest Review (2014), which informed the program design of VTEC and EPI, the available data did not reveal what evidence was utilised to design the programs.*

The following section assesses the evidence base behind the IEP programs' design through consideration of:

- the design intent (i.e. the extent to which a robust evidence base was used to inform the design of the IEP programs), and
- the program design features themselves (i.e. the extent to which IEP programs' design align with best practice).

While understanding the extent to which evidence was used to inform the programs' design process provides valuable context, the scope of this evaluation is limited to assessing the sub-programs in their current form (i.e. post-2014). As such, this section will predominantly focus on the extent to which program design features are aligned with best practice.

2.2.1 Evidence used to inform the design of the IEP programs

Consultation with IEP providers and partners indicated that the design of the IEP (specifically, VTEC and EPI) were informed by recommendations from the Forrest Review.

The Forrest Review - written in 2014, with a focus on '*Creating Parity*' - was deeply critical of the mainstream employment services 'supply-driven' approach. The review instead advocated for a 'demand-driven' system, arguing that employers needed to play a greater role in increasing Indigenous employment rates, which was instrumental in the design of the IEP.

In a formal response, Indigenous academics and other stakeholders criticised the Forrest Review for its business-centric, deficit approach and several underlying assumptions²⁷. Additionally, the extent to which the Forrest Review itself was based on evidence is unclear. During consultations, several providers drew links between the Forrest Review and the IEP design, unprompted. Providers indicated that the Forrest Review recommendations were not subject to rigorous, evidence-based design process and were based too heavily on the author's own experiences within a specific labour market and industry. An example of these perspectives includes:

²⁶Productivity Commission (2020), *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*, Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018), *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Evaluation Framework*.

²⁷ Klein, E. (2014). 'Academic perspectives on the Forrest Review: creating parity' *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

"[The VTEC program design] worked really well in some unique contexts and it all came out of the Forrest Review and you've got the perspective of a guy that runs a mining company in a remote area, and that's a very specific situation." (VTEC provider)

(Note: Chapter 3 considers the challenges with implementing specific design features outlined in the review in further detail).

Government stakeholders noted that the Forrest Review was just one of many inputs into the design of the IEP. However, policy and program documentation provided to the evaluation team did not provide any further insight into other evidence that was used to inform program design.

Additionally, the literature review found a scarcity of Indigenous employment specific evidence. This indicates that if any consultation with Indigenous people or iterative policy design processes were undertaken, it was not published or made available to this project team or the public.

2.2.2 Alignment of program design features with best practice

Key finding

- *The design of the IEP broadly aligns with an accumulated evidence base of what works for disadvantaged jobseekers. However, literature pertaining specifically to Indigenous Australians and employment services is weak and there are limited Indigenous perspectives in the research to date.*

The literature scan has identified an established group of principles and design features that are associated with best practice employment programs generally and Indigenous employment programs specifically. It should be noted, however, that much of this evidence base is formed through evaluations and inquiries conducted through a Western economic lens and there are limited Indigenous perspectives in the research to date.

The list of identified principles and design features established through the literature scan is used to anchor the appropriateness assessment included in this section of the report (the full literature scan is included as an attachment in **Appendix A**).

Table 2.1 below utilises the findings from the literature scan to determine the alignment between best practice and the IEP program design elements. As shown below, the design of the IEP broadly aligns with an accumulated evidence base of what works for disadvantaged jobseekers found in the literature. Design features that are viewed positively in research literature and are present in the IEP include streaming, job-readiness and job-specific training, job-matching, place-based approaches and post-placement support. However, it should be noted that literature pertaining specifically to Indigenous Australians and employment services is weak and there are limited Indigenous perspectives in the research to date.

While this comparison with literature finds that many of the IEP features are viewed as best practice, evidence emerging from the evaluation as to the appropriateness of the IEP design is mixed. Employers, providers and regional NIAA staff identified several features of the program design to be limiting to the ability of the programs to operate effectively and efficiently.

The subsequent discussions throughout this report provide further detail on the specifics of the design parameters of each of the three sub-programs and considers to what extent the programs have been implemented in line with these parameters and the impact on program outcomes.

Table 2.1: Alignment of IEP design with design features and success principles for employment programs

| | Presence in IEP design | | | Key considerations |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| | VTEC | TAEG | EPI | |
| Design features | | | | |
| Parity initiatives | X | X | ✓ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The effectiveness of parity initiatives as a mechanism of employment growth has received mixed results in research conducted to date, but there is evidence of its improvement to the work environment. EPI is a target-based parity initiative, so organisations need to carefully consider embedding values, strategies and tactics to ensure enable achievement of targets. While VTEC and TAEGs are not parity initiatives as they are supply focused, they do often work to support parity initiatives (including those led by governments and organisations through RAPs). |
| Wage subsidies | X | X | X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian evaluations and international research have reported inconsistent results regarding the impact of wage subsidies on employment outcomes. While EPI could be considered a wage subsidy program as EPI partners only receive a payment once employees reach 26-weeks, this feature has been classified as outcome driven funding. EPI funding is intended to cover a range of activities, not necessarily wages. |
| Participant streaming | ✓ | X | Varies by partner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While streaming has been identified in literature as a positive feature that supports sustainable employment through a differentiated approach, there are various challenges associated with implementing this feature. A key challenge and reason for participant stream misallocation is the reliance on individual disclosure of personal information. The limitations of the streaming process are disproportionately experienced by the most disadvantaged cohorts. |
| Job-readiness training | ✓ | ✓ | X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The delivery of training to support job-readiness skill development has been linked to improved outcomes for participants. The delivery of job-readiness training may have a more profound effect on enhancing work-readiness and improved employment programs for disadvantaged cohorts. VTEC and TAEG both have a focus on providing job-readiness training. EPI partners may undertake some job-readiness activities, such as CV support, though this is not an explicit element of the program design. |
| Job-specific training | ✓ | Varies by program | Varies by partner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling individuals to complete work-experience and job-placements while attaining a qualification is particularly effective as it develops job-specific skills while supporting continued engagement. While TAEG may not require job-specific training in its program design, TAEGs may deliver this in their programs. EPIs may offer on-the-job training to participants. |
| Job-matching | ✓ | Varies by program | X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job matching has been found to support increased productivity, sustained engagement, earning growth and reduced searching for external employment opportunities – leading to lower turnover rates. |

| | Presence in IEP design | | | Key considerations |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| | VTEC | TAEG | EPI | |
| | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TAEG does not require job-matching in its program design, but TAEGs report that they undertake this activity. |
| Outcome driven funding | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes-based funding is only suitable in certain contexts, such as programs with fixed requirements and working with vulnerable cohorts. Consultations have indicated that ongoing internal analysis, undertaken by the federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment, has supported the ongoing use of the 26-week milestone. Beyond this internal analysis, there is mixed evidence from employment program evaluations that supports the use of outcome payments. |
| Place-based approach | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within a place-based approach, decision-making power is decentralised (rather than a top-down structure) to ensure the complex community needs and local labour market opportunities are understood, allowing for program tailoring to ensure sustainable employment outcomes. While the programs will ideally be place-based and supported by the NIAA regional office structure, some elements of the design and administration of the IEP impacts on the capacity for the programs to be place-based when implemented. This is discussed in further detail in Section 5.7. |
| Post-placement support | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is considered effective practice to offer post-placement support for participants who experience significant barriers to employment to address issues likely to affect their employment sustainability. VTEC and TAEG both require post-placement mentoring. All EPI partners are required to assess participant needs and provide broad on-the-job supports, however, only some offer bespoke activities and support for participants. |
| Success principles | | | | |
| Indigenous engagement and self-determination | There is no specific program requirement | There is no specific program requirement | There is no specific program requirement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs that allow for Indigenous engagement and self-determination locally ensure that the diversity of communities are captured and this can enhance participant buy-in and long-term employment outcomes. It is the IEP's intent to engage with Indigenous communities, but this varies according to its implementation. |
| Leadership advocacy | There is no specific program requirement | There is no specific program requirement | Varies by EPI partner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An invested leadership is more likely to engage the local Indigenous community, which can incentivise community buy-in, program adoption and improved likelihood of long-term employment. While the IEP design advocates for employers to be invested leaders, this is likely to vary significantly from employer to employer and will be of differing focus in how providers work with employers. |
| Sustained focus on building skills | There is no specific program requirement | There is no specific program requirement | There is no specific program requirement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recognised that Indigenous Australians face various barriers to accessing education, training and employment, and that a coordinated, sustained approach to building the skills of this cohort is necessary. While there is an expectation that across all programs support participants for 26-weeks post-placement, the extent to which skill building is sustained beyond this to overcome barriers to continued employment will vary. |

| | Presence in IEP design | | | Key considerations |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------|-----|---|
| | VTEC | TAEG | EPI | |
| Sustained wrap around support | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While wrap-around support is imperative for all disadvantaged jobseekers, it is important that Indigenous participants access wrap-around support that is underpinned by an Indigenous cultural focus. Wrap-around support is a key programmatic feature of both VTEC and TAEG, whereas EPI partners have the flexibility to choose whether they provide this support. |

Source: Deloitte Access Economics *Indigenous Employment Programs: Literature Scan* for reference to academic sources and government papers.

2.3 Changes to the design of the programs

Key finding

- *There is limited evidence to suggest these programs have been subject to regular, rigorous evaluation and data-informed refinement.*

The evaluation was unable to identify any mechanisms that have been established, and consistently used, to review and refine the programs in an ongoing way beyond contract manager relationship. While a post-placement survey exists, it has not been distributed or analysed in a systematic manner and the data was not made available to the evaluation.

An evaluation of the VTEC program was undertaken after one year of operation which provides insights into the design, implementation, and early outcomes of VTECs. No comparable evaluation was undertaken for the TAEG and EPI programs, and as such, there is little documentation how the design of the TAEG and EPI programs have changed since they were launched.

This section predominantly relies on insights gained through consultation with IEP providers and partners to determine how the design of the in-scope programs have changed throughout the course of their delivery. However, the extent to which these refinements have been based on evidence is not always clear.

Suggestion 1: Future programs should establish clear evaluation principles and procedures prior to their inception and implement rigorous evaluations on a regular basis.

Effective policy evaluation is central to promoting public accountability, ongoing learning and increasing public sector effectiveness through improved decision making.²⁸ As noted above, the IEP sub-program have historically been evaluated inconsistently and partially, creating a risk that the program is not being optimised or improved over time.

Future programs should establish clear evaluation principles and practices prior to their inception, to ensure that subsequent evaluations are completed in a rigorous manner. Further, the evaluation framework and procedures should be informed by best-practice on the topic, including frameworks such as those developed by the Productivity Commission and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Section 1.3.3), along with the suggestions of this report.

The evaluation framework should also ensure that the necessary data capture tools are implemented to collect high-quality and accurate quantitative data on an ongoing basis, from the outset. These datasets may include:

- Detailed participant-level data, capturing information on a wide range of demographic characteristics such as participant's age, gender, length of unemployment, postcode of residence and highest level of education attainment, in addition to outcome variables.
- A participant entry and/or exit survey, to collect information on participants' motivations and satisfaction with the program components, along with potential improvement ideas.
- A provider survey, to collect information on providers' motivations and satisfaction with the program and ideas for improvement.

Finally, program evaluation and monitoring procedures should be embedded into the program's governance and oversight arrangements, to ensure that the evaluation directly supports the ongoing confidence in and refinement of the investment. This is common in all innovative policy and practice we encounter in our broader role.

2.3.1 Previous evaluation findings

The overarching findings from the 2015 Miles Morgan evaluation of the VTEC program are summarised below. This summary demonstrates how an evidence-based review process has been

²⁸OECD, *Improving Governance with Policy Evaluation: Lessons from Country Experiences* (2021).

used to identify elements of the program’s design that require revision, as well as validate design strengths:

- **a key advantage of the VTEC program is the provision of mentoring and advocacy**, through “strong, authentic links with the Indigenous community”
- **insufficient support is provided to participants experiencing long-term structural unemployment**, particularly those living in remote areas where opportunities to engage in a local labour market are scarce
- **the streaming process does not always stream participants appropriately**, resulting in some participants not receiving the necessary supports and training. This is reportedly due to a range of cultural and institutional issues
- **the provision of training is not always aligned with the background and specific needs of individuals**. This finding resulted in the evaluation recommending the development of an employability skills needs assessment tool
- **engagement between VTEC, community and industry varies** with VTECs with established relationships with Indigenous communities experiencing advantages in respect to cultural approach supports and processes
- **there is at risk of competition with complementary services**, such as the EPI, resulting in concern that service providers are competing for eligible jobseekers
- **there is a lack of readiness to take on Indigenous jobseekers in some workforces**. This finding prompted the recommendation for improved delivery of effective cross-cultural training in workplaces.

The VTEC evaluation concluded with 24 recommendations for amending or adjusting the existing program, as well as re-purposing the VTEC program. However, only a select number of recommendations have been actioned since the evaluation was delivered.

The VTEC evaluation recommended key changes to clarify the role of the key organisations, refined stream allocation processes and improved promotional activities. While roles of key stakeholders have been refined, recommendations related to streaming and promotional activities do not appear to have been adopted in the current VTEC model.

Table 2.2 below summarises the key evaluation recommendations, comments on the rationale for each, and the evidence of program refinement in line with these recommendations.

Table 2.2: Summary of recommendations from the *VTEC evaluation* and evidence of refinement

| Key evaluation recommendations | Rationale for change and evidence of refinement |
|---|--|
| Clarify the role of the Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) and GenerationOne | <p>The <i>VTEC evaluation</i> found that while the AEC had been designed to work in partnership with VTEC, the majority of jobs were not sourced through the AEC register (74.2 per cent). As such, the evaluation found that the AEC was of limited value.²⁹</p> <p>Funding has since ceased for the AEC and it is not considered a part of the VTEC model in the updated program logic. Consultation with GenerationOne revealed that while GenerationOne used to play a greater role in engaging with employers, this is no longer a part of their core responsibilities.</p> <p><i>This recommendation has been actioned.</i></p> |

²⁹ Miles Morgan Australia. (2015). ‘Progress Evaluation of the Vocational Training and Employment Centre Programme.’

| Key evaluation recommendations | Rationale for change and evidence of refinement |
|---|---|
| <p>Strengthen process for stream allocations and reassessment</p> <p>Quotas should be reviewed or removed</p> | <p>The JSCI is a statistical tool used to measure the capacity and needs of jobseekers and is used to determine a jobseekers relative disadvantage and determine the level of support they receive. The JSCI is utilised in mainstream services, such as jobactive, and as a complementary service the VTEC model also uses this streaming system.</p> <p>The <i>VTEC evaluation</i> recommended reviewing and strengthening the stream allocation due to a lack of confidence in the allocation process undertaken by Centrelink. Additionally, as there was found to be no significant difference in outcomes between participants across the streams, the evaluation recommended quotas be revised to increase flexibility.</p> <p>The 2019 Senate Inquiry paper <i>Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve</i> also found similar issues with the accuracy of the JSCI system.³⁰</p> <p>The JSCI is regularly reviewed as a component of mainstream service provision, and is not within the remit of NIAA to change. As at the time of the <i>VTEC evaluation</i>, there was a standard quota of 70 per cent of (what is now known as) Stream C participants. Now, quotas are proportionally-based. Provider reflections on streaming quotas are detailed further in Section 5.4.</p> <p><i>This recommendation has been partially actioned.</i></p> |
| <p>A communications and promotional campaign should be attached to the VTEC program</p> | <p>The <i>VTEC evaluation</i> found that the majority of service providers interviewed noted that an awareness or promotional campaign would have been a useful method for distributing coordinated cross-agency communications.</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations reported challenges working with other related services (e.g. jobactive) and these findings are discussed in detail in Section 5.4.</p> <p><i>This recommendation has not been actioned.</i></p> |
| <p>A paid work experience scheme may be an appropriate mechanism with which to develop capacity among participants and employers</p> | <p>The <i>VTEC evaluation</i> reported that for participants with significant barriers to entry, paid work experience may enable participants to develop work behaviours in a low-stakes setting, and for employers to be incentivised to develop capacity in cultural competency within the workplace, which could stimulate opportunities for future employment.</p> <p>While the VTEC program has not been updated to incorporate this recommendation, some TAEG programs reflect this work experience model (as detailed in Section 5.5).</p> <p><i>This recommendation has been partially actioned.</i></p> |

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020).

2.3.2 Stakeholder reflections

Beyond the VTEC evaluation documentation, consultations have indicated there were a number of further refinements to the IEP through the life of the program, but the initiation of these

³⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, Education and Employment References Committee. (2018). *Jobactive: failing* 6

refinements or the strength of evidence supporting these changes is unclear. These changes include:

- **VTEC Indigeneity requirement** - as of 2018, all VTECs are required to either be an Indigenous organisation or have a joint venture with an Indigenous organisation. This was not a recommendation in the VTEC evaluation, but was a criterion introduced by former Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion to further promote engagement with Indigenous Australian communities, and to ensure that Indigenous organisations were at the heart of the VTEC model. There does not appear to be formalised documentation of the rationale for this change.
- **EPI career advancement stream pilot** intended to be trialled with FMG but ultimately did not proceed.³¹ - the pilot was to support up to 400 Indigenous employees to achieve their career goals through professional development and training opportunities, as well as long-term employment support (up to two years). This pilot has been considered for EPI because FMG have already reached their parity target and NIAA wanted to explore the effectiveness of a more mature model of the EPI which focused on longer milestones and ensuring career progression for Indigenous Australians.
- **TAEG milestone payment structure** – several consulted TAEG providers noted there was a change in how milestone payments were distributed. Instead of a bulk payment at 26-weeks in employment, providers received payments upon commencement and at 13 weeks in employment. While this change in funding structure was considered valuable as it alleviated some of the burden of upfront costs for providers, it is unclear what evidence was used to inform this design change.

2.4 Consultation and collaboration with Indigenous people

Key finding

- *There is limited evidence to suggest that the process for originally designing and then continually refining the IEP has involved deliberate collaboration with Indigenous Australians.*

This section aims to determine not only whether Indigenous Australians participated in designing the sub-programs, but what role they have played throughout this process and the extent to which this influence policy and program design.

2.4.1 Importance of Indigenous Australian input into program design

Indigenous specific employment programs are more successful if they are designed and implemented with a greater sensitivity to cultural expectations and appropriateness.³² To achieve this, it is imperative that Indigenous engagement and self-determination, at both the national and local level, is understood and respected as a critical feature enabling program and policy effectiveness.

Agency and deliberation are key to ensuring meaningful collaboration with Indigenous Australians. Policy development is a process, and Indigenous Australians need to have a legitimate role as part of that process to ensure that policies are valued, understood and meet the needs of Indigenous Australians.

Suggestion 2: Future iterations of the program should be genuinely co-designed with Indigenous Australians

Indigenous programs need to be developed in close collaboration with Indigenous peoples to ensure the program's cultural relevancy, appropriateness, practicality and ultimate effectiveness.

³¹ While this was the intention, during consultation, it was established that the pilot did not go ahead.

³²Productivity Commission (2020), *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*, Australian Government.

Future versions of the IEP should be co-designed with Indigenous representatives from a wide variety of communities, peak bodies and community organisations, to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are thoroughly embedded into the foundations of the program.

The concept of 'co-design' is often poorly defined, but generally refers to enabling or empowering the people affected by a policy issue to actively contribute to developing a solution for it.³³ The key components of policy co-design typically include:³⁴

| Component | Description |
|-----------------|--|
| Process | Iterative stages of design thinking, oriented towards innovation |
| Principles | People are creative; people are experts in their own lives; policy should be designed by people with relevant lived experience |
| Practical tools | Creative and tangible methods for telling, enacting, and making |

Importantly, the co-design process should extend beyond simply consulting with Indigenous representatives to genuinely including and empowering them as part of a participatory process. This would likely involve engaging with Indigenous representatives during the initial design / idea generation phase and embedding Indigenous voices into the ongoing governance structures of the program's design, implementation and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Effectively including Indigenous voices as part of the policy development process has the ability to improve not only the cultural appropriateness and effectiveness of the program, but also its legitimacy.

2.4.2 Evidence of Indigenous Australian input into program design

There is limited evidence to suggest that the process for originally designing and then continually refining the IEP has involved a deliberate collaboration with Indigenous Australians.

Related documentation available to the evaluation team detailing Indigenous input into the evaluation is detailed below. Note: the two documents discussed only relate to the VTEC program, and to a small extent, the EPI program. No substantial evidence was provided to detail the extent to which Indigenous perspectives informed the design of TAEG and EPI programs.

The Forrest Review was informed by Indigenous perspectives in the following ways:

- a large-scale consultation process, involving a combination of in-person stakeholder engagement methods (i.e. public town hall meetings, roundtables, site visits and national public consultations)
- a written submission process, in which submissions from 102 individuals or organisations identifying as Indigenous were received
- Professor Marcia Langton AM, a descendant of the Yiman and Bidjara nations of Queensland, who provided expertise as an academic advisor of the review.

While the review provides some insight into the volume of submissions received from Indigenous Australians, the review does not include detail on how extensive, representative or participatory the consultations were, and particularly whether implicit bias in survey and consultation processes may have impacted contributions from those with different levels of confidence in English language survey and submission tools.³⁵ Additionally, while 349 submissions were made to the review, only five are quoted within the review itself and a lack of direct quoting makes it difficult to determine how Indigenous perspectives contributed to the findings of the review³⁶

³³<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8500.12310>

³⁴ Sanders, E. 2014. 'Perspectives on Participation in Design.'

³⁵ Klein, E. (2014). 'Academic Perspectives on the Forrest Review (2014): Creating Parity.' Accessed from: <https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/academic-perspectives-forrest-review-creating-parity>

³⁶ Ibid.

As a result, it is challenging to determine the role that Indigenous Australians have played in the review, and this evaluation is unable to ascertain the nature of this involvement and how it shaped the policy recommendations included within the review.

The VTEC evaluation was informed by Indigenous perspectives in the following ways:

- focus groups with VTEC participants
- surveys with community and industry stakeholders
- semi-structured, open-ended interviews with community and industry stakeholders
- place-based site analysis and observation.

While a participatory methodology was employed, it is still difficult to determine the extent to which changes to the program design were influenced by Indigenous perspectives. Additionally, as shown in Table 2.2, only a limited number of the VTEC evaluation's recommendations were implemented.

Additionally, while literature has found co-design at a local level helpful for establishing participation and cultural relevance, the evaluation did not find any evidence that this process was undertaken. Discussions in *Program implementation* further details the role of Indigenous Australians in the implementation of the programs, considering the extent to which the programs are implemented in a place-based way which enables localised, Indigenous-led decision making.

In summary, while there have been opportunities for Indigenous voices to contribute to the design of the IEP, there has not been a deliberate effort to show how these voices have influenced design, or the experiences of participants and communities has been considered. Further, there is no evidence that there has been a co-design or Indigenous-led design in the development of the programs. As such, they can be understood as being designed firmly within a Western paradigm.

3 Program implementation

Having already established the design features of the program, this chapter considers whether the sub-programs have been implemented as originally intended, as well as any challenges faced by providers and partners in implementing the programs as designed.

Specifically, the chapter has a particular focus on the below evaluation questions:

- *to what extent has the program been implemented by NIAA (/PM&C) in line with its design parameters?*
- *to what extent have the programs been delivered in a respectful, strengths-based and place-based way?*

As an intersecting point, the chapter considers the governance of the IEP. This topic was not originally intended to be a central part of the evaluation; however, stakeholders have repeatedly emphasised the importance of governance factors in either enabling or preventing the effective implementation of the sub-programs. Therefore, the evaluation team has concluded that this topic must be considered to gain a holistic and meaningful understanding of the program's implementation.

3.1 Analytical approach

This section draws on stakeholder observations, as well as literature pertaining to best practice employment practices, to determine the extent to which programs were being implemented effectively, and as intended.

IEP Provider and Partner, employer and participant perspectives have been used to understand the implementation of the programs in practice, including any delivery challenges and critical success factors.

NIAA staff perspectives have been used to answer various governance questions such as how to balance accountability, consistency and local decision making, procurement and contract management considerations, and implications for program effectiveness and efficiency.

Chapter 3: Program Implementation

Focus

- This chapter considers whether the sub-programs have been implemented as originally intended, as well as any challenges faced by providers and partners in implementing the programs as designed. This section responds to the evaluation questions:
 - *to what extent has the program been implemented in line with its design parameters?*
 - *to what extent have the programs been delivered in a respectful, strengths-based and place-based way?*

Data sources

- Stakeholder consultations with providers, partners and NIAA representatives.
- The VTEC and TAEG provider survey.
- NIAA program data

Findings:

Program delivery

- VTEC and TAEG providers offer a wide range of pre-employment and employment supports to most participants. Consultations suggest that EPI Partners similarly deliver employment support through mentoring, although it is less intense in nature.
- VTEC and TAEG services are participant-centric, rather than employer-focused. This is reflected in providers' effort, which is overwhelmingly spent working with participants instead of employers.

Implementation challenges

- Providers are constrained by the specific local labour market conditions they each operate within. Specifically, providers operating within regional or rural communities are limited by the number of appropriate employment opportunities available and the participants available to them.
- It is unclear whether the existing outcomes-based funding model adequately compensates providers for the true costs of effective program delivery.
- Participant and provider eligibility criteria are particularly restrictive for the VTEC program, which has limited the pool of available applicants and service providers to engage in the program.

Governance structures

- A highly centralised governance structure impacts providers' ability to deliver the programs in a place-based, responsive manner and in more extreme cases, leads to missed opportunities.

Accountability and continual improvement

- It is unclear how the performance of providers flows through to contracts for delivery across the IEP. This issue is particularly acute within the EPI program, where long contracts and a lack of progressive milestones leaves the overarching performance metrics for partners unclear.
- The absence of a clear performance framework means that there is limited reward for high performance providers in the form of increased trust in the relationship between themselves and the NIAA or increased flexibility or certainty in funding provision.
- The NIAA faces significant restrictions and capability issues in accessing and utilising the program data that is collected, and there is no current mechanism through which NIAA can observe period performance of the programs, even at an overarching level. This is evident in both the implementation of the IEP, and the conduct of this evaluation.

Suggestions

3. Future funding models should be better informed by an understanding of the costs and/or value of service delivery, and adopt a refined approach to outcomes-based funding, based on an understanding of the circumstances in which it is appropriate or inappropriate.
4. The streaming process should be amended to be made more culturally appropriate, and thereby effective, for Indigenous jobseekers.
5. Devolve more responsibility to the regional office network, with preconditions in place.
6. Establish a clear performance framework for providers that encourages high-performance

3.1 Program delivery

Key finding

- **VTEC and TAEG providers offer a wide range of pre-employment and employment supports to most participants. Consultations suggest that EPI Partners similarly deliver employment support through mentoring, although it is less intense in nature.**
- **VTEC and TAEG services are participant-centric, rather than employer-focused. This is reflected in providers' effort, which is overwhelmingly spent working with participants instead of employers.**

The sub-programs deliver a wide range of supports to participants and employers, including pre-employment support, employment support, vocational education and training and employer support and training. This section provides an overview of the way in which these activities are delivered, and in doing so, addresses the following evaluation question:

- To what extent is the program design based on evidence?

3.1.1 Pre-employment support

Pre-employment support refers to a broad range of activities that are designed to prepare participants for their employment placement. As described in the program logic, this may include:

- case management support,
- referrals to other support services,
- developing a training plan,
- holding job information sessions, and
- providing job and interview advice.

Providers stated that they exercise a degree of discretion in deciding how they screen and identify participants for a specific employment opportunity. On balance, providers appear to either prioritise finding the participants who are most suitable and capable for a specific role or finding participants who are most in need of assistance, and they believe would not operate well in mainstream programs. For example, providers note that:

"When the committee was choosing people, it ultimately came down to an assessment of who was likely to turn up and last the distance." (TAEG provider)

"We weren't looking for people who would have been able to ace the recruitment on their own, we were looking for people we could actually work with them and they would benefit from it and hopefully get them the outcome that they were looking for." (VTEC provider).

The VTEC and TAEG provider survey reveals that, in practice, pre-employment support overwhelmingly takes the form of individualised case management or mentoring, with over 94 per cent of surveyed providers reporting that all or most of their participants receive this type of support.

In addition, providers deliver a wide range of other pre-employment support activities to participants, with the survey indicating that over 60 per cent of providers across both programs deliver the following activities to all or most participants:

- an overview of workplace expectations,
- the preparation of a training and support plan,
- employee cultural support,
- resume and interview advice, or
- holding job information sessions.

While there are broad similarities across the programs, TAEG providers appear to spend more time working with participants to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills than VTEC providers.

Specifically, the provider survey indicates that between 24 to 28 percent of TAEG providers deliver literacy, numeracy or English language training to all or most participants, compared to only 6 to 8 percent of VTEC providers (Charts 3.1 and 3.2). TAEG providers note that:

"...There are a range of significant barriers to employment, and training. We try and address those across the board and we have, so the main one is literacy and numeracy and we deliver literacy and numeracy support on site, one on one and in groups." (TAEG provider)

"So what we're trying to do is give them that cultural understanding but also giving them the Western system of education because sometimes the literacy and numeracy levels are very low and so when we're doing this we really try to work with them on their own level of understanding" (TAEG provider)

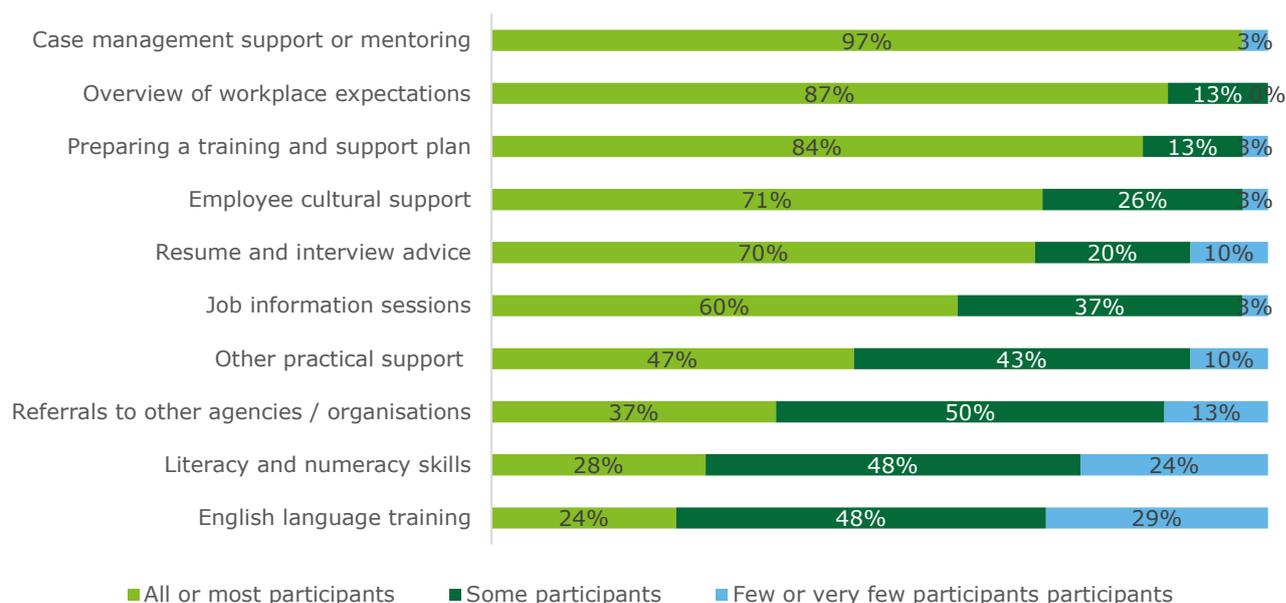
The provider survey suggests that VTEC providers are significantly more likely to deliver resume and interview advice to participants than TAEG providers. The survey reports that VTEC providers are 24 percentage points more likely to offer this activity to all or most participants than TAEG providers. This finding is likely a reflection of the differing design of the two programs, with VTEC delivering training with a guaranteed employment opportunity attached, meaning that they may have a greater focus on preparing participants for a specific employment opportunity.

Stakeholder consultation suggest that EPI Partners also deliver pre-employment support to participants, although this is generally done in a less intense and systematic manner than TAEG and VTEC providers. For example, several EPI Partners noted that they had developed specialised Indigenous HR teams whose responsibility it was to identify potential Indigenous jobseekers and offer informal support and coaching to them. Other EPIs reported offering their staff considerable autonomy in how they deliver the program, and what support they provide. EPI partners note:

"... corporate office will often go, "This is our target, how you achieve that is up to you". And that's how I deal with the EPI team as well. [...] we know what their targets are, how they do it is up to them." (EPI Partner).

"We take a case management approach to the recruitment of employees into our properties to ensure that they have roles that they're going to succeed at [...] we've used the funding specifically to enable that [recruitment and screening process] to be successful." (EPI Partner)

Chart 3.1: Share of TAEG participants who receive pre-employment support, by activity type



Source: Provider Survey (2020).

Chart 3.2: Share of VTEC participants who receive pre-employment, by activity type



Source: Provider Survey (2020).

3.1.2 Support during employment

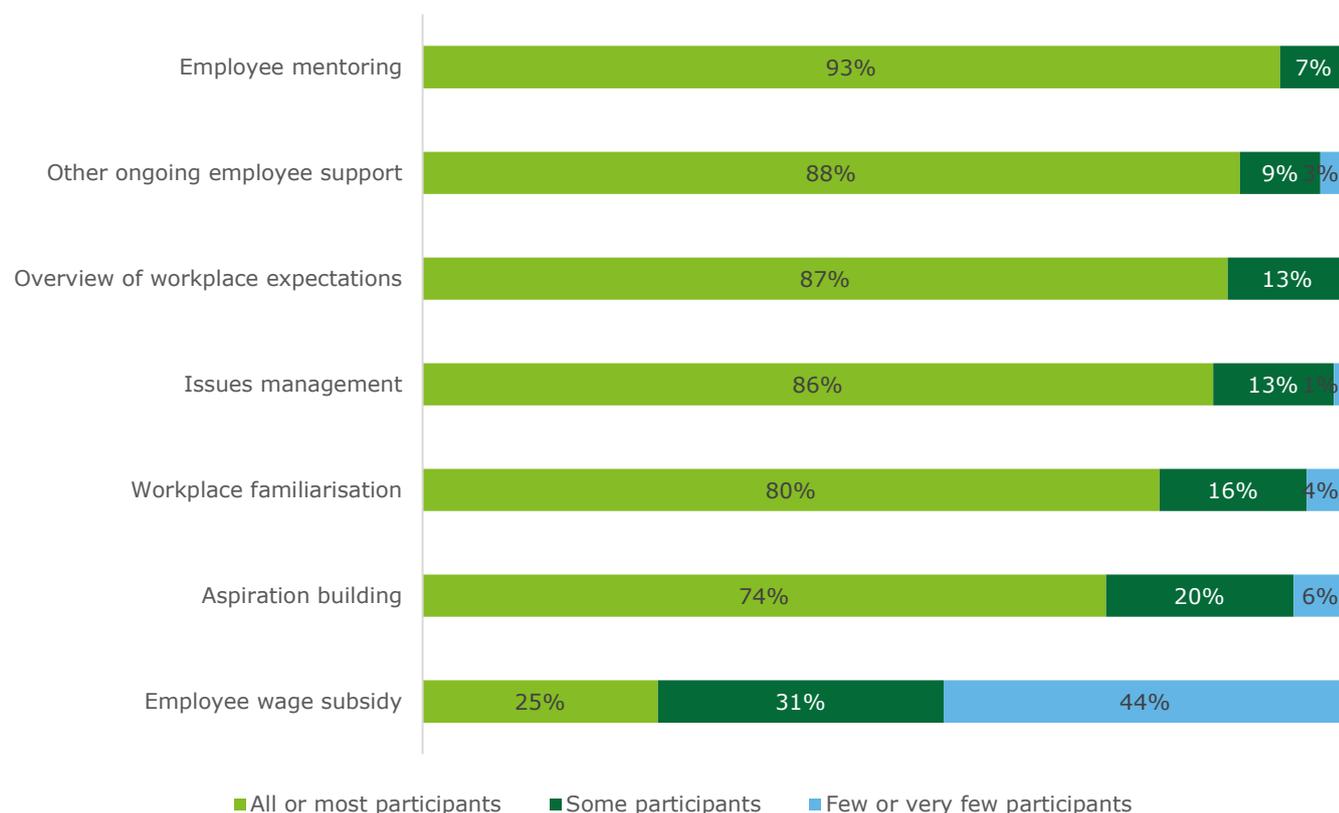
Employment support refers to activities that providers or partners deliver to participants to support them to remain in employment. This may include a broad range of activities that are intended to overcome the varied and often complicated barriers that participants face to remaining in employment. The provision of employment support is a central element to each of the sub-programs and an activity that providers/ partners are incentivised to deliver to successfully obtain outcome payments.

The provider survey highlights that VTEC and TAEG participants gain access to a wide range of employment supports through the programs. Chart 3.3 below provides an overview of the breadth and intensity of the key employment supports that are delivered to participants.

This analysis reveals that the four most commonly delivered supports, which over 85 per cent of providers deliver to all or most participants, are directly related to supporting participants to remain in employment and overcome the barriers they may face (Chart 3.3). Stakeholder consultations with providers suggest that these services are likely to include:

- **employee mentoring:** weekly or fortnightly check-ins with participants to understand how they are finding their employment experience, and whether any additional support services are required
- **overview of workplace expectations:** a high-level overview of the habits and practices that are expected in the workplace (or a particular industry)
- **issues management:** resolving issues that may arise while a participant is completing their employment placement. For example, this may involve a provider advocating on behalf of a participant to change their working arrangements or hours
- **other ongoing employee support:** a broad range of ongoing support measures, including, for example, providing transport for participants to travel to or from work.

Chart 3.3: Level of participation in TAEG and VTEC employment services



Source: Provider survey (2020).

Additionally, providers note to be responsive and genuine in supporting the needs of participants, mentoring services often extend beyond program guidelines. For instance, providers spoke of being on call 24/7 to support with issues as they arose, supporting participant family members and providing practical assistance (such as transport) even when not funded to do so. It was emphasised that this holistic approach was required to meaningfully support participants to overcome barriers to employment.

"[We heard, from community feedback] that there's a group of jobseekers that we're probably not necessarily supporting as well as what we could and that's that group of jobseekers that are very, very disadvantaged, long term unemployed and require the additional support, more than the once a week. So, we've tried to listen to that feedback and that's resulted in us putting a full-time staff member within that pre-employment space. So, it's a significant investment from our end - which is unfunded" (VTEC provider).

EPI partners appear to offer a range of ongoing supports to participants, although these are generally less intense and individualised than those delivered by TAEG and VTEC. This may be because EPI partners have a comparatively job-ready group of participants, meaning that these jobseekers are less in need of foundational skill development.

Consultations did find, however, that EPI partners do still offer forms of informal support that may help build participants general behavioural and workplace skills. For example, during consultations EPI partners noted that:

- their internal recruitment team acts as an ongoing form of support and informal mentoring to program participants. They noted that this support can be used to improve participants conflict resolution and communication skills
- individual line managers often play an important role in mentoring program participants and helping them understand workplace practices and expectations
- one partner organised an external provider to deliver a resilience training program to participants, to help equip them with the tools needed to overcome the new challenges they may encounter in the workplace.

Several EPI partners also draw on third parties to provide support for recruitment, training and retention of staff. Depending on the nature and quality of this outsourcing, this can also influence the extent to which participants are exposed to culturally inclusive and engaging supports.

3.1.3 Vocational education and training

To varying degrees, the sub-programs deliver formal vocational education and training qualifications to participants to supplement the on-the-job and informal training they receive. This training is intended to develop practical job-specific skills that helps participants gain and maintain employment in a specialised area. This training may either be delivered internally (i.e. by the provider or partner) or by an external Registered Training Organisation (RTO). While there is no data systematically captured on the nature of the qualifications that participants gain, the provider survey suggests that typical qualifications include:

- Certificate II or III in Hospitality
- Certificate I, II or II in Construction
- Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

While all in-scope sub-programs have improved job skills as an objective, the differing program designs may impact the extent to which they prioritise vocational education and training. However, the provider survey suggests that TAEG providers are similarly likely to offer vocational training to participants as VTEC providers (72% of TAEG participants commence vocational education and training, compared to 76% of VTEC participants), and in fact have a higher estimated completion rate. However, the current program data captured by the NIAA does not systematically record the type of qualifications offered or completion rates, meaning that it is not possible to comment on the degree to which this training aligns with participants' employment placement.

In line with program guidelines, VTEC providers have a strong focus on delivering targeted, job-specific training to prepare participants for their employment placement. These providers generally emphasise that they use vocational training strategically to fill qualification gaps, rather than as a generic part of their service offering that is applied to all jobseekers. These stakeholders note that:

"If we identify any particular participants that do need some upskilling in their qualifications in that training perspective, that's where we would work together with the training provider in

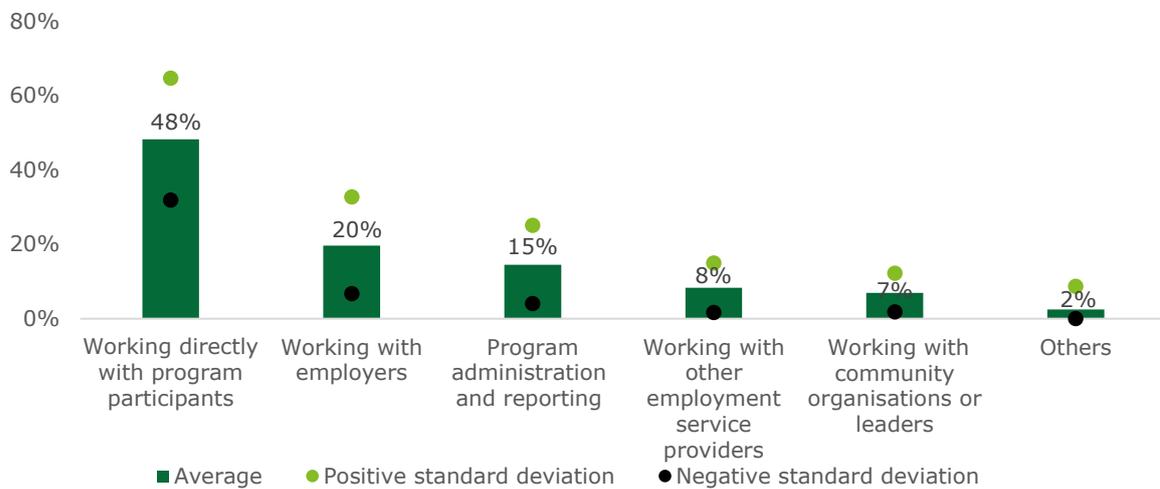
the community to source suitable training options, whether that’s for individual participants or in a group referral situation.” (VTEC provider)

3.1.4 Employer training

Employer training refers to activities that are delivered by VTEC and TAEG providers to enhance the cultural capability of the organisations in which participants work. Such trainings are intended to change employer attitudes towards Indigenous Australians and their understanding of the unique challenges faced by these individuals in the workplace.

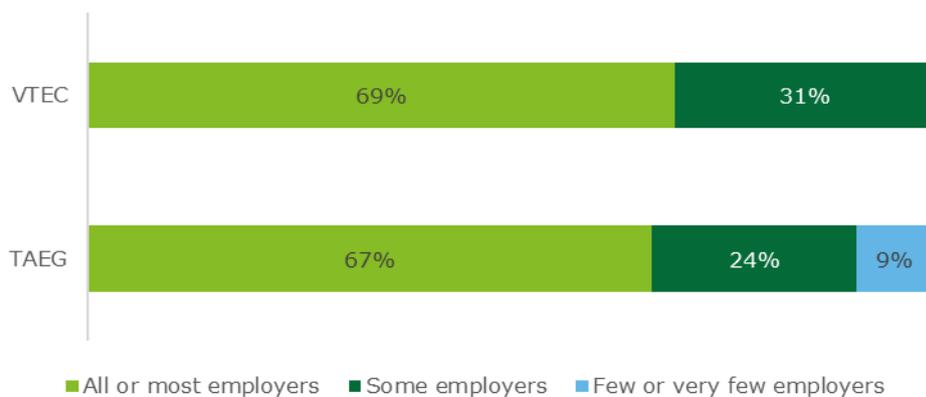
VTEC and TAEG providers spend a comparatively small portion of their time (20%) working directly with employers (Chart 3.4). This effort appears to be largely focused on delivering cultural awareness training, with the provider survey suggesting that between 67 to 69 per cent of both TAEG and VTEC providers deliver cultural awareness training to all or most employers they work with (Chart 3.5). Further, stakeholder consultations with providers reaffirm that providers view the work they do with employers to be of critical importance to ensuring that they successfully employ Indigenous staff.

Chart 3.4: Share of provider effort, by activity type



Source: Provider Survey (2020).

Chart 3.5: Level of employer participation in provider cultural awareness training, by program

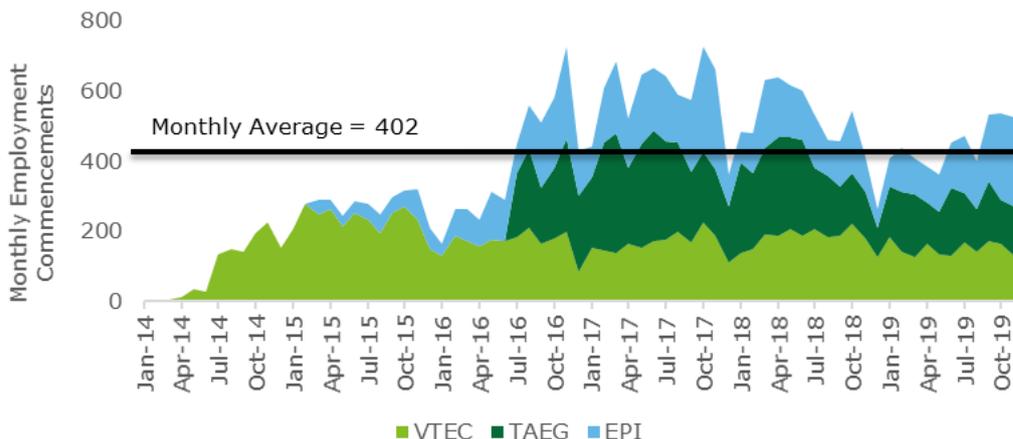


Source: Provider Survey (2020).

3.2 Participant profile

As shown in Chart 3.6, employment commencements in the IEP have fluctuated significantly over time. Total monthly commencements peaked in October 2017 at 726 and have trended downwards since, to approximately 430 in the second half of 2019. Since program inception, VTEC commencements have consistently decreased, potentially reflecting the introduction of the other Indigenous employment programs capturing part of the market for Indigenous jobseekers or changes to the VTEC provider eligibility criteria.

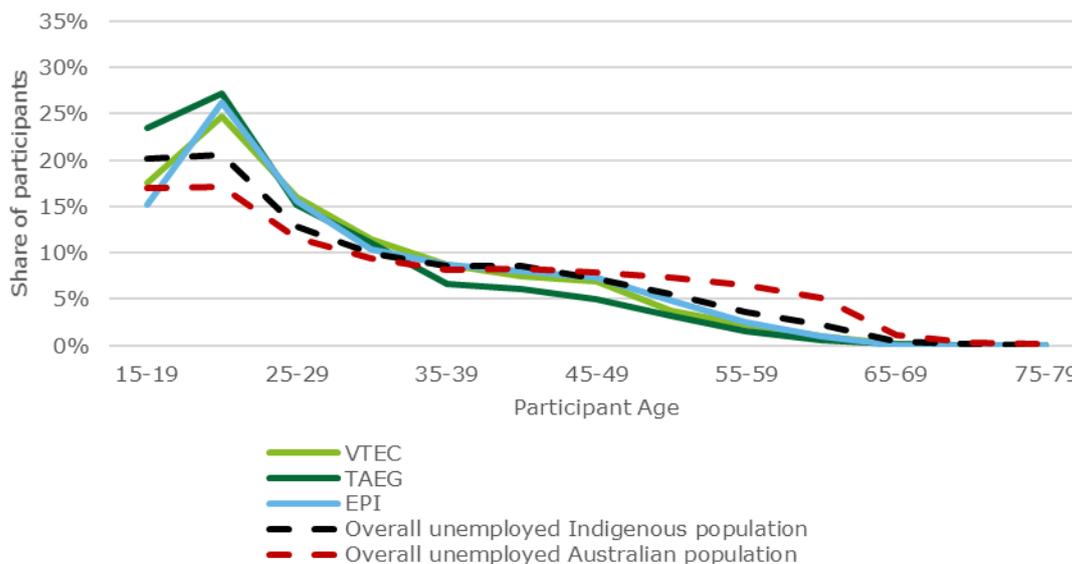
Chart 3.6: Time-series of monthly employment commencements, by program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019). Note: 'Monthly participation' includes both training and employment commencements.

The IEP participant population is overrepresented in younger age groups compared to the general unemployed Indigenous population. As shown in Chart 3.7 below, approximately 26 per cent of IEP participants are between the age of 20 and 24 years old, compared to 21 per cent in the broader unemployed Indigenous population and 17 per cent in the unemployed Australian population.

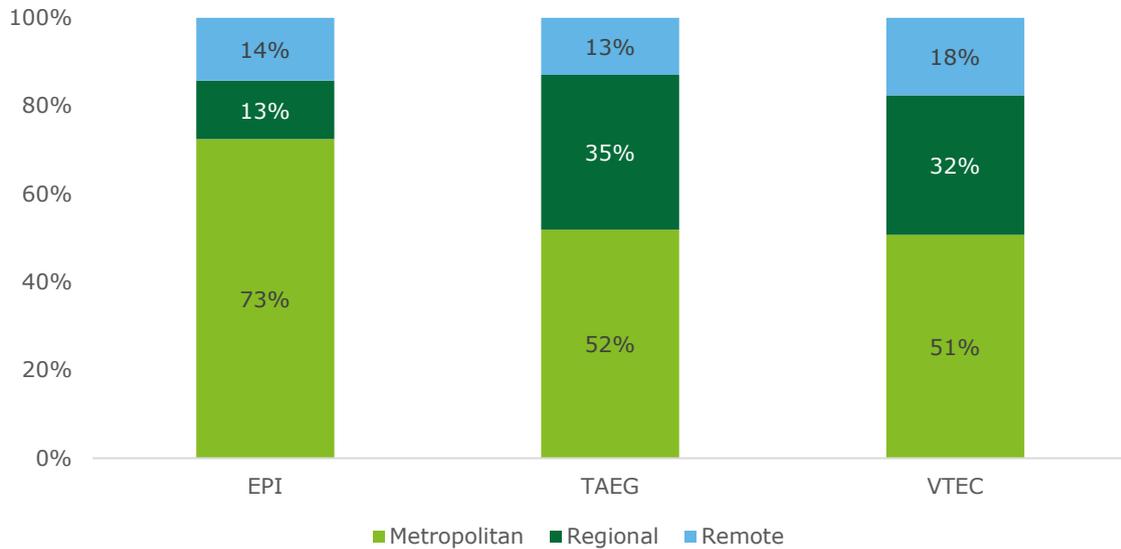
Chart 3.7: Distribution of participants age, by program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019), ABS Census of Population and housing (2016). Note: This analysis includes all IEP participants listed in the program data, including those who do not commence employment.

The EPI participant pool is heavily skewed towards metropolitan-based candidates, whereas VTEC and TAEG have greater numbers of regional and remote program participants (Chart 3.8).

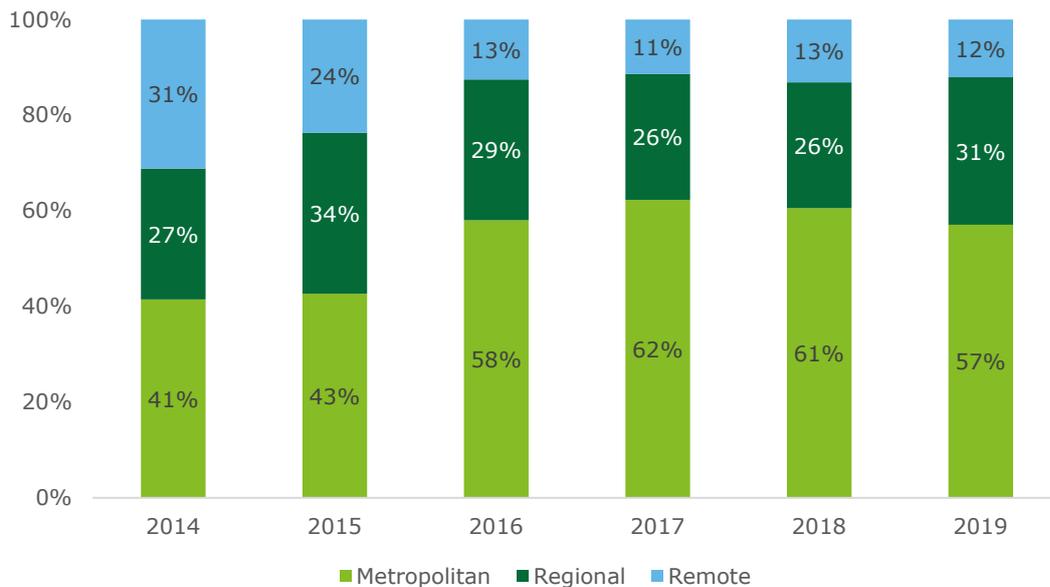
Chart 3.8: Participant remoteness, by program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019). Note: This analysis includes all IEP participants listed in the program data, including those who do not commence employment.

Over time, the proportion of participants in remote areas has decreased significantly (Chart 3.9). This is partially explained by the introduction of EPI which has a large representation of metropolitan participants (as shown above). However, even within the TAEG and VTEC programs the share of remote participants has consistently decreased. While the exact drivers of this change cannot be conclusively determined, it is possible that this reflects the fact that it is easier for providers to work with participants in metropolitan areas, given the relative abundance of potential employers and other support services.

Chart 3.9: Time-series of participant remoteness, by program

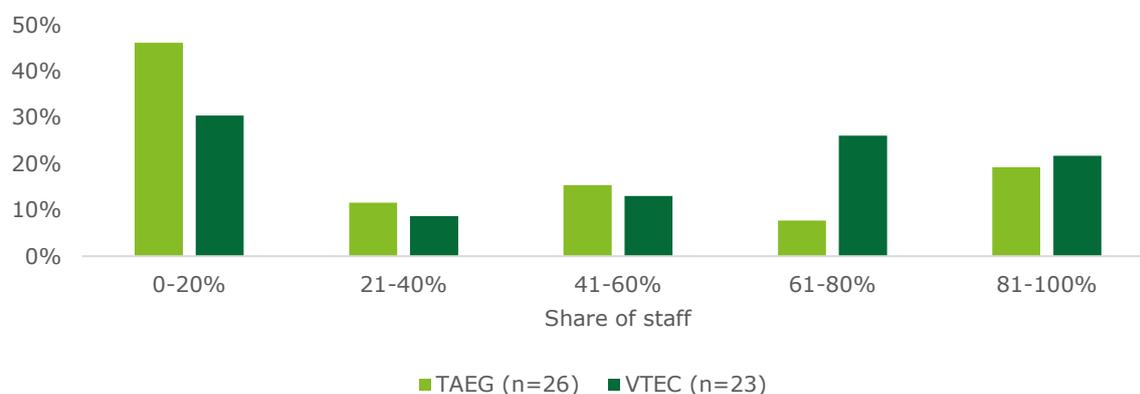


Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019). Note: This analysis includes all IEP participants listed in the program data, including those who do not commence employment.

3.3 Provider and EPI partner profile

The VTEC provider landscape is comprised of a smaller number of larger, more tenured providers than the TAEG program (Table 3.10). In addition, the provider survey suggests that VTEC providers generally have a higher share of Indigenous staff (likely a reflection of the Indigenous ownership requirement), while TAEG providers are more likely to be a direct employer of program participants.

Chart 3.10: Share of Indigenous staff, by program



Source: NIAA Provider Survey (2020).

However, within these broad averages, there are several notable points of variation, including that:

- while the TAEG program has the smallest average number of participants per project (73), the TAEG program also has the single largest project (Aboriginal Employment Strategy, 2,400 commencements)
- while the average share of Indigenous staff across both TAEG and VTEC ranges between 50 to 74 percent, there are a large group of providers across both programs with a very low share of Indigenous staff (Chart 3.10)
- while 90 percent of providers have either one or two projects in total, one provider (Group Training Australia) has had nine projects across both the VTEC and TAEG programs.

In line with program guidelines, EPI consists of only 13 partner organisations, each with a large number of program participants. Further, these organisations have the longest average tenure of the IEP (3.7 years) as all the original founding EPI partners are still part of the program.

Table 3.1: Provider and project overview

| | TAEG | VTEC | EPI | Overall |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Total number of projects | 101 | 76 | 15 | 192 |
| Total number of providers or EPI partners | 73 | 52 | 13 | 143 |
| Average participants per project | 83 | 169 | 402 | 138 |
| Average projects per provider | 1.3 | 1.5 | 1.2 | |
| Average provider tenure | 1.8 years | 3.4 years | 3.7 years | |
| Share of providers who are Indigenous owned, controlled or a joint venture with an Indigenous organisation | 50% | 74% | - | - |

Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019), VTEC and TAEG provider Survey (2020).

3.4 Challenges in delivering the program

Key findings

- **Providers are constrained by the specific local labour market conditions they each operate within. Specifically, providers operating within regional or rural communities can be limited by the number of appropriate employment opportunities available.**
- **It is unclear whether the existing outcomes-based funding model adequately compensates providers for the true costs of effective program delivery.**
- **Participant and provider eligibility criteria are particularly restrictive for the VTEC program, which has limited the pool of available applicants and service providers to engage in the program.**

Each partner and provider face their own set of challenges in delivering the IEP. These challenges are related to external factors (i.e. environmental factors outside provider or program control), and specific program design features. Both categories are discussed in the following section, drawing on themes and direct quotes from stakeholder consultations.

Specifically, this section responds to the following evaluation questions:

- What challenges have been encountered in implementing the suite of programs as intended?
- What is the effect of funding/ payment milestones on the activities being delivered? Is the funding/ payment model financially sustainable for providers?

In assessing the challenges associated with delivering the program, this section relies heavily on evidence collected from stakeholder consultations with providers. In addition, Head Agreements and shell Schedules for each program were made available to the evaluation. However, the details of individual contracts could not be accessed because of confidentiality and legal reasons.

3.4.1 External factors

Local labour market - the IEP model operates under the assumption that there are sufficient and appropriate employment opportunities available. In practice, the number of appropriate and meaningful employment opportunities are limited. Providers and community stakeholders consistently reflected on this as a challenge, including:

"[In a different geographical context] we did all the assessments and that, and at the end of that third week, those three major employers came and selected 20 people out of that group. They all got jobs. That's how a VTEC should work. Out here, I can't do that. How many tier one companies are actually here? None." (VTEC provider)

"We need to recognise that in particular areas of this country, there are no employment opportunities. If you are eight hours away from Alice Springs, 800km on a remote homeland, your employment aspects or opportunities are going to be significantly lower than someone who lives in Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs. [...] Of course, there's opportunities for them through art and through music, creative industries. We certainly always have to always do more in a creative industry areas. But we have to stop this mentality that they're lazy and they're not going to work. We'll show me what they can do out there that will give them economic opportunities and actually give them satisfaction." (Community stakeholder).

Consultations indicated that finding appropriate employment opportunities was more of a challenge for smaller TAEG and VTEC providers, particularly those based in regional or remote areas. EPI partners did not consider this to be a significant barrier, as they typically operate nationally and have a large pool of employment opportunities. However, during COVID-19, certain industries

were particularly affected (i.e. EPI Partners delivering accommodation or hospitality services), which also considerably impacted the number of jobs available through the EPI program.

Employer capabilities and attitudes – EPI partners, and some TAEG providers, are both the service provider and the employer. This is not the case for VTEC providers, and some TAEG providers, who act as the conjugate between the employer and participant, and are required to rely on external employers.

Given the program focus on capacity-building for participants, rather than employers, several consulted providers found that the capabilities and unrealistic expectations of available employers could be constraining:

"We still probably see a lot of employers with great intent within the space, but either have just had no experience in Indigenous engagement, let alone employment or some of the areas they're working in, like we had a company that came in and said "we want to employ 150 Aboriginal engineers" [...] so it's a lot of work to get the employers on the same level and the same realistic expectations about the candidates that we're putting forward as well" (VTEC provider).

"[Employers] want motor-free cruising, so they're looking for the Stream As. They don't really want to deal with challenging participants and participants that may need a bit of extra help" (VTEC provider).

While some providers noted they had strict screening policies for the employers they would work with (i.e. those that were, or had the capacity to be, culturally competent), this would be more challenging for providers operating in regions with limited employment options.

3.4.2 Program design features

Outcomes-based funding model - all in-scope programs are funded according to an outcomes-based funding model. All providers and partners receive payments at the 26-week participant milestone, however, there is some variation between programs, i.e.:

- EPI partner milestones are negotiated on a contract basis
- VTEC providers receive additional early milestone payments when supporting participants classified as highly-disadvantaged
- TAEG provider payment structures vary, with some providers receiving early payments at four and 13 weeks.

The rationale behind this approach was to ensure that provider and partners avoid 'training for training's sake' and to ensure that funding is used to effectively support participants into employment. However, consulted stakeholders questioned whether the 26-week outcome measure was an appropriate indicator of participants gaining sustainable employment, or an accurate measure of the support required to ensure a participant remains in employment:

"The people that we're employing are often coming from jobactive providers involved in VTEC so they've either been unemployed for quite a while for a reason or they haven't been able to stay in work for a reason. [...] So I think if it ran 12 months you get them comfortable and stable, and then you can bed down those behaviours to make sure it's sustained employment if not with us they can hopefully even progress into another role in another organisation and take another step up." (VTEC provider)

"[Within] a six-month period, you can sort of go and hit certain levels, but to get them to understand it fully, you obviously need more time, more tuition. I think 12 months for the suite of programs that we have been designing, sort of custom making for each employee, really needs 12 months to play out. Especially literacy and numeracy, [and] money management." (TAEG provider)

The challenges in delivering the program and achieving successful outcomes for jobseekers experiencing complex barriers to employment, meant that many providers reported that the costs

of running the program were unsustainable. Community, participant, and provider consults all cited extensive barriers to employment that many Indigenous jobseekers face. Some commonly cited barriers include:

- systemic racism
- alcohol and/or drug dependencies
- criminal background
- poor mental health
- living arrangements (e.g. homelessness, domestic violence sufferer)
- lack of family support or carer responsibilities
- lack of birth certificate or drivers' license; and
- low literacy, numeracy and/ or computer literacy.

As such, one of providers' most common criticisms of the funding model was the extent of unfunded and unseen work they are required to undertake with participants, both pre- and post-employment – suggesting there is a greater need for support than the program is designed for. Providers consistently noted that the funding amount was insufficient to deliver the complete wraparound support that many jobseekers require to address their barriers to employment:

"We might have been working with 25, 30 people but there is probably only 15 that we can actually claim for by the end of September that will have actually gotten into work. And so the rest of them we don't get anything for and the Department thinks we have probably been skirting off and not really working with people, but we have we just can't claim for them, that's all" (TAEG provider).

"We've been doing mentoring, but we don't get paid for it. So, that was one of the issues as well. We done a lot of work and didn't get paid for it in the end run." (VTEC provider)

"You may get \$1,000 as a milestone payment when you sign someone up into a job, but it can cost \$5,000-6,000 to get them there" (TAEG provider).

When reflecting on the sustainability of the program, in terms of the services they need to deliver within specified budgets, providers noted:

"If I was running my business, I wouldn't be able to run it this way." (VTEC provider)

"I just wonder whether that something that in a broad sense should be considered for ongoing programs and things like that that maybe there should be some quarantine money that is specifically to be spent on participants rather than expecting organisations to take it off the bottom line, which is paying for the mentor wages and the mentor car and phone and all that other stuff." (VTEC provider)

In addition to the resources dedicated to directly supporting participants, providers also reflected on the significant administrative costs involved in delivering the program. Providers indicated they often expend considerable time and effort liaising with employers to source supporting evidence to demonstrate participants have reached employment milestones. It was noted that this high administrative burden can distract providers from their core responsibilities:

"I think it's an absolute nightmare because with our outcomes [...] we have to actually provide a payroll to our contract manager and it's very, there's not a lot of leeway. So, if we might be one day short, but the jobseeker is still employed, we will still have to wait that extra fortnight pay to get that additional payroll to validate that outcome." (VTEC provider).

Consultations indicated that for the VTEC program in particular, providers' expectations were that the funding would cover the full cost of services provided to participants. While VTEC providers noted they have been accessing other available sources of funding – and this is the intent of the funding model, many expressed frustrations with the administrative effort required to effectively

jigsaw different funding together.

Suggestion 3: Future funding models should be informed by an understanding of the costs and/or value of service delivery, and adopt a refined approach to outcomes-based funding, based on an understanding of the circumstances in which it is appropriate and effective.

This evaluation has been unable to identify detailed evidence of how the existing funding model was developed (beyond the simple unit-cost table and guidelines examined in Section 4.5.1). Further, the stakeholder evidence presented in this chapter suggests that there are potential issues with the existing model, in particular with the adequacy of the payments made to providers.

Future funding models should be informed by either an activity or public value-based funding study (or combination of both). Exercises of this nature would establish what the true costs of service delivery are for an effective provider and/or what the value of the outcomes achieved are for participants and the broader community. This would ensure that there is a sound analytical foundation for the program's funding and give the agency confidence that the funding provided is appropriate.

In designing a future model, policymakers should look to examples in the health and education sectors, both of which often make use of sophisticated funding models.³⁷ Practically, this would likely involve working with a sample of providers who operate in a diverse range of settings and are deemed to be effective at generating positive outcomes, to understand the cost of quality service provision in different environments.

Additionally, while elements of outcomes-based funding can be effective at encouraging provider efficiency, further care needs to be taken to understand the instances in which it is inappropriate. For example, in highly remote areas where providers can only work with a very small number of participants/employers (and the cost of delivery is generally higher) further upfront funding, or the direct provision of services may be required, to ensure that services can still be delivered (see section 4.5.4 for a further exploration of the decisions the agency may need to make around service coverage).

Contract timeframes – the contract lengths vary between in-scope programs, specifically:

- TAEG contracts vary in length (with both single- and multi-year options)
- VTEC contracts were initially three years in length
- EPI contracts vary in length.

In terms of the broader contract length, VTEC offers a longer contract (three years) than some comparable programs (not in-scope for review), which motivated some providers to apply for the program. However, three-year contracts are still deemed by some providers to be too short, particularly for the first contract which requires establishing the program processes and raising awareness about the program in the community. The implications of this is that the providers are required to wear significant financial risk during the establishment phase, even though it may take time for the venture to become utilised and sustainable:

"program set-up requires building significant organisational capacity around infrastructure and staffing" (TAEG provider).

"It took a few years for people to realise what the VTEC actually was" (TAEG provider).

³⁷See, for example: Macquarie University, *The use and usefulness of outcomes based funding for hospitals* (2019) and NSW Department of Education, *Needs-based funding* (2020). Available at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability/2021-school-excellence-in-action/effective-use-of-funding-and-resources/needs-based-funding>

While NIAA does offer some advanced payments, they are still tied to outcomes. This is a risk for providers early in the program, and may act as a disincentive for new or small providers entering the market.

Consulted stakeholders indicated that both early, and ongoing, refinement would likely be required to ensure the programs were appropriate and effective in catering for the specific place-based needs of the local job market and participants they were servicing. One consulted Indigenous academic advised that a six-month grace period, in which providers are supported to tweak their approach, without the financial risks associated with the outcomes-based funding model, would be beneficial.

Participant eligibility criteria

VTEC streaming requirement – unless stipulated in individual EPI contracts, the VTEC program is the only in-scope program with participant streaming requirements.

VTEC participants are streamed using the JSCI. The JSCI is a questionnaire that jobseekers are required to complete when they first register for employment assistance, and when they experience changes in circumstances. Based on responses to this survey, jobseekers are classified as Stream A (least disadvantaged), B or C (highly disadvantaged).

This streaming approach is a critical element of the design of VTECs, as it has implications for how providers can deliver services, specifically:

- providers receive differing payments for participants, depending on their stream classification, and
- providers are limited by the number of Stream A candidates they can support.

The JSCI streaming requirement was the most cited issue with program design among VTEC providers. Providers deemed the approach particularly inappropriate for Indigenous jobseekers, who may have a negative relationship with government services or may feel ashamed to respond truthfully:

"[Jobseekers will need to] speak to a stranger who they've never spoken to before and they're asking them some really personal detailed questions of the JSCI. And there's an element of shame with some participants who really don't want to tell them that they're going through DV situations or they've got some issues with drug usage or whatever the issues may be. They're talking to a complete stranger and they don't feel comfortable in answering those questions" (VTEC provider).

"The system for assessing whether [participants are] an A, B or C is flawed. And so in reality, the A, B or C really only dictates how much money we're going to get; it does not dictate how much support they need. That's not the assessment. That's a challenge, and I'd like to see that rectified" (VTEC provider).

Additionally, providers reported that even when streaming is inaccurate, it is challenging to modify participant JSCI categorisations:

"[Ideally there would be] just a streamline mechanism to change [an incorrect streaming]. A dedicated person at Services Australia that can change the screening based on, you know, similar to what we do when we have to change people from other providers. If you can demonstrate what barriers someone has to employment and you advocate on their behalf, then it seems like a no-brainer to me that you would change their [streaming assessment]" (VTEC provider).

Suggestion 4: The streaming process should be amended to be made more culturally appropriate for Indigenous jobseekers.

"Tools of classification are notoriously difficult to apply to Indigenous Australians. Leaving aside the sometimes-difficult literacy and/or language connections or the inherent vulnerabilities of Indigenous community, there are also the profound disconnects in the purpose of classification and relative meanings of specified terms in these instruments

A further complication in the process of classification is the cultural overlay of authority, community and even sometimes gender in the way different people react to questioning from particular individuals in different circumstances.

All of these differences can be misread as resistance to JSCI streaming processes, when in fact there are often more substantive cultural and personal reasons behind the quiet response and perceived reluctance of some participants.

Solving for these is both very simple and very complex. At the simple level, improving engagement with Indigenous Australians requires an increase in the humanity of interactions. Sitting with jobseekers, recognising them as people, rather than their role in the system as an employment or community statistic. At the more complex level the approach needs to also translate to the tools and processes that underpin streaming and allocation processes, where it is well established that there are inherent biases in standardised processes and in particular in normative survey instruments.

There is formal process that can underpin this (for instance; changes to interview guides, cultural hiring and interview protocols, family support, in-home discussions etc...), as well as potential changes to the tools of questioning in the survey led models of JSCI to improve tailoring and sensitivity." (Prof. Deen Sanders OAM)

Minimum hours requirement – participants need to complete a minimum hour requirement in employment (or training in some TAEG programs) for partners and providers to receive participant outcomes payments. This minimum hour requirement is 38 hours for VTEC and EPI participants, or 15 hours for TAEG participants. In addition, partial outcome payments are paid under all three programs to part-time participants.

Several providers criticised this requirement, noting that full-time (or even part-time hours) was unrealistic for chronically unemployed cohorts:

"when you're putting someone into their very first job, an 8-hour job is a good way to start, rather than trying to go into 4-5 days a week. So that has a real, we do put people into jobs with less hours but most people wouldn't. They wouldn't put a person into a 1-day a week job or even a 2-day a week job. Because it's not going to end in any outcome for them" (TAEG provider).

Providers also note that this minimum hours requirement, and the parameter that participants cannot take more than two weeks of leave within the 25 weeks, did not respect the many cultural, community and familial obligations and priorities that Indigenous employees often had alongside their formal employment. This point was reiterated by several consulted participants who indicated they needed to move away from their family and community to pursue employment, as it was too challenging to manage the expectations of both parties.

Other IEP supports received – to be eligible for one of the sub-programs, participants cannot have received support under another in-scope IEP within the last six months. The only exception to this is VTEC and EPI, where if a VTEC provider delivers employee support services and a EPI partner was the employer the two parties are able to share an outcome payment.

Providers note that participants undertaking school-based training programs were also ineligible for the VTEC program within the following six-month period, which presents a significant challenge

for young Indigenous graduates seeking employment.

"You can't [transition school-leavers into a VTEC model] without having a six month hiatus, or a six month break in funding. So what do we do? Do we actually let these people do for six months, if we haven't already found a tertiary education or a job?" (VTEC provider).

Providers criticised this eligibility criteria as it fails to recognise, or support, participants through the series of 'false starts' that they will inevitably face as a highly disadvantaged or chronically unemployed cohort. Providers and community stakeholders report that participants who need to wait six months before receiving employment support, can have a detrimental impact on jobseekers' motivation and confidence to reengage in the workforce.

Provider eligibility requirements

Indigeneity requirement – as of 2018, there was a requirement for VTECs to be, or have a joint venture with, an Indigenous-owned and controlled organisation. As such, providers who planned to continue delivering services as a VTEC following the introduction of the Indigeneity requirement have either transitioned to an Indigenous-controlled organisation (typically, through a joint venture), or are in the process of doing so.

Of the sample of VTECs that responded to the provider survey, 74 percent indicated they were either Indigenous-controlled, or in a joint venture with an Indigenous organisation. In consultation NIAA policy staff reported that 23 of the 24 current VTECs had met this requirement. This difference may be explained based on an interpretative difference as to whether they were transitioning to meet the requirement or had already met this requirement.

VTEC providers and NIAA staff report that the Indigeneity requirement has a strong rationale, and in the long-term will ensure services are culturally appropriate. This is because it ensures that Indigenous Australians are at the centre of the VTEC model and have the ability to drive decisions around how they engage with communities, the locations that they focus their efforts, the types of jobs they source and employers that they work with, as well as how they utilise other funding streams to support participants.

At the same time, there have been significant issues in implementing this requirement. Providers who were required to change their organisational structure and/or develop partnerships with other organisations to satisfy this new requirement were more critical, noting:

"We've had a long history of delivering these Indigenous programs, but we're certainly not an Indigenous organisation [...] we were disappointed in that move because of our commitment, both tangibly and culturally, I suppose, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment initiatives, and we were set to withdraw from the VTEC program" (VTEC provider).

"We've got good networks with Indigenous community groups anyway, so I wouldn't say that we, being Indigenous-owned, there's really been a change at all" (VTEC provider).

Another provider reflected that this new requirement further restricts the pool of providers that are eligible to deliver this program, noting it is unlikely there would be enough appetite within small to medium sized Indigenous organisations to run job readiness employment programs, particularly with the level of upfront risk and investment that the program model demands.

"[The NIAA] were hoping that other Aboriginal organisations just might wholly and solely take it on, but they've got to understand that the Aboriginal organisations, some of it's not their core business. Their core business is health services, not employment. They're struggling with the capacity that they have running their own organisations and their own core business" (VTEC provider).

3.5 Governance structure

The question of governance arose as a consistent theme in the consultations with stakeholders, unprompted, thereby forming an essential consideration for the overall implementation of the IEP.

We recognise that governance is a fraught topic with limited quantitative data to draw on, but it is informative as to process and points to indicators of success for the future. This section considers the contract management and overall effectiveness of the governance structures of the program.

In doing so, the section examines whether it is preferable for different aspects of the program to be centralised or decentralised - a natural tension present in any complex program of service delivery. History shows that when the preconditions for effective devolution aren't in place, it is less preferable than a centralised structure.

While stakeholders and the evaluation do not favour a swinging pendulum in respect of centralisation v. decentralisation, the hypothesis here is that the conditions for devolution success are now increasingly in place, or should be invested in as the path to improved outcomes from these kinds of investments. It is also noted that subsidiarity is fundamental to Indigenous policy.

In the end, governance structures are among the most important and overarching conclusions with respect to the implementation of programs - this relates to both internal and external structures of governance. It is also not uncommon for internal structures in service delivery organisations to need to be reviewed and redesigned with purpose as contexts change, just like external structures are.

Key finding

- *A highly centralised governance structure impacts providers' ability to deliver the programs in a place-based, responsive manner and in more extreme cases, leads to missed opportunities.*

3.5.1 Contract management

In administration of the IEP, the NIAA is simultaneously tasked with ensuring consistent, transparent and fair application of the programs across the nation, while also ensuring programs are responsive to shifting opportunities and areas of need in order to maximise impact. While some activities fall under regional office responsibilities, in recent years, decision making regarding contract sign-off and distribution of funding across each program has been centralised.

Consulted stakeholders noted how the changes in federal government structures had impacted on the way that NIAA staff undertake their role. NIAA staff reflected that the transition from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) and then to the NIAA had meant that processes had become increasingly centralised. This plays out slightly differently across each of the three sub-programs in terms of roles and responsibilities:

- **EPI** - NIAA regional offices have very little contact with the EPI program, as this is managed through a central NIAA team of staff who work individually with each EPI partner
- **TAEG** - NIAA regional offices are involved in the application process for TAEG programs as they work with potential providers to develop an initial proposal. The decision to fund particular TAEG projects, however, is made by the Minister, or delegate in NIAA central office. The intent is that this enables a NIAA central team to make consistent choices nation-wide about the investment of TAEG funding
- **VTEC** - NIAA regions include regionally based grant management staff as well as regional engagement staff. Grant management staff are the main point of interaction with VTEC and TAEG providers on contract matters, and regional engagement staff are responsible for broader engagement with providers. While regional engagement staff have a role in managing contracts, they reported that often decisions regarding contracts, such as modifying or clarifying a contract, were forwarded on by grant management staff to be made by central staff who hold the budget responsibilities. Central NIAA staff provide program level oversight to the VTEC program, which is intended to ensure consistency in contract implementation, a central monitoring process and a national lens to enable strategic investment of VTEC funding.

NIAA staff commented that these roles had changed with the transitions between DEEWR, PM&C and the NIAA, and that under current arrangements regional engagement staff had less agency to make decisions.

The outcomes-based funding model offers a strong accountability mechanism, in that if providers fail to meet their milestones – they will not be paid. However, visibility over service provision is still required to ensure that programs are being delivered in line with contract obligations and outcomes are verified. This is the responsibility of NIAA staff within regional office.

Staff in regional NIAA offices described this contract management relationship in varied ways:

"[It has] turned the team into contract administrators, made the team more passive. [We're] not as active in seeking opportunities." (NIAA Regional Office)

"Provider conversations are really regular if they have a contract with them [such as] a new VTEC they're holding fortnightly meetings... At first the priority was internal governance and ensuring they're meeting record keeping requirements. Then linking them in with the right people/meetings/connections." (NIAA Regional Office)

While outcomes-based funding models are typically non-prescriptive in relation to the delivery of services, enabling provider innovation and flexible responses, this is not the case across all sub-programs.

Government procurement of service delivery can be considered to exist upon a spectrum of 'high control', where guidelines for program design and implementation are prescriptive, to 'high trust', where providers are empowered to flexibly deliver services. A 'high control' approach is most appropriate where the risks associated with program delivery are high, or where best practice design and implementation features are well-established and uniform. A 'high trust' approach is appropriate where adaptability and responsiveness in service delivery is required.

In their current design, the IEP employs a hybrid mix of these two approaches. An outcomes-funding model is a feature of a 'high trust' approach, and yet each of the sub-programs are coupled with prescriptive guidelines or contracts, which places the risk of these prescriptive features being effective or not with the provider or partner. In turn, these prescriptive features can weaken the capacity for these programs to recognise the strengths of place-based approaches and local knowledge.

A model that moves away from prescription and closer to a 'high trust' model, with appropriate accountability mechanisms in place, has the capacity to empower providers (rather than the centre) to become the evidentiary authority on best-practice across various contexts. This flexibility, if coupled with strong service relationships and avenues to support the sharing of best practice across sector, could support a cycle of system improvement embedded in local responses.

It should be also noted that in certain instances outcomes-based funding arrangements may not be the most effective mechanism to support contract management. For example, this may be the case where it is difficult to adjust market-settings in a way that will incentivise providers towards the intended model or where the risks of non-delivery are particularly high.

3.5.2 Effectiveness of governance structures

A majority of stakeholders consulted have observed that while the centralised decision-making model may hold advantages in terms of ensuring consistent treatment of IEP providers and opportunities, these have not been without significant practical implications, including reduced autonomy at the coalface of regional engagement, where local employment conditions and opportunities could be maximised with better place based decision making and agency.

Lengthy processing times - both providers and NIAA regional staff consistently observed that the centralised governance model limited the ability of the sub-programs to respond to labour market opportunities in a timely manner. An example of the timeliness in the approvals process causing negative impacts for providers and regional NIAA staff is highlighted in the box below.

Case study: A provider's perspective on contract approval delays

One IEP provider stated that they had a close and productive working relationship with the local NIAA regional office, but this was threatened by subsequent delays in the contract approval decision-making process.

The provider stated that they worked collaboratively with the regional office to design their programs in line with NIAA intent and priorities, optimising the opportunity for success. They reflected that sometimes these proposals were developed in response to direct approaches from NIAA relating to opportunities. However, even through this process – **opportunities were missed due to slow decision making.**

"We've got one TAEG proposal that's sitting there with 30 funded jobs, promised \$500,000 worth of co-contribution to a grant of \$200,000 or whatever, and we've had that sitting there in the assessment stage at the National Office for the last four months. The employer is ready to go. The employer has clients, they have a viable business model, they are an Aboriginal organisation employing up to, I think around now, 30 Indigenous employees. We've more than fulfilled our brief, the employer has more than fulfilled their capacities, they've pledged that what they'll do over the next, and these are all permanent positions...And yet all they [NIAA] need to do is say yes, that's all they need to do." (TAEG provider)

The provider observed that this had several negative impacts including:

- **Time and resources wasted** in developing proposals that are ultimately missed due to timeliness *"They'll come to you for a direct approach...We'll go back and we'll put that together, put it back towards them...They're just going to sit on it... Employers aren't going to wait, they're just not going to wait. They'll go and do something else."*
- **Damaged relationships** with employers and **poorer outcomes** *"We've got to try and keep the trust of jobseekers and employers, and we look pretty silly sometimes when we can't deliver on what we're trying to do... it's about our reputation as well, because we don't overpromise, nor promise, because we know that everything's subject to being written off for a contract. But boy, oh boy, I tell you what, you wouldn't walk in under-promising [laughs] if you wanted to walk out with 30 employment starts."*

A lack of **tangible connection between policy intent, local need and the role of the programs** in meeting this gap. *"there's a fair bit of money invested in this and yet they put barriers up to us working together, they want to keep us segregated, and that makes no sense because we know that we just have people, if we can set it up so that you've got experts doing their bit, and then you make it easy for them to collaborate and work together, you'll get better outcomes. But it's not easy."*

NIAA regional staff reiterated these concerns, citing the approval process as excessively lengthy and with scope for streamlining. These stakeholders note that the current approval process generally takes between five to 12 months, and that this can cause providers to miss out on employment opportunities. Specifically, stakeholders report that:

"Decisions take months and months, even from when it's approved to getting the brief up is slow – the knowledge isn't held centrally, need to go back and forth constantly." (NIAA Regional Office)

"Knowing the length of time an approval process takes, I would not choose to engage with the NIAA." (NIAA Regional Office)

As highlighted in the quotes above, several providers and regional officers stated that the lack of timeliness in decision making, and the reduced role of regional staff in being able to meaningfully support local decision making, had led employers and other employment services to bypass the IEP in favour of alternatives.

Several providers also noted that in some instances these lengthy timelines mean they would need to commence work with an employer prior to a contract being approved so as not to miss an

opportunity they felt was in line with program intent. In this instance, providers risk undertaking work that may not ultimately be funded or meet NIAA program guidelines.

Providers stated that in certain cases, that while not ideal process, it was sometimes best to commence service provision prior to contract approval in order to maintain relationships with employers, their reputation and service viability. This could, however, place the provider at 'extreme financial risk':

"Only last week that I actually got approached by an employer, saying, 'Look, I really need some mentoring support for some clients I've placed... Can you help us out?' Well, yeah sure, however, it's got to be like this. So, we would have to do some additional comments sent to PMC with the intake form, so they can actually make a decision and come back to us to say we can mentor that program, and sometimes that process may take 3 weeks. In the meantime, the person's already started. We've been doing mentoring but we don't get paid for it. So, that was one of the issues as well. We done a lot of work and didn't get paid for it in the end run." (VTEC provider).

Future funding uncertainty – The shift to centralised decision-making resulted in reduced proactivity in regional officers to respond to local opportunities and build relationships. In several instances, this was noted by regional officers to be demotivating and disempowering to their role.

Regional officers noted that as well as timeliness issues, a key implication of the move to centralised contracting was the inability to provide guarantees to potential providers or employers as opportunities arose. It was observed that this had the potential to, and had been observed in some instances to, damage relationships with stakeholders.

"It wasn't worth promoting the program if you couldn't guarantee, couldn't say to them you've got a good chance of getting funding." (NIAA Regional Office)

Several regional officers commented that they found the current governance model disempowering, and as result – suffered motivation challenges in fulfilling their role.

"The system appears to be too centralised; this has disempowered us. Regional offices have very little power to influence what is funded. This reduces ability to react to fast-moving labour market opportunities." (NIAA Regional Office)

"Being reactive – my current role is not in the engagement space. [The shift] was more around budgetary constraints, it wasn't worth promoting the program if you couldn't guarantee, couldn't say to them you've got a good chance of getting funding. It's not our decision. It becomes tighter and tighter in terms of what we can fund. It just didn't make sense for you to do that work when there's no funding/certainty there." (NIAA Regional Office)

"Accountability structures have changed: Turned team into contract administrators, made the team more passive. Not as active in seeking opportunities. We were good at setting up an employment pathway." (NIAA Regional Office)

In line with this, regional officers also observed that the loss of control over funding allocations had resulted in a move away from proactive relationship management and opportunity generation. Staff in regional offices commented that this was in part due to the reduced autonomy in their role, and control over funding outcomes.

However, it was also observed that through the transition from DEEWR to PM&C/NIAA the role of the team had broadened to encompass a wide range of social indicators as opposed to an employment focus. While staff commented that this had the potential to support a holistic and integrated service delivery model, with Indigenous peoples at the centre, as overall resourcing for regional offices hadn't increased in a manner commensurate with scope, previous areas of focus were diluted.

"Basically, it comes down to funding, before moving into NIAA and PM&C, the funding for employment projects was organised at a state level. The state manager was allocated a budget for employment programs and they had the delegation over that. We then, as

offices promoting the programs, knew that we had that local level of commitment rather than going through the bureaucracy and approval. We were able to target employers, knowing that we could pretty much guarantee them funding if they met guidelines of the program. Now it's out of our hands at a local level, we can recommend funding, at one stage all the delegation sat with the minister, depending on what week or day it was whether it would be signed off or not." (NIAA Regional Office)

"There used to be the notion of regional budgets and targets on jobs, numbers on consultancies and market research. There was a focus on employment, but now the regional office is focused more broadly on social indicators." (NIAA Regional Office)

Reduced decision-making abilities - a centralised decision-making model reduces the capacity for the programs to be delivered through a place-based approach. Both providers, regional NIAA staff and national NIAA staff raised that the lack of contextual knowledge held by central staff was problematic in supporting place-based approaches and could result in poor decision making.

"National office used to exist to support regional, somehow this has been reversed. If you want it to be place-based, this needs to be regionally based." (NIAA Regional Office)

"In the national office we are so removed from what is actually happening...there are constant emails and requests for information between the national and regional office...I would like to see the regional manager have the authority to approve requests" (NIAA National Office)

Additionally, stakeholder consultations highlighted a disconnect between EPI Partners and VTEC/ TAEG Providers as regional offices were unable to determine the areas that EPI Partners were operating within. This meant efficiencies between the programs were lost.

Loss of corporate knowledge - several providers spoke to an issue with NIAA staff turn-over, particularly within central office, and the disruptive impact that a lack of appropriate contract hand over had:

"There has obviously been a lot of changes constantly within the personnel at NIAA. You can't control that but that has created at times difficulty because you might have agreed one thing with one particular program manager or contact. They move on but don't share really good notes about what's been discussed in the past and so not only are you rebuilding a new relationship with whoever the next person is sometimes there's a different understanding about what that contract was designed to deliver [...] there seems to be a bit of leeway in the program management from the NIAA so that has caused us, we've often felt that we've gone around in circles a lot of times and that means additional administration requirements that probably that we would otherwise needed." (EPI partner)

"We had quite a while there where we were in no man's land, we didn't actually have a contract manager, they had moved on to another role and hadn't handed us in to anyone so our emails were going unanswered and things like that and that sort of stuff. So that has been an issue in the past. There has been problematic issues early in with those programs because of lack of response from the department" (VTEC provider).

The above findings highlight the tension between a centralised or devolved governance model.

Greater empowerment of regional offices would also be expected to result in stronger partnerships between the NIAA and key program stakeholders (including employers, providers, Indigenous community members, local and state governments and adjacent service providers). Regional officers reflected that under these arrangements, the opportunity to consider employment challenges holistically and systematically is improved, allowing multi-faceted responses to be deployed in partnership with other agencies.

One NIAA regional office staff member described this kind of approach in how they work across their region:

"Our overriding questions are: what are the overall concerns of the community? Where does that fit? What needs to be done to improve the lives of Indigenous people? And

having the relationships to drive the change where it's needed. We know there are opportunities coming up in those infrastructure projects down the road [in one area of our region] but need to know how we can work with other portfolio agencies to link in...

We are jigsaw puzzle masters and need to navigate the different working parts. But [that] could be quite different for [one area] compared to [another area].” (NIAA Regional Office)

This regional office described that for particular locations and communities, they considered a range of different social indicators to understand need. From there, they could work to link in with other services (at a state or federal level of government), and then determine how to best optimise the services they could provide. This particular office commented, however, that they felt they could achieve this holistic service provision in spite of, rather than due to, the current governance arrangements which promote a more siloed and centralised approach.

It is worth noting that the above commentary is specifically focussed on TAEG and VTEC governance. EPI providers, though noting similar concerns with contract timeliness, NIAA staff turn-over and a lack of empowered relationships overtime, in general appreciated centrally managed contracts.

“NIAA was completely and utterly flexible, really dynamic, they worked in a team you know they were all, they did everything in their power to be able to facilitate our relationship and make sure that the program could continue to be successful and we did vary our contract quite significantly ... so I think that was a really good outcome but it took us a little bit of time to get to that.” (EPI partner)

“So going back to employment parity we found that it was easier to cut through all the red tape, have a deal directly with Prime Minister and Cabinet and NIAA where we could have flexibility around the nature of the training, how we do the mentoring and the retention piece, how we source and attract people into the recruitment pipeline, it's really worked for us as a company given the nature of our operations and our different business sectors if that makes sense.” (EPI partner)

Suggestion 5: Devolve more responsibility to the regional office network

For the reasons listed above, including the lengthy processing times, future funding uncertainty, reduced decision-making abilities and loss of corporate knowledge, it is suggested that the NIAA devolve more responsibility to the regional office network.

It is acknowledged that there are clearly costs and benefits associated with both centralising and decentralising programs, and that this is in effect a persistent challenge that government agencies must navigate. Further, it is noted that there are benefits to the centralised oversight of the IEP, including the ability to readily identify high and low performing providers, support the sharing of best practice, and take a systems-level view of ensuring that the program investment is well aligned to need. However, in this instance, the substantial body of evidence in favour of devolving responsibility appears to outweigh the benefits of central oversight.

Further, an effectively implemented system of devolved responsibility can incorporate accountability and monitoring mechanisms to achieve many of the same benefits noted above as being features of centralised programs. For example, the Australian Public Service Commission has published several suggestions on how devolved policy arrangements can be effectively managed, including:

- Establishing clear responsibilities and accountabilities across the different agents involved.
- Establishing a clear, shared view of the goals and objectives of the program.
- Including effective performance management frameworks to assess the performance of individual agents.
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the delivery system.

- Foster strategic conversations on the practical implications of devolving elements of service delivery.³⁸

Deloitte Access Economics' prior experience also suggests that there are highly relevant examples of programs that are sufficiently similar to the IEP that have successfully implemented a devolved delivery system. Most notably, the Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) program includes an innovative devolved decision-making approach to funding decisions.³⁹

3.6 Accountability and continual improvement

Key findings

- *It is unclear how the performance of providers flows through to contracts for delivery across the IEP. This issue is particularly acute within the EPI program, where long contracts and a lack of progressive milestones leaves the overarching performance metrics for partners unclear.*
- *The absence of a clear performance framework means that there is limited reward for high performance providers in the form of increased trust in the relationship between themselves and the NIAA or increased flexibility or certainty in funding provision.*
- *The NIAA faces significant restrictions and capability issues in accessing and utilising the program data that is collected, and there is no current mechanism through which NIAA can observe period performance of the programs, even at an overarching level. This is evident in both the implementation of the IEP, and the conduct of this evaluation.*

Oversight and governance of the IEP is required to – at a minimum, ensure that the programs are being delivered in line with intent and contractual obligations. More broadly, NIAA governance of sub-programs should work to support continual improvement of the programs and impacts for Indigenous Australians.

3.6.1 Understanding provider performance

It is unclear how the performance of providers flows through to contracts for delivery across all sub-programs. This issue is particularly acute within the EPI program, where long contracts and a lack of progressive milestones leaves the overarching performance metrics for partners unclear.

Other than payment milestones, there are limited performance metrics or assessments of providers. A lack of data pertaining to provider delivery and outcomes renders it difficult to assess provider outcomes relative to each other and across contexts, or form benchmarks or expectations for success.

Further, a reliance on milestone completions without collecting appropriate contextual data (including participant characteristics) makes it difficult to assess the extent to which a provider's performance is reflective of effectiveness as opposed to contextual influences.

3.6.2 Growing program impact through investing in high performance

Reflecting the lack of a clear performance framework, providers observed that there was limited reward for high performance regarding increased trust in the relationship between themselves and the NIAA or evidenced through increased flexibility or certainty in funding provision.

"In terms of the contract, it's been interpretations of the contract, and we like to think that we've been doing this long enough, longer than most of our contractor managers, where

³⁸Australian Public Service Commission, *Policy implementation through devolved government* (2019).

³⁹Deloitte Access Economics, *Evaluation of Skilling Queenslanders for Work* (2012). Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/evaluation-skilling-queenslanders-for-work-program.html>.

we understand the spirit of the contract, but there doesn't seem to be much alignment between the spirit of the contract, what we're all there to do, and then the interpretation of different clauses and what they mean." (VTEC provider)

Further, there are high barriers to entry in becoming an effective provider – including the significant investment required in relationship building with community, employers and service providers. The knowledge held by these providers is therefore of high value to the effective delivery of the IEP, particularly considering the intent of the IEP to support growth in effective Indigenous employment strategies across the sector. There are risks within the current contract management approach that high value providers may choose to leave the program, taking with them deep expertise and knowledge.

Improving Indigenous employment is a priority of many Australian businesses. These organisations are willing to invest – often with the support of IEP providers – in innovating, collaborating and refining strategies to improve their Indigenous employment outcomes. NIAA has the opportunity to work in partnership with these organisations, leveraging their corporate expertise and innovation, to better program outcomes. One EPI partner reflected:

"The only reason why I want to be involved with NIAA now, is about having a partnership with government so then we can just show what best practice is and hopefully they can adopt our methodologies and use it for other companies" (EPI partner).

Suggestion 6: Establish a clear performance framework for providers that encourages high-performance

The NIAA should consider how an improved provider performance framework, aligned with program intent, may support an increasingly nuanced understanding – across both the NIAA and service providers, of the effective outcomes that can be achieved. This in turn has the power to influence provider behaviour and outcomes overtime.

Further, as discussed above, recognising high-performance providers would allow the NIAA to consider ways in which these providers could be further supported to ensure their continued involvement in the program. One way of achieving this (which warrants further investigation) is an 'earned autonomy model' in which high-performance providers are granted additional levels of program flexibility.

There are a range of performance models that can be used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of which providers are adding the most value to the program participants they are serving. These include:

1. *Value-added modelling: as is done for Australian schools, this empirical technique assesses performance after controlling for the characteristics of the client intake (i.e. the starting point of those you are serving). Providers can also then be positioned on efficiency frontiers using other non-parametric techniques.*
2. *Place-based perceptions: reaffirming the importance of a more devolved model of governance, where local governance committees can assemble local impressions of provider performance (with the data) to form more holistic judgments of provider effectiveness. A running record of local intelligence on each provider could be entered into a relationship management platform by an empowered and enabled regional office(r), as is done in many private organisations managing relationships with service providers.*
3. *Participant voice: client exit surveys and post-program client-tracking over time (in keeping with the global goals of the program/policy) is an obvious and essential inclusion in judging the efficacy of providers and service provision. While it is not without challenge, it is also not without precedent in this area of policy, and is, worth investing in with the knowledge of what will and won't engage different clients. This has the added benefit of reducing the reliance on proxy outcome measures, like whether or not a participant is observed in the income support system.*
4. *Employer voice: employer 'use and views' surveys are underway at scale in Australia's skilling system broadly, and offer insight as to what could be considered for these purposes. Implementing this would also be an opportunity to encourage self-reflection of*

practice and attitudes among employers, in a confidentialised way (if necessary), to also assist in gauging the progress the policy agenda is making on that critical front.

5. *Independent assessment: at the extreme, there is always the option of independent assessment of skills and attitudes built through the course of the program. This would take a very carefully designed tool and process, with expert practitioners – ideally carefully piloted before broad application. A potential benefit of such an approach could be where it is linked to genuine forms of accreditation for the participant – where a national micro-credentialling agenda might hold some promise.*

Each of these activities is within reach of the NIAA/IEP in its next formation, and should be designed at the outset, to cohere with and reinforce the policy/program intent, and to be monitored by a parallel strategic evaluation for any unintended consequences.

A balanced scorecard or similar type approach can be the way to bring these distinct sources of information together for each individual provider – and these can be shared with providers as formative assessments for them to identify areas for improvement (which the NIAA could too assist with via connections to higher performing providers in similar contexts, elsewhere in the country).

As a final and perhaps most critical point, contracts are never complete, and policy can always be gamed. Whatever the approach to performance management in the next round of policy, it must be careful not to undermine the majority in order to control a minority of poor or egregious provider behaviour. In a way this implies simplicity, and formative insights, and again empowering local communities/regional offices to play a greater role.

3.6.3 Program review and refinement

At a higher level, the NIAA holds responsibility for the continual review and refinement of the IEP, ensuring public investment is optimised in the pursuit of sustainable employment for Indigenous Australians.

There have been several external reviews of the sub-programs, including an evaluation of the VTEC program, which was undertaken in 2015. While external review is important, internal monitoring and review is fundamental to continual program improvement. As discussed above, the lack of clear performance framework across the IEP, and associated data collection in align with priority indicators, restricts the ability of NIAA to perform this role.

Over the course of the evaluation, it has also been identified that the NIAA faces significant restrictions and capability issues in accessing and utilising the program data that is collected. Currently, IEP participant data and how this relates to employment outcomes or provider performance is not systematically collated or assessed. As such, there is no current mechanism through which the NIAA can observe periodic performance of the programs, either at a program level or even at an overarching level.

This is not just a question of data and decision clarity but also reflective of the role of the Agency itself. As an agency with centralised responsibility for Indigenous Australians it is essential that it have access to and influence over the data design and perhaps even the data sovereignty of all those intersections between government and this vulnerable cohort of Australians.

This project has been directly affected by the lack of timeliness, quality and certainty of data received from multiple separate agencies. Despite every individual officers' best intentions and the dedication of the respective agencies, delays in release and obscurity of the data sets hampered the process substantially. The absence of coordinated or accurate data not only reduces program design and evaluation clarity but also undermines the autonomy of the agency itself.

Specific commentary on data access, quality and analysis is provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

4 Program effectiveness

This chapter examines the effectiveness of the IEP in relation to the following evaluation questions:

- *to what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term?*
- *in what contexts has the program been more or less successful?*
- *what do program outcomes tell us about effective and ineffective investment?*
- *how can the value of each program be optimised within the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs?*

The discussion below presents a detailed exploration of the range of outcomes sought to be influenced by the VTEC, TAEG and EPI sub-programs. Collectively, these outcomes – spanning improvements in pre-employment skills, employer attitudes and behaviours and positive participant experiences with employment – reflect the requisite drivers of the desired overarching program impact, which is improved and sustained employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

This chapter also includes a brief assessment of the effectiveness of the investment being made in each of the sub-programs. This effectiveness is assessed in relation to how the sub-programs work together and within the broader employment system, along with how providers are selected and the associated average cost-per-outcome.

Ultimately, data limitations mean that conclusive findings on the long-term employment outcomes of the sub-programs (beyond 26-weeks) and consequently, the effectiveness of the overall investment, cannot be derived. Instead, this section aims to clearly present the analysis that could be conducted, highlighting the areas in which this is consistent or inconsistent, and identifying areas where future analysis should be conducted.

4.1 Analytical approach

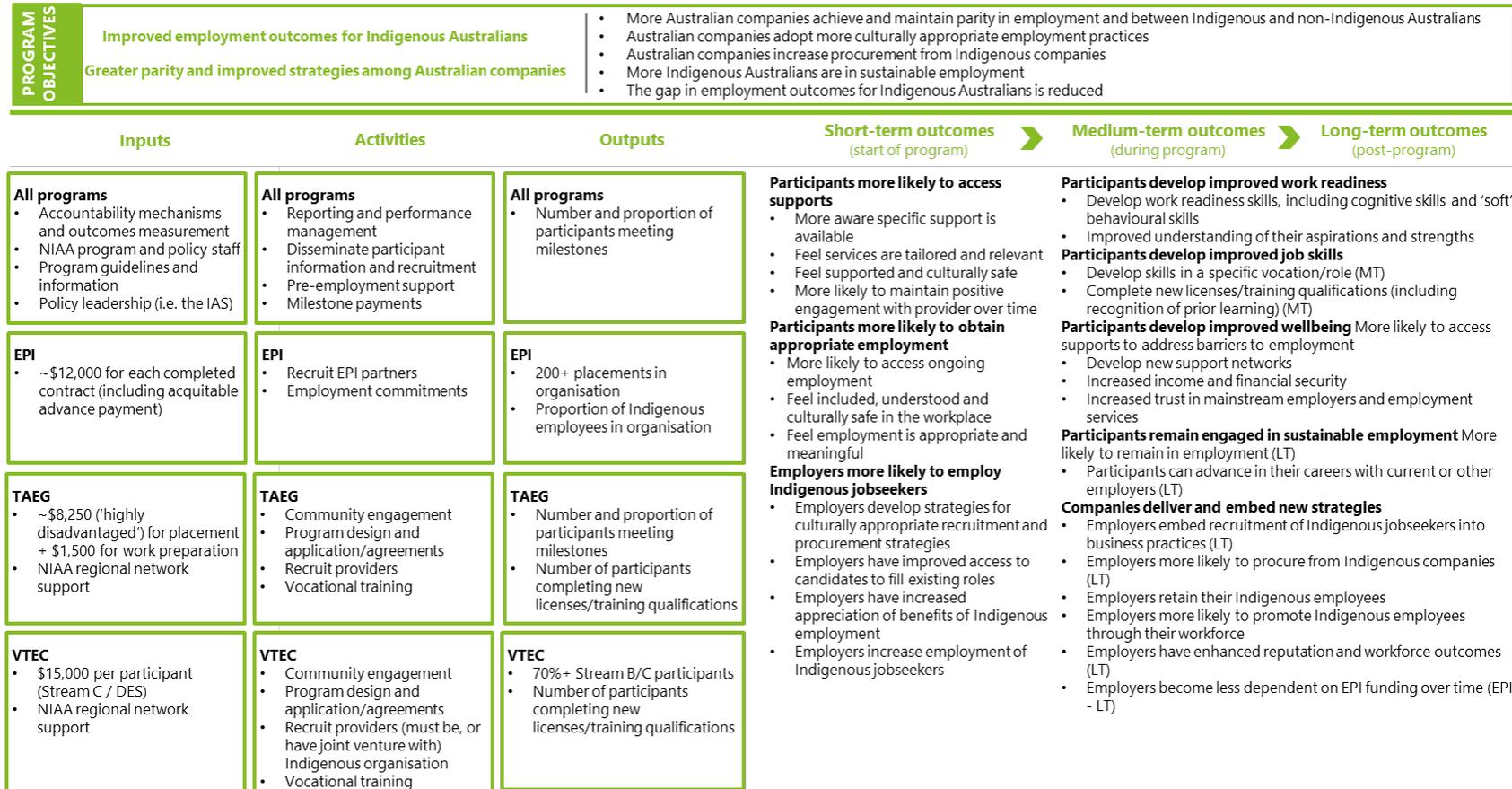
This section examines the effectiveness of the sub-programs in achieving their intended short, medium and long-term outcomes, as articulated in the program logics. The analysis in this chapter is guided by the over-arching program logic, which synthesises the intended outcomes across all three of the sub-programs and is included in Figure 4.1.

For each outcome, to the extent that it is possible, effectiveness is measured through:

- whether there is evidence that the programs have generated the intended outcome.
- what the evidence tells us about the extent to which the outcome has been generated.

Consideration is also given to which features of the programs are needed to support an outcome being realised, as well as in which contexts this outcome appears to be more or less successful.

Figure 4.1: IEP Program logic



External considerations that are beyond the direct scope of this framework, but which will have material influence over whether the objectives are met include the following (it is important to note that these factors will be able to be considered within the categories of barriers and enablers in this monitoring and evaluation framework):

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020).

Chapter 4: Effectiveness

Focus

This chapter examines the effectiveness of the IEP in relation to the following evaluation questions:

- *to what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term?*
- *in what contexts has the program been more or less successful?*
- *what do program outcomes tell us about effective and ineffective investment?*
- *how can the value of each program be optimised within the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs?*

Data sources

- Stakeholder consultations with participants, providers, partners, community representatives and NIAA representatives.
- The VTEC and TAEG provider survey.
- The Literature Scan completed for this evaluation (Appendix A)
- NIAA program data
- RED and CDP data

Findings:

Short-term outcomes

- IEP employers and partners consistently report that participating in the program supports them to increase their employment of Indigenous jobseekers.
- There is evidence to suggest that the individualised and culturally appropriate support that the IEP delivers increases the likelihood that an Indigenous jobseeker will access both employment and non-employment related support services, and commence employment.
- While identifying meaningful employment opportunities for IEP participants is a challenging element of the programs, participants interviewed have generally commented positively on their employment experiences to-date.
- VTEC and TAEG employers do not tend to implement significant new Indigenous employment practices within their businesses, instead, they rely on providers to deliver these services on an ad hoc basis.

Medium-term outcomes

- The TAEG and VTEC programs are generally successful in building participants work-readiness skills, particularly in behavioural areas such as improving participants' confidence and attitude to employment. There is limited evidence on the extent to which the EPI program has achieved this outcome.
- All three of the sub-programs appear to support participants to build job-specific skills, predominantly through on-the-job learning as opposed to completing formal qualifications.
- There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the programs can improve participants' wellbeing - both through the individualised mentoring and support they receive, and the positive impact that employment can have under the right (cultural) conditions.

Long-term outcomes

- The EPI program has the highest and least variable 26-week milestone completion rate of the sub-programs, while the TAEG and VTEC sub-programs have similar rates.
- 12+ months after program exit, the sub-programs cease to have any statistically significant difference in their ability to support participants to exit income support.
- Across the sub-programs, the 26-week milestone is associated with whether participants cease receiving income support in both the short and long-term, although further analysis is required to explore this relationship.
- EPI partners report to have begun embedding a range of new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses, however, it is unclear to what extent these changes are sustainable.
- There is little evidence to suggest that the employers of VTEC and TAEG participants have embedded significant new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses.

Chapter 4: Effectiveness

Findings:

Effective investment

- There is a substantial degree of variation in the average unit cost (to the NIAA) per activity. While this appears to be driven by clear program-specific guidelines for the VTEC and TAEG programs, this variation is less deliberate and systematic for the EPI program, raising questions about the effectiveness of this investment.
- Stakeholder consultations reveal that the IEP sub-programs do not always effectively work together, with their being instances of TAEG/VTEC providers struggling to cooperate with EPIs and, more broadly, limited knowledge sharing across the provider system.
- Given the absence or flexible nature of the program guidelines defining how the IEP is intended to work with mainstream programs, the relationships between IEP and mainstream providers appear to be highly variable and primarily driven by the intent and capability of individual organisations.
- The current system of provider funding is largely reactive, in that the NIAA must invite currently operating providers to participate in the program. This approach of 'currently operating' creates a risk that the programs are not best targeting areas of 'need' or maximising their potential impact.

Suggestions

7. Continue to invest in culturally competent individualised support and mentoring.
8. Future programs should consider ways in which employers can be encouraged and supported to meaningfully embed new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses.
9. Future programs need to clearly articulate how their objectives inform funding decisions, and what implications this has for service coverage and program impact.

4.2 Short-term outcomes

4.2.1 Participants more likely to access supports

Key finding

- *IEP employers and partners consistently report that participating in the program supports them to increase their employment of Indigenous jobseekers.*
- *There is evidence to suggest that the individualised and culturally appropriate support that the IEP delivers increases the likelihood that an Indigenous jobseeker will access both employment and non-employment related support services, and commence employment.*
- *While identifying meaningful employment opportunities for IEP participants is a challenging element of the programs, participants have generally commented positively on their employment experiences.*
- *VTEC and TAEG employers do not tend implement significant new Indigenous employment practices within their businesses, instead, they rely on providers to deliver these services on an ad hoc basis.*

As established in the evaluation literature review, Indigenous jobseekers may face several complex and intersecting barriers to workforce participation, including:

- persistently low English literacy and numeracy levels due to sustained barriers to education,⁴⁰
- the tension between 'mainstream' employment norms and expectations and Indigenous family and cultural responsibilities,⁴¹ and
- poor health, which has a strong negative relationship with employment participation.⁴²

While these barriers are highly individualised, access to support services may help to reduce these barriers and lead to employment opportunities and more sustainable workforce participation. In this vein, the intent of the IEP is to provide services that are individually tailored and culturally safe to ensure that participants are more likely to access supports. Cultural safety requires 'actions that recognise, respect and nurture the unique cultural identity of a person and safely meets their needs, expectations and rights' and involves 'working from the cultural perspective of the other person.'⁴³ These results may occur as a result of:

- participants feeling that the IEP programs are more culturally relevant and safe than mainstream employment services and so are more likely to access and engage with an IEP
- participants gaining access to a broader range of support services through the IEP than they would otherwise have access to
- participants being referred to other services providers, such as healthcare services, family violence support or housing services through their involvement in the IEP.

The three sub-programs do differ, however, in the degree to which providing access to these supports is a part of their theory of change and expected outcomes.

⁴⁰ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>.

⁴¹ Venn, D. and Biddle, N. (2018). 'Recent trends in indigenous employment' *Journal of Australian Political Economy*.

⁴² Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>.

⁴³ SafeWork (n.d). 'Culturally Safe Workplaces'. NSW Government. Accessed from: <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/safety-starts-here/our-aboriginal-program/culturally-safe-workplaces/>.

Both VTEC and TAEG are tailored to Indigenous jobseekers and activities are focused on providing individualised support through case management, and pre/post-placement. In comparison, EPI activities focus on providing tailored support during recruitment processes and general on-the-job support during employment (though some EPI partners do provide more intensive mentoring and case management). As such, it is more likely that VTEC and TAEG providers will invest more heavily in supports tailored to pre-employment barriers.

To assess whether this outcome has been met, evidence is used to determine the extent to which:

- the sub-programs create a culturally safe environment that is supportive of Indigenous jobseekers and encourages engagement.
- participation in these support activities helps participants to gain and maintain employment, and in what contexts this is more or less likely to be effective.

Program effectiveness in increasing access to supports

TAEG and VTEC providers consistently report that they deliver culturally safe programs that encourage jobseekers to access supports, stating that the activities they deliver are likely to be more Indigenous-specific and culturally tailored than that of mainstream programs.

During stakeholder consultations, TAEG and VTEC providers stated that they primarily create this culturally safe environment through the delivery of intensive and individualised mentoring with program participants. These providers emphasise that forming deep and genuine relationships with program participants is of central importance to ensuring that a level of mutual trust is developed, and that participants choose to be involved in the program. For example, one provider noted that:

"I think the whole program is culturally safe, there's no doubt about it... most VTECs that pick it up understand what that's about. It's about genuineness, and people can't feel genuineness and trust until you build that relationship with them. That takes time... But in terms of cultural appropriateness, I think that most of the VTECs that I run across, especially our own, are very culturally safe places" (VTEC provider).

This point was further validated by consultations directly with program participants, who overwhelmingly emphasise that they did feel better supported and understood in the IEP compared to mainstream programs. This suggests that the efforts of providers in this domain is translating to a tangible impact on the lived experience of participants. For example, participants noted that:

"They [VTEC provider] would actually sit down one-on-one and speak to me, ask me what I wanted to do and what I had an interest and stuff in. With [mainstream provider], they were chucking random jobs at me" (VTEC Participant)

"Yeh, I enjoy working with the [TAEG provider] because I get to work with Aboriginal people as well as the rest of the community" (TAEG Participant)

Further, consultations with TAEG and VTEC employers highlight that they view the cultural capability of providers as being a key strength of the program, and an important success factor in ensuring participants access support. Specifically, employers report that:

"Without the cultural capabilities of the provider team, I fear we would not be able to provide the same level of support to participants" (VTEC Employer).

"I had several apprentices relocate ... to commence their apprenticeships and I was very conscious they needed some extra culturally relevant support that we probably couldn't provide, the VTEC provided this" (VTEC Employer).

This provision of tailored and culturally centred supports was also observed to result in ongoing relationships (beyond the program delivery timeline) between TAEG and VTEC providers and particular jobseekers.

In these instances, the same participants would return to providers intermittently where and when support services were required. This provides a point of continuity, and arguably minimises the risk of jobseekers returning to long-term unemployment through the provision of timely and individualised support. Three separate VTECs demonstrated this:

"We've had quite a few previous candidates come back through that may have just recently finished their four-year apprenticeship. We've genuinely placed them three/four years ago and they're coming back on their own for assistance with employment again because we're the "go-to". We've done the right thing by them previously and they've got that trust in us to do it again for them" (VTEC provider).

"By [the 26-week milestone], we've already developed a really strong relationship with these participants, and we'll continue to provide that past the six months because they'll come to us when they've got an issue" (VTEC provider).

"We are still mentoring people from more than a year ago, which is great, but we are funded to mentor them for six months [...] it's not everyone that contacts us years later but some do and we are usually able to help them particularly if they have been employed during that time, it makes it easier to find them new work or whatever" (TAEG provider).

VTEC and TAEG providers report that Indigenous staff members are often better able to create a culturally safe environment that encourages participants to access supports than non-Indigenous staff. These stakeholders note that Indigenous staff can leverage their cultural understanding to develop trusting relationships with participants, which in turn, enhances participants' comfort in seeking further support. For example, providers with both a high and low representation of Indigenous staff note that:

"...It's been hard for us as a mainly non-Aboriginal organisation at times, to make participants feel that we have a genuine understanding of the barriers they are facing" (TAEG provider with a small number of Indigenous staff).

"Our managers are Indigenous people. They are related to most of those participants across the organisation. The participants feel that instant trust because there's family, there's a connection, there's culture, there's community" (VTEC provider with high number of Indigenous staff).

Suggestion 7: Continue to invest in culturally competent individualised support and mentoring

Individually tailored support and mentoring makes participants feel culturally safe, and in turn, more likely to access supports. Stakeholder consultations consistently emphasised that delivering this support in a culturally competent manner is a key success factor.

Future iterations of the programs should continue to invest in individualised support and mentoring, noting that the existing form of the program has been generally successful in achieving this outcome. In addition, processes should be put in place to encourage the use of Indigenous mentors wherever feasible, or if this is not practical, non-Indigenous mentors who have a proven track-record of cultural competency in service delivery. As Professor Deen Sanders OAM notes teaching, mentoring and support are not all the same thing:

"On a spectrum of educational experiences and teaching tools, it is common to place them on a range from didactic (teacher/mentor out front) experiences to student-led (teacher check in) experiences. As a general principle this spectrum doesn't neatly match the Indigenous cultural processes of learning, which have tended to value the 'side by side', experiential form of learning."

This point further reinforces the importance of Indigenous mentors and in particular location (place) based mentors.

Professor Sanders further notes that:

"teaching and training methodologies have prioritised the assimilation of Indigenous people into non-Indigenous cultures⁴⁴ utilising non-Indigenous models of engagement. For Indigenous Australians, mentoring is not only an instructional methodology but an exercise in relationality, where 'relationality' is a perspective of Indigenous culture that anchors experience (living and learning) in the connections between people and all other things, including country⁴⁵

Mentoring for Indigenous Australians then, as a practice of support and instruction, is most successful when it is anchored in relationships, in relationality, where bonds and connections are made and anchored in cultural concepts of community and self. Put simply, Indigenous mentors are doing more in the act of mentoring than mere mentoring. They are building connectivity to new knowledge and opportunity but also strengthening the individual and their connection to culture, country and confidence."

Investing in the development of Indigenous mentors is an investment in the long term success of Indigenous employment in a way that values and strengthens cultural value for all participants.

Providers emphasised that having long-standing relationships with the communities in which they operate helps build trust and allows them to offer a valuable continuity of service. For example, one VTEC provider emphasised that operating in the same remote community for over 20 years means that the local Indigenous community has a strong level of trust and appreciation for the work the provider does. The provider noted that:

"Our strength lies in our ability to work very closely with a lot of community organisations. Firstly, with Aboriginal organisations and secondly with other organisations who can assist us with our program. And we've got a good name, we've got a good reputation because we listen and we work with and we're immersed in the community at all levels" (VTEC provider).

Furthermore, the provider argued that this enables them to provide continuity of service to the community, in that they can formally or informally work with the same participants multiple times over several years.

On balance, stakeholder consultations with providers and participants suggest that while providers do make referrals to other services, it is not a central feature of the programs and does not occur in most instances. Providers generally emphasise that this is because most participants' barriers to employment could be addressed by the provider organisation itself (e.g. building confidence and basic work readiness skills) and that it was only where a specific skillset was required that a referral may be made. For example, one provider noted that:

"And another participant [was referred to and] himself into drug and alcohol rehab... we see that as a result of his participation in the program because he went to, when he finished it, he went to get serious help in a long term program of drug and alcohol management. And so that was an outcome, it's not a job but it's sort of trying to get his life together kind of outcome. (VTEC provider)

However, some caution should be taken in interpreting this result, as it is also possible that in some instances providers do not have a clear incentive to make referrals to other organisations. For example, a provider may refer a participant to another organisation aimed at addressing long-term barriers to unemployment (such as mental health challenges or alcohol/drug issues), and while this

⁴⁴ Luke, A. (2009). On Indigenous education. *Teaching Education* 20, no. 1: 1–5.

⁴⁵ Bawaka Country including, S.Wright, S.Suchet-Pearson, K.Lloyd, L.Burarrwanga, R.Ganambarr, M.Ganambarr-Stubbs, B. Ganambarr, D. Maymuru and M. Graham, 'Everything Is Love: Mobilising Knowledges, Identities, and Places as Bawaka', in N.Gombay and M.Palomino-Schalscha (eds), *Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces: The Politics of Intertwined Relations* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 51–71.

may benefit the participant it may not increase the likelihood of meeting the immediate employment outcomes for which the provider organisation is funded.

4.2.2 Participants more likely to obtain appropriate employment

The effectiveness of an Indigenous employment program relies on cultural sensitivity from the job identification stage, all the way through to recruitment, training and retention. There are many steps in the employment process that rely on an individual feeling welcome and able to participate, as well as recognising where employment opportunities can meet individual aspirations.⁴⁶

In relation to accessing employment, there are several barriers that may impact on a candidate's successful journey through the recruitment process, including:

- not understanding the process, how to commence or how to access assistance
- not having continued support to assist in the process
- feeling uncomfortable with a formal 'mainstream' process
- not responding to the 'mainstream' job advertisements.⁴⁷

This indicates that best practice Indigenous employment practices would involve established recruitment processes that allow candidates safe, clear and welcoming access to potential roles.

Beyond practical barriers to accessing employment opportunities, defining 'appropriate' employment adds an additional complexity. In this analysis, 'appropriate employment' is defined as gaining employment that is aligned with an individual's skills, aspirations and strengths – noting that for Indigenous Australians, this is likely to be differentiated from mainstream or Western notions of employment aspirations and skills.

The process of obtaining appropriate employment, beyond simply employment in and of itself, requires planning, reflection and support to help jobseekers to develop skills that match with their intended job and better understand the value they wish to derive from work, as well as the skills they want to deploy and develop. Ultimately, the appropriateness of employment obtained would be evidenced through the tenure and satisfaction of a jobseeker with their place of employment.

While the IEP does not necessarily focus on resolving the tension between Western and Indigenous perspectives on what constitutes meaningful employment, all of the programs intend to create more culturally sensitive workplaces and hiring practices that enable Indigenous candidates to have a greater chance of obtaining employment. Beyond this, VTEC and TAEG aim to develop participant's understanding of their own aspirations and strengths, educate and support participants in how to navigate employment opportunities, and facilitate the connection between jobseekers and employers.

To assess whether this outcome has been met, evidence is used to establish the extent to which:

- employment commencements have achieved their target levels
- program participants are more likely to commence employment as a result of their involvement in the IEP
- VTEC and TAEG employer change their recruitment processes and workplace culture to allow candidates to feel included, understood and culturally safe. *EPI partners are discussed in Section*

⁴⁶ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*; Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohoar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>; GenerationOne. (2011). 'Walk in My Shoes: Employer experiences of barriers and drivers in the employment cycle for Indigenous Australians'.

⁴⁷ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*; Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohoar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>; GenerationOne. (2011). 'Walk in My Shoes: Employer experiences of barriers and drivers in the employment cycle for Indigenous Australians'.

3.4.2 as refinements to workplace processes in these instances is more generally part of a longer and embedded change strategy.

- participants feel their employment is appropriate and meaningful to them.

Program effectiveness in supporting the outcome

From 2014-19, there were over 27,000 employment commencements as part of the IEP. While specific commencement targets do not appear to be clearly defined for each of the sub-programs, this total appears to be broadly in line with target levels (with the exception of EPI) (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Summary of IEP commencements and targets

| Program | Employment commencements | Target |
|---------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| VTEC | 11,731 | 7,500 (No date set) |
| TAEG | 8,320 | Not reported |
| EPI | 7,470 | 20,000 (by 2020) |

Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019). Note: The total volume of employment commencements presented here includes instances where a participant has commenced employment multiple times. The total volume of unique employment commencements over this period is estimated at 22,468.

During stakeholder consultations participants reported that they are more likely to commence employment through the IEP than they would through mainstream programs. These participants noted that on balance IEP providers delivered more individualised and culturally appropriate support than they received at mainstream providers, and that in particular IEP providers paid greater attention to understanding their unique aspirations and strengths. For example, participants stated that:

"They [the mainstream provider] don't listen to what you're interested in. But it's different with these people [VTEC provider]" (VTEC Participant)

"So I came to [VTEC provider] I would say two years ago. And it was just through word of mouth that I came in contact with [VTEC provider]. And when I first came here, everybody was really welcoming and within two weeks, they got me one of my first jobs. And it was actually pretty good." (VTEC Participant)

However, it should be noted that this finding could not be validated with a large number of program participants, as not all participants had had experiences with mainstream providers or were willing to comment on the differences between the IEP and mainstream service delivery.

However, there is little evidence to suggest that VTEC and TAEG employers implement significant *new* Indigenous employment practices within their business. There may be self-selection biases in this, as it is likely that only those with particular interest and familiarity working with Indigenous Australians prioritised involvement in these initiatives. In these instances, they are likely to have greater ability to provide cultural safety and adjustments. It also appears to be due to the fact that employers rely on the Indigenous employment expertise of providers, and hence do not focus on embedding the same practices, and building the same capability, internally. For example, as one VTEC employer reflected:

"We would struggle to bring the same services that [the provider] deliver internally into the business. Without the economies of scale and the expertise that they have, it would just be too hard."

Suggestion 8: Future programs should consider ways in which all employers can be encouraged and supported to meaningfully embed new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses..

"The goal of increasing Indigenous employment participation should not merely be a matter of seeking representative employment outcomes or parity.

Indigenous Australia is at great pains to say that "Closing the Gap" is not merely a one-way street where Indigenous Australians have to become more aligned to Non-Indigenous Australia. It is an exchange of process, and there is a mutual learning and benefit to be gained from Non-Indigenous Australia embracing the lessons of Indigenous Australia about how to thrive in this landscape.

The same applies in the employment space, where Indigenous Australia has much to teach Non-Indigenous employers about ways of working, about relationships in community and about success. In this regard we consider that those employers that approach the employment of Indigenous Australians as the receiving of a gift, rather than the giving of one are the ones most likely to get the full benefit of change and opportunity.

This is a radical departure from the 'welfare' or deficit framing that typifies most engagements with Indigenous Australians. This is played out in employment programs and even in Reconciliation Action Plans, where in many instances, RAP's act as a vehicle for doing social good, rather than as a tool for employers to learn and change those behaviours and systems that stop them from engaging deeply with the benefits of bringing Indigenous Australians into their workplace.

What we understand from reports such as Gari Yala is that it is not sufficient for organisations to merely have RAP's or employ Indigenous Australians, they will only thrive if they are willing to engage respectfully and learn from their Indigenous Australian employees.

To understand how this sharing of responsibility can best be achieved, and employers can embed new employment practices, a genuine co-design process involving both Indigenous Australians and successful employers needs to be conducted. This co-design process will provide examples of small-scale successes that can be scaled-up to drive broader, system-level change." (Professor Deen Sanders OAM)

The *Gari Yala* report identified the need within some employers to explore the practice of inclusion in greater depth. The report found that Indigenous employees working within organisations that failed to embed culturally safe practices were less likely to be satisfied with their job, less likely to recommend their workplace to others and would be more likely to leave their organisation in the following year. This indicates that embedding cultural practices has benefits for both employees and employers.⁴⁸

Consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders suggest that identifying meaningful employment opportunities for IEP participants is a critical but challenging element of the programs. These stakeholder generally alluded to similar themes to those discussed in the literature review for this project, that is, differing notions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on the role, purpose and nature of employment, along with the challenges of finding employment opportunities in remote communities. For example, NIAA Regional Staff and Indigenous community leaders note that:

"Some Indigenous jobseekers just don't feel comfortable working at mining, but at times, those might be the only employment opportunities that are available" (NIAA Regional Office Staff).

"The [CDP] job providers, currently out bush are not creating engaging opportunities for people. If the jobs they're providing are not meaningful, they're not going to do it. If [CDP] is creating opportunities for people that they aren't passionate about, then it's not doing anything. Because we all know, when we don't want to do something, we don't do it. So we can't have different

⁴⁸Diversity Council Australia (2020). 'Gari Yala – Speak the Truth', Synopsis report. Accessed from: https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca_synopsisreport_web_0.pdf.

rules for different people. I don't know if the NIAA are programs are any better, but I don't think they're engaging with the community members to find out" (Indigenous Community Leader).

Consultations directly with VTEC and TAEG participants reveal that they generally reflect positively on the type of work they are engaged in through the programs, reporting that they find it to be either directly meaningful or a positive 'stepping stone' for them to move on to other employment opportunities. For example, participants note that:

"Previously I did not really have the most meaningful work. I was doing heaps of different jobs. I was doing hospitality, landscaping, air-conditioning mechanic, childcare and just, yeah, heaps of stuff. And then, I got a new [TAEG] placement around March last year. It's been pretty good." (TAEG Participant)

"Look I don't know if this is really what I want to do forever [hospitality], but it's definitely a good place to work, and I know that. They make you feel welcome, and you get to be surrounded by culture. So yeh, I can definitely see the value in being here" (TAEG Participant)

"I enjoy it [the placement] because I get to work with Aboriginal people as well as the rest of the community. I think that's one of the main reasons why I got into childcare" (VTEC Participant)

"I'm just so passionate with my job and what I do. I feel like I'm actually doing good. I'm really happy that I'm up here and doing this and if I can contribute even five percent towards what's going on I'm happy with that" (VTEC Participant).

This evidence suggests that participants' level of satisfaction with their employment placement can be derived from a variety of sources, commonly associated with engaging closely with their local community and making a positive impact.

Finally, it is recognised that given that the IEP focus on supporting labour supply (via upskilling participants and overcoming barriers employment) instead of stimulating labour demand, providers are limited in their ability to consistently create meaningful employment opportunities for participants. For example, during stakeholder consultations, several providers in remote and regional areas noted that they are heavily restricted by the local labour market in terms of what employment opportunities are available for them to offer participants.

Indigenous leadership comment on meaningful employment and measures of unemployment.

There is clear opportunity to develop a new definition of meaningful employment for Indigenous Australians. One that is referenced as a form of work that allows a person to work towards their personal aspirations, meet their community obligations and participate in their cultural expectation. It may be different for each person and should be negotiated individually (person centred).

COVID-19 provides us with illustration of why 'employment' should also not be measured on the simplistic spectrum of "not being in receipt of unemployment or other non-work benefits". At the commencement of the pandemic many of our people prioritised caring for their family and community by returning to homelands and/or pooling whatever forms of income were available, so as to reduce their need to attend social services and Centrelink facilities. Even though this may have had the statistical effect of making them less visible to the welfare systems, they were no more employed then before the pandemic. In reality it is just another form of being invisible from the system.

Professor Deen Sanders OAM

4.2.3 Employers more likely to employ Indigenous jobseekers

There are a number of barriers (real or perceived) that employers face when aiming to increase their Indigenous workforce, including candidate job-readiness, lack of organisational awareness and inclusive culture, limited number of Indigenous candidates, and channels to reach Indigenous

candidates or support for employers.⁴⁹ While these barriers are highly contextual for each employer, reducing these barriers may enable an employer to increase and sustain their Indigenous workforce.

All of the sub-programs are designed to overcome employer barriers to recruiting and retaining Indigenous candidates, but they do so via different mechanisms and with different expected outcomes. Both VTEC and TAEG support employers by improving their access to Indigenous candidates to fill existing roles, as well as by providing support for participants in transitioning to the workplace (reducing risk for employers).

In contrast, the EPI program does not directly offer a support mechanism for employers. Instead, the program focuses on employers making corporate commitments to reach parity employment targets and to embed workplace strategies that will enable them to reach this target.

To assess whether this outcome has been met, evidence needs to establish:

- whether participating in the IEP has increased employers' access to and employment of Indigenous jobseekers.

Program effectiveness in supporting the outcome

Consultations with VTEC and TAEG employers demonstrate that anecdotally the programs are supporting businesses to access and employ more Indigenous jobseekers; however, in the absence of employer-level data this cannot be quantitatively validated.

VTEC and TAEG employers report that participating in the IEP improved their ability to work with Indigenous jobseekers along all stages of the recruitment and employment journey. For example, employers note that working with TAEG and VTEC providers improves:

- their access to Indigenous jobseekers, as providers often have an extensive network of relationships with Indigenous communities which allows them to refer suitable candidates. Employers note that this is particularly valuable when providers are able to refer Indigenous jobseekers who are suitable for open positions, including having all of their required supporting documents, such as birth certificate and tax file number
"Because they are working with so many organisations and communities, they've already got relationships in places where we may not have. So they're assisting with those introductions as well. I think that's been a really strong part of the way that we work together" (VTEC Employer).
- their ability to support Indigenous staff during their on boarding process and ongoing employment. Employers generally note that the individualised mentoring and support that providers deliver is critical to supporting Indigenous staff during the start of their employment journey, and that they would generally be unable to deliver the same level of culturally sensitive support without providers.
"I've got [our VTEC] mentoring them and constantly ringing and asking how they're going. It is that communication, making sure that, you might have someone that has got family that have just passed away and not being able to understand culturally how that happens and how it works, and what they need to do with ceremonies and things like that" (VTEC Employer).
- improving the level of cultural understanding and capability, through cultural awareness training and more general support
"The managers really need that coaching, and if I don't have a really good manager that really understands and really puts that effort into making sure it happens, then it's not going to work. So that's where [VTECs] are great, not just working with our new hires, but also working with the

⁴⁹ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*; Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohoar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>; GenerationOne. (2011). 'Walk in My Shoes: Employer experiences of barriers and drivers in the employment cycle for Indigenous Australians'.

managers and making sure that the needs of our new hires are met and that we have an understanding about the different needs” (VTEC Employer).

- their understanding of the employment, wage and training subsidy systems. For example, during employer focus groups, two stakeholders noted that the VTEC provider they had worked with provided valuable advice on the different wage and training subsidies that are available to organisations that hire Indigenous staff members

“I don’t know if this is the part for it, but we’ve also been fortunate to benefit from their skills and expertise in understanding wage subsidies and training subsidies and all of the other benefits or supports that are available to organisations when working with an Aboriginal workforce” (VTEC employer).

Provider and employer consultations suggest that TAEG and VTEC participants are more likely to obtain employment opportunities if employers exhibit a degree of flexibility in their hiring process and try and accommodate the needs of Indigenous jobseekers. For example, this may include allowing Indigenous candidates to:

- apply for a position even if they do not have all the required identification documents, such as their birth certificate, tax file number or driver’s license
- attend an interview with their mentor or a representative from the provider agency
- have a degree of flexibility in their working hours, such that they can participate in employment while still meeting community, family or cultural obligations.

EPI partners also report that participating in the program enhances their ability to employ Indigenous jobseekers, primarily through providing them with the funding and organisational focus required to expand their internal Indigenous employment programs and overcome the barriers that might exist to employing Indigenous jobseekers. These stakeholders emphasise that irrespective of the funding the program delivers, the public commitment of the organisations’ leadership to achieve the target of Indigenous employment parity can create the momentum and focus required for management to prioritise the initiative.

“Joining the EPI was like taking a very public pledge...it ensured the CEO and the whole leadership team were behind it, and that the whole organisation stayed focus on the target” (EPI partner).

EPI partners also report that the program enhances their capacity to employ Indigenous jobseekers by providing them with the funding required to establish the appropriate infrastructure and systems to support these jobseekers. Section 3.4.2 provides a detailed overview of the support measures that EPI partners typically embed in their organisation to support Indigenous jobseekers.

EPI partners observed that employing Indigenous jobseekers, particularly those who may be relatively inexperienced in the workplace, can incur additional costs for businesses, and that the EPI program provides the funding that is required to compensate businesses for this. For example, one EPI partner stated that:

“The funding is what allowed us to make the commitment. The commercial reality would stop a CEO from making this commitment without the funding” (EPI partner).

Other EPI partners commented that these additional costs may include:

- hiring additional staff members in recruitment or support teams to identify, on-board and support Indigenous participants
- over-resourcing teams, if managers believe that Indigenous jobseekers may struggle to hit performance targets when starting a new and unfamiliar job
- site managers dedicating additional time to coaching and mentoring program participants.

It should be noted that in a small number of participant and community consultations stakeholders report that certain employers (both those involved in the IEP and in the broader community) may

hold racist views and ingrained beliefs about Indigenous workers that limit their employment of Indigenous jobseekers. For example, stakeholders note that:

"Yeah, the community is definitely still racist. I mean, there is a reason you don't see many Indigenous faces working at any of the shops around here [including an EPI Partner]"

"To me, it's racism. A lot of young people don't even think they can get a job around here, they think they can only work at the Aboriginal Co-op"

Importantly, while these views were only explicitly expressed in three consultations (from two different regions), given the sensitive nature of this topic and a general unwillingness for participants to speak of it, it is likely that other stakeholders may have had similar experiences but did not feel comfortable expressing this view.

While the IEP is unlikely to have an immediate impact on community-wide attitudes towards Indigenous Australians (given how deeply embedded these perspectives may be), the programs may have some ability to drive longer-term change, by creating positive employment experiences for participants and employers.

4.3 Medium-term outcomes

4.3.1 Participants develop improved work readiness and foundational skills

Key finding

- *The TAEG and VTEC programs are generally successful in building participants work-readiness skills, particularly in behavioural areas such as improving participants' confidence and attitude to employment. There is limited evidence on the extent to which the EPI program has achieved this outcome.*
- *All three of the sub-programs appear to support participants to build job-specific skills, predominantly through on-the-job learning as opposed to completing formal qualifications.*
- *There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the programs can improve participants' wellbeing - both through the individualised mentoring and support they receive, and the positive impact that employment can have under the right (cultural) conditions.*

Work readiness training is intended to overcome the structural barriers to employment that an individual may face by building the fundamental capabilities required for effective workplace and community participation, including areas such as:

- English language training
- literacy and numeracy skills
- job search and application skills
- training in basic, general skills required for the workplace (such as IT)
- interpersonal skills and time management
- introduction to workplace expectations relating to working in teams, working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, behaviour and dress code
- assistance in overcoming barriers to work (such as lack of transport, childcare).⁵⁰

For all of the sub-programs, work-readiness training aims to support the development of cognitive and soft/behavioural skills and help participants understand their aspirations and strengths. While

⁵⁰ Borland, J., Considine, M., Kalb, G. and Ribar, D. (2016). 'What Are Best-Practice Programs for Jobseekers Facing High Barriers to Unemployment?' *Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research*.

the aims are the same, programs differ in the activities that they will utilise to reach these objectives. For instance, TAEG is funded to provide work preparation support and structured mentoring and may provide referrals to job-readiness support services. In comparison, VTEC offers case management, support to prepare for a work placement and may offer referrals to job-readiness support services. Finally, EPI partners may provide work readiness support during recruitment (though not all partners do).

To establish whether this outcome has been met, evidence needs to establish:

- the effectiveness of the supports offered by providers/partners in improving participants' work-readiness skills.

Program effectiveness in supporting work-readiness

Providers, employers and partners across all three of the sub-programs spoke positively regarding the effectiveness of the supports delivered by the programs in building participants' work-readiness skills and helping participants achieve positive employment outcomes.

Consultations suggest that this improvement in work-readiness skills is primarily a result of the extensive pre-employment support that providers deliver. As discussed in detail in Section 3.2.1, pre-employment support is a central element of the TAEG and VTEC programs and involves the delivery of a wide range of supports, including individual mentoring and case management.

The provider survey reveals that the most cited benefit of both the VTEC and TAEG programs is an improvement in participants' level of confidence and self-belief. This is a key behavioural work-readiness skill that is anticipated to support participants' ability to effectively operate in the workplace. Specifically, providers observe that:

"We see the confidence and improvement in the participants. More outgoing, confident and able to integrate into a workforce." (TAEG provider)

"We are only a new program, but we see significant growth and development in individuals which we have supported to gain employment. Individual report increased feelings of confidence, esteem and satisfaction. Individuals report a knock-on improvement to other areas of their life" (TAEG provider)

TAEG providers were 12 percentage points more likely to mention this benefit than VTEC providers (46% compared to 34% from a free-text question). This difference may reflect TAEG's focus on building basic foundational skills (such as literacy, numeracy and aspiration building) which is expected to have a significant impact on participants overall capability, and hence their feeling of confidence.

Beyond this, providers also note that the TAEG and VTEC programs can improve participants overall outlook and attitude towards employment by creating a supportive environment and positive experience. They report that creating this can overcome the negative attitudes that participants may have developed towards employment as a consequence of experiences with demanding employers or culturally insensitive workplaces. For example, providers note that:

"What [participants] need [during pre-employment support] is this soft place to work where it's not really about how quickly you can produce something but, about a happy, fun environment. Doing it this way means that participants actually learn how to work, and they develop a better attitude to what work should be like" (TAEG Provider)

"A lot of Aboriginal people didn't have the skills, you know, their education was limited because they come from the Mission to this town. That's why the mentoring is so important, they learn that they can learn new skills and that work can be a good thing" (VTEC Provider)

Consultations with participants and employers suggest that the VTEC and TAEG programs can be successful in building participants literacy and numeracy skills, although this is generally not one of the leading outcomes these stakeholders note. It appears that while a significant portion of providers deliver literacy and numeracy training (see Section 3.2.1) this support is generally less intense than

that delivered to build participants overall confidence and work preparedness, and hence the outcomes in this domain are also less pronounced.

VTEC and TAEG providers emphasise that the literacy and numeracy training they deliver (or provide referrals to) is intended to be used strategically to fill specific skill gaps, as opposed to a generic offering that is delivered to all participants. Further, it is noted that while this training may not be broadly delivered, it can be highly successful in overcoming certain participants barriers, for example:

"For instance, we had a participant who absolutely loves his job, his employer loved him, but he was just lacking a little bit of numeracy. Because he was doing a warehousing job, he needed to improve that numeracy so he was placed into the STEPS program and they've kept him and he's completed his 26 weeks. So that was a success story." (TAEG Participant)

There was no direct evidence from EPI Partners or participants that the program led to an improvement in literacy or numeracy skills. As discussed in Section 3.2.1, this broadly aligns with the program guidelines, and EPI's focus on direct employment instead of formal training.

Providers note that the level of motivation of participants to gain employment is a critical factor in determining the extent to which participants develop work-readiness and employability skills. For example, providers note that:

"The program works best for people that actually want a job and are looking for it. It's those ones who actually want to learn skills and are just looking for that support to get there – they get the best outcomes." (VTEC provider)

"Motivation is the biggest factor. Particularly if participants are at a stage in life when they have commitments and they need employment, then they will put in the effort to learn those basic skills" (TAEG Provider)

4.3.2 Participants develop improved job skills

In contrast to work-readiness training/support, job-specific training is focused on building the specific skills required to gain employment in a particular job.

For those facing long-term structural barriers to employment, job-specific training in the form of accredited training, work experience and job-placements is required in addition to job-readiness training.⁵¹ This is because significantly disadvantaged jobseekers may be excluded from labour market opportunities due to an absence of both work readiness skills as well as formal training and qualifications. Further, the development of job-specific skills can help prepare jobseekers for the employment demands of their local labour market, and hence ensure that they possess the relevant and in-demand skills.

The IEP intends to develop participants' job skills via supporting participants to complete on-the-job training and/or formal qualifications. By definition, the on-the-job skills that participants acquire may be in any of the occupation areas where participants complete a placement. Examples of the types of formal qualifications delivered by VTECs, EPIs or TAEGs (or via an external RTO) include:

- Certificate II or III in Hospitality
- Certificate I, II or II in Construction
- Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

While all of the sub-programs have improved job skills as an objective, the design of the programs may mean that they prioritise this aspect of the training more or less. For example, VTEC is a deliberate job-skills training program where participants are matched to roles upon entry into the program and receive training specific to their future role. In contrast, the TAEG program is more flexible and may not have an employment opportunity directly attached to the program. Consequently, the program may have less of a focus on job-specific training, and a greater emphasis

⁵¹ Caddy, I. and Mortimer, D. (2012). 'Solving' Unemployment: An analysis of two Australian policy initiatives', *International Employment Relations Review*.

on broad employability skills. Finally, the EPI program is highly employment focussed in nature, and generally involves extensive on-the-job training, potentially supplemented with formal training courses.

To establish whether this outcome has been met, evidence needs to establish:

- the effectiveness of the supports offered by providers/partners in improving participants job skills.

Program effectiveness in supporting this outcome

Consultations suggest that providers and partners across all three sub-programs believe that participants learn valuable job-specific skills through the programs, predominantly through on-the-job training. These stakeholders note that these often include highly transferrable and in-demand skills that improve participants employability beyond the programs, noting that:

"We've had some amazing successes around trialling innovative, different ways of doing training initiatives in skillsets, full quals and often on the job" (EPI Partner)

"Even if participants leave the employer, the skills they learn help them move on to other things." (VTEC Provider)

"I think a lot of the positions here build transferable skills, so even sometimes at the end of the trainee, if there isn't a position available, we've seen participants jump into other roles" (VTEC Provider)

This finding was further validated by consultations with participants, who in several instances emphasised that they developed useful job-specific skills through the programs, reporting that:

"Yeh I love working in the kitchen here. I never really liked being at school because I just had to sit in a classroom all day, but here I can be busy and on my feet all day. I reckon working here and set me up to working in other kitchens in the future too, that's definitely what I want to do" (TAEG Participant)

"I've definitely learnt customer service skills in this job...look I don't really know if it's what I want to do forever, but I do like working with people, and I think I've gotten a lot more confident in how I can deal with people now so that I can actually get those sort of jobs. Maybe in sales for example" (TAEG Participant)

This evidence also suggests that the extent to which participants acquire job-specific skills may be linked to their level of interest in their placement occupation. That is, participants with a genuine interest in their industry of employment may be more motivated to develop job-specific skills. This further reaffirms the finding identified in Section 4.3.2 that matching participants with employment opportunities that they find engaging and meaningful is a key success factor for the program.

The provider survey reveals that 79% and 55% of TAEG and VTEC participants respectively complete the vocational education training courses they commence. The survey suggests that there are a wide range of reasons – predominantly centred around outside disruptions to participants learning - that lead participants to not complete the formal vocational training courses that they commence. For example, the most cited reasons included:

- family and cultural obligations preventing participants from consistently attending training
- physical or mental health issues
- a lack of available transport
- participants moving or relocating.

To a lesser extent, providers also note that several training-specific challenges can lead to participants not completing courses, including participants:

- lacking the basic foundational skills required to engage with vocational training
- having little interest in the theoretical or classroom aspects of training courses, with participants having a strong preference for more applied or hands-on learning.

However, consultations with a wide range of stakeholders reveal that there are mixed perspectives on whether the attainment of formal vocational education and training qualifications has a meaningful impact on participants employability. For example, several stakeholders argue that these qualifications do not help Indigenous jobseekers find employment as they do not address the fundamental barriers that participants likely face to gaining employment, such as employer discrimination and a lack of workplace familiarity, noting that:

"I always say that my people have more qualifications than anyone else when they are going for a job, that's not the issue. The issue is the community and employers themselves...they lack the cultural capability and sensitivity to know how to employ Indigenous people" (Indigenous Community Leader)

"I'm having to complete my certificate at the moment, and my mentor tells me it will help me do my job better, but it just doesn't. I don't really see how it will help me at all" (VTEC Participant).

Conversely, at least one provider noted that the attainment of certain in-demand vocational qualifications can enhance the overall employability of participants, reporting that:

"Completing forklift training, confined space training, working at heights training and these sorts of things... are good skills for later. So even if they don't work out here, they're very good skills to take away and earn good money" (TAEG provider).

Taken together, these competing perspectives suggest that care should be taken when encouraging participants to complete qualifications to ensure that the courses are both highly in-demand, relevant and of direct interest to the jobseeker.⁴

4.3.3 Participants develop improved wellbeing

While there is no single definition of wellbeing, the concept is generally understood to mean the presence of positive emotions, satisfaction with life, fulfilment and a state of physical and mental good health.⁵² Wellbeing is generally influenced by a wide range of factors, including individuals health, relationships with others and availability and access to basic resources. Given the inherently subjective nature of the concept, wellbeing is typically measured by self-reports.⁵³

Research such as the *Mayi Kuwayu Study: the National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing* have expanded and adapted this concept to an Indigenous context. The study considers the correlations and linkages between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts and practices such as connection to country, cultural practices, spirituality and language use.⁵⁴

An individual's employment status is also likely to impact their wellbeing. For example, studies suggest that paid employment is critical to individual wellbeing by providing access to resources, as well as fostering a sense of meaning and purpose.⁵⁵ Further, unemployment has been associated

⁵² 'Well-being concepts', *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (n.d.) <<https://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm#three>>.

⁵³ 'Well-being concepts', *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (n.d.) <<https://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm#three>>.

⁵⁴ 'Mayi Kuwayu', *The National Study of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing*, <<https://mkstudy.com.au/>>.

⁵⁵ Warr P. Well-being in the workplace. In: D Kahneman, E Diener, N Schwarz (eds.) *Well-Being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications; 2003:392–412.

with lower levels of wellbeing both in the short and long-term.⁵⁶ However, the caveat to this, is that, for employment to have a positive impact on wellbeing, employers must be culturally competent and provide a safe and welcoming environment. The *Gari Yala* report found that culturally unsafe workplaces significantly decreased Indigenous workers' wellbeing and retention.⁵⁷

The IEP is intended to improve the wellbeing of program participants by:

- addressing broad ranging barriers to employment (including health, housing, confidence etc.)
- supporting participants to develop new support networks
- increasing participants' income and financial security
- increasing participants' trust in mainstream employment and employment services.

To establish whether this outcome has been met, evidence needs to establish:

- the extent to which participants report that their wellbeing has improved over the course of the program
- the aspects of the program or employment that participants identify has had the greatest impact on their wellbeing
- the extent to which improvements in wellbeing enable participants to obtain and maintain employment.

Program effectiveness in supporting this outcome

The sub-programs do not measure participant wellbeing in a systematic or rigorous manner, meaning that there is limited visibility over the effectiveness of the programs in achieving this outcome.

Further, this means that any measurement of participant wellbeing will inevitably rely on self-reported measures, which may be influenced by subjectivity biases as well as participants reluctance to disclose sensitive information.

Provider consultations suggest that IEP participants, particularly in VTEC and TAEG, enter the program with highly variable levels of physical and mental health. For example, one provider summarised that:

"Participants in remote and regional areas often face inter-generational trauma and welfare dependence with associated health, substance abuse and low self-esteem. Indigenous Australians are not a homogenous group and some people, depending on their level of inter-generational trauma, and notably their proximity by generation to people who were stolen, will require a combination of all of the above plus more." (VTEC provider)

During stakeholder consultations, VTEC and TAEG providers emphasised that participant wellbeing and labour market outcomes are closely related, and that supporting participants to address physical and mental health challenges is critical to meeting employment milestones. For example, one provider summarised that:

"Supporting jobseekers to address these barriers, often with the assistance and expertise of (Aboriginal) service providers is key to ensuring jobseekers once commencing employment are more likely to remain at a workplace." (VTEC provider)

There is some evidence to suggest that the individualised mentoring that the VTEC and TAEG programs deliver supports participants' physical and mental wellbeing. Provider consultations suggest that this occurs through gaining a deep understanding of participants' background and either providing support services directly to them (likely in the form of informal counselling) or referring them to healthcare professionals. For example, providers note that:

"Our weekly pre-employment program addresses a number of barriers to employment including drug & alcohol, physical fitness, mental health." (VTEC provider)

⁵⁶Argyle, M. Causes and correlates of happiness. In: D Kahneman, E Diener, N Schwarz (Eds.) Well-being: the foundations of hedonic psychology. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; 1999:307–322:353–373.

⁵⁷ https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca_synopsisreport_web_0.pdf.

"We look at fitness, drug use, medicals, family issues, ex-offender history, past employment history etc." (TAEG provider)

More broadly, providers and EPI partners across the sub-programs consistently report that gaining employment can directly enhance participants' wellbeing. These providers generally emphasise that employment can have a transformative impact on participants' lives by:

- giving participants a newfound sense of belonging, helping reduce the psychological impact of trauma
- providing a stabilising influence on participants' lives that encourages them to adopt healthier lifestyle habits
- providing an incentive for individuals to seek help to overcome addiction or substance abuse problems.

This finding was supported by consultations with participants, noting that only a comparatively small number of stakeholders were willing to speak openly on this subject, noting that:

"My other workplaces just had too much pressure. I don't know how to explain it. It's just easy working here, and it makes me feel a lot better". (TAEG Participant)

"I definitely feel better. Well, since I've been working here my memory's been getting better, which is good. I've had terrible short-term memory... I wouldn't say an active person but I get up early every day, and then just do normal stuff." (VTEC Participant)

Finally, as one provider aptly noted, the benefits of employment on participants' wellbeing are likely to accrue over time, and hence observed more strongly in the long run. This suggests that the consultations that have been conducted with current participants as part of this evaluation may understate the total impact the programs have had on participants' wellbeing.

4.4 Long-term outcomes

Key finding

- **The EPI program has the highest and least variable 26-week milestone completion rate of the sub-programs, while the TAEG and VTEC sub-programs have similar rates.**
- **12+ months after program exit, the sub-programs cease to have any statistically significant difference in their ability to support participants to exit income support.**
- **Across the sub-programs, the 26-week milestone is associated with whether participants cease receiving income support in both the short and long-term, although further analysis is required to further explore this relationship.**
- **EPI partners report to have begun embedding a range of new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses, however, it is unclear to what extent these changes are sustainable.**
- **There is little evidence to suggest that the employers of VTEC and TAEG participants have embedded significant new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses.**

4.4.1 Participants remain engaged in sustainable employment

Remaining engaged in sustainable employment is the overarching objective of the IEP and is the outcome that will ultimately lead to achieving *Closing the Gap* targets. Sustainable employment is

generally understood to mean that an individual remains in employment, either in one job or by moving to other jobs, and has opportunities to advance and progress their career.⁵⁸

In mainstream academic literature, obtaining sustainable employment is generally associated with improved wellbeing, health and economic security. However, it is acknowledged that from an Indigenous perspective the value and role of employment may differ from that presented in Western academic thinking.

The IEP has sustainable employment as an outcome and expect this to include participants being more likely to remain in employment (for 26-weeks or more) as well as being able to advance in their careers with their employer or another employer. The IEP explicitly acknowledges the importance of career progression in ensuring that Indigenous jobseekers remain engaged and have an opportunity to pursue a meaningful long-term career beyond the immediate period of their employment placement.

How is effectiveness determined against this outcome?

To assess whether this outcome has been met, evidence needs to establish:

- the extent to which participants meet program employment milestones
- the extent to which participants remain in employment beyond the program
- the extent to which participants are able to advance in their careers with their employer or another employer
- the contexts in which achieving the above outcomes is more or less likely.

Program effectiveness in supporting this outcome

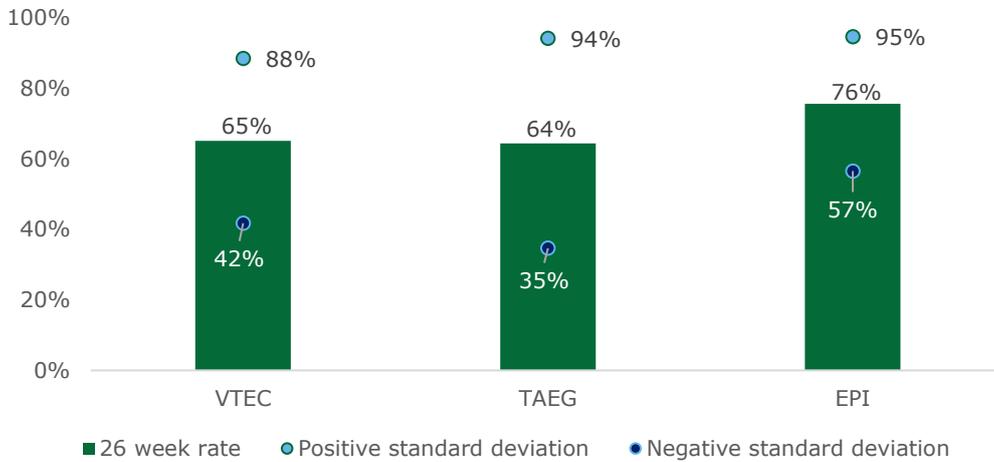
As part of the outcomes-based funding model, IEP providers are awarded funding after participants meet specific employment milestones, typically at (or at some combination of) 4, 13, 26 and 52 weeks. The exact employment milestones that are used (and the level of associated funding) typically vary in accordance with the specific contract that a provider may have with the NIAA. For the purpose of this analysis, the 26-week milestone completion rate is primarily used, as this is the most consistently reported milestone used across the projects. In alignment with program guidelines, the 26-week milestone completion rate is taken to be the proportion of participants who reach 26-weeks in employment as a share of those who commence an employment placement.

When assessing milestone completion rates, the EPI program has the highest average 26-week milestone completion rate of the three programs (76%), while the TAEG and VTEC programs have similar rates of 64% and 65% respectively (Chart 4.1).

Building off this, econometric analysis was used to further explore the effectiveness of the sub-programs. This analysis controlled for basic participant characteristics such as age, gender, remoteness, year and length of unemployment to better isolate the impact of the specific sub-programs (Table A.7 in Appendix C). This analysis supports the above finding, suggesting that even when basic controls are applied EPI participants are 14 percentage points more likely to achieve the 26-week milestone than the VTEC participants, while TAEG participants are marginally less likely (-3 percentage points).

⁵⁸ Devins, D., Bickerstaffe, T., Nunn, A. and Mitchell, B. (2011). 'The role of skills from worklessness to sustainable employment with progression', *UK Commission for Employment and Skills*. Accessed from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306143/Worklessness_to_sustainable_employment__the_role_of_skills.pdf.

Chart 4.1: Average participant 26-week milestone completion rate for participants that commence an employment placement, by program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019).

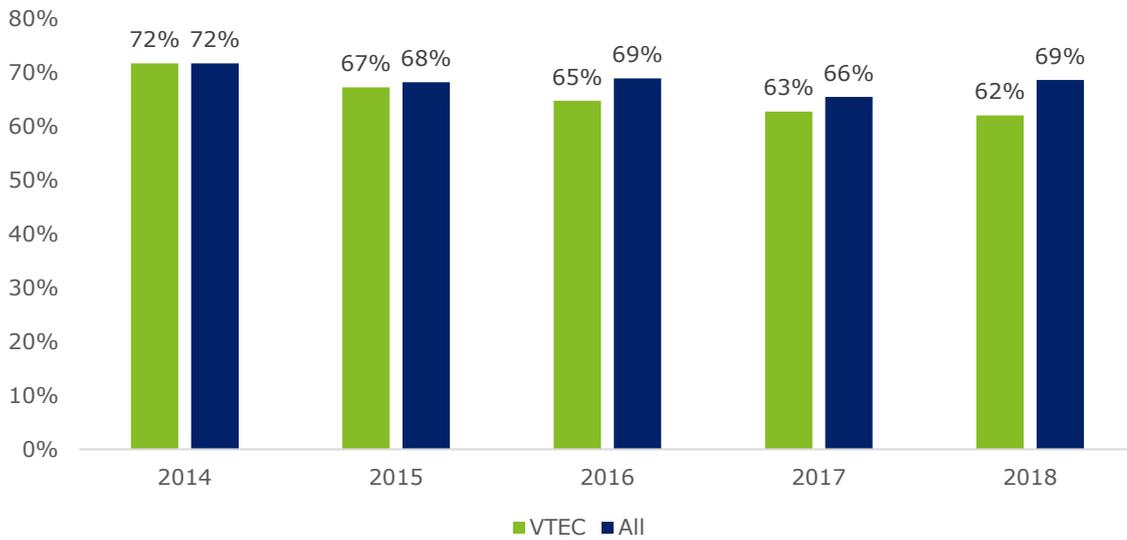
There is also considerable variation in the milestone completion rates within each of the three programs, as indicated by the difference between milestone completion rates one standard deviation above and below the mean level (Chart 4.1).

The TAEG program appears to have the greatest level of variation in milestone completion rates. This could be driven by a range of factors, including the more flexible (and hence less consistent) TAEG guidelines, TAEG having a more variable composition of participants, or simply greater variation in the quality of providers delivering the sub-program.

Conversely, the EPI sub-program has the smallest variation in outcomes. Anecdotally, stakeholder consultations suggest that this may be a result of EPI partners taking a more work-ready and hence uniform group of participants, meaning that program outcomes are naturally more consistent in nature. Alternatively, it is possible that EPI partners have a greater level of control over the employment outcomes of program participants, as they directly employ participants.

From 2014-18, the average combined milestone completion rate across the three programs was relatively consistent, fluctuating between 66 to 72 percent (Chart 4.2). However, VTEC employment outcomes have consistently worsened over this period. Further analysis reveals that this is not driven by changes in the composition of providers, as even within the set of providers who continuously operate between 2014-18 milestone rates have decreased.

Chart 4.2: Time-series of average milestone completion rate, by program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019).

Provider consultations suggest that there are a diverse range of factors that lead to participants not meeting the 26-week employment milestone, primarily centred on participants' cultural obligations and individual circumstances. For example, providers note that the most common reasons they observe include:

- Cultural obligations that require individuals' time and effort, preventing them from meeting work commitments
- A strong sharing economy meaning that individuals do not privately benefit from additional income, effectively reducing their incentive to work
- A poor match between participants' interests and their employment placement.

Stakeholder consultations with providers and NIAA regional staff suggest that it can be challenging for participants to obtain sustainable employment in regional and remote areas, as there may be limited permanent employment opportunities available. These stakeholders emphasise that irrespective of the skills and connections that participants develop as part of the program, the achievement of long-term employment outcomes requires there to be employment opportunities available for participants.

Additionally, where the employment opportunities do exist, they are likely to be casual – conflicting with program eligibility guidelines. This issue is enhanced by the expectation that participants travel or relocate to work, conflicting with community, cultural or family obligations.

Stakeholder consultations also suggest that EPI partners have the greatest and most deliberate focus of the three programs on supporting participants to advance their careers and obtain more senior positions. VTEC and TAEG providers appear to have a less consistent focus on this outcome, with the extent to which this is targeted being driven by the goals of an individual provider or employer. EPI partners consistently report that they seek to advance the careers of their Indigenous staff members and that they have implemented a range of initiatives to try and achieve this. For example:

- one EPI partner noted that they had developed a leadership development program specifically for Indigenous staff members. They report that to date over 70 Indigenous staff members have participated in the program, and over 50% have been promoted within the organisation.

EPI's greater focus on the career advancement of their Indigenous staff members may be due to several factors, including that they:

- directly employ participants (which VTEC and TAEG providers do not necessarily do), meaning that they have a greater level of control over participants career progression
- operate at a scale which allows for the development of more targeted career progression programs.
- May work with more job-ready group of participants, who will naturally find it easier to progress to senior positions.

Participant characteristics

This section identifies the key participant characteristics that are associated with relatively higher or lower milestone completion rates.

A range of participant characteristics that are not currently captured in the program data may drive program impact, including participants' length of unemployment, highest level of educational attainment, and JSCI stream. Further, as discussed in subsequent sections, the relative success of different cohorts appears to change depending on which datasets or analytical techniques are used (i.e. when looking at 26-week outcomes vs. income support status). This highlights the need for further analysis to be conducted on this topic, with access to the fuller dataset, and new data.

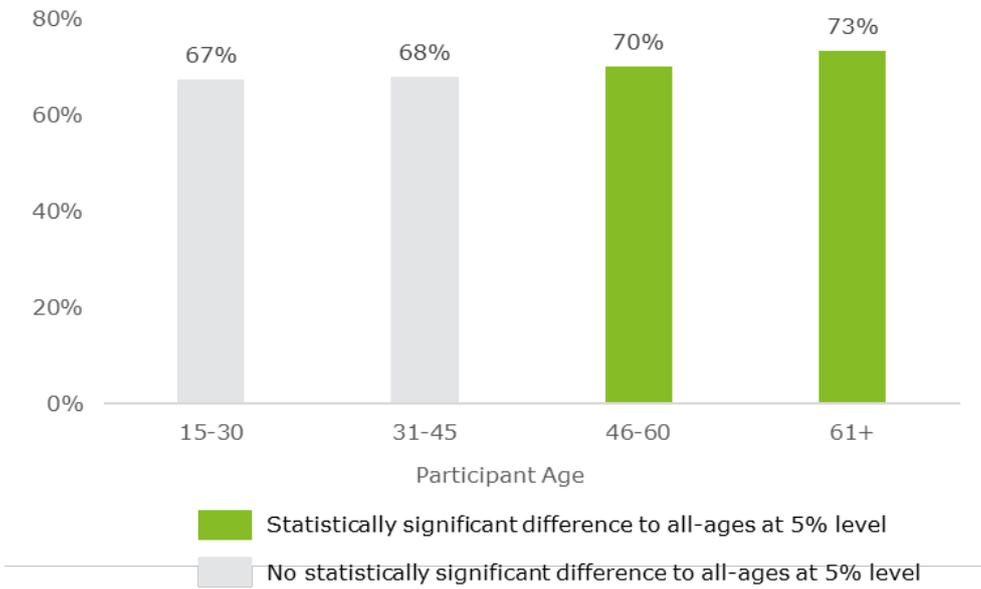
On balance, older participants appear to have a marginally higher average milestone completion rate than younger participants. Participants aged 46 years old and over have an average 26-week milestone completion rate that is statistically different (two to six percentage points higher) to the all ages average (Chart 4.3). However, older participants account for only a small fraction of total participants, with a total of around 5,200 employment commencements from participants aged 46 years old plus over the life of the programs.

Stakeholder consultations with providers suggest that this differential impact by age may reflect the level of financial and 'life' commitments that participants have. For example, one provider noted that older participants are more likely to have dependents, and therefore have a stronger need to gain employment to achieve financial security. Conversely, the provider argued that it can be difficult to engage younger participants, as they may be unsure as to whether they wish to pursue specific employment opportunities.

However, providers and EPI partners also note that working with younger participants can have a transformative and lasting impact and has the capacity to alter the life trajectory of participants. For example, one EPI partner noted that:

"We put a lot of emphasis on creating employment opportunities for young people, even those who still might be at school or studying. We know that Indigenous people are far less likely to be engaged in part-time employment than non-Indigenous Australians when they are young, and this likely means they miss out on obtaining these valuable work skills. If we give employment opportunities to young people, it can set them up for a future of working" (EPI partner.

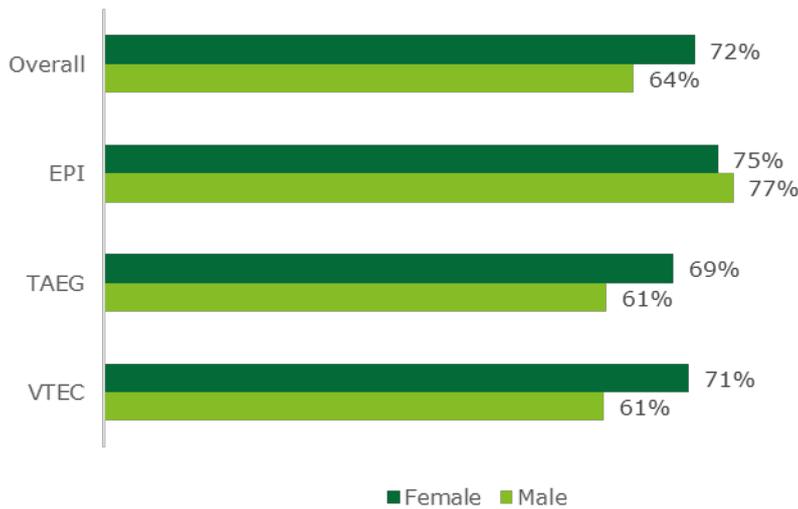
Chart 4.3: Average 26-week milestone completion rate, by participant age



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019).

In general, female participants appear to have a significantly higher 26-week milestone completion rate than male participants, with the exception of the EPI program (Chart 4.4). However, across the sub-programs, female participants remain the minority – accounting for approximately 45% of employment commencements.

Chart 4.4: Average 26-week milestone completion rate, by participant gender



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019). Note: the difference in milestone completion rates between males and females is statistically significant at the 5% level within each of the programs (and overall).

Providers and employers suggest that participants who have been unemployed for a longer period of time generally find it more difficult to achieve employment outcomes. This finding is consistent with

academic literature on the subject, which suggests that being unemployed for a long period of time can lead to the loss of job skills as well as a range of negative psychosocial impacts.⁵⁹

In stakeholder consultation, providers affirmed this and cited a range of factors including that long-term unemployed jobseekers:

- likely face deeper barriers to employment, potentially including health, lifestyle or numeracy and literacy challenges
- are less likely to have work experience, or if they do, this is likely to be from several years ago.

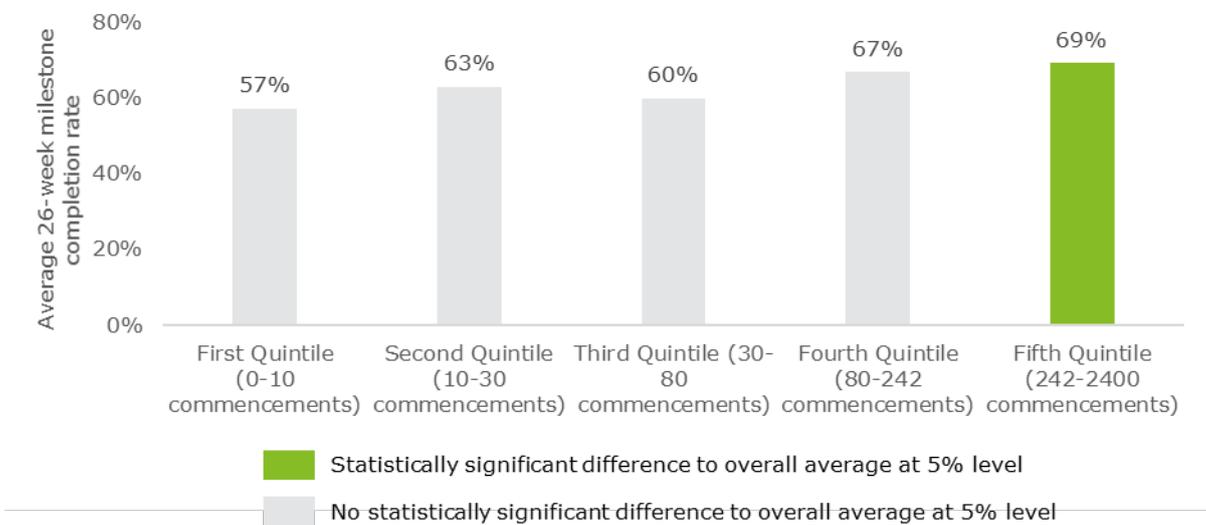
Provider characteristics

This section identifies the key provider characteristics that drive employment outcomes. This analysis utilises the program data that is currently available along with stakeholder consultations.

On average, the largest providers (measured by the volume of employment commencements) tend to have the highest average 26-week milestone completion rate (Chart 4.5). This could be due to a plurality of reasons, including:

- that there are economies of scale meaning that larger providers can more efficiently or effectively deliver services. For example, it may be the case that larger providers are able to invest more in the supporting infrastructure that is required to deliver the IEP
- that providers who achieve better outcomes receive more funding, and hence grow in size
- that EPI partners are generally larger in size and tend to have higher milestone completion rates.

Chart 4.5: Average 26-week milestone completion rate, by provider size



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019).

On average, there does not appear to be a clear relationship between provider tenure (i.e. how long a provider has been operating for) and their average 26-week milestone completion rate. However, stakeholder consultations suggest that providers who have been operating for a longer period of time may be more effective, as they have developed greater organisational expertise and more in-depth local relationships. For example, one provider noted that:

"We were slow getting off the mark and we really had to build some organisation capacity and there were some setbacks around the infrastructure and staffing. And really, we're coming to the end of the contract now, it's a three-year funding agreement, we've only had

⁵⁹ For example see, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043237>

two groups of, one group of four and one group of six trainees come through, or workers, I should call them. ” (TAEG provider).

This is an important element of feedback as it emphasises the level of investment and commitment that a provider needs to have in order to get the best out of the program and the participants. It also speaks to the positive effect of program and contract certainty, so that providers need to have confidence in the investment they make, which in turn flows through to program and participant outcomes.

There does not appear to be a clear or statistically significant relationship between placement remoteness and the average 26-week milestone completion rate. This suggests that once an employment placement has been secured, and an individual has commenced, remoteness is unlikely to be an influential variable in driving milestone completion rates.

Longer-term employment outcomes

Data from the Research Evaluation Database (RED) was used to estimate the impact that the IEP has on the long-term employment status of program participants (i.e. 6+ months after program exit).

The RED database contains information on the income support status of a sample of IEP participants (see Appendix C for further detail on the dataset and its limitations), reporting whether they are receiving income support payments a given period of months after they exit the IEP (either as a result of achieving their final 26-week employment outcome, or exiting before that).⁶⁰ In doing so, the income support status of a participant is used as the best available proxy for whether they are still engaged in paid employment or not.⁶¹

Preliminary analysis suggests that 6+ months following program exit the relative effectiveness of the sub-programs in supporting participants to exit income support changes over time (Chart 4.6). That is, in the earlier periods TAEG appears to outperform EPI by six percentage points, but this difference closes to only one percentage point 24 months from program exit.

Econometric analysis reveals that 12+ months following program exit the sub-program differences cease to be statistically significant (Appendix C). This finding suggests that while the EPI program appears to outperform the other sub-programs in its 26-week milestone completion rate, the longer-term relative effectiveness of the sub-programs is more indistinguishable.

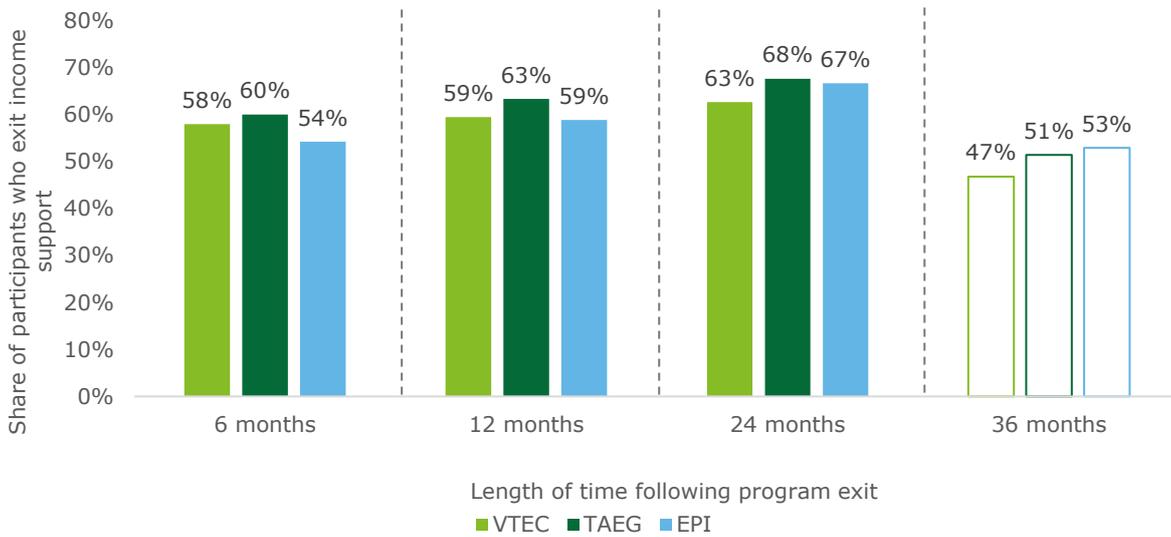
Stakeholder consultations provide some initial hypotheses on the possible drivers of this inconclusive longer-term result. In particular, several stakeholders commented that the TAEG and VTEC programs generally work with a more disadvantaged cohort of individuals than EPI and that this may explain the difference in 26-week milestone rates. Further, as noted earlier in this chapter, TAEG and VTEC providers generally deliver more intense, individualised support to program participants than EPI Partners. It is plausible that this type of intensive support that focuses on building foundational skills delivers longer-term benefits to participants, effectively allowing VTEC and TAEG participants to perform similarly to EPI participants in the longer-term despite weaker 26-week milestone rates.

Ultimately, this result highlights the need for further econometric (and stakeholder) analysis. Ideally, this analysis would analyse a broader set of participant characteristics including variables such as educational attainment, industry of employment and provider characteristics. Box 1 provides some further ideas on possible areas for future analysis.

⁶⁰In this analysis, income support status refers to whether an individual is receiving either Newstart or Youth Allowance (Other) payments.

⁶¹ As noted in Professor Sanders comments (page 68), this is a poor proxy for a measure of employment, as there may be many reasons that indigenous Australians disappear from the income support system and they may have poor correlation to actual meaningful, long term paid employment.

Chart 4.6: Share of IEP participants who exit income support, by sub-program



Source: Research Evaluation Database (2015-2019). Note: As an example, 52% of VTEC participants who were receiving income support payments when they commenced the program were not receiving income support payments when they exited the IEP (i.e. at '0 months'). Further, the cohorts listed above are not strictly comparable (as indicated by the dividing lines) as the sample sizes across each of the time periods vary, reflecting the fact that, for example the '36 month' outcome only examines those participants who commenced in the program prior to 2016. The 36-month outcomes are shaded differently, highlighting that these results appear to be inconsistent with earlier time periods. Preliminary analysis has not been able to identify the drivers of this difference.

There is a considerable variation within these results by participant characteristic (Table 4.2). On balance, younger participants who have been unemployed for less than 52 weeks on program commencement appear to be more likely to exit income support. While this finding with respect to the longer-term unemployed aligns with the analysis conducted on the 26-week employment milestones, this age finding appears to be reversed. Further analysis is required to understand whether this is a result of the different cohorts that are being analysed, the analytical techniques being used or whether the dynamics relating to income support are fundamentally different to that of the milestone completion rates.

Notably, there is also a substantial difference between the likelihood of a participant exiting income support and whether they achieve the 26-week employment milestone or not – with their being an average difference between the two of 26 percentage points. Box 1 below provides further detail on the relationship between the 26-week employment milestone and the income support status of participants.

Table 4.2: Share of IEP participants who exit income support, by select characteristics

| | 6 months | 12 months | 24 months | 36 months |
|---------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Age | | | | |
| Under 25 | 64% | 66% | 71% | 54% |
| 25-44 | 54% | 58% | 62% | 48% |
| Over 45 | 51% | 54% | 60% | 43% |
| Gender | | | | |

| | 6 months | 12 months | 24 months | 36 months |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Male | 59% | 61% | 65% | 48% |
| Female | 56% | 60% | 66% | 52% |
| Region | | | | |
| Major Cities of Australia | 58% | 61% | 67% | 53% |
| Inner Regional Australia | 52% | 57% | 62% | 48% |
| Outer Regional Australia | 59% | 61% | 62% | 45% |
| Remote and Very Remote Australia | 61% | 62% | 66% | 47% |
| Achieved 26 Week outcomes | | | | |
| YES | 68% | 68% | 72% | 57% |
| NO | 40% | 47% | 54% | 37% |
| Length of on income support (on commencement) | | | | |
| <52 weeks | 66% | 69% | 72% | 56% |
| >=52 weeks | 49% | 52% | 58% | 43% |

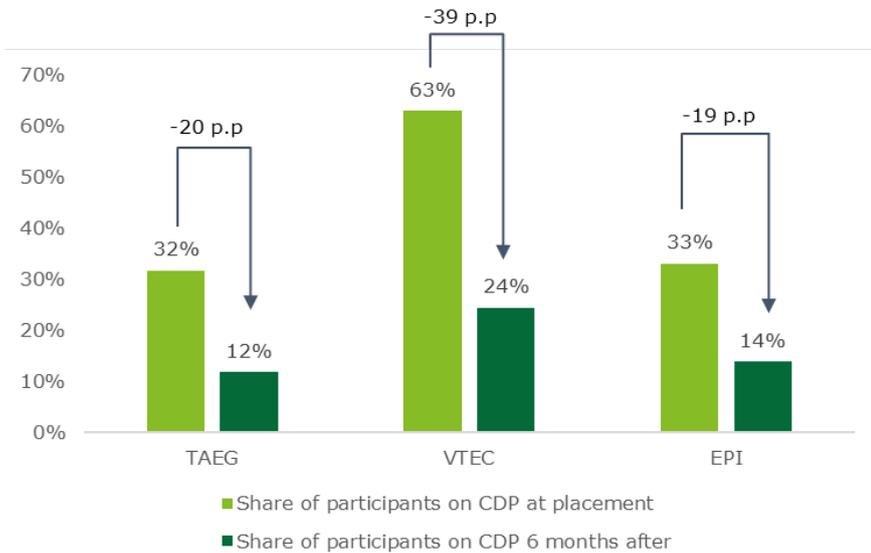
Source: Research Evaluation Database (2015-2019). Note: Cells shaded in green indicate that the value is 5 percentage points above the overall average in that time period, while cells shaded in grey represent a result 5 percentage points below average. Percent values can be interpreted in the same manner as in Chart 4.6 above.

In addition to the RED, a high-level extract of data on IEP participants in the Community Development Program (CDP) was obtained as part of the evaluation. The CDP is the Australian Government's remote community employment and development service. Analysis from this dataset provides an alternative perspective on how effective the sub-programs are at encouraging participants to exit the income support system and gain mainstream employment.

Preliminary analysis suggests that the VTEC program is most successful at supporting participants to exit the CDP program (i.e. a proxy for gaining paid employment), while the TAEG and EPI programs have similar outcomes (Chart 4.7). For the purpose of this analysis, it is acknowledged that the initial share of IEP participants receiving CDP support is likely overstated (given that the dataset only contains information on participants who have received CDP support at some stage); however, the difference between the share receiving support on commencement and after six months still provides a meaningful measure of how the programs may impact employment rates.

Further, while these results do not necessarily mirror those found from the RED analysis, this is likely a reflection of compositional differences in the cohorts for each of the programs (and which participants receive jobactive or CDP support). Further, it suggests that there is not necessarily a sub-program that is universally more effective, although the EPI program appears to be comparatively less effective at supporting participants to exit income support.

Chart 4.7: Share of IEP participants receiving CDP support at placement and +6 months after program exit, by sub-program



Source: Community Development Program (2021). Note: this dataset includes all jobseekers who commenced in the IEP prior to the 31st December 2018 and are present in the CDP database (i.e. they have received CDP support at some point). For example, 32% of TAEG participants in the CDP system were receiving CDP support when they commenced in the program.

Box 1: The relationship between the 26-week employment milestone and income support status

Econometric analysis suggests that the 26-week employment outcome is associated with being less likely to receive income support in both the short and long-term, and that these effects are statistically significant.

However, it should be noted that these effect sizes become smaller over time. Specifically, as presented in Tables A.4 to A.7 in Appendix C, the 26-week employment outcome status of a participant is associated with a 36 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of not being on income support upon program exit. This decreases to 21 percentage points after 36 months.

In the longer term, a range of other factors also increasingly influence the income support status of IEP participants, with the preferred model specification explaining only (approximately) 8% of the variation seen in participants' income support status after 36 months.^[1] This includes factors such as participants' income support status at 12 and 24 months, which were found to have moderate to strong correlation with income support status at 36 months. These factors were not included in the preferred model so that the full impacts of the IEP in mediating future improvements to participants' labour market outcomes could be observed. That is, achieving a 26-week outcome in the IEP program could increase the likelihood of individuals being off income support at 12 and 24 months, which is associated with a lower likelihood of being on income support at 36 months.

Overall, the findings suggest that there is a statistically significant associative relationship between 26-week outcomes and long-term employment outcomes, and it is an indicator of long-term employment outcomes. Additional analysis should be undertaken to understand the extent to which a 26-week outcome mediates future employment outcomes, and the strength of those relationships over time. Further analysis would also be required to identify whether extending the employment milestones used (e.g. introducing a 52-week outcome across all programs) would lead to more sustainable employment outcomes for participants.

^[1] The NIAA assisted with the regression analysis, and had input into the choice of the outcome variable, and the variables include in the preferred regression models.

Further, the analysis suggests that the included explanatory variables are limited in their ability to explain variation in participant outcomes, and that there may be other factors that may be important for considering. Further analysis aimed at understanding those potential factors, and the extent to which those conditions can be enabled through the IEP program could further support the program in achieving the sustainable, long-term employment outcomes that the program aspires to achieve.

4.4.2 Employers embed new Indigenous employment strategies

While the short-term outcomes focus on overcoming barriers to employing Indigenous jobseekers, longer-term outcomes for employers focus on ensuring that employers have improved and embedded new Indigenous employment practices into their normal ways of working.

This change is necessary on the employer side, to ensure that the sub-programs are able to have an impact beyond the time that participants are involved in the programs and for Indigenous jobseekers outside of the program. With increased employer competency in training, recruiting and supporting Indigenous employees, employers will then be able to continue to grow their workforce and this will step towards the greater program aims of improved employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The types of employment practices that employers can best implement in their business differ and will depend on the context. Some employment practices may include:

- prioritising applications from Indigenous jobseekers
- amending recruitment and hiring processes to make them more accessible to Indigenous jobseekers
- providing ongoing support programs to Indigenous employees, to encourage their retention and career development
- delivering cultural awareness training to staff members.

This outcome is articulated similarly across both VTEC and TAEG but is considered quite differently within the EPI. For VTEC and TAEG, employers are expected to improve their Indigenous employment practices by developing more culturally appropriate employment practices and then increasing their employment of Indigenous jobseekers.

For EPI, however, there is greater focus on embedding Indigenous employment practices into the everyday functioning of the business and that EPI partners will play a leadership role in motivating other businesses to follow their lead in developing their own Indigenous workforces. For EPI, these expected outcomes, as detailed by the program logics, include:

- embedding Indigenous jobseekers recruitment practices into their business practices
- EPI partners retain their Indigenous employees
- EPI partners are more likely to promote Indigenous employees through their workforce
- EPI partners have enhanced reputation and workforce outcomes
- EPI partners become less dependent on EPI funding over time
- other major companies are motivated to develop new Indigenous employment strategies and/or express interest in EPI.

Beyond these outcomes, there are also other economic and cultural benefits for employers, such as improved workplace culture and community connection.

To assess whether this outcome has been met, evidence needs to establish:

- the extent to which EPI partners have embedded improvements in their Indigenous employment practices into their business, and whether EPI funding is expected to be relied upon into the future
- the extent to which EPI partners view that they have an enhanced reputation and can influence and motivate other organisations

- the extent to which TAEG and VTEC employers have developed more culturally appropriate employment practices and then increased their employment of Indigenous jobseekers
- the extent to which IEP providers and partners have an enhanced appreciation of the benefits of Indigenous employment.

Program effectiveness in supporting this outcome

EPI partners report that they have begun to embed a range of new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses. For example, EPI partners report that they have introduced a wide variety of new practices, including:

- amending their recruitment processes so that HR teams prioritise reviewing applications from Indigenous jobseekers
- increasing their collaboration with the employment services sector (such as jobactive providers) to try and proactively identify Indigenous jobseekers
- delivering intensive onboarding processes for new Indigenous staff members that aims to highlight the workplace expectations and support measures that are in place.
- delivering ongoing leadership development programs that aim to support Indigenous staff members to advance within their organisation
- delivering cultural awareness programs to all staff members, to try and ensure that workplace culture is supportive and culturally safe.

However, it is unclear to what extent these changes are truly sustainable and would continue in the absence of EPI funding. EPI partners expressed mixed perspectives on the extent to which practices would continue in the absence of funding:

"We've always been really clear with the visions that we expect these roles to be ongoing and after completion of the programme, like they need to be thinking now, after the completion of the programme, how they're going to keep them sustainable and what they're going to do." (EPI partner).

"I think that we're lucky that, there was one period there where the funding stopped for a year. But because we could self-fund, we weren't reliant on the funding cycles" (EPI partner).

Consultations suggest that the employers of VTEC and TAEG participants seldom implement significant new Indigenous employment practices into their businesses. As discussed in section 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, VTEC and TAEG employers generally receive cultural awareness and sensitivity training from providers but were not observed to implement the broader employment practice changes that EPI partners do. This is likely a reflection of the different nature of the program design, with VTEC and TAEG employers not receiving direct funding to implement these changes, and instead relying on the expertise of the providers they work with.

Employers across the IEP appear to be most likely to embed new Indigenous employment practices when it is in alignment with their social and commercial interests, and there is strong senior leadership for the changes. Stakeholder consultations suggest that employers across the IEP are most likely to embed improvements in their Indigenous employment practices when their business' commercial interests directly align with their social goals. While employers commonly report that their social goal is to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment outcomes, their commercial goals are far more divergent, for example:

- one VTEC employer noted that their company had a large base of Indigenous customers, and that expanding their Indigenous workforce would allow them to better interact with and meet the needs of these consumers
- one EPI partner noted that expanding their Indigenous workforce would likely enhance their competitiveness in bidding for large government procurement contracts.
- another EPI provider in the mining industry noted that expanding their Indigenous workforce would help them meet the traditional owner agreements that are in place for particular mine sites.

Employers also report that they are more likely to embed these practices when there is a strong commitment from the senior leadership of an organisation to pursue employment parity. These stakeholders note that line managers, recruitment and operational staff face a wide range of competing priorities and will generally de-prioritise tasks that they deem as unessential to business operations. Consequently, it is only when the senior leadership of an organisation commit to the goal of reaching Indigenous employment parity that HR and management teams will dedicate the effort that is required to achieve this target. Further, these teams will likely face accountability measures that require them to update senior management on the progress that has been made towards the target.

There are mixed perspectives about the effectiveness of the TAEG and VTEC programs in enhancing employers' appreciation of the benefits of Indigenous employment. These varied perspectives are likely driven by a range of factors, including an organisations' culture, the level of exposure that the company has had to Indigenous culture and people, and the company's recent experiences working with Indigenous staff. Initial consultations suggest that:

- most employers do not report that the program enhanced their overall appreciation of the benefits of Indigenous employment. This is likely because employers had some level of appreciation for the benefits of Indigenous employment before they started the program, and that this is what motivated them to work with Indigenous jobseekers and IEP providers.
- however, at least one provider noted that they had observed a positive shift in employers' attitudes towards Indigenous employment as a result of program participation. Specifically, the provider noted that they had worked with an employer in the mining industry who had previously had very little experience working with Indigenous staff, and that participation in the program had given them a newfound appreciation of the benefits of Indigenous employment.

4.5 Effective investment

Key finding

- *There is a substantial degree of variation in the average unit cost (to the NIAA) per activity. While this appears to be driven by clear program-specific guidelines for the VTEC and TAEG programs, this variation is less deliberate and systematic for the EPI program, raising questions about the effectiveness of this investment.*
- *Stakeholder consultations reveal that the IEP sub-programs do not always effectively work together, noting instances of TAEG/VTEC providers struggling to cooperate with EPIs and, more broadly, limited knowledge sharing across the provider system.*
- *Given the absence or flexible nature of the program guidelines defining how the IEP is intended to work with mainstream programs, the relationships between IEP and mainstream providers appear to be highly variable and primarily driven by the intent and capability of individual organisations.*
- *The current system of provider funding is largely reactive, in that the NIAA must invite currently operating providers to participate in the program. This requirement of 'currently operating' creates a risk that the programs are not best targeting areas of 'need' or maximising their potential impact*

This section examines the following evaluation questions:

- *What do program outcomes tell us about effective and ineffective investment?*
- *How can the value of each program be optimised within the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs?*

In addressing these questions, this section first examines the average government (NIAA) expenditure-per-outcome associated with each of the sub-programs. This is not intended to be a substitute for a comprehensive cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analysis, instead, it is intended to

provide an overview of the anticipated cost of achieving certain outcomes within each of the programs. Further, these cost measures are not benchmarked against other programs, as the necessary data from a suitable counterfactual is not available.

In addition, this section examines how the sub-programs interact with one another and the broader Indigenous employment policy landscape to deliver outcomes. This analysis is included in this discussion of effective investment as the extent to which the sub-programs effectively operate together, and with other Indigenous employment programs, is central to understanding the effectiveness of the investment that is being made in these programs. Further, this analysis will help determine how the value of each IEP can be optimised within the broader policy landscape, by identifying points of potential duplication or gaps in the current service delivery system.

Finally, this section assesses the processes through which providers are selected or invited to participate in the program, and the implications that this has for the effectiveness of the investment that is being made.

Taken together, this section provides only a preliminary understanding of the effectiveness of the existing investment. Given data limitations, this topic requires further investigation in a future co-design process.

4.5.1 Government (NIAA) expenditure-per-outcome analysis

The median unit cost for each of the sub-programs is broadly similar, ranging from between approximately \$10,000 to \$12,500 (Table 4.3). In alignment with NIAA reporting, this metric is defined as the total approved cost divided by the maximum number of employment places for each activity. In doing so, this measure provides an indication of the average cost to the agency of a single participant achieving all their employment milestones. Further, there is a substantial degree of variation in the average unit cost within each of the subprograms – particularly for TAEG and EPI (Chart 4.8).

Analysis of NIAA guidelines suggests that this variation in unit costs is driven by several program-specific features, including:

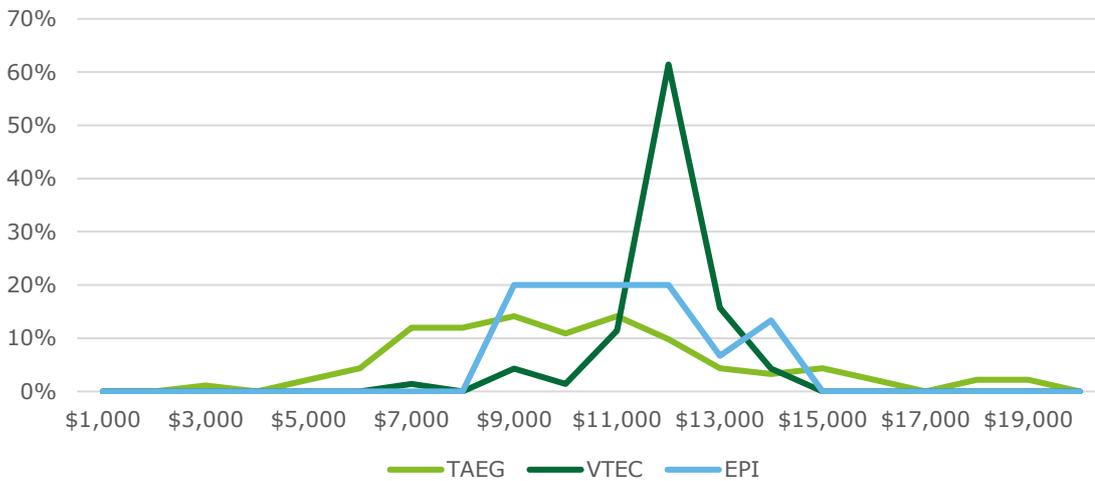
- TAEG unit costs are guided by the TAEG Unit Cost Guidelines, which advise the standard maximum unit cost per participant for the various activity types.
- VTEC projects are funded based on a set formula, whereby the size of an outcome payment is determined by the stream of the participant and the length of time they have remained in employment (i.e. 4, 13 and 26 weeks). Hence, the average unit cost of a specific project is driven by the mix of stream A, B and C participants
- EPI does not have a standard unit cost price or funding model, with EPI arrangements being negotiated with the NIAA on a case-by-case basis.

Table 4.3: Cost-per-outcome measures, by sub-program

| Sub-program | Median Unit Cost |
|-------------|------------------|
| VTEC | \$12,549 |
| TAEG | \$10,357 |
| EPI | \$11,284 |

Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019).

Chart 4.8: Distribution in average unit cost, by sub-program



Source: NIAA Program Data (2014-2019).

Given that it is not feasible to capture the full range of benefits that participants may receive from working with a specific provider (which may include benefits that are challenging to quantify such as wellbeing improvements) it cannot be definitely determined whether providers with higher unit costs provide higher quality services or achieve better outcomes, and hence justify their higher costs. However, the absence of a rigorous unit cost funding model for the EPI program, combined with its variable unit costs, suggests that the total effectiveness of its investment is unlikely to be optimised.

4.5.2 How the sub-programs work together

The sub-programs are intended to operate cohesively as part of a system of change that supports Indigenous Australians to gain sustainable employment. Seeing as there is little delineation in the types of Indigenous jobseekers that the programs are intended to target, the programs will inevitably interact with one another at a provider, participant and employer level.

Stakeholder consultations suggest that there are mixed perspectives about the ability of VTEC/TAEG providers to collaborate with EPI partners and share outcome payments. For example, stakeholders noted that:

"[An EPI] said the payments are so low it's not worthwhile working together. And I get it, they are hardly getting a lot of money from it and they're even less inclined to share that with us even if we're [VTECs] sharing the workload" (VTEC provider)

"Recently the program changed, and it now allows us to do deals [with VTEC/TAEG providers] where if we're working on one candidate we can go 50/50 in whatever the dollars are. That flexibility from a policy point of view is so critical because it's not a one size fits all for these candidates." (EPI partner)

"If we end up working with an EPI participant, sometimes we get no money, so we'll spend our own time and effort and receive nothing." (VTEC provider)

Several VTEC providers report that they have poor visibility over which participants and employers are involved in the EPI program, and that this can create confusion and tension between providers. For example, providers note that:

"Often, we'll be putting in an employment placement or a four week claim and then we'll hear from NIAA that that jobseeker was registered with another parity or funded employer and then, we have to apply the jobseeker to be transferred, even if they haven't had contact with

that previous programme before. So, there's no visibility of that when you're working with the jobseeker prior to placing them into employment." (VTEC provider)

"There are so many EPIs in the Northern Territory now, and there have been several cases where we would be working with an employer, and suddenly they joined EPI. So, it really did impact us hugely. There was no communication from the department about who the parity employers actually were." (VTEC providers)

"So, you could be working with them in a VTEC and then once you've secured a placement, which obviously doesn't happen immediately because you're working with the person individually, with an employer, if that employer's EPI, part of the EPI programme, then they could claim it as well." (VTEC provider)

It's important to note that competition between providers and partners is not necessarily a negative. While providers – particularly VTEC and TAEG providers – expressed frustration and disappointment in instances of lost market share to EPI providers, in some instances this could be understood as an efficiency gain.

Further, TAEG and VTEC providers report that there is limited knowledge sharing between providers, and that further collaboration would be useful to share lessons learned and best-practice ideas. Providers note that there have been some instances of this collaboration in the past, such as through organised forums for VTEC providers, though this no longer occurs and now collaboration is only on an ad hoc basis. For example, providers note that:

"A small group of VTECs used to meet up quite regularly. It was pretty good actually just to have that, it wasn't a competitive space at all and there were some good learnings from others" (VTEC provider).

"[...] we haven't had a VTEC forum or an employment services forum, I want to say since 2017. And so, the knowledge of each other's products at that material level is probably not real great." (VTEC provider)

One widely implemented method of achieving this is to establish Communities of Practice (CoP). A CoP is generally understood to be a group of like-minded professionals who regularly interact with one another to understand how they can improve at their chosen field.⁶² The establishment of CoP has the capacity to deliver substantial benefits to the individuals and organisations involved. For example, CoPs can:

- enhance individual's professional development, by allowing them to learn from others on how they can become more capable at their role
- improve employee engagement, by providing staff with an opportunity to interact with professionals who share common interests
- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of participating organisations, by allowing members to share best-practices, and thereby continually improve their operations.⁶³

4.5.3 How the sub-programs work within the employment services landscape

The sub-programs are a part of a larger landscape of employment service provision. The programs are intended to complement mainstream employment services such as jobactive and CDP, as well

⁶² Serrat, O. (2017), 'Building Communities of Practice', in *Knowledge Solution*, pp 581-588. Accessed at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-0983-9_61#:~:text=Communities%20of%20practice%20are%20groups,of%20knowledge%20in%20their%20domain.

⁶³ Millen et al. (2002), 'Understanding the benefits and costs of communities of practice', *Communications of the ACM*, 45(4), p 69-73. Accessed from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220423803_Understanding_the_benefit_and_costs_of_communities_of_practice.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220423803_Understanding_the_benefit_and_costs_of_communities_of_practice)

work closely with state and territory employment programs. This section considers how the IEP is designed to work with these different programs, along with how this interaction works in practice.

Given the absence or flexible nature of detailed program guidelines defining how the IEP is intended to work with mainstream programs, the relationships between IEP and mainstream providers appears to be primarily driven by the intent and capability of individual organisations to build relationships. Consultations suggests that this leads to highly variable levels of collaboration.

For example, stakeholder consultations suggest that there can be tension between IEP and jobactive providers as a result of poor levels of mutual understanding and a sense of competition. Both TAEG and VTEC providers, along with NIAA regional staff, note that this lack of cooperation can be driven by several factors, including that:

- jobactive providers often have a poor understanding of the nature of the sub-programs, limiting their ability to collaborate. Further, stakeholders note that these jobactive providers often have high staff turnover, compounding this problem and reducing the incentives for IEP providers to invest in relationships
- jobactive providers may be reluctant to refer participants to alternative programs, as they may be concerned that this will create an additional administrative burden or compromise their own performance KPIs
- even where jobactive understanding of the role of IEP is high, jobactive officers may not refer eligible candidates through to an IEP due to other factors such as a high case load and a lack of incentive/accountability to do so.

Stakeholders summarise that:

"There can be tension between JAs and VTECs... JAs tend to be a bit protective, they're hard to work with. Their contract is different in that they're run on numbers, and so they don't tend to get as customised and personal with the people, and so that's a tension that doesn't need to be there." (VTEC provider)

"The policy settings for performance for providers are not necessarily correct. Don't think mainstream Departments take Indigenous employment seriously." (NIAA Regional Office)

"It's a very crowded industry, we are not necessarily working with other agencies, it feels more like competition. Often hard to engage jobactive for example" (NIAA Regional Office).

"While there's buckets of money out there that could be accessed, because each bucket comes with its own rules and regulations, sometimes it's been difficult for us to access the funds to make the model work. And they're all kind of designed to solve a model." (VTEC provider)

Importantly, jobactive providers were not directly consulted with as part of this evaluation process, meaning that counter-perspectives on the above points cannot be provided.

Few IEP providers and partners stated that they relied solely on jobactive or CDP referrals to recruit participants. Rather, providers found recruitment processes were more effective and sustainable if embedded in a variety of relationships – including, but not limited to, word-of-mouth within local Indigenous communities and from previous program participants.

In some cases, IEP providers reported that word of mouth networks created access to Indigenous jobseekers that had not yet engaged with a mainstream service provider. This is an important observation as it highlights the role that the IEP can play in establishing trusted relationships with community and encouraging participation in employment services (and employment more generally) for those that would not have participated otherwise.

The nature of the relationship between the IEP and mainstream employment service providers has significant implications for the efficacy of the IEP. Funding for both the IEP and mainstream employment providers is based on a series of assumptions pertaining to their relationship with each other and the activities undertaken. If this relationship is not functioning as intended – for instance,

if the IEP is generating referrals through other means, or if mainstream employment providers are reducing their service delivery to Indigenous clients while they participate in an IEP, this has implications for the efficacy of investment.

In this case, there appears to be scope to revisit the relationship between mainstream service providers and the IEP to ensure:

- there is clear guidance provided on the respective roles and responsibility of each agency in terms of both sharing of information, and also service delivery for individual jobseekers while a jobseeker is participating in both programs
- the funding arrangements are revised to reflect these roles and responsibilities, if they differ from current guidance
 - for instance, funding may be adjusted to reflect the increased role that the IEP may be expected to play in community relationships to support the recruitment of participants, or in providing tailored mentoring and support where jobactive providers do not also deliver this service
- governance and accountability structures support appropriate sharing of information and service collaboration between the IEP and mainstream service providers.
 - This may include data sharing between agencies, or explicit clauses in mainstream employment service funding agreements where a base level of relationship is required (such as referring eligible participants on).

At a minimum, the above measures would seek to support the programs functioning together as intended – reducing the risk that Commonwealth funding is duplicated across multiple services for sub-standard outcomes. Ideally, however, the above measures would support strong collaborative relationships between the IEP and mainstream employment service providers – ensuring that investment was optimised through appropriate information sharing, service delivery aligned with comparative advantage, and a shared commitment to lift employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

In addition to interacting with mainstream employment services, states and territories also deliver an array of Indigenous employment services. A preliminary scan of the Indigenous employment policies at this level of government (informed by stakeholder consultations and desktop research) suggests that there are a wide variety of different policies in place.

Analysis of IEP policy and program documentation suggests that there are no formal guidelines or processes dictating how the IEP is intended to interact with state and territory government programs. That is:

- there is currently limited guidance within contracts or role descriptions on how IEP providers, partners or participants are expected to interact with locally delivered programs
- regional offices are not required to interact with local or state/territory governments to ensure co-ordinated service provision at a regional level
- there is also no evidence to suggest that NIAA head-office holds strong relationships with state and territory governments to support a strategic and co-ordinated inter-jurisdictional approach.

During consultation with state and territory government offices focused on Indigenous employment, it was frequently found that there was little awareness of or understanding of the IEP or Commonwealth activity supporting Indigenous employment (with the exception of jobactive and CDP services).

Given the prevalence of state and territory based Indigenous employment programs, the lack of a guiding strategy to support inter-jurisdictional collaboration poses a risk of duplicated effort, a disconnected and confusing employment services landscape for Indigenous jobseekers and missed opportunities for strategic partnerships and program design that efficiently leverages the comparative strengths of each system.

4.5.4 Provider funding decisions

Investment will be most effective when targeted towards the areas of IEP delivery that hold the most impact, and where this is implemented in an efficient manner that is cognisant of, and works with, the complex service delivery environment in which this policy agenda sits.

Currently, while both the VTEC and EPI program invite providers to participate, thereby allowing for some degree of central determination in the quality and nature of providers, these providers must already be operational (i.e. there is no direct government delivery of the IEP or building of provider capacity) and providers choose whether to accept the invitation or not. As such, there is a reactive element of IEP service provision in that providers must exist and be willing to deliver services before a project can be established. This is particularly the case for the TAEG program, in which regional offices stated the model was largely reactive, *'we wait for people to come to us'* (NIAA Regional Office).

The high level of financial risk that is borne by providers means that in certain geographical areas, industries or for cohorts in which the risk for outcomes is greater – there may not be providers willing to deliver services. The reactive procurement model means that there is limited ability for the NIAA to ensure that the programs have suitable coverage or align well with 'need'.

Suggestion 9: Future programs need to clearly articulate how their objectives inform funding decisions, and what implications this has for service coverage and program impact.

The existing IEP does not clearly explain how specific funding decisions are tied to the program's overall objective (beyond the simple aim of increasing Indigenous employment). This creates a risk that funding decisions are not being made in a deliberate or systematic manner, and that their consequences are not being fully considered.

For example, individual funding decisions will likely vary depending on whether the objective of the program is to:

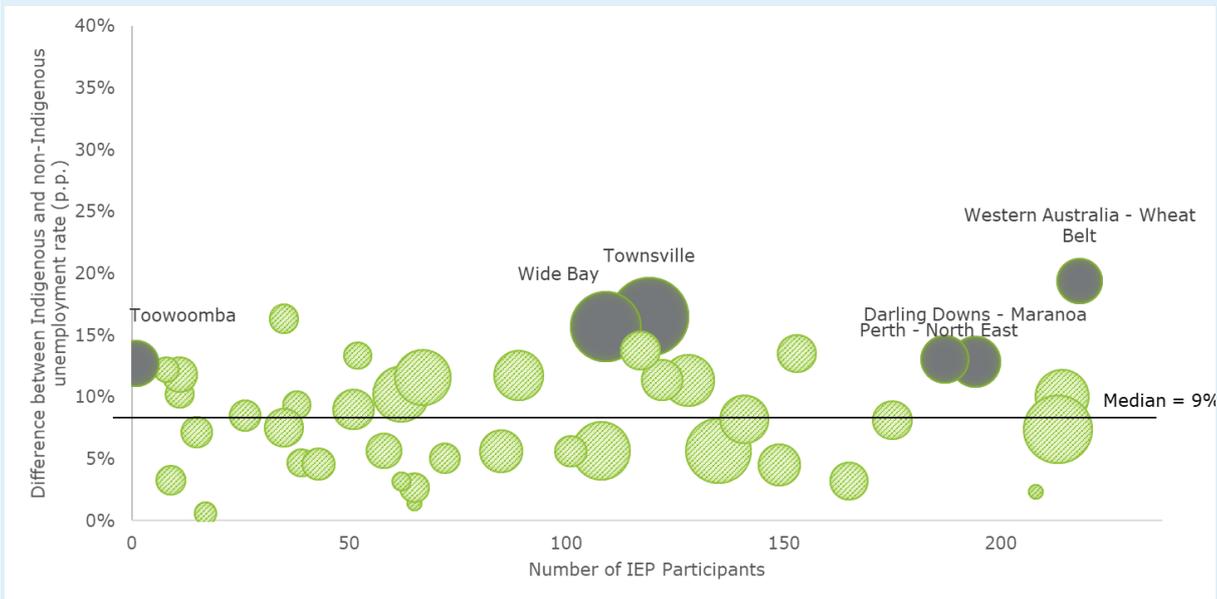
- Maximise the number of jobseekers that commence employment.
- Maximise the number of jobseekers who achieve the 26-week outcome.
- Provide equitable access to the program across all geographies
- Support the most disadvantaged jobseekers to gain employment etc.

Choosing from these objectives (among many others) is ultimately a policy decision that the NIAA must make, but irrespective of the outcome, a clear logic (and aligned evidence) should underpin how specific providers/programs are funded.

By way of illustration, the agency could consider the level of alignment between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment differential (used here as a proxy of 'need' for IEP intervention) and IEP participation as an indicator of which regions should be prioritised for future funding. Conducting this preliminary analysis finds that six SA4 regions (all of which are in Queensland and Western Australia) are underrepresented if considering need for the IEP as defined by a combination of the size of the Indigenous population within an SA4 and the differential between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous unemployment rate (Chart 4.9).

In turn, the program objectives and funding methodology selected by the agency will have clear implications on the program's overall impact and coverage. For example, a program that exclusively works with only the highest quality providers may generate the greatest impact, but have very limited geographical coverage, creating access and equity issues.

Chart 4.9: Alignment between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous unemployment differential and IEP participation (SA4 level, chart shows SA4s with below median IEP participation only)



Source: ABS 2016 Census; NIAA Program Data (2016). Note: The bubble size represents the size of the Indigenous population. The six regions identified above were chosen via a systematic process of examining all of the SA4 regions in Australia and identifying those that have a below median number of IEP participants, above median sized Indigenous population and above median sized difference between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous unemployment rate.

5 Impact

Building on the effectiveness analysis, this section of the report considers the extent to which the IEP generates economic and social impacts for jobseekers, employers, local communities and broader society. This includes consideration of the following evaluation questions:

- *To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term?*
- *In what contexts has the program been more or less successful?*
- *How can the value of each program be optimised with the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs?*

While the effectiveness analysis focused on understanding the extent to which the program achieves its intended outcomes (most notably, long-term employment), this section examines the broader impacts that an increase in sustained employment can have on jobseekers, employers, communities and society.

5.1 Analytical approach

The impact analysis presented in this section extends upon the effectiveness analysis presented in Chapter 4 to consider the net impact that the realisation of IEP short, medium and long term outcomes have on key program stakeholders. Specifically, impact is considered in relation to:

- **program participants:** where impact occurs through participation in the IEP and subsequent outcomes are realised
- **employers:** where impact occurs through direct participation in an IEP or employment of IEP participants, as well as any subsequent outcomes realised
- **community:** where impact occurs within a local community as a result of IEP presence. *Note, analysis differentiates between a geographical community definition and an Indigenous community definition.*
- **society:** where impact occurs at a national level, including through increased taxation or reduced government expenditure associated with the IEP.

Impact is articulated as the social and economic benefits likely to arise from the realisation of program outcomes (as established in Chapter 4) above and beyond those likely to arise from counterfactual scenarios.

While consideration of impact itself stems directly from the outcome's analysis presented in Chapter 4, the impact analysis considers impacts (both positive and negative) from a broader lens than that presented in the current program logic. Importantly, this creates space to consider impacts through an Indigenous lens, noting that the design of the IEP (and as such, their program logics) was framed within a western economic paradigm and informed by western conceptions of employment and work.

Considerations of impact were informed through four key sources:

- the outcomes analysis presented in Chapter 4.
- employer, participant and community identification and articulation of outcomes and impacts through stakeholder consultation
 - Within this analysis, a deliberate effort has been made to highlight Indigenous articulation of experience and impact wherever possible, and to note where this differs from Western articulations
- a literature review (Appendix A) that canvassed expected impacts associated with the activities, outputs and outcomes of the IEP
 - As the literature review revealed a paucity of available literature on successful Indigenous employment programs, particularly in relation to the scarcity of Indigenous voices in studies

pertaining to employment strategies and outcomes, stakeholder perspectives are given primacy.

- data on several publicly available counterfactuals, such as the jobactive and CDP programs.

The below framework provides a high-level overview of the nature of impacts assessed, and the method through which the extent of attributable impact to the IEP can be made (Table 5.1).

Impact considerations have been differentiated between those associated with **program participation** (that is, what can be directly observed through this evaluation as occurring through IEP participation), and those associated with **sustained employment outcomes**. This is to ensure that impact is also considered for participants that engage with the IEP program, but do not gain sustained employment as a result.

Table 5.1: Impact measurement framework

| | <p>Impact increases with outcomes realised across IEPs or counterfactuals</p> | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| | Program participation | Sustained employment outcomes | Considerations for the analysis |
| Job seeker | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational attainment employment experience connections with support services <p>Impact measured through (relative to counterfactual):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> direct and future earnings potential health, cultural and wellbeing impacts <p>Sources: Department of Education and Training. <i>National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (2012)</i>; Perkins, K. <i>Adult literacy and numeracy: research and future strategy (2009)</i>; Productivity Commission 'PC News - August 2014: Literacy and numeracy skills and labour market outcomes' (Shomos, A & Forbes, M. 2014); Lamb, S. and Huo, S. 'Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education' (Report no. 02/2017); Polidano, C., and Ryan, C. (2016). <i>Long-term outcomes from Australian vocational education. Melbourne Institute Working Paper Series, Working Paper No. 35/16.</i></p> | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sustained employment financial security career opportunity and progression | <p>Impact will differ in accordance with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program characteristics (nature and intensity of support services provided) Participant characteristics (intensity of barriers to employment) Educational attainment (nature of training offered, recognition of qualifications) Nature of employment (including position, wages, sustainability, alignment to aspirations) Program and milestone completion rates |
| Employer | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> employment of Indigenous jobseekers meeting of Indigenous employment targets <p>Impact measured through (relative to counterfactual):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Net fiscal impact of program participation Broader employer workforce impacts <p>Sources: OECD. (2019). <i>Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia</i>, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en. Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', Diversity Council Australia; Austin-Broos, D. (2006). "Working for" and "working among" Western Arrente in central Australia (1), Oceania 76(1).</p> | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> growing Indigenous workforce (including career advancement) integration of Indigenous values and knowledge frameworks in workplace cultural capabilities | <p>Impact will differ in accordance with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer program (nature and intensity of employer supports provided) Industry of employment (the benefits of an Indigenous workforce differ across industries) % of workforce identifying as Indigenous Employer intent and aspiration for Indigenous employment (the rationale and commitment for increasing Indigenous employment) |
| Community | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased participation in education and training at a community level links between community services <p>Impact measured through (relative to counterfactual):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> health, cultural and wellbeing impacts of broader community <p>Sources: Savage, J, and Norton, <i>Non-financial benefits of higher education (Grattan Institute, 2012)</i>, Australian Council for Educational Research. <i>Adult literacy and numeracy - what's the story? (2014) Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System (2019)</i> < https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets.pdf>.</p> | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous workforce in key services social capital gain community aspirations and opportunities for self-determination improved community cohesion | <p>Impact will differ in accordance with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program characteristics (nature and intensity of program/educational attainment/employer links with community services and objectives) Community characteristics (community size, community demographics, % of IEP participation) Nature and location of employment (including alignment with community aspirations) |
| Society | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cost of program delivery <p>Impact measured through (relative to counterfactual):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> administration costs | <p>The economic and social impact associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> benefits associated with reducing the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians sector leadership and shifts in national Indigenous employment approaches <p>Impact measured through (relative to counterfactual):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> government expenditure reduced through employment support, health and crime costs avoided economic, cultural and wellbeing impacts of broader employers, jobseekers and communities beyond those participating in the IEPs | <p>Impact will differ in accordance with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The effectiveness of IEPs in supporting sustained Indigenous employment and other impacts The efficiency of IEP delivery The nature of spill over benefits |
| | <p>Impact measured through (relative to counterfactual):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> administration costs government expenditure reduced through employment support, health and crime costs avoided economic, cultural and wellbeing impacts of broader employers, jobseekers and communities beyond those participating in the IEPs | | |

Chapter 5: Impact

Focus

This section of the report considers the extent to which the IEP generates economic and social impacts for jobseekers, employers, local communities and broader society. This includes consideration of the following evaluation questions:

- *To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term?*
- *In what contexts has the program been more or less successful?*
- *How can the value of each program be optimised with the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs?*

Data sources

- Stakeholder consultations with participants, providers, partners, community representatives and NIAA representatives.
- The Literature Scan completed for this evaluation (Appendix A)
- NIAA program data

Findings

Counterfactual analysis

- Detailed participant-level data from similar employment programs (such as jobactive) could not be obtained as part of this evaluation.
- A preliminary scan of the publicly available data from other employment programs in Australia suggests that the 26-week milestone completion rate for the IEPs is generally higher than average.

Jobseeker impact

- Participation in the program can have a broad range of positive impacts on participants, both through directly gaining employment and through the education, connection and support they receive.

Employer impact

- Employers reported a wide range of financial and non-financial benefits associated with the participating in the program, including enhancing their ability to meet Indigenous employment quotas and targets, their reputation, and the diversity of their workforce.
- It appears that the IEP remains predominately focused on supporting jobseekers to navigate established employment models, rather than shifting the employment model itself.

Community impact

- Stakeholder consultations and academic literature suggest that the IEP can have a positive community-level impact, through increasing community cohesion, sense of belonging and aspiration.

Societal impact

- The IEP has the capacity to have a positive societal impact by reducing welfare expenditure and helping overcome the structural inequities that Indigenous Australians face.

Suggestions:

10. Further econometric impact analysis should be conducted to further explore the mixed results.

5.2 Moving towards a counterfactual

Key finding

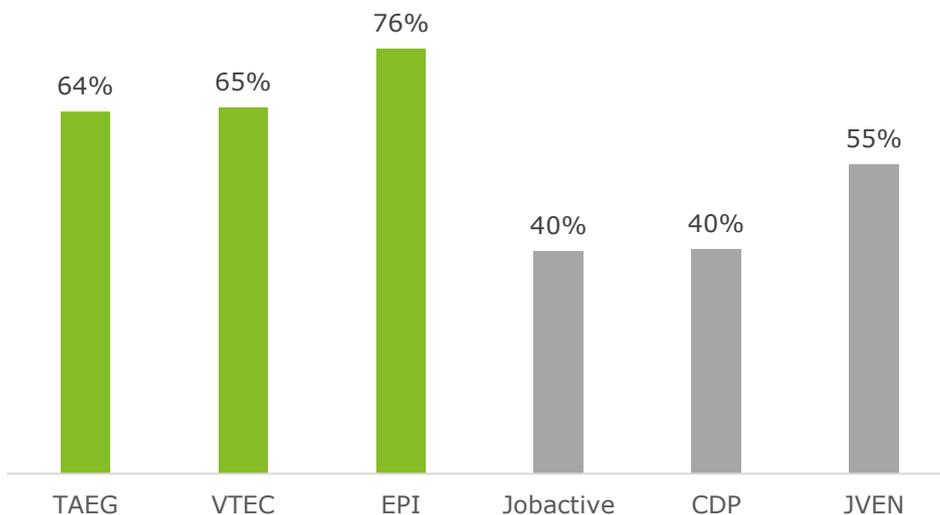
- **Detailed participant-level data from other employment programs (such as jobactive) could not be obtained as part of this evaluation.**
- **A preliminary scan of the publicly available data from other employment programs in Australia suggests that the 26-week milestone completion rate for the IEPs is generally higher than average.**

The employment services landscape in Australia is inherently complicated, featuring a combination of both state and federal generic and cohort-specific programs. Consequently, there are a wide range of possible counterfactuals that the IEP could be evaluated against.⁶⁴

This analysis is limited to comparing the primary quantitative measure of program success that is captured (the 26-week milestone) for the IEP sub-programs against a series of alternative programs (i.e. possible counterfactuals). Caution must be taken when interpreting these results, as this analysis does not account for compositional differences in the cohorts of each of these programs. That is, whether certain programs engage with relatively more disadvantaged or advantaged jobseekers, and how this may impact their reported completion rates. While this evaluation had intended to complete econometric analysis to account for these differences, the required data was ultimately not made available.

A simple comparison of the reported 26-week milestone completion rate for the IEP vs. a selection of similar programs reveals that that the IEP sub-programs have generally achieved higher 26-week milestone completion rates (Chart 5.1). While this analysis cannot be interpreted as definitive evidence of the additionality of the IEP sub-programs, it does suggest that the programs are generally more likely to achieve positive employment outcomes.

Chart 5.1: Comparison of average 26-week milestone completion rates



Note: JVEN refers to the Jobs Victoria Employment Network. The JVEN milestone completion rate is sourced from the Parliament of Victoria (2020) while the CDP rate is cited in the Australian National Audit Office (2017).

⁶⁴ Note: A 'counterfactual' refers to the outcomes that would have been achieved by the beneficiaries of a program in the absence of program participation.

Suggestion 10: Further econometric impact analysis should be conducted to further explore the mixed results.

This evaluation intended to use econometric analysis to estimate the program impact that participation in the IEP may achieve above and beyond participating in a counterfactual mainstream program. Ultimately, the necessary unit-record jobactive data to complete this analysis was not available to the NIAA.

It is strongly recommended that further efforts be made to obtain this counterfactual data – in an exploratory way, putting existing concerns aside – and further econometric analysis conducted. The current results are more inconclusive than they might ultimately be with further testing, using the full dataset.

In particular, it is proposed that a conditional probability model should be created to examine the likelihood that both an IEP and jobactive participant achieve a positive employment outcome. In this instance, a positive employment outcome could be defined as either achieving a 26-week employment outcome, or preferably, a longer-time employment outcome.

Practically, it is anticipated that this would require the use of a logistic regression, such that the response variable was binary in nature (i.e. indicating that a participant had achieved a positive employment outcome or not). The use of logit models to predict labour market outcomes is widely used in the economic literature on this subject.⁶⁵

As an example, a regression conducted on a pooled dataset of IEP and jobactive unit-record data may take the form of:

$$Pr(Employed_{t+1,j} | Unemployed_{t,j}) = f(\beta_j X) + \beta_z IEP$$

Where $Employed_{t+1,j}$ takes the value of 1 if the individual meets the 26-week milestone and 0 otherwise. X represents the set of individual characteristics that are being controlled for (as a minimum: age, gender, remoteness). IEP takes the value of 1 if the individual participated in an IEP program and 0 otherwise (implying they participated in Jobactive). In this example, the coefficient β_z would provide an estimate of the additional likelihood of achieving a positive employment outcome as a result of IEP participation compared to jobactive participation.

Note that this example is not intended to provide a definitive guide to what future econometric analysis should be completed – as this will always be dependent on the exact data provided and testing for model fit, rather it is meant to provide a starting point for future analysis.

Further analysis is required to understand whether the results presented in this study are more a function of the different cohorts that are being analysed, the analytical techniques being used or whether the dynamics relating to income support are fundamentally different to that of the milestone completion rates.

5.3 Jobseeker impact

Key finding

- **Participation in the program can have a broad range of positive impacts on participants, both through directly gaining employment and through the education, connection and support they receive.**

5.3.1 Determining the impact associated with increased employment opportunity

To the extent that IEP participation results in increased sustained employment for an individual, this is correlated with many benefits including the financial benefits of direct earnings, as well as health

⁶⁵See, for example Reserve Bank of Australia, *Factors Affecting an Individual's Future Labour Market Status* (2016).

and wellbeing improvements associated with increased financial stability (including housing). This has been reported as leading to long term and significant changes for an individual:

"We have also observed a change in the poverty cycle for many jobseekers who gain financial independence when gaining long-term employment. This also impacts the financial resilience of their family members and can reduce welfare dependency." (VTEC provider)

Aside from the direct employment impacts associated with participation in an IEP, there are numerous impacts associated with participation in the program itself, irrespective of whether employment is gained. These impacts include:

- the likelihood that education attainment obtained through the program, including through both foundational skills (to the extent that this supports work readiness) and formal qualifications, supports increased earning potential in the future, even if not as a direct or immediate result of IEP participation.

"[Forklift licensing], confined space training, working at heights training and these sorts of things. Firefighting and fire extinguishing training, all these sorts of things are good skills for later. So even if they don't work out here, they're very good skills to take away" (TAEG provider).

- improvements in health and wellbeing associated with the educational attainment, employment experience and access to services facilitated by the IEP, including the promotion of healthy behaviour, links to more intensive support services and increased confidence.

"Mental health is a major issue and loss of culture has contributed to that mental health issue. [...] so the whole idea is we look at wellbeing and mental health, and culture is an essential part of that healing process" (TAEG provider).

- social impacts associated with program participation, including in some instances the opportunity to participate in cultural activities, connect with local community and/or establish a sense of belonging or purpose.

"It's also sometimes the first time they've been able to understand their history of culturalisation and settlement. So I think [...] it's really good for them too when they're working and they go into a role. Maybe sometimes they're the only Aboriginal person there, you know, to have that strong identity of who they are – it's very important" (Indigenous representative, TAEG provider).

- spill-over benefits associated with participation, including the acquisition of drivers' licences, support navigating government services and career/life planning.

"[As a result of our support, participants] now have [...] you know, stable accommodation, getting a license, sometimes just getting in the right frame of mind" (VTEC provider).

Collectively, the extent to which these impacts are positively influenced by participation in an IEP is assessed through the relative likelihood of being employed post participation, as well as the health and wellbeing gains associated with education attainment, access to support services and employment experience irrespective of employment gain.

5.4 Employer impact

Key finding

- **Employers reported a wide range of financial and non-financial benefits associated with the participating in the program, including enhancing their ability to meet Indigenous quotas and targets, their reputation, and the diversity of their workforce.**
- **It appears that the IEP remains predominately focused on supporting jobseekers to navigate established employment models, rather than shifting the employment model itself.**

Consultations with employers of IEP participants established various benefits of program participation. A number of these benefits are associated with direct financial benefits for the employer, including:

- the ability to meet Indigenous employment quotas required for government contracts
- the ability to improve service provision for Indigenous consumers, increasing their customer base
- the ability to create positive working relationships with Traditional Owner groups on whose land the business was operating, improving business development opportunities, and
- the ability to market the business as socially responsible, increasing reputation and brand power.

Beyond the financial benefits, a range of non-monetisable spill-over benefits were also identified, including:

- improved workplace capability in methods to increase diversity, resulting in positive benefits for other minority groups within the workplace
- improved cultural understanding and connection to Indigenous Australia, influencing a positive workplace culture and sense of purpose and place, and
- the benefits of an increasingly diverse workforce, including improvements in workplace culture, a broadening of business development opportunities and improved cultural capabilities of management staff.

5.4.1 Determining the impact associated with increased employment of Indigenous jobseekers

Determining the net impact of these benefits on employers is challenging given data limitations, particularly pertaining to the level of investment employers make in administering the IEP programs beyond any funding received. However, given the voluntary nature of participation in the program, the recurrent engagement of employers with the IEP is evidence that employers consider engaging with the program to be a net benefit.

At its simplest, employer reflections highlighted that where improving Indigenous employment was a priority for their business, the existence of the IEP facilitated a smoother recruitment and retention process for employers.

For employers working with VTEC and TAEG providers – particularly for smaller organisations or organisations looking to recruit only a small number of Indigenous staff, it was observed that there were significant efficiencies to be gained through outsourcing this specialist expertise. Access to community, support with identifying, screening and on boarding potential applicants and the continued support for individual hires, as well as guidance on culturally appropriate workplace practices and processes, enhanced the recruitment and retention process.

For EPI and TAEG employers that deliver the program internally, participation in the IEP was observed to support the upfront and ongoing investment of the organisation in developing tailored recruitment and retention strategies. The program facilitated employers investing in teams, processes and programs to enhance their Indigenous employment capabilities.

While there is some partial evidence to suggest that the IEP generates additional Indigenous employment above and beyond what would occur in their absence, this may be due to a reduction in frictional barriers to recruitment and retention for employers – rather than incentivising Indigenous employment above and beyond what is planned.

The key question in determining the impact of the IEP on Indigenous employment, from an employer perspective – is then considering to what extent the IEP facilitated *additional employment* for these businesses, as opposed to supporting the ease of employment that would have occurred irrespective of intervention.

If the benefit to employers has been a smoother process or it has brought-forward a more successful recruitment and retention process for already planned Indigenous employment, the net impact can be understood as different to where there was previously no Indigenous recruitment intention at all.

If this employment is genuinely additional under all circumstances, then the impact is more aligned with IEP intent – truly improving access to sustained employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Evaluation evidence to date suggests that the impact sits somewhere between these two dimensions, as is often the case for employment assistance programs.

Many employers stated that their incentive to participate in an IEP was in response to their business prioritising a lift in the employment of Indigenous staff for either commercial or social imperatives. While this does suggest that recruitment of Indigenous staff may occur irrespective of the IEP, a strong theme in employer consultations was that even in cases where Indigenous employment was a company priority – it was difficult to implement given a lack of internal expertise. As such, there is evidence to suggest that the presence of the IEP facilitates additional employment above and beyond what would be expected in the absence of the IEP.

In this vein, the impact of the IEP can be understood as primarily driven through reducing the frictional barriers for employers more so than as an incentive to increase Indigenous employment above what was planned. The IEP play a role in bridging the employer capability gap and galvanising corporate activity around a dedicated goal. As established in Section 4.4.2, in employers with sufficient scale and investment in the program (predominately EPIs) this capability is typically built internally, better enabling the IEP influence to be sustained following program completion.

For instance, one EPI partner stated that following the completion of their contract, the company continued to provide the same level of service, and indeed increase their Indigenous employment targets, without IEP support.

Another perspective is to look at the processes and practices of employers that have strong Indigenous employment outcomes without the intervention of an IEP. The existence of companies that prioritise, and are successful in, lifting Indigenous employment in the absence of IEP support does bring into question the net impact of the programs, particularly the EPI. For example, organisations such as BHP and Australia Post have either obtained or exceed Indigenous employment parity without this support.

This has important implications for efficiency and determining optimal investment as there is a risk that funding employers to deliver IEP services, particularly after internal capability has been built, is effectively subsidising existing activity.

While the above analysis highlights the complexity of employer intent in determining the additionality of IEP impact – particularly in considering implications for efficient investment, the qualitative evidence gathered through the evaluation to date suggests that the IEP is supporting employers to build the capability and capacity to hire Indigenous staff, or providing this expertise as direct facilitation for smaller businesses.

It should also be noted that to the extent new knowledge and strategies for improving employer capability to recruit and retain an Indigenous workforce are created through these programs, and the extent to which these learnings are shared and embraced throughout various organisations and sectors, there is the potential for broader system-level change.

5.4.2 Challenging this impact assessment through an Indigenous lens

The above analysis suggests that while the IEP may support employers to recruit Indigenous jobseekers above and beyond what would occur in their absence, this may only be incentivising what they intended to do anyway and/or improving their capacity to do that which they intended to do anyway. The net outcome may not be less about stimulation of additional employment, and more about improving the ease with which they can meet their planned outcomes.

While it may ultimately be beneficial to reduce the frictions of employment for Indigenous people it is not clear that this is a problem of the Indigenous participant or even unique to them. It is just as likely to be a problem with employer systems and practices for employment that struggles with differences in culture or participant type.

The ability to generate this impact is therefore grounded in the current disconnect between Western employment norms and practices, and the cultural requirements of Indigenous people to have access

to and be retained in, meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities. The program design is centred in growing the skills and capabilities of Indigenous jobseekers, to fit more easily into predominately Western business structures.

Given the dominance of Western business in Australia's economy, this is to be expected, but it does raise questions as to the sustainability and quality of employment outcomes from this model. The expected assimilation that is required of jobseekers to successfully transition into such employment can hold negative impacts for other elements of life – including health, wellbeing, connection to community and self-determination (as established in Section 4.3.2). This is pertinent given that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Australia is a signatory to, articulates the 'right of all peoples to be different.'⁶⁶

There is also an important social policy implication in the identification of Indigenous employment as a 'social imperative' for some employers. Such a position frames the act of employing Indigenous people as one of a social good (charity like), which also then changes the employment dynamic for both employer and employee in subtle but pervasive ways, including in the shaping of expectations of success and the likelihood of continuance in the absence of incentives.

Where employers, through their participation in an IEP, genuinely evolve their processes and practices to be more Indigenous centred (as opposed to requiring the adjustment to be solely on the jobseeker side) it is more likely that outcomes will be sustained and meaningful.⁶⁷ It is this type of evolution that is expected to be required to support a sustainable improvement in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

In considering the programs, EPI partners (and TAEG providers who are also employers) are most likely to be able to make this kind of change as they have direct influence over their organisation, whereas TAEG and VTEC providers are more limited in their capacity to influence employer practice.

In practical terms, the process of incorporating Indigenous values into a workplace is likely to be very different in particular contexts as employers exist on a spectrum of understanding and engagement with Indigenous worldviews. For an employer founded in a Western business tradition, a business may seek to ensure that their workplace is culturally safe, by undertaking cultural awareness training across the firm and establishing roles for Indigenous workforce development and support. This type of organisational change focuses on ensuring that Indigenous candidates are included in the workplace.

At the other end of the spectrum, a business that has Indigenous values at the heart of the decisions they make and the way they do business, will likely make decisions differently. For example, only sourcing products that have been collected through culturally aligned methods or setting up different team structures and relationships between employees, potentially in ways that contribute positive economic consequence to the employer.

In these instances, the experience of an Indigenous employee may go beyond just feeling included, to enabling them to have a high sense of belonging in their workplace. It should be noted that not all businesses will have the capacity to centre their organisation in Indigenous values, but that businesses which have Indigenous values at the centre do exist and Indigenous employees are likely to have a different experience working in these organisations.

The evaluation has observed limited evidence of significant, long-term changes in employer practices. A minority of the employers interviewed are evolving their programs to encourage Indigenous employment into leadership and management roles, and overtime this may see a deeper

⁶⁶ UN General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/471355a82.html> [accessed 20 November 2020]

⁶⁷ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>. Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*; Austin-Broos, D. (2006). "'Working for' and 'working among' Western Arrente in central Australia (1), *Oceania* 76(1).

embedding of Indigenous thought within corporate structures. Similarly, as employers experience greater levels of Indigenous participation in their workforce, and there is increased understanding, recognition and celebration of the benefits of this, including direct economic benefits, over time a more genuine shifting towards Indigenous centred workplaces may occur.

On balance, however, at this point in the national awareness of the benefits of Indigenous engagement and employment, it would appear that the IEP remains predominately focused on supporting jobseekers to navigate established employment models, rather than shifting the employment model itself. While much smaller in scale, models of Indigenous led entrepreneurship and business development offer alternative visions of how employment can look through Indigenous centred models. Comparisons of Indigenous employee experience across these models allows for further insights into the sustainability and quality of employment (and associated impact) across employer types.

5.5 Community impact

Key finding

- **Stakeholder consultations and academic literature suggest that the IEP can have a positive community-level impact, through increasing community cohesion, sense of belonging and aspiration.**

Literature finds that at the community level, training and employment programs are associated with improved social cohesion, inclusivity and connectivity, facilitated by higher education, improved foundational skills and reduced unemployment.⁶⁸ As part of this, individuals who undergo training and employment programs are more likely to participate in social, community or political groups, volunteer, engage in environmental conservation and advocacy activities, and feel able to 'have a say' on important issues in the community.⁶⁹

Beyond this social capital gain, stakeholder consultations identified that the IEP has the potential to have a wide range of community benefits, including through spill over impacts for family members of those participating. Identified benefits included:

- Improved sense of belonging and community pride through the employment of Indigenous peoples in local organisations.
 - *"A lot of times we go into shops here and there's no Koori faces in the street, or behind our shop counters, or anything like that. I've got a huge population here so I think it's really important to invest in a local community and provide them with opportunities because the ripple effects of that are going to be huge. For us culture is at the foundation of what we do within all our programs and then there's a heavy focus on that" (Employer of IEP participants).*
- Significant spill-over benefits associated with role modelling and aspiration building for family and friends.
 - *"We also see the positive influence on young people when they have a person in their family working and setting them an example of the routines required to maintain employment. This is the multiplier effect that will be the change for the next generation." (VTEC provider)*
 - *"I've seen families change just because one person we have been working with gets a job. This can impact on younger siblings and things like that. I've also seen parents that have*

⁶⁸ Savage, J, and Norton, *Non-financial benefits of higher education (Grattan Institute, 2012), Australian Council for Educational Research. Adult literacy and numeracy - what's the story? (2014) Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System (2019) < <https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets.pdf>>.*

⁶⁹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment. *Benefits of Educational Attainment (2019) < <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/53004>>.*

seen their young person succeed and said, hang on, what can you do for me, I'm now keen to get into the workforce or whatever." (VTEC provider)

- Increased awareness of community services, and linkages between these services, as employers, IEP providers and wrap around services collaborate – improving community health and wellbeing.⁷⁰

5.5.1 Determining the impact of the IEP on communities

Some of the community benefits articulated above are due to increased employment of Indigenous jobseekers and as such, to the extent that the IEP generates increased Indigenous employment above and beyond the counterfactual scenario, a positive impact can be observed. This impact is enhanced in accordance with the level of disadvantage associated with those gaining employment, and the level of educational attainment gained.

However, when comparing the delivery of the IEP and mainstream employment services, a key difference is in the ability of an Indigenous employment program to tailor a program for the specific needs of a community, including creating a program that is culturally tailored, connected to local services and employers, and through the establishment of a strong community reputation, has the ability to attract Indigenous jobseekers that may not have participated in other employment programs or services.

Through a threshold level of participation within particular communities, and where the IEP impacts are positive, there is potential for community impact to be much greater. As the stakeholder observations testify, this is also expected to hold inter-generational benefits as increased exposure to positive Indigenous employment experiences increases trust in and aspiration for employment within communities. These future inter-generational benefits can then work towards healing the past legacy of discrimination and segregation.

Realisation of the above potential, however, is dependent on positive experiences of program participation and subsequent employment – and as such, intrinsically linked to the quality of the program delivered. Not all sub-programs are currently working closely with community to provide culturally centred and locally based programs or observing such impacts.

"Talking about community in general, not so much I suppose. I can't think of any offhand where we can sort of say, well, the whole community has turned around because we got this person a job. I would love to be able to say that and I am sure there has been some impact, but yeah, not that I can identify off the top of my head." (VTEC provider)

5.5.2 Challenging this impact assessment through an Indigenous lens

Within traditional Indigenous knowledge frameworks, the concept of sustained and meaningful employment cannot be disentangled from community outcomes. The literature review found that programs that allow for Indigenous engagement and self-determination at the local level are community-focused, holistic and tailored to local contexts. This ensures that the diversity of each community is captured and supports relevance, acceptance and appropriateness, which can, in turn, heighten participant buy-in and enhance long-term employment outcomes.

Extending beyond this, and linking to the discussion in Section 4.4.2, it follows the employment opportunities that are locally delivered, self-determined, culturally meaningful and connected to community will hold greater impact than those embedded within Western employment models or that require Indigenous jobseekers work away from Country.

For instance, one VTEC provider noted that they focused on ensuring that jobseekers in remote communities were able to stay on Country if they wished to remain in and give back to their community. This provider utilised trained and hired a number of case managers to work in their own

⁷⁰ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>; OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

remote communities to avoid continuing to employ 'drive in and drive out' workers and instead train and employ Indigenous people to support others. For this provider, this was a deliberate community-led approach which centred on ensuring Indigenous jobseekers could remain within their community.

One EPI employer observed that the success of their employment program in recruiting strong Indigenous candidates from particular communities to work on-site had the unintended consequence of draining these communities of social capital. This employer was considering program extensions that saw community leaders supported to return home and invest back in their community.

Given the IEP is primarily focussed on jobseekers or large corporate employers, rather than local Indigenous business stimulation, there is a risk that while TAEGs and VTECs may deliver culturally centred programs within community, the follow-on link to an appropriate employment opportunity is not consistently available locally.

5.6 Societal impact

Key finding

- ***The IEP has the capacity to have a positive societal impact by reducing welfare expenditure and helping overcome the structural inequities that Indigenous Australians face.***

As identified in the preceding sections, the collective impact of the sub-programs are associated with a range of economic, health, social and cultural benefits that flow onto broader Australian society.

At a basic level, the fiscal impact of the IEP for society is determined by an assessment of the costs of program delivery (funded by tax-payers) in comparison to government expenditure avoided (driven by reduced welfare costs, health costs and crime costs associated with increased employment) and government revenue gained (through increased taxation).

More broadly, however, against the historical backdrop of colonialism and entrenched inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the potential social impact associated with progress towards parity in opportunity in employment and its associated impacts is large.

The evaluation has heard of the power of education and employment, when realised in line with individual, community and cultural aspirations, to transform not only the lives of jobseekers but also families and communities. To the extent that sub-programs support this journey through:

- supporting Indigenous jobseekers to connect with and remain in employment
- facilitating and upskilling employers in the recruitment and retention of an Indigenous workforce
- incubating and sharing best practice strategies for employers to lift their employment of Indigenous people, and
- growing a recognition and understanding of the benefits of Indigenous perspectives in the workplace that, overtime, reduces the structural barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians through an increasingly culturally centred and capable business landscape.

This suggests that the IEP clearly has the capacity to support the government objectives around national reconciliation and improving the lives of Indigenous Australians. However, as this evaluation has noted throughout, there are clear opportunities to re-imagine and re-design the way in which this is achieved.

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Appendix A: Literature scan

Note that this literature scan was finalised in November 2020 and has not been updated to reflect any subsequent policy announcements or changes.

A.1. Introduction

This literature scan forms part of the analysis completed for the Indigenous Employment Programs (IEP) evaluation. In scope for this evaluation is a package of three Commonwealth funded IEPs seeking to deliver improved outcomes for Indigenous Australians, including Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs), the Employment Parity Initiative (EPI) and Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG). These three initiatives have different program designs and are intended to support Indigenous jobseekers/employees, as well as employers, in generating employment outcomes.

The aim of this literature scan is to identify the key design and implementation features of effective IEPs. This literature scan has been a living document throughout the course of the project engagement. It has been continuously built upon and supplemented with additional sources throughout the evaluation.

The literature scan was guided by key research questions which aim to understand:

- key learnings from past Indigenous employment initiatives, with a focus on parity, wrap around support and training and employment.
- perspectives of Indigenous Australian⁷¹ jobseekers and employees and perspectives of employers regarding their IEP experiences
- expected outcomes of Government employment programs in general, and how these compare with those designed for Indigenous Australians
- key success factors and principles underpinning successful Indigenous Australian initiatives
- the limitations of existing literature

The search strategy involved gathering literature from a range of academic, employment and Indigenous specific databases and peer-reviewed journals, as well as grey literature. Relevant but broad search terms relating to IEPs, employment initiatives and key success factors for enhancing Indigenous employment were used.

The outcomes of the search strategy identified over 50 papers, largely with a focus on qualitative research in relation to general employment initiatives to support Indigenous Australians to access and participate in employment. A large portion of the research was short-term rather than longitudinal, but nonetheless offers insights into trends of success and programmatic features and principles.

The search methodology yielded limited results to allow differentiation between types of IEPs (such as those that focus on achieving parity, training or wrap around support). This means that this literature scan presents a generalised discussion of the features of effective IEPs. The literature scan also considers learnings from broader employment programs and successful Indigenous initiatives across sectors.

⁷¹ In recognition of the NIAA's remit as the National Indigenous Australians Agency, the term "Indigenous Australian" is used throughout this document to reflect the variations of term used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or First Nations Australians

A.2. Policy and employment context

This section establishes the rationale for Indigenous employment programs and provides a high level overview of past policy responses.

A.2.1. The challenge for Australia

When it comes to traditional employment outcomes, Indigenous Australians are among the most disadvantaged cohorts within Australian society. Sources of this disadvantage are numerous and systemic, influenced by historic policies of discrimination, including the removal – and ongoing removal – of Indigenous children and the consequential inter-generational trauma.⁷²

For the purposes of this research, disadvantage is reflected in Indigenous Australian's differentiated access to, and participation in, meaningful employment programs and opportunity. These exclusions result in the participation rates, skills, qualifications and income reported by Indigenous Australians at far below the national average.⁷³

Improving the health, education and employment outcomes of Indigenous Australians has been a national priority, particularly since the *Closing the Gap* initiative commenced in 2008. Over the past decade, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment rates has slightly decreased (1.3 percentage points).^{74 75} This is due to both an increase in Indigenous employment rates and a slight decrease in non-Indigenous employment rates. The remaining gap, however, is stark, with the Indigenous employment rate at approximately 49 per cent compared to around 75 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians.^{76 77}

Government funded IEPs have been in place since the 1970s, when the practice of distributing rations to Indigenous Australians ceased. This occurred following the 1967 Referendum, which culminated in a significant amendment to Section 51 or 'the race power' of the Constitution, giving the Commonwealth Government – for the first time – the power to make laws for Indigenous Australians, which was previously under State and Territory remit. Unfortunately, the limited impact of employment initiatives on reducing the gap to date indicates that a different approach is required to instigate change.

Several intersecting factors are contributing to this low and persistent Indigenous employment rate, with many of these barriers stemming from the cultural attitudes, as well as policies and systems associated with Western colonisation. Despite these commonly experienced barriers to employment, Indigenous Australians should not be perceived as a homogenous group, as there is a significant variation in their culture, language, background and therefore experiences. As reported in the literature, some of these include:

- persistent low literacy and numeracy, particularly in remote communities, due to sustained barriers to education;⁷⁸
- the tension between 'mainstream' employment norms and expectations and pressures with Indigenous family and cultural responsibility, which is often viewed as a primary obligation;⁷⁹ and

⁷² Atkinson, J. et al. (2010). 'Trauma, Transgenerational Transfer and Effects on Community Wellbeing.' Accessed from: https://communitylegalqld.org.au/sites/default/files/downloads/pages/working_with_first_nations_people_-_trauma_transgenerational_transfer_and_effects_on_community_wellbeing.pdf

⁷³ Burgess, J. and Dyer, S. (2009). 'Workplace mentoring for indigenous Australians: a case study.' *Equal opportunities International* 28 (6), pp. 465-485.

⁷⁴ Australian Government. (2020). 'Closing the Gap Report 2020'. Accessed from: <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/employment>

⁷⁵ In 2008, the Indigenous employment rate was 54% compared to 73% for non-Indigenous Australians.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ The evaluation team will return to these figures later in the year to ensure the most relevant and up-to-date data is included.

⁷⁸ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

⁷⁹ Venn, D. and Biddle, N. (2018). 'Recent trends in indigenous employment' *Journal of Australian Political Economy*.

- enduring trends of poor health amongst Indigenous Australians, including major chronic diseases and poor self-assessed health status, which have a strong negative relationship with employment participation.⁸⁰

Research has highlighted that macroeconomic conditions also influence Indigenous employment outcomes. In Australia, strong macro-economic conditions supported growth in Indigenous employment between 1994-2008.⁸¹ Conversely, Indigenous Australian employment levels are more prone to being impacted by economic downturns when compared to non-Indigenous Australians, largely due to Indigenous Australians having lower levels of human capital (education or skill level).⁸²

By the time Indigenous Australian's reach employment age, there is limited opportunity to redress risk factors and barriers. As such, early intervention and prevention strategies - such as those focused in education and pathways, are useful considerations. Educational participation and engagement remains one of the most influential factors to augment the Indigenous employment rate, but these programs have not been considered as part of this literature scan.⁸³ Studies have demonstrated that education coincides with growth in employment - when Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have the same level of education, the employment gap is significantly reduced.⁸⁴

However, Indigenous employment and education and training opportunities also vary depending on location.⁸⁵ In remote communities, levels of low Indigenous educational attainment are more pronounced, and fewer vocational education and training opportunities are offered in remote communities.⁸⁶ Coupled with a weak labour market, remote communities continue to face the highest levels of long-term Indigenous unemployment.

A.2.2. The response to date

Overview of the response

Since the 1967 Referendum, the Australian Government has prioritised Indigenous employment, with a number of policies and programs being implemented. Figure A.1 outlines the evolution of key Commonwealth employment policies and initiatives - relating to both Indigenous and mainstream cohorts - and includes reference to some of the seminal reviews that informed subsequent shifts in policy. Table A.1 builds on Figure A.1 by providing a more detailed outline of the key policy/program changes and key features. Having established the key shifts in policy and programs, the subsequent discussion further details the reasoning and rationale for these shifts in policy over time.

Current IEPs should be understood as having evolved from long-standing Indigenous employment policies and approaches, which have shifted over time in response to a range of factors,

including labour market conditions, evaluations and inquiries, and the direction of mainstream employment programs. The graphic below includes key mainstream services (such as the Job Network and jobactive) in addition to IEPs, noting that while these are not tailored specifically to Indigenous jobseekers, they do provide service to many individuals (including Indigenous Australians), and IEPs are often designed to be complementary to these mainstream services. Jobactive and the Community Development Program (CDP) are the mainstream programs that are currently in operation and the three in-scope IEPs for this evaluation include VTECs, EPI and

⁸⁰ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

⁸¹ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Gelade, S. and Stehlik, T. (2004). 'Exploring locality: The impact of context on Indigenous vocational education and training operations and outcomes.' *NCVER*; Schwab, R.G. (2006). 'Kids, Skidoos and Caribou: The Junior Canadian Ranger Program as a Model for Re-engaging Indigenous Youth in Remote Areas.' *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research - Australian National University*

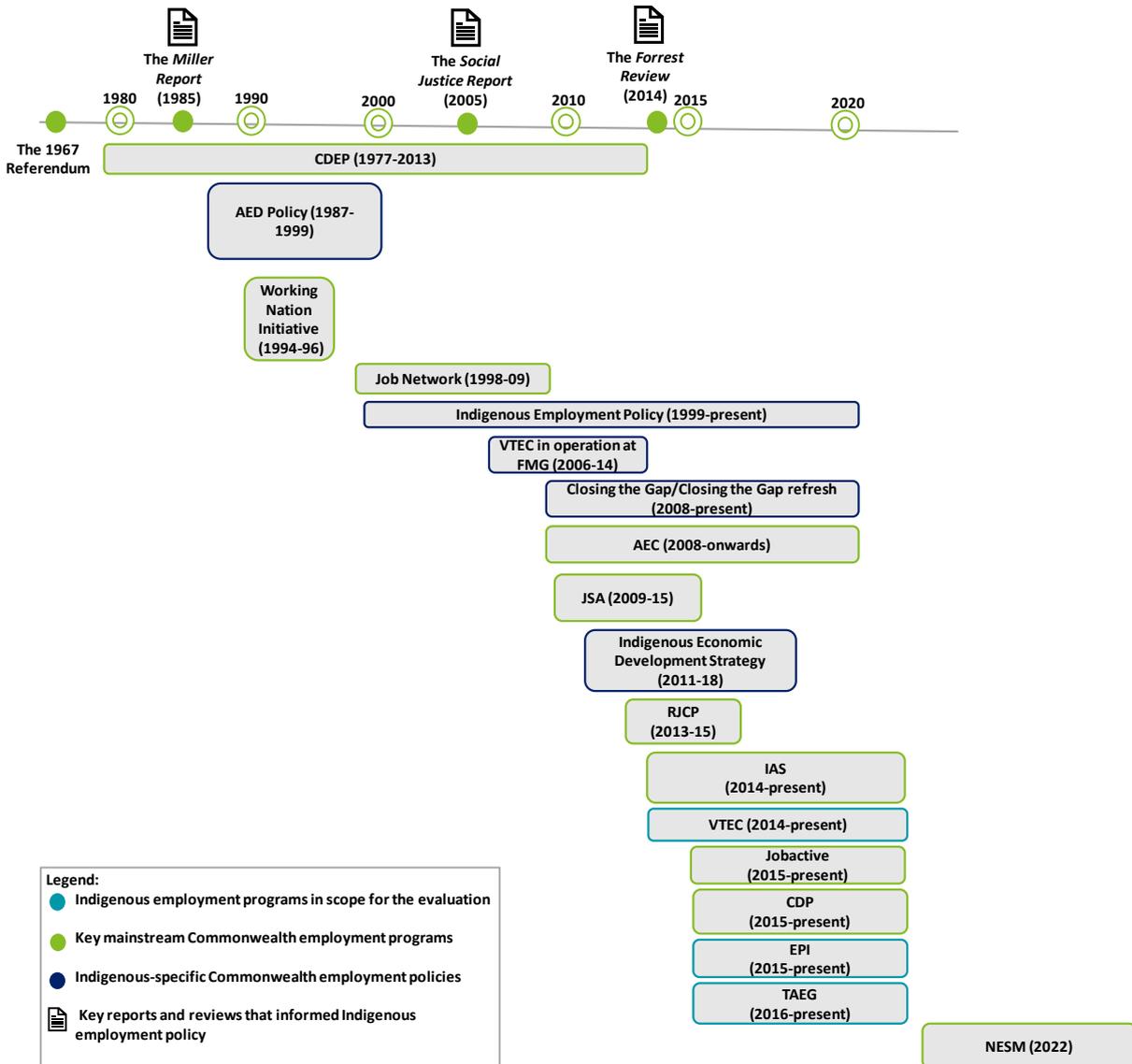
⁸⁶ Ibid.

TAEG. The New Employment Services Model (NESM) is also included in this illustration, as the Australian Government has announced in March 2019 that the NESM would replace jobactive.

Note that, for visual clarity, the following additional acronyms/initialisms are utilised in the Figure A.1 below:

- Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP)
- Australian Employment Development (AED) Policy
- Fortescue Metal Group (FMG)
- Australian Employment Covenant (AEC)
- Job Services Australia (JSA)
- Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP)
- Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS)
- New Employment Services Model (NESM)

Figure A.1: The evolution of key Commonwealth employment initiatives



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020).

Table A.1: Evolution of employment policies and policy reviews affecting Indigenous Australians

| Timeline | Key policies, programs and changes | Targeted cohort | Features |
|-----------------|--|------------------------|--|
| 1967-69 | <p>Revision of Section 51 (xxvi) of the Constitution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commonwealth Government was now able to develop legislation for Indigenous Australians | Indigenous Australians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the 1967 Referendum, Section 51 or 'the race power' of the Constitution was amended, giving the Commonwealth Government power to make laws for Indigenous Australians, which was previously reserved for States and Territories |
| 1977 | <p>National Employment Strategy for Aborigines (NESA)</p> | Indigenous Australians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs (The Miller Report 1985) found that NESA had not been implemented as a cohesive strategy and achieved only a 'marginal impact on the overall Aboriginal employment situation' |
| 1977-2013 | <p>Community Development Employment Program (CDEP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First mutual obligations scheme in Australia Participation in community works projects became tied to unemployment support payments Originally offered flexible employment opportunities and a focus on community development, local control and responsibility Major component of the NESA | Indigenous job seekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of employment benefits coupled with the absence of employment prospects in remote communities led to concerns that payments would disincentivise work and be detrimental to recipient motivation and Indigenous communities more broadly Given its long existence, the CDEP underwent a series of revisions and iterations before being replaced by the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) in 2013 Over time, the scheme became more aligned with mainstream employment programs, such as Job Network, due to criticism that the CDEP was not sufficiently building participant 'work readiness' or transitions in sustainable employment In 2004, The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) was transferred responsibility of the CDEP from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission (ATSIC) |
| 1987-99 | <p>Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major components: Training for Aboriginals Program, and an expansion of the CDEP, including to more regional locations | Indigenous job seekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed in response to the review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs: The Miller Report (1985) |

| Timeline | Key policies, programs and changes | Targeted cohort | Features |
|-----------------|--|------------------------|--|
| 1994-96 | <p>Working Nation Initiative (WNI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major components: expansion of labour market programs, unemployed case management, a Youth Training Initiative, New Work Opportunities, the Job Compact, and revisions to the social security system | All job seekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WNI developed in response to recession in the early 1990s and subsequent increase in long-term unemployment Disadvantaged job seekers, such as Indigenous jobseekers, were targeted by a large number of placements across program types |
| 1998-2009 | <p>Job Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides employment placement assistance to jobseekers in receipt of income support | All job seekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on a competitive tendering process of Australia-wide community-based and private agencies seeking employment service contracts |
| 1999 | <p>Indigenous Employment Policy/Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major components: wage assistance, Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP), CDEP Placement Incentive, National Indigenous Cadetship Projects, and Indigenous Employment Centres | Indigenous job seekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sought to encourage private sector employment Underwent some significant revisions in 2009, such as the cessation of CDEP in locations with established economies; the CDEP's program features shifted towards building skills for non-CDEP employment, reflecting mainstream employment programs; and language and literacy training for participants. |
| 2008 | <p>Closing the Gap</p> | Indigenous Australians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tom Calma's <i>Social Justice report 2005</i> urged Australian governments to commit to achieving equality for Indigenous people in health and life expectancy within 25 years. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) pledged to close six <i>Closing the Gap</i> targets relating to life expectancy, mortality rates for children, early childhood education within remote communities, reading, writing and numeracy outcomes, year 12 attainment, and employment outcomes. |
| 2009 | <p>Job Services Australia (JSA)</p> <p>Key changes include: improved links between labour market assistance and apprenticeships, and vocational training and State and Territory government employment and training programs</p> | All job seekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaced the Job Network, JSA became the primary employment program throughout Australia While not Indigenous-specific, JSA provided job search assistance to the Indigenous population |

| Timeline | Key policies, programs and changes | Targeted cohort | Features |
|-----------------|---|---|--|
| 2011-18 | Indigenous Economic Development Strategy | Indigenous Australians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ultimate objective is to support increased personal and economic wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, through greater participation in the economy Key priorities: strengthen foundations to create an environment that supports economic development; invest in education; improve access to skills development and jobs; and assist individuals and communities to achieve financial security and independence. |
| 2013-15 | Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) Key changes from the CDEP include: a stronger focus on linking jobseekers to the formal economy, while also enhancing local economic development; and it's administration largely reflects non-remote employment programs, such as Work for the Dole's centralised approach. | All job seekers in remote areas (majority Indigenous) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants and clients from the CDEP, Job Services Australia, Disability Employment services and the Indigenous Employment Program in remote areas were rolled onto the RJCP. RJCP sought to address the many criticisms of CDEP, such as limited participants not building employable skills or job prospects external to the CDEP, and that work requirements were not being enforced. |
| 2014 | Creating Parity: the Forrest Review (2014) Pivotal review that informed the refinement of existing and development of new programs designed to achieve parity in outcomes for Indigenous Australians. | Indigenous Australians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Forrest Review (2014) set out 27 independent recommendations which underpinned the development of the VTEC The recommendations were designed to reduce passive welfare, especially in remote communities, and "provide strong incentives recognising that only first Australians themselves can make necessary lifestyle changes, and only employers and the market can deliver real jobs". |
| 2014-present | Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) This strategy aims to shift the way funding is delivered to ensure it is flexible and better designed to address the needs, priorities and aspirations of individual communities. | Indigenous Australians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IAS consolidates the policies and programs delivered by the Government into five key program streams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs, Land and Economy Children and Schooling Safety and Wellbeing Culture and Capability Remote Australian Strategies |
| 2015 – present | Jobactive Key changes include: increased focus on building jobseeker skills to meet employer needs; increase | All job seekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaced JSA in 2015 as the primary employment program in Australia Participant compliance with MORs includes attendance at appointments, genuine job search efforts and engagement in suitable activities. |

| Timeline | Key policies, programs and changes | Targeted cohort | Features |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| | jobseeker engagement through stronger mutual obligation requirements (MOR); and a reduction in red tape for service providers. | | |
| 2015-present | <p>Community Development Program (CDP)</p> <p>Key changes include: MOR and Continuous Work for the Dole, replacing 'Structured Activities', with a 25 hour per week activity requirement</p> | <i>All job seekers in remote areas (majority Indigenous)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replacing the RJCP, the CDP was designed to increase participation in work-like activities, improve sustainability of employment transitions and participant employability in remote areas. |
| 2014 – present | Vocational Training and Employment Centre | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a demand-driven approach, pre-employment training is provided to participants by specialised training providers, linked to a guaranteed job. |
| 2015-present | Employment Parity Initiative (EPI) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports large Australian companies to increase Indigenous representation in their workplace |
| 2015-present | Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds projects that seek to improve job readiness and employability of Indigenous Australians |

Recent history of Indigenous employment policy

This section explores the evolution of Indigenous employment policy over four decades, from the 1970s-2012. For the purposes of this literature scan, this evolution can best be understood in two key timeframes – post the 1967 referendum and 1990/91 recession in Australia.

At a high-level, the evolution of Indigenous employment policies for this period can be understood considering key shifts in policy direction:

- The initial approach to Indigenous employment policy emphasised the importance of a **flexible, place-based approach, allowing for self-determination and cultural preservation**, through the inclusion of Indigenous input into decision-making. This is reflected in the design and implementation of CDEP and the AEDP.
- The 1990/91 recession was a key turning point in mainstream employment policy strategy, resulting in an **increased focus on the privatisation of services or skills/training**, and an **increased focus on program activities supporting mainstream job readiness**.

Indigenous employment policy has been shaped by successive governments and overtime **policy has increasingly been geared towards participation in the mainstream economy and a governance approach that is more centralised**. In this way, it appears that the focus on self-determination and cultural preservation based on a differentiated and localised approach was replaced by a more homogenous approach.

Post the 1967 Referendum Program

The CDEP was the first Indigenous-specific mutual obligations scheme that operated in remote locations. It began in 1977 and continued until 2013– the longest standing employment program to date in Australian history – which was replaced with RJCP in 2013, and then two years later by the CDP. The CDEP addressed the widely held concern that the absence of employment prospects in remote communities, coupled with the creation of unemployment benefits, would disincentivise work and have detrimental effects on job seeker motivation.⁸⁷ It established as a mutual obligation scheme where participants worked for welfare entitlements, but over its lifecycle, the objectives expanded to include community development, enterprise development, employment creation and income support.⁸⁸ As the vast majority of participants resided in remote and very remote communities, the CDEP was the major labour market in these locations, as limited or no mainstream options existed in these locations.⁸⁹

The CDEP was designed as a place-based approach to providing employment, where Indigenous leaders held decision-making power over what work-like activities would be undertaken within the community. The flexibility of the program design and ability to tailor the program to specific and unique needs, such as flexible work arrangements to attend cultural and family responsibility, was perceived positively by Indigenous communities.⁹⁰ This aspect of the CDEP was seen a progressive as it enabled greater flexibility, individual choice and connected employment creation, income support and community development.⁹¹ These characteristics enabled Indigenous participant agency, and the types of activities engaged in reflect that the focus was on participation

⁸⁷ Department of Finance and Deregulation: Office of Evaluation and Audit. (2009). 'Evaluation of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Program.

⁸⁸ Altman, J.C. (2007). 'Scrapping CDEP is just plain dumb,' *Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University*.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Altman, J.C. (2005). 'CDEP 2005: A New Home and New Objectives for a Very Old Program?'. Accessed from: https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148933/1/Altman_CDEP_2005_0.pdf

⁹¹ Altman, J.C. (2007). 'Scrapping CDEP is just plain dumb,' *Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University*.

rather than just mainstream employment.⁹² Examples of Indigenous selected activities include arts production and sale and customary (non-market) wildlife harvesting.⁹³

The Miller Report (1985) articulated that the CDEP was successful from a moral and cultural sense, in that Indigenous communities and participants were granted autonomy to select the activities and structure of work in accordance with their lifestyle. The *Miller Report* proposed an expansion of the CDEP to more regional and settled locations, and urged the Government to consider a policy of support that “goes beyond the welfare, housing and municipal services industries and which should be directed towards Aboriginal people becoming more independent by enabling them to provide for their own livelihood”.⁹⁴ Beyond this, the report also reported that programs that work towards self-determination will be “longer-term, involve real training and result in Aboriginal control of resources, as well as access to jobs in the regular labour market.”⁹⁵

In addition, because the CDEP supports a majority of participants in remote and very remote areas, the focus on increasing participation in work-like activities was received positively by some, as opportunities for labour market participation were scarce.⁹⁶ Twenty years after the *Miller Report*, in 2005, Professor Jon Altman’s academic analysis, based on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSISS), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) and census data, of the CDEP stated that the scheme was a success in “generating positive economic and community development outcomes at a minimal cost to the Australian taxpayer”.⁹⁷

The CDEP, however, has also received criticism, namely regarding ‘double dipping’ and the program’s limited ability to transition participants into mainstream employment. ‘Double dipping’ can occur because participants can receive CDEP payments alongside other forms of income assistance.⁹⁸ Further, the program’s lack of relevancy to ‘real jobs’ and connection to the ‘mainstream’ market economy was considered a weakness by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous policy makers and community members.⁹⁹ As a result of this, there was further concern that the absence of engagement with ‘real jobs’ would encourage welfare dependency.¹⁰⁰

Following the ten-year operation of the CDEP and the Miller Review, the AEDP which was the first Indigenous specific employment policy, was implemented in 1987. The AEDP aimed to increase Indigenous employment and reduce Indigenous welfare dependency, while enhancing self-determination and cultural preservation.¹⁰¹ In addition, the AEDP recognised the differences in unemployment experiences and employment barriers for those living in remote versus towns with an

⁹² Altman, J.C. (2005). ‘CDEP 2005: A New Home and New Objectives for a Very Old Program?’. Accessed from: https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148933/1/Altman_CDEP_2005_0.pdf

⁹³ Altman, J.C. (2007). ‘Scrapping CDEP is just plain dumb,’ *Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University*.

⁹⁴ Miller, M. (1985). Aboriginal employment and training programs: report to the Committee of Review. Accessed from: <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A29210>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Altman, J.C. (2007). ‘Scrapping CDEP is just plain dumb,’ *Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University*.

⁹⁷ Altman, J. (2005). ‘CDEP 2005: A New Home and New Objectives for a Very Old Program?’. Accessed from: https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148933/1/Altman_CDEP_2005_0.pdf; Altman et al. (2005). ‘Policy Issues for the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme in Rural and Remote Australia’. Accessed from: https://caep.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2005_DP271_0.pdf

⁹⁸ Hudson, S. (2008). ‘CDEP: Help or Hindrance? The community Development Employment Program and its Impact on Indigenous Australians,’ *The Centre for Independent Studies*.

⁹⁹ Jordan, K. (2017). ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions.’ *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid; Department of Finance and Deregulation: Office of Evaluation and Audit. (2009). ‘Evaluation of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Program.

¹⁰¹ Gray, M., Hunter, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). ‘Increasing Indigenous employment rates’, Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

established labour market. As such, programs in established towns were aligned with mainstream approaches, while the CDEP provided in remote areas focussed on community-based employment.

Post the 1990/91 recession

A key turning point in Australia's approach to employment services and program policies occurred in response to the 1990/91 recession and the subsequent increase in Australian unemployment under challenging labour market conditions. It is understood that policies and programs from this time onwards typically favoured a 'work-first' approach that sought to align jobseeker skill development with the those required in local labour markets and expected by private employers.

The Working Nation Initiative, implemented from 1994-96, was the government's response to address the impact of the recession on employment opportunities. It involved an expansion of mainstream labour market programs and case management of *all* unemployed individuals.¹⁰² While this initiative was not specifically for Indigenous Australians, it did see a large number of additional program placements for disadvantaged participants, including Indigenous Australians.

In 1998, Job Network was created – a mainstream employment program that provides placement assistance to job seekers, who receive income support payments. An integral feature of Job Network that has since become a hallmark of many employment programs was the competitive tendering process of both community and private agencies seeking employment service contracts.¹⁰³ It is also understood that Job Network was the first program with outcome milestone payments of 13 and 26 weeks. In existence until 2009, Job Network was replaced by JSA.

In 1999, the Indigenous Employment Policy came into effect, replacing the AEDP. **With the creation of the Indigenous Employment Policy, Indigenous-specific programs received an increase in funding and the key changes include an increasing emphasis on Indigenous integration and employment in the mainstream economy, particularly in the private sector.**¹⁰⁴ The Indigenous Employment Policy extended to several Indigenous employment programs, including STEP, CDEP Placement Incentive, National Indigenous Cadetship Projects, and Indigenous Employment Centres.¹⁰⁵

Tom Calma's Social Justice report (2005) urged Australian governments to commit to achieving equality for Indigenous people in health and life expectancy within 25 years - a turning point for Indigenous employment policy strategy.¹⁰⁶ This report spurred the creation of *Closing the Gap* in 2008 in which COAG pledged to achieve six *Closing the Gap* targets, with one specific to employment outcomes.

JSA was the primary employment program in Australian for the first seven years of *Closing the Gap*. Between 2009-15, JSA supported a mainstream cohort and while it was not Indigenous-specific, it provided job search assistance to Indigenous job seekers. **JSA sought to enhance jobseekers' job readiness' for the labour market** by ensuring that job search assistance, apprenticeships, vocational training and State and Territory government employment and training programs are

¹⁰² Gray, M., Hunter, B. and Lohoar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

¹⁰³ Productivity Commission. (2009). 'Independent Review of the Job Network.' Accessed from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/job-network/report/jobnetwork.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ Gray, M., Hunter, B. and Lohoar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2005). 'Social Justice Report'. Accessed from: https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social_justice/sj_report/sireport05/pdf/SocialJustice2005.pdf; Gariner-Garden, J. (2020). 'Closing the Gap.' Accessed from: https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook44p/ClosingGap

geared towards improving the skills of participants to engage in the labour market.¹⁰⁷ It is understood that the JSA was the first employment program that included milestone payments for 26-week employment outcomes. This evidence basis for this exists internally with DESE where analysis reportedly demonstrated that this feature has a positive impact on participant employment outcomes.

In 2009, the Indigenous Employment Policy was refined, and **program features became increasingly geared towards building skills for the mainstream labour market and achieving short-term employment outcomes.**

The Indigenous Economic Development Strategy came into effect in 2011, with the aim to support increased wellbeing – in both the personal and financial sense – of Indigenous Australians through greater participation in the economy.¹⁰⁸

Following this in 2012, **the RJCP came into effect resulting in participants and clients from a range of existing projects being rolled onto the RJCP.** These programs included the CDEP, JSA, the Indigenous Employment Program and Disability Employment Services.¹⁰⁹ A key distinction of the RJCP from previous programs is that the **RJCP had a stronger focus on linking jobseekers to the formal economy and it was administered in a largely similar way to non-remote employment programs, such as Work for the Dole.**

Current Commonwealth government Indigenous employment policy

This section explores the evolution of Indigenous employment policy from 2014 to present.

At a high-level, the evolution of Indigenous employment policies for this period can be understood considering key shifts in policy direction:

- The Creating Parity: *Forrest Review* (2014) is a seminal report that informed the current direction of Indigenous employment policy and provides a rationale for the roll-out of the VTEC model and EPI and refinement of TAEG.
- The *Forrest Review* **argued that existing employment programs' incentives were weighted too heavily towards process rather than employment outcomes**, which the review stated perpetuated the cycle of "training for training's sake".

The recommendations within the *Forrest Review* ushered in an era of Indigenous employment policy that is **currently focussed on a demand-drive approach that ensures jobseekers have the skills required and desired by employers to enable sustained employment in the mainstream market.**

The Forrest Review

In 2014, the *Forrest Review* set out 27 independent recommendations, building on past evaluations and reviews, which underpinned the development of employment programs supporting Indigenous Australians.¹¹⁰ The recommendations sought to address criticisms of past programs, including reducing passive welfare (particularly in remote communities) and increasing participation in the mainstream economy.¹¹¹ In particular, the recommendations were designed to "provide strong

¹⁰⁷ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2012). *The Evaluation of Job Services Australia 2009-2012*. Accessed from:

https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/the_evaluation_of_jsa_2009-2012_1.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Australian Government. (2011) 'Indigenous Economic Development Strategy'. Accessed from: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/youthpol/en/equest.fileutils.dochandle?p_uploaded_file_id=500

¹⁰⁹ Commonwealth of Australia. (2018). 'The Community Development Programme: Evaluation of Participation and Employment outcomes.' Accessed from: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/cdp-evaluation-participation-employment-outcomes.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Commonwealth of Australia. (2015). 'The Forrest Review (2014): Creating Parity'. Accessed from: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Forrest-Review.pdf>

¹¹¹ Ibid.

incentives recognising that only Indigenous Australians themselves can make necessary lifestyle changes, and only employers and the market can deliver real jobs".¹¹²

The *Forrest Review* promoted a strictly demand-driven approach to employment services that focused on sustainable employment outcomes, as opposed to training outcomes.¹¹³

Key shifts in the proposed features of employment services providing support for Indigenous Australians include:

- the removal of potential provider "vested interests" through payments that are "heavily weighted towards achieving 26-week employment outcome";
- rigorously applying job seeker obligations, "with exceptions and directions strictly limited", to enhance participant motivation;
- provision of case management support to "build employability skills and address issues, such as drug dependence, with in-job support wherever possible;
- implementing activities that reflect "real workplace pressures and requirements", such as those from Work for the Dole;
- removal of "training for training sake" by only funding providers of programs that are recognised by employers and linked to a guaranteed job.¹¹⁴

It is important to note that the *Forrest Review* has come under heavy scrutiny and criticism from academic and Indigenous leaders, as evidenced by *Academic Perspectives on the Forrest Review: Creating Parity*, published by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR). The key criticisms highlighted in the paper are:

- there is "no recognition of the potential conflict of interest in the Review being led by the Chairman of a major corporation who has publicly lobbied for a very particular form of employment and training service (the VTEC model) for several years prior to the Review being undertaken";
- opportunities for self-determination have been wound back, due to the prioritisation of the "voices of unelected political activities", which has meant the "input from a broad range of Indigenous people to ensure the policy is sensible, and has a high probability of success" has been overlooked;
- the approach and recommendations ignore the "cultural character of economic activity among Indigenous people", and instead polarises the issue as 'real' or 'mainstream' economic activity versus welfare dependency;
- there is "little space for creative and community-based strategies to emerge, and for Indigenous agency, self-determination, aspirations or alternative development propositions to flourish";
- the *Forrest Review* presents "an imagined utopia of sameness", ignoring the multitude of cultural and social differences within the Indigenous population.¹¹⁵

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), released in the same year as the *Forrest Review*, set out to ensure that the way funding is delivered to programs across sectors is flexible to meet the aspirations, needs and priorities of individuals and communities.¹¹⁶

Jobactive

In 2015, jobactive came into being and is the current key employment program designed for all jobseekers, including a sizeable number of Indigenous jobseekers. This program comprises a network of service providers across 1700 locations in Australia, enabling local labour market insight to be incorporated into the delivery of services. Participants are streamed into four groups, each with their own requirements and activities.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Klein, E. (2014). 'Academic Perspectives on the *Forrest Review* (2014): Creating Parity.' Accessed from: <https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/academic-perspectives-forrest-review-creating-parity>

¹¹⁶ Commonwealth of Australia. (2020). 'Indigenous Advancement Strategy'. Accessed from: <https://www.indigenous.gov.au/indigenous-advancement-strategy>

The Senate inquiry entitled *Jobactive: failing those it is intended serve* (2019) reported that “through the evidence the committee received, it became clear that the jobactive program is not fit for purpose”. While it is true that the program has achieved more than 1.2 million job placements, the inquiry challenged the alignment of these placements with the participant and the sustainability of employment.¹¹⁷ **The inquiry found fundamental issues with respect to jobactive appropriateness and effectiveness**, with four key themes emerging that disproportionately impacted the most disadvantaged jobseekers.¹¹⁸

- **There is insufficient support for job seekers experiencing multiple serious barriers to employment** – this is in part a result of people being incorrectly assessed as ‘job ready’ and because consultants reportedly have such large caseloads they are unable to provide tailored individualised support by linking to appropriate services.
- **Job search and other mutual obligation requirements are poorly designed and often inappropriate.** For example, in locations with a small labour market, participants approach the same employers again and again; and some participants have missed paid employment to attend compulsory appointments with their jobactive provider.
- **The Targeted Compliance Framework is punitive and unfair.** Homeless participants and Indigenous Australians are among the largest cohorts that experience payment suspensions, due to a breach of their mutual obligation requirements.
- **Administrative errors have resulted in participants wrongfully having their payments suspended.**¹¹⁹

OECD research indicates that **jobactive appears less effective for Indigenous Australians than non-Indigenous Australians.**¹²⁰ According to the OECD, the number of Indigenous caseloads (numbers not in work) has continued increasing since 2015, while the number of caseloads for non-Indigenous Australians has decreased. It is understood that a reason for this is Indigenous population growth. There is also evidence that Indigenous Australians remain within the *jobactive* program for longer than non-Indigenous jobseekers.¹²¹ The reasons for this may be the short-term focus of the *jobactive* program. *Jobactive* primarily provides job-readiness support and assistance with employability skills and employment applications to jobseekers.¹²² As such, Indigenous Australians, who face – on average – more complex barriers to job-readiness, may be less suited to the program.

Community Development Program

The same year jobactive was introduced, the CDP replaced the RJCP with the objective to “increase participation in work-like activities, improve sustainability of employment transitions and participant employability in remote areas.” The CDP provides support to a majority Indigenous cohort (83 per cent) and operates in more than 1000 remote communities nationwide.¹²³ In these locations, labour market opportunities are often limited.¹²⁴ As such, work-like activities can include “work for the dole activities, community and cultural activities, and undertaking training and other support activities” that address barriers to employment and community participation.¹²⁵

The 2018 Senate Inquiry report on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the CDP shed light on several issues with CDP design, and **there was no conclusive evidence for the positive effect**

¹¹⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, Education and Employment References Committee. (2018). *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ OECD. (2019). ‘Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia’, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Commonwealth of Australia (2018). ‘The Community Development Programme: Evaluation of Participation and Employment Outcomes’; Allam, L. (2019). ‘Government releases damning review of its own Aboriginal work-for-the-dole scheme’. Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/feb/06/a-third-of-remote-aboriginal-work-for-the-dole-participants-say-community-worse-off>

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ NIAA. (2020). ‘Community Development Program Overview.’ Accessed from: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/cdp-overview.pdf>

on job placements and 13-week outcomes.¹²⁶ In addition, the report found that social problems increased since the CDP was introduced in remote locations, including an increase in domestic violence and an increase in mental health challenges, sleep deprivation and feelings of shame.¹²⁷ The committee reported that in their view the “**CDP cannot and should not continue in its current form**”.¹²⁸ Box 1 below outlines some of the key findings from the Senate Inquiry, supported by additional academic and Indigenous perspectives from the CAEPR.

Box 1: Perspectives on the CDP

The CDP has received some criticism with respect to its design, implementation and effectiveness, as evidenced in the Senate Inquiry and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions* by the CAEPR.

- **The work-first orientation of the CDP has received scrutiny as the program is intended to cater for participants in remote and very remote areas where labour market opportunities are scarce.**¹²⁹ For example, according to the Senate Inquiry, the CDP supports nineteen out of Australia’s twenty most disadvantaged and remote locations, where employment prospects are more sporadic and short-term.¹³⁰
- **The centralised governance approach has been criticised as inflexible and there are reportedly fewer opportunities for Indigenous community members to engage in decision-making regarding the type of work-activities undertaken.**¹³¹ The Senate Inquiry, for instance, reported that “a new program needs to be developed which moves away from a centralised, top-down administration in which communities are told what to do and move towards a model where the local communities are empowered to make decisions that are best for them”.¹³²
- **With respect to implementation, the program has been criticised for the limited engagement with local community members to adapt the program at the ground level, reducing opportunities for self-determination.**¹³³ This was of particular concern since the majority of participants are Indigenous, making up 80 per cent of the CDP cohort, with 76 per cent of these Indigenous Australians living in very remote Australia, where labour market opportunities are very limited.¹³⁴
- **Implementation revealed that participants facing higher barriers experience more penalties compared with participants who face low barriers.**¹³⁵ In total, 60 per cent of participants in any one quarter recorded at least one suspension, and a third were penalised during the 2016-18 period.¹³⁶
- **With respect to employment outcomes, there was a one percentage point improvement on 26-week outcomes when comparing participants under the RCJP compared to the CDP.** This is a very minor outcome, particularly when factoring in the high rate of penalties and subsequent suspension of payments. In addition, stakeholder perceptions on whether

¹²⁶ Commonwealth of Australia (2018). ‘The Community Development Programme: Evaluation of Participation and Employment Outcomes’

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Commonwealth of Australia (2018). ‘The Community Development Programme: Evaluation of Participation and Employment Outcomes.’

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Jordan, K. (2017). ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions.’ *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

¹³² Commonwealth of Australia (2018). ‘The Community Development Programme: Evaluation of Participation and Employment Outcomes.’

¹³³ Jordan, K. (2017). ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions.’ *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

¹³⁴ Commonwealth of Australia (2018). ‘The Community Development Programme: Evaluation of Participation and Employment Outcomes.’

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

communities had improved since the roll out of the CDP varied significantly, with 21 per cent of stakeholders felt the community was better off since CDP was introduced, while 36 per cent felt the community was worse.¹³⁷

The outcomes being measures reflect those in mainstream employment programs and does not sufficiently take into account the specific community context. For instance, the Senate Inquiry identified that the provision of provider flexibility to negotiate how employment outcomes are defined, measured and paid for could lead to improved employment outcomes, as it will enable the local labour market condition, community context and local culture to be taken into account.¹³⁸

Closing the Gap refresh

As noted in Section A.2.1, ten years after its introduction, Closing the Gap had not achieved its targets. In response the Australian Government released a Closing the Gap refresh in 2018, stating that **the priority of the Closing the Gap refresh is to work more closely Indigenous Australians to co-design and set revised aspirations.**¹³⁹ Partnerships with Indigenous Australians, guided by key principles of empowerment and self-determination, are emphasised as key.

The Indigenous Employment Programs

It is with this background and within this context that the TAEG, EPI and VTEC programs were created and continue to operate. These three programs function as follows:

- **TAEG** – this program provides supports activities that seek to support Indigenous jobseekers with sustainable jobs, through funding cadetships and providing employer support to assist with attracting and retaining Indigenous Australians.¹⁴⁰
- **EPI** – this initiative works alongside large Australian companies, encouraging them to commit to Indigenous workforce targets.¹⁴¹
- **VTEC** –this initiative seeks to connect Indigenous jobseekers with guaranteed employment by providing necessary support services to prepare jobseekers for long-term employment, as well as training through industry employers.¹⁴²

VTEC

The VTEC model was first developed in 2006 within Fortescue Metals Group (FMG), of which Andrew Forrest was then CEO, as a way to facilitate Indigenous employment within FMG and its contractors in the Pilbara. Having developed the VTEC model within FMG, Forrest then launched the Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) alongside then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. The AEC had the goal of placing 50,000 Indigenous Australians into jobs within two years and focused on securing job pledges from a wide range of employers.¹⁴³

By the time of the *Forrest Review's* publication the AEC was a programme led by GenerationOne - an organisation established by Forrest to focus on advocating for changes to employment and training services for Indigenous Australians – and had over 60,000 jobs committed from nearly 350 companies.¹⁴⁴ The AEC drove a significant shift in Indigenous employment and training policy

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Jordan, K. (2014). 'Andrew Forrest's Indigenous employment project: Do the arguments stack up?' *The Australian National University*; Jordan, K. (2011). 'The Australian Employment Covenant: A research update.

¹⁴⁴ Commonwealth of Australia. (2015). 'The Forrest Review (2014): Creating Parity'. Accessed from: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Forrest-Review.pdf>

towards employers taking on a greater role in contributing to improving Indigenous employment rates.¹⁴⁵

The *Forrest Review* endorsed a nationwide scale-up of the VTEC and the AEC was an important part of this policy, as VTECs would support and train Indigenous jobseekers for the jobs committed to in the AEC.¹⁴⁶ By the time the *Forrest Review* was published (2014), the Commonwealth Government led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott had committed to funding 21 VTECs nation-wide.¹⁴⁷

To date, there has been one progress evaluation of VTECs, and the key findings from this report are presented in Box 2 below.

EPI

The EPI also had its origins in the *Forrest Review*, as **the report recommended that the 'Commonwealth Government provide the top 200 companies in Australia and those with a strong track record of first Australian employment, with tailored contracts to increase the proportion of first Australians among their employees'**.¹⁴⁸

The *Forrest Review* had the ambitious goal of reaching employment parity in Australia,¹⁴⁹ which would require the working Indigenous population to double in size. **As large businesses employ a significant number of Australians, these businesses had the scale to employ a large number of Indigenous Australians.**¹⁵⁰ Moreover, census data demonstrated that there was very low incidence of private sector employment of Indigenous Australians in non-mining industries, which meant that these industries should be targeted to grow their Indigenous workforce.¹⁵¹

At the same time, the *Forrest Review* looked to the high number of AEC job commitments as evidence that employers were willing to invest in growing their Indigenous workforce. **The *Forrest Review* reported that employers had long been frustrated by the inability for employment services to deliver job-ready jobseekers who had undertaken appropriate training and the unnecessary red tape that makes processes overly complex.**¹⁵² The funding required by these business needs to be flexible and responsive to allow employers to develop their own employment strategies.

TAEG

As with VTEC and EPI, the TAEG program has been shaped by the *Forrest Review*. While the TAEG program has existed in its current form since 2016, **it has evolved overtime and was previously a part of the Indigenous Employment Programme**, which came into effect in 1999 and included several other employment programs. **Within the *Forrest Review*, the Indigenous Employment Programme was viewed positively because of its demand-driven approach to providing tailored support to recruit and retain Indigenous employees.**

The *Forrest Review* notes that the employment outcomes for the Indigenous Employment Programme are 55 per cent higher than for mainstream employment services. Reflecting employers' views, the *Forrest Review* did recommend that changes be made to reduce red tape and make navigating the programs easier.

¹⁴⁵ NCVER. (2017). 'Policy snapshot: Indigenous training and employment.'

¹⁴⁶ Miles Morgan Australia. (2015). 'Progress Evaluation of the Vocational Training and Employment Centre Programme.'

¹⁴⁷ Kirrily, J. (2014). 'Andrew Forrest's Indigenous employment project: Do the arguments stack up?' *The Australian National University*.

¹⁴⁸ Commonwealth of Australia. (2015). 'The *Forrest Review* (2014): Creating Parity'. Accessed from: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Forrest-Review.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ According to the *Forrest Review* employment parity can be achieved through ensuring Indigenous Australians have a "decent education", as parity in employment already exists for Indigenous Australians who have a Certificate III or IV level training. Note that the *Forrest Review* does not define the term 'parity'.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

While the *Forrest Review* gives a basis for understanding what the rationale was behind the design of the current IEPs, **there does not appear to be further policy documentation and rationale for the design of the programs.** A detailed policy rationale, inclusive of an initiatives theory of change and the expected causal logic, sets out the rationale for investment and how an initiative is expected to function and reach outcomes. Without this detail, it is difficult to tell what evidence was utilised to design specific features of the IEPs.

Box 2: Key findings from the *Progress Evaluation of the Vocational Training and Employment Centre Programme (2015)*

This evaluation provides some insights into the design, implementation and early outcomes of VTECs after one year of operation. In sum, the overarching findings include the following points.

- **The VTEC programme has resulted in some positive social outcomes,** with 71% of respondents to the service for service providers agreeing that the program has improved family and community relationships.¹⁵³
- **A key advantage of the VTEC program is the provision of mentoring and advocacy,** through “strong, authentic links with the Indigenous community”.¹⁵⁴
- **Insufficient support is provided to participants experiencing long-term structural unemployment,** particularly those living in remote areas where opportunities to engage in a local labour market are scarce.¹⁵⁵
- **The streaming process does not always stream participants appropriately,** resulting in some participants not receiving the necessary supports and training. This is reportedly due to a range of cultural and institutional issues.
- **The provision of training is not always aligned with the background and specific needs of individuals.** This finding resulted in the evaluation recommending the development of an employability skills needs assessment tool.
- **Engagement between VTEC, community and industry varies** with VTECs with established relationships with Indigenous communities experiencing advantages in respect to cultural approach supports and processes.
- **There is at risk of competition with complementary services,** such as the EPI, resulting in concern that service providers are competing for eligible jobseekers.
- **There is a lack of readiness to take on Indigenous jobseekers in some workforces.** This finding prompted the recommendation for improved delivery of effective cross-cultural training in workplaces.
- **Participant outcomes differ significantly and are deeply contextually specific and contingent,** with the most disadvantaged streams of cohorts yielded the lowest employment outcomes based on the 26-week milestone. Of the population sample used in this evaluation (2,912 jobseekers) 74.5% transitioned into employment, falling short of the 90% target.

The majority of jobs were not sourced through the AEC register (74.2%). As such, the evaluation found that the AEC was of limited value.¹⁵⁶

5.6.1 Other services that support Indigenous Australians

Employment programs do not operate in isolation, and participants, especially disadvantaged participants with multiple barriers, access supports from a range of services. For example, the current IEPs are designed to be complementary to, rather than instead of, mainstream programs. The Commonwealth provides a number of services for Indigenous Australians comprises several and varied support programs. Some of which include:

- **Transition to work** – provides support to young people to enter employment or complete education through intensive, pre-employment support to improve their work-readiness.

¹⁵³ Miles Morgan Australia. (2015). ‘Progress Evaluation of the Vocational Training and Employment Centre Programme.’

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

- **ParentsNext** – provides a range of supports to eligible parents, including assistance in finding a course or work experience; help arranging financial support for childcare and study; and connects parents to local services for counselling, emotional support and domestic and family violence.
- **Time to Work Employment Service** – a program that provides intensive and tailored wrap around support for adult, sentenced Indigenous prisoners to prepare them to find employment and reintegrate into the community.

Further, there is an intersection between Commonwealth and state remit when it comes to implementing employment programs, with states and territories also delivering employment assistance initiatives. This is because the Commonwealth has assumed primary responsible for Indigenous affairs, while it shares responsibility and goals with the States and Territories for employment and training. The evaluation considers these intersections, but the literature review has not systematically reviewed state-based programs.

A.3. Perspectives on IEPs

This section explores key learnings from the perspective of Indigenous Australians and employers in relation to IEPs or other related programs or services. This discussion largely relies on three key qualitative studies involving interviews, focus groups and case studies with employers and Indigenous employees. An important caveat is that none of these studies is a strict academic analysis and is linked to either policy goals or advocacy. Consequently, this material has been further supplemented with peer reviewed literature relating to effective program elements, such as mentoring. The three studies include:

- *Walk in My Shoes*, a report commissioned by GenerationOne in 2011, which synthesises key employment program success factors from the perspectives of Indigenous employment managers from a range of sectors, including mining, hospitality, banking, retail and community services.
- *Increasing Indigenous employment rates*, an issues paper for Closing the Gap Clearinghouse in 2012, which synthesises available research to date on the what is known and unknown regarding how to enhance Indigenous employment rates, and includes perspectives of both employers and employees from a range of sectors.
- *Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector* is a consultative report created for *Diversity Council Australia* that collates Indigenous employee and non-Indigenous employer perspectives on private sector initiatives, across sectors, through focus groups and face-to-face interviews.

Before exploring the findings from these research papers, it is useful to summarise the multiple, and often compounding, barriers that are referred to in the following sections. These factors were frequently referenced in the research, by both employers and Indigenous employees, as presenting significant barriers to attracting and retaining employment. It is important to note that these barriers are not exclusive to Indigenous cohorts are also faced by disadvantaged and vulnerable cohorts.

- Stereotypes and stigmas associated with Indigenous Australians
- Limited literacy and numeracy skills as a result of interrupted education
- Past criminal record
- Intergenerational effects of past child removal policies
- Alcohol and other drug dependencies
- Mental health issues
- Poor family health
- History of family violence
- Family pressures and responsibilities, including humbugging¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Humbugging refers to the act of making demands for cultural obligations regarding care for kin, family and the sharing of resources. This may conflict with employment obligations or requirements.

- Households with parents who have been unemployed.¹⁵⁸

These numerous health, wellbeing, environment, cultural and economic factors intersect, compounding disadvantage and perpetuating a cycle of unemployment. The ways in which employers and Indigenous employees and jobseekers understand and perceive these barriers differs.

For employers, these barriers are often perceived as individual weaknesses that can impede the Indigenous employee or jobseeker's ability to fulfil their role. For Indigenous people, these barriers are often perceived as external, environmental factors imposed on them through successive government policies, such as child removal or the inter-generational consequence of colonial settlement and cultural degradation, and when combined with the rigid Western structures of employment, inhibit their ability to access, participate in and retain employment.¹⁵⁹

In this sense, the majority of past Indigenous employment programs have employed a mainstream approach. A 'mainstream' approach privileges Western employment practices, expectations, values and norms, identifying these conceptions as ideal or "correct". In doing so, differences in conception for Indigenous employment norms, practices and cultural attitudes are positioned as deficient and in need of improvement.¹⁶⁰ This means that mainstream approaches are simply those that are deployed in employment programs generally, including for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.

These differences may extend to significant practical differences in perspectives on work and reward as well as personal and community value. They may also incorporate profound differences in value of relationship to employers and the wider economic system. The inevitable result is a misalignment of policy goals, processes and incentives, ultimately demonstrated in outcome measurements.

The policy rationale behind the 'mainstreaming' stance is that greater integration in mainstream markets and 'norms' of employment would serve to widen opportunity and increase autonomy and integration for Indigenous Australians.¹⁶¹ This approach does not accommodate the noted differences in Indigenous norms, values or needs, and assumes that the adoption of Western economic institutions is preferred and that this is the best way to erase statistical inequalities.¹⁶²

A.3.1. Key learnings from the perspective of Indigenous Australians

Table A.2 below summarises the findings of the research on Indigenous perspectives of the barriers, impact and enabling factors within design and implementation aspects of IEPs.

An important reflection on employee perspectives is that the effectiveness of an employment program relies on cultural inclusion from the job identification stage, all the way through to recruitment, training and retention. There are many steps in the employment process that rely on an individual feeling welcome and able to participate, as well as recognising where employment opportunities can meet individual aspirations. Further, employment programs should recognise the array of intersecting factors that present barriers to employment for individuals, and seek to holistically redress these challenges.

¹⁵⁸ GenerationOne. (2011). 'Walk in My Shoes: Employer experiences of barriers and drivers in the employment cycle for Indigenous Australians'; Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohoar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

¹⁵⁹ Jordan, K. (2017). 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions.' *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

¹⁶⁰ Di Giorgio, A. V. and Habibis, D. (2019). 'Governing pluralistic liberal democratic societies and metis knowledge: The problem of Indigenous unemployment.' *Journal of Sociology* 55(1), p 42.

¹⁶¹ Jordan, K. (2017). 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions.' *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

¹⁶² Di Giorgio, A. V. and Habibis, D. (2019). 'Governing pluralistic liberal democratic societies and metis knowledge: The problem of Indigenous unemployment.' *Journal of Sociology* 55(1), 37-53; Jordan, K. (2017). 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions.' *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

Table A.2: Summary of research pertaining to Indigenous Australian perspectives on employment programs

| Aspect | Barrier(s) and impact(s) | Enabling program factor(s) |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Recruitment | <p>Indigenous jobseekers may find/have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'mainstream' recruitment processes, including advertising, formal interviews, questionnaires • limited cultural capital to support the process and build 'know-how' and skillset • multiple, intersecting wellbeing, health, education, family and financial factors (listed above) <p>These may lead Indigenous jobseekers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not understand the process, how to commence or how to access assistance • not have continued support to assist in the process • feel unconfident and uncomfortable with a formal 'mainstream' process • not respond to the 'mainstream' job advertisements | <p>Culturally appropriate recruitment techniques, such as approaching Indigenous community representatives or organisations to explore effective advertisement avenues are considered effective.</p> <p>The provision of hands on support for prospective Indigenous employees enables more personalised support, especially compared to the circulation of written information.</p> <p>Employer cultural awareness training can help employers improve their recruitment processes, ensuring flexibility processes that are culturally sensitive and appropriate.</p> |
| Training programs | <p>Indigenous jobseeker may perceive pre-employment training as irrelevant to their jobs.</p> <p>As such, Indigenous jobseekers may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceive pre-employment training as futile as it does not necessarily translate into work • experience a sense of hopelessness, as even with several certificates (such as forklift licence, aged care certificates) participants remain unemployed | <p>Traineeships are more job-specific and career progression opportunities are clearer and linked to the program.</p> <p>Training opportunities are more effective when linked to individual aspirations and real job opportunities.</p> <p>Training opportunities that offer wages can build employability and confidence in participants.</p> |
| Retention | <p>Indigenous employees may face:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persisting and intersecting social, cultural, family, health and wellbeing and financial factors (listed above) • explicit and implicit forms of racism, prejudice and discrimination | <p>The following factors assist in enhancing Indigenous employee retention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organisation connection to local community • building relationships with Indigenous locals |

| Aspect | Barrier(s) and impact(s) | Enabling program factor(s) |
|--------|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managers and non-Indigenous employees with a lack of understanding and tolerance for cultural, family and social responsibilities and expectations • a sense of isolation, particularly if there are few Indigenous employees <p>As a result, Indigenous employees may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feel disconnected from the workplace and community • be less motivated to express challenges and issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural awareness training for employers, delivered by an Indigenous person or organisation • mentoring programs, particularly those with Indigenous mentors who have a deep and sensitive understanding of cultural norms and how to navigate workplace norms • Provision of opportunities for career development and progression • Provision of flexible working arrangements, such as working from home, job sharing and flexible leave options |

Source: Constable (2009); Gray, Hunter and Lohoar (2012); GenerationOne (2011).

A.3.2. Key learnings from the perspective of employers

Table A.3 summarises the findings of the research on employer perspectives of the barriers, impact and enabling factors within design and implementation aspects of IEPs.

An important reflection on employer perspectives is the emphasis on the deficiencies of individual Indigenous job seekers.¹⁶³ This deficit-based view of Indigenous employees generates assumptions about individual agency rather than the influence of group and community agency and also fails to acknowledge the employer and industry related barriers or deficiencies that prevent Indigenous employment.¹⁶⁴

Table A.3: Summary of research pertaining to the perspectives of employers of IEPs

| Aspect | Barrier(s) | Enabling program factor(s) |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Job readiness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence and communication skills Understanding of workplace norms and expectations Significant barriers associated with disadvantage (discussed above, such as unstable accommodation) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address challenges of work-preparedness, soft skills and negative lifestyle factors first through hands-on training Employ creative and innovative recruitment processes, informed by Indigenous stakeholders to reduce the impact of work-readiness barriers |
| Recruitment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient supply of suitable candidates Channels to access suitable candidates Limited external support to employers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job-readiness training and recruitment Alternative recruitment methods, informed by Indigenous stakeholders, that recognise the limitations of conventional recruitment methods, such as questionnaires and formal panel interviews Provision of family support |
| Inclusion and trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racism (both overt and covert) reduces levels of trust and engagement Lack of cultural awareness among non-Indigenous managers and staff is problematic Distrust and suspicion from Indigenous communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing mentoring and support while on the job Debunking myths and misconceptions about Indigenous people, and dealing with racism through cross-cultural training Holistic, collaborative approach that involves all key Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders |
| Retention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited pre-employment soft skills Lack of routine required to attend work daily (particularly apparent in remote communities) External mentoring programs may not be able to solve issues without organisational understanding Lack of cultural understanding among non-Indigenous employees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility in work arrangements, allowing Indigenous employees to meet alternative requirements (work, family, community) Mentoring programs – both professional and cultural 'Buddy' system whereby the Indigenous employee is supported by another employee regarding day-to-day responsibilities Cross-cultural training for employees Provision of career development opportunities |

¹⁶³ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*.

¹⁶⁴ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*; Austin-Broos, D. (2006). "'Working for' and 'working among' Western Arrente in central Australia (1)", *Oceania* 76(1).

| Aspect | Barrier(s) | Enabling program factor(s) |
|--------|------------|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of traineeships, apprenticeships and scholarships • Provision of family support |

Source: Constable (2009); Gray, Hunter and Lohoar (2012); GenerationOne (2011).

A.4. Key programmatic features and principles for success

Established throughout this literature review so far is an understanding that Indigenous Australians perceive the value, and arguably even the purpose, of employment differently to non-Indigenous Australians.

While such a generalisation is challenged by the evidence that there are tens of thousands of employed Indigenous Australians, 'employment' as defined in the policy context for Australian government is itself a Western normalised conception that asks Indigenous people to engage in an act of conformance in order to fit into Western models of employment.¹⁶⁵ It may not appear different in practical terms because 'employment' is such a widely normalised concept for all Australians but it is different in profoundly cultural and personal terms. In short, the fact that Australia has so many Indigenous Australians who are employed does not mean that they derive the same value and purpose from work as non-Indigenous Australians.¹⁶⁶ Understanding this and solving for the barriers that compound this difference and result in disproportionate employment outcomes is the critical exercise in designing employment programs targeting an Indigenous cohort.

This chapter does not progress this argument of 'employment value and purpose' further. This is not the place for that exposition as the analysis is intended as a representation of the research that exists within the current literature and data. It is essential to the consideration of this analysis (and the body of research generally) that the research and reports referenced herein have largely been undertaken with the bias of 'normative Western conceptions' of work, skills and even unemployment baked into their essential design. On one reading, this means that the evidence basis presented in the remainder of this document does not offer answers, or even ask the complete range of questions, to the nature of employment, unemployment and training amongst Indigenous Australians. On another reading, it is the essential truth that underpins policy design in this area and needs to be drawn out here to demonstrate the paucity of properly framed research.

Ultimately statistical improvement in employment outcomes appears largely dependent on whether intrinsic and extrinsic reward for the individual, and the intended outcomes and benefits for society, can be designed into employment programs/policy. This needs to be done in such a way that it overcomes barriers for either group, as well as ensuring there is alignment to the cultural needs and expectations of the community it seeks to affect.

There is extensive research worldwide on employment program features and this literature scan is not intended to capture it all. Instead, the analysis below draws on key Australian employment and program evaluations, supplemented by Australian and international literature and research.

The first section of this chapter presents an overview of the key features in Australian employment programs, providing insight into some of the research findings, as well as illustrative examples of these features within current or past Australian employment programs, that highlight some of the implementation complexities. The second section of this chapter presents an overview of the success principles and design features of IEPs, supported by some specific examples from an Australian and international context.

¹⁶⁵ Di Giorgio, A. V. and Habibis, D. (2019). 'Governing pluralistic liberal democratic societies and metis knowledge: The problem of Indigenous unemployment.' *Journal of Sociology* 55(1), p 42.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

The identified features/principles in this chapter will be used to consider the alignment of the IEP design with evidence.

A.4.1. Typical design features of Australian employment programs

As noted in Chapter 2, in recent decades there have been several forms of general government employment programs – each with a different method and focus. Employment policies and initiatives are often politicised, and the research to evaluate these reports varied results. This is particularly because their success is dependent on the state of the economy.

There are several forms of general government employment programs – each with a different method and focus.

Employment services generally work with three stakeholder groups (jobseekers, employment service providers and employers) and Australian employment programs can be categorised into two types of approaches – ‘work-first’ and ‘life-first’. With their differing design, duration and focus, the two approaches serve different cohorts of unemployed people. For instance, features are designed to align with the jobseekers’ work readiness, meaning that approaches to incentivise behaviour change and skill improvement differ depending on the background and context of the individual jobseeker.

A ‘work-first’ approach is a short-term employment program that benefits those who are temporarily unemployed (also known as frictional unemployment) but have recent experience and qualifications to re-enter the workforce. Predicated on the idea that moving unemployed individuals into employment as swiftly as possible, with the least cost intervention (and often with a sense of compulsion), these initiatives do not best serve long-term unemployed individuals who face a myriad of disadvantages.¹⁶⁷

A ‘life-first’ approach targets those who are long-term unemployed and face structural and intersecting barriers to employment. With sensitivity to life’s complexities, ‘life-first’ employment programs prioritise the personal needs of individuals (such as social skills, health and housing) as a precursor to finding work.¹⁶⁸ This approach best serves disadvantaged and long-term unemployed people who require holistic support.¹⁶⁹

While there is some evidence that the focus of employment programs, on balance, is shifting towards a ‘life-first’ approach, particularly for the most disadvantaged jobseekers, ‘work-first’ approaches to employment programs still exists and are the least effective in yielding success for long-term unemployed people.¹⁷⁰

Existing Australian literature and employment program evaluations have been used to inform a discussion of the most common program features within the Australian context. Before exploring these key aspects, it is important to note two important caveats:

- the success of employment programs is to some extent dependent on the state of the economy and local labour market opportunities.
- the success features are not mutually exclusive and should be considered in conjunction with one another, as they are regularly combined in the design of employment programs.

While noting these caveats, the common features of Australian employment programs are summarised in the box below.

¹⁶⁷ Isherwood, L., Moskos, M., King, D., Walker, R. and Brown, L. (2017). ‘Multiple disadvantage, service delivery and client outcomes in a strengths-based employment program’, *ABL* 43(1) 1-20.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Table A.4: Program features of general employment programs

| Program feature | Description | Effectiveness |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Parity initiatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parity initiatives seek to improve employment equity through the provisions of employment opportunities for cohorts that are not equally represented due to a range of systemic barriers • Parity initiatives relate to both quotas and targets • Quotas are specific, measurable and time-bound goals that are externally imposed by an authoritative body • Targets are specific, measurable and time-bound goals that are voluntarily set by the organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effectiveness of parity initiatives as a mechanism of employment growth has received mixed results in research conducted to date, but there is evidence of its improvement to the work environment. |
| Wage subsidies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wage subsidies encourage employers to hire job seekers that they otherwise may not have hired, providing funds to compensate for the cost of additional support required in the workplace – particularly for disadvantaged cohorts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian evaluations and international research have reported inconsistent results regarding the impact of wage subsidies on employment outcomes. |
| Streaming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streaming is an assessment process that determines the level and type of training and support received by a participant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While streaming has been received as a positive feature that supports sustainable employment through a differentiated approach, there are a number of challenges associated with the implementation of this feature. • |
| Job-readiness training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of training that addresses barriers to sustainable employment. This training typically involves the provision of foundational skills, such as literacy, numeracy, time management, CV writing and job-searching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The delivery of training to support job-readiness skill development has been linked to improved outcomes for participants. The delivery of job-readiness training may have a more profound effect on enhancing work-readiness and improved employment programs for disadvantaged cohorts. |
| Job-specific training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of accredited training and work experience/placements, focussed on delivering skills sets that match employment opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling individuals to complete work-experience and job-placements while attaining a qualification is particularly effective as it develops job-specific skills while supporting continued engagement. |

| Program feature | Description | Effectiveness |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Job-matching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment services assist in job-matching by notifying jobseekers of training/employment opportunities that align with the jobseeker’s experience, capabilities and goals • This type of employment program aims to assist jobseekers by reducing information barriers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job matching has been found to support increased productivity, sustained engagement, earning growth and reduced searching for external employment opportunities – leading to lower turnover rates. |
| MORs and compliance frameworks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MORs are set out in the <i>Social Security Act 1991</i> to ensure that unemployed people receiving an activity-tested income support payment and are complying with their required activities, unless the individual is granted an exemption • Jobseeker requirements generally relate to three areas: (a) attendance at appointments, with their provider or with third parties, (b) job search activities, and (c) engagement in suitable work-oriented activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some known preconditions for the success of compliance frameworks (also known as Mutual Obligation Requirements) within the Australian context: participants need to be aware of and understand their required activities and a diversity of activities should allow for differentiated tasks to suit individual strengths, interests and aspirations. |
| Outcomes driven funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers receive funding for their services based on specific outcomes or milestones, such as at 4 week, 13 week and 26 week employment milestones | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is mixed evidence from employment program evaluations that supports the use of outcome payments. |
| Place-based approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place-based approach captures specific circumstances of a place by engaging local individuals across sectors to serve as active contributors to initiative development and implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within a place-based approach, decision-making power is decentralised (rather than a top-down structure) to ensure the complex community needs and local labour market opportunities are understood, allowing for program tailoring to ensure sustainable employment outcomes. |
| Post-placement support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-placement support provided to the employer involves monitoring the placement for any issues through ongoing check-ins; ensuring that the employer understands what support is available for the participant; and ensuring contact with employers is appropriate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is considered effective practice to offer post-placement support for participants who experience significant barriers to employment to address issues likely to affect their employment sustainability. |

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020).

In addition to these features, there are several success principles that overlap and underpin general Australian employment programs. Many of these are implicit in the design features of Australian employment programs discussed below.

A flexible program that is responsive to local labour market needs and the needs of jobseekers accessing the initiative is key. This ensures that training aligns with the individual jobseekers' goals and preferences and is relevant to the skills required for sustained employment.

Participant self-determination is a key success principle as it influences motivation and investment in the employment program, thereby contributing to the positive outcomes.¹⁷¹ Further, the provision of opportunities for participant choice allows for greater alignment between program offerings and the participant's needs, aspirations and preferences, leading to more positive attitudes and reception of the program.¹⁷²

For the most disadvantaged cohorts of jobseekers, the **provision of wrap-around and ongoing support** is key to employment program success.¹⁷³ Wrap-around support may include mentoring programs and connections to external services, such as mental health.¹⁷⁴

5.6.2 Parity initiatives

Parity initiatives are contested and refer to actions undertaken to generate equality in employment opportunities between different groups within society. The way parity is defined differs. For example, under the EPI, parity is defined as reflecting the size of the Australian Indigenous population (currently 3 per cent); while GenerationOne's version of parity includes the same level of population employment as non-Indigenous Australians across a range of demographic factors (such as age and gender). With respect to Indigenous Australians, parity initiatives have the potential to generate greater employment equity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The effectiveness of parity initiatives as a mechanism of employment growth has received mixed results in research conducted to date, but there is evidence of its improvement to the work environment, with a recent American longitudinal study concluded that affirmative action contributed to increased diversity in workplaces.¹⁷⁵ In the context of Australia, there is very limited rigorous evidence supporting the use of parity initiatives. This is likely due to the difficulty in evaluating these kinds of initiatives – namely, that it is difficult to isolate the effects of such an initiative, as they are generally implemented in conjunction with other initiatives.

Parity can be worked towards through affirmative action, such as the implementation of quotas, targets or employer incentives. These strategies compensate for institutional barriers experienced by a particular cohort and can be effective, as described below.¹⁷⁶ As such, linking quota compliance and employer incentives can be significant in generating parity.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Isherwood, L., Moskos, M., King, D., Walker, R. and Brown, L. (2017). 'Multiple disadvantage, service delivery and client outcomes in a strengths-based employment program', *ABL* 43(1) 1-20

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Borland, J., Considine, M., Kalb, G. and Ribar, D. (2016). 'What Are Best-Practice Programs for Jobseekers Facing High Barriers to Unemployment?' *Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research*.

¹⁷⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, Evaluation of Skilling Queenslanders for Work (2012) <<https://www.employment.gov.au/how-see-helps-job-seekers>>.

¹⁷⁵ Kurtulus, F.A. (2016). 'The Impact of Affirmative Action on the Employment of Minorities and Women: A Longitudinal Analysis Using Three Decades of EEO-1 Filings', *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 35(1), 34-66.

¹⁷⁶ Kramar, R. et al., (2013) *Human resource management: strategy, people, performance*, (Fifth edition. North Ryde, N.S.W: McGraw-Hill Education).

¹⁷⁷ Spender, P. (2015). 'Gender Quotas on Boards – Is it Time for Australia to Lean in?' *Deakin Law Review* 20(1).

However, each approach requires careful consideration, addressing potential challenges and barriers to implementation, to ensure it can contribute to increase diversity as described below.¹⁷⁸

Quotas

Setting quotas is believed to assist organisations in generating parity at an increased rate than it would have otherwise. However, research into the appropriateness of setting gender quotas on boards noted the following barriers to implementing quotas effectively:

- belief that they are unfair and discriminatory, or may stigmatise beneficiaries further, as there may be a perception that employment is not based on merit
- perception that they are not appropriate in a given context, or that accountability does not lie within a particular organisation to achieve such parity
- belief that changing ideologies will effectively address parity concerns
- lack of genuine commitment to the quota initiative
- conscious or unconscious bias
- lack of suitable metrics to effectively measure performance
- absence of consequences for failing to satisfy the quota.¹⁷⁹

While these barriers may be valid considerations in determining the suitability of quotas, key arguments for quotas relate to the fact they guarantee and expedite parity, while effectively increasing representation and the justification of greater inclusion of disadvantaged cohorts within organisations.¹⁸⁰

Targets

Many employers in Australia have attempted to achieve parity for Indigenous Australians and gender equality by setting targets to foster increased representation in the workplace and compensate for an otherwise disadvantaged trajectory.¹⁸¹ Research conducted into the 'Women on Boards Initiative', which included targets for the percentage of women on boards, found that **such techniques can support parity whilst improving productivity, enhancing financial and social performance and facilitating greater diversity and inclusion across organisations more broadly.** The key contributing factors, underpinning such benefits, included:

- strong governance with a clear vision/strategy for diversity and inclusion
- committed leaders, who are willing to hold accountability for outcomes
- development of inclusive branding to generate an inclusive culture
- systems and processes to attract diverse individuals and measure performance.¹⁸²

While targets are similar in approach to quotas, and barriers are somewhat similar, the key difference is that targets are aspirational rather than mandated. As such, the barriers have limited focus on functionality and practicality, and primarily relate to culture and leadership.¹⁸³ They include:

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Deloitte Access Economics, *Research Report – Toward Gender Parity: Women on Boards Initiative* (2016); Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Employment Parity Initiative – Questions and Answers*; (2019). Silva Goncalves, J. et al. (2016). 'Affirmative action and effort choice: An experimental investigation (WIDER Working Paper 2016/54)', *United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER)*, Finland.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Deloitte Access Economics, *Research Report – Toward Gender Parity: Women on Boards Initiative* (2016).

- assumptions that there is limited supply of experienced and capable individuals from the disadvantaged cohort
- failure to conduct appropriate recruitment strategies that align with targeted cohort needs and interests
- a reputation that is perceived as being non-inclusive
- lack of role models or mentors and a lack of accountability due to poor reporting metrics and bias in decision-making.¹⁸⁴

As such, in implementing targets as a party initiative, organisations must carefully consider embedding values, strategies and tactics to ensure it can be employed effectively and overcome barriers.

Box 3: Reconciliation Action Plans

The prime example of a target in relation to Indigenous employment and improving relationships between Indigenous and other Australians is RAPs, administered by Reconciliation Australia. This initiative is Government-led and assists organisations to enhance their corporate responsibility by shifting their culture and planning goals that enhance reconciliation by improving Indigenous employment programs.¹⁸⁵

The program aims to embed organisational culture change by building good relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees, and between the organisation and the broader local community; understanding and respecting Indigenous people's contribution, experiences and culture; and creating opportunities for Indigenous employment.¹⁸⁶

Limited research exists that evaluates the effectiveness of RAPs. An Auspoll evaluation from 2012 surveyed 4,612 respondents from 19 organisations with RAPs and found that overall RAPs are having a positive impact on workforce culture and relationships within and external to the organisation.¹⁸⁷ Approximately half of the survey questions were leveraged from Reconciliation Barometer, a biennial survey that monitors the progress of reconciliation, to compare the attitudes and behaviours of RAP organisation employees with those of the broader public.

Specifically, this evaluation found that:

- **knowledge and awareness of Indigenous culture, background and hence reconciliation efforts among employees of RAP organisations is higher than the broader community;**
- **RAP employees participate in more reconciliation activities and actions, as compared with the general community as a whole;**
- **RAP employees have more contact with Indigenous Australians and more positive attitudes towards Indigenous people;**
- **there is an opportunity for further promotion of RAPs within organisations.**¹⁸⁸

Unfortunately, this evaluation did not include findings on whether Indigenous employment increased within organisations with a RAP, although it is noted that a further eight years of data (to 2020) and evolution in RAP practices would allow for richer perspectives.

¹⁸⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, *Research Report – Toward Gender Parity: Women on Boards Initiative* (2016).

¹⁸⁵ Auspoll. (2012). 'Evaluating the effectiveness of Reconciliation Action Plans'. Accessed from: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Auspolls-Evaluating-the-effectiveness-of-Reconciliation-Action-Plans-Overall-analysis.pdf>

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Wage subsidies

Wage subsidies typically target the most vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts; they serve to compensate employers for the real or perceived risk of taking on the job seeker with the targeted characteristics (such as the provision of additional supports or training).¹⁸⁹

Australian evaluations and international research have reported inconsistent results regarding the impact of wage subsidies on employment outcomes.¹⁹⁰

- An Australian study evaluated the impact of *jobactive* and Disability Employment Services (DES) wage subsidy programs utilising data from the Department of Social Services (DSS) from 2014-2016. This study found that **subsidy schemes for the employment of people with disability in the open labour market produced positive influences**. In particular, more participants in jobs linked to wage subsidies fulfilled 13-week and 26-week milestones when compared to those in jobs not linked to wage subsidies.¹⁹¹
- **Wage subsidies within *jobactive* have received criticism with respect to the way the funding is determined**. Funding for wage subsidies sits within the Employment Fund, a pool of funding provided to the employment services provider to spend at their choosing. For instance, wage subsidies of up to \$10,000 (GST inclusive) may be available to Australian businesses hiring employment services participants, but this choice lies with the employment service provider.¹⁹² This means that wage subsidies may not necessarily be being used to fund the most relevant and effective activities, supports or training required by participants.
- **In the recent 2019 Senate Report *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve*, submitters expressed different views on the effectiveness of wage subsidies**. Key themes included: wage subsidies must create genuine pathways to long-term employment, instead of subsidising short-term positions; wage subsidies are ineffective in isolation and must be "part of a package of support"; and accessibility to wage subsidies is hampered by "red tape".¹⁹³

In sum, wage subsidies have found to positively influence employment outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers. However, key limitations of wage subsidies include:

- **negative signalling** – participants may endure employer stigmatisation after disclosing details of their personal conditions which they would otherwise not have to share
- **displacement** – jobs are created at the expense of 'regular' jobs which can distort competition
- **costly** – wage subsidy schemes can be administratively expensive and may be underutilised.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Waghorn, G., Dias, S. and Parletta, V. (2019). 'The Influence of Wage Subsidies on Open Employment of People with Disabilities.' *Journal of Rehabilitation* 85(4), 24-32.

¹⁹⁰ Waghorn, G., Dias, S. and Parletta, V. (2019). 'The Influence of Wage Subsidies on Open Employment of People with Disabilities.' *Journal of Rehabilitation* 85(4), 24-32; Australian Government. (2020). *Jobactive: Wage subsidies*. Accessed from:

https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/wage_subsidies_factsheet_update_oct_20.pdf; Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

¹⁹¹ Waghorn, G., Dias, S. and Parletta, V. (2019). 'The Influence of Wage Subsidies on Open Employment of People with Disabilities.' *Journal of Rehabilitation* 85(4), 24-32.

¹⁹² Australian Government. (2020). *Jobactive: Wage subsidies*. Accessed from:

https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/wage_subsidies_factsheet_update_oct_20.pdf

¹⁹³ Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

¹⁹⁴ Waghorn, G., Dias, S. and Parletta, V. (2019). 'The Influence of Wage Subsidies on Open Employment of People with Disabilities.' *Journal of Rehabilitation* 85(4), 24-32.

Key preconditions to success identified in the literature include the need for a clearly targeted, well-defined group, as well as ensuring that the initiative is administered with sensitivity and care.¹⁹⁵

Streaming

Streaming is a common feature of mainstream employment programs that seeks to ensure supports, activities and training offered align with the needs of the participant. In

Australian employment services, streaming is based on an assessment of relative disadvantage, using the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) that assesses the capacity and unique needs of the jobseekers. After the JSCI assessment, participants are allocated into one of three service streams: Stream A, which comprises participants who are the most job-ready; Stream B, which includes jobseekers who require their provider to play a greater role in supporting job-readiness; and Stream C, which encompasses the most disadvantaged cohort facing a range of personal and work-related barriers.¹⁹⁶

While streaming has been received as a positive feature that, among others, supports sustainable employment through a differentiated approach, there are a number of challenges associated with the current process for streaming, leading to participants being misallocated. For example, the Committee in the recent jobactive evaluation reported that it is “very concerned around inaccurate streaming of participants... and strong supports making the process more comprehensive”.¹⁹⁷

A key challenge and reason for participant stream misallocation is the reliance on individual disclosure of personal information.¹⁹⁸ Participants may be reluctant to share information about their barriers and personal circumstances due to fear of it being recorded in a government system.¹⁹⁹ For participants, this can be a daunting process, particularly for those experiencing structural disadvantage and psychological barriers. Divulging this type of information to an unfamiliar assessor, who the participant does not have an established, trusting relationship, may result in participants misrepresenting or diluting their barriers.²⁰⁰ Further, participants may not be fully aware of the impact that non-disclosure or disclosure can have on their experience of employment services. **For these reasons, the limitations of the streaming process are disproportionately experienced by the most disadvantaged cohorts.**²⁰¹

Job-readiness training

Job-readiness training differs from job-specific training in that the former supports participants to overcome personal barriers that significantly interfere with accessing and keeping employment, while the latter relates to the skills required by an employer to ensure the participant is able to perform the duties necessary for their specific job.²⁰²

The types of training/skill development included in job-readiness training are:

- English language training
- literacy and numeracy skills
- job search and application skills

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2017). ‘Evaluation of jobactive: Interim Report.’

¹⁹⁷ Commonwealth of Australia. ‘Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve’, *Education and Employment References Committee*.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Borland, J., Considine, M., Kalb, G. and Ribar, D. (2016). ‘What Are Best-Practice Programs for Jobseekers Facing High Barriers to Unemployment?’ *Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research*.

- training in basic, general skills required for the workplace (such as IT)
- interpersonal skills and time management
- introduction to workplace expectations relating to working in teams, working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, behaviour and dress code
- assistance in overcoming barriers to work (such as lack of transport, childcare).²⁰³

It is important that the type of training offered aligns with the job seeker's job-specific needs and goals. The 2015 *Progress Evaluation of the Vocational Training and Employment Programme* report recommended that VTEC consider developing an employability skills needs assessment tool, to improve training 'fit' and ensure consistent practice to selecting appropriate training for program participants.²⁰⁴

Language, literacy, numeracy and employment skills are considered fundamental to workplace and community participation.²⁰⁵ **The delivery of training to support such skill development has been linked to improved outcomes for participants,** including enhanced likelihood of gaining and retaining employment, or engaging in further training which can also lead to improved employment outcomes.²⁰⁶

As low levels of language, literacy and numeracy are currently overrepresented among unemployed Australians, adults from non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous Australians and individuals in prison, **delivery of job-readiness training may have a more profound effect on enhancing work-readiness and improved employment programs for these disadvantaged cohorts.**²⁰⁷

In supporting disadvantaged cohorts, a commitment to supporting participant needs through providing tailored assistance has been found to be effective in overcoming individual learning barriers and challenges associated with engaging in the workforce. This may include providing pedagogy that accounts for previous negative learning experiences of formal learning, connects participants to social services as needed and provides training in a community setting instead of an institutional setting such as TAFE.²⁰⁸

The incentives and structure of a program's payment model can influence the effectiveness of job-readiness training. For example, the structure of *jobactive's* payment model and privileging of short-term outcomes has disincentivised employment service providers from providing necessary training/skill development opportunities over a longer period of time to address the systemic barriers to employment for disadvantaged cohorts.²⁰⁹ The Senate Inquiry *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve* found that jobseekers are "not receiving the basic job-readiness services that *jobactive* is meant to provide, such as assistance with resumes and interview practice".²¹⁰ Instead, stakeholders that provided evidence to the inquiry described the experience of

²⁰³ Borland, J., Considine, M., Kalb, G. and Ribar, D. (2016). 'What Are Best-Practice Programs for Jobseekers Facing High Barriers to Unemployment?' *Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research*.

²⁰⁴ Miles Morgan Australia. (2015) 'Progress Evaluation of the Vocational Training and Employment Centre Programme'.

²⁰⁵ Department of Education and Training. *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults* (2012).

<https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/national-foundation-skills-strategy-for-adults_0.pdf>.

²⁰⁶ Department of Education and Training. *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults* (2012).

<https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/national-foundation-skills-strategy-for-adults_0.pdf>;

Perkins, K. *Adult literacy and numeracy: research and future strategy* (2009), NCVET,

<https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0023/9392/adult-literacy-and-numeracy-2162.doc>.

²⁰⁷ Misko, J, *Country background report: Assessing the training and assessment needs of adults with low basic skills in Australia* (n.d.) <<https://www.oecd.org/education/cei/40015669.pdf>>.

²⁰⁸ Deloitte Access Economics, *Evaluation of Skilling Queenslanders for Work* (2012)

<<https://www.employment.gov.au/how-see-helps-job-seekers>>.

²⁰⁹ Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

providing job-readiness training as a 'tick and flick' exercise, and noted that the rigid nature of the compliance framework meant that providers felt obliged to adhere to the requirements, even if it was to the detriment of their client's outcomes.²¹¹ **As such, to enable the success of job-readiness training, there is a need for a tailored, complementary, job-readiness focussed services for disadvantaged jobseekers, such as IEPs for Indigenous cohorts.**

Job-specific training

For those facing long-term structural barriers to employment, job-specific training in the form of accredited training, work experience and job-placements is required in addition to job-readiness training.²¹² This is because significantly disadvantaged jobseekers may be facing barriers due to an absence of formal training and qualifications and work experience that provides them with opportunities to develop practical workplace skills.

The provision of accredited training enables job seekers opportunities to obtain the qualifications and skills necessary to effectively engage in the workplace, and benefit from improved employment outcomes associated with higher levels of educational attainment, such as increased income and financial stability.²¹³

Enabling individuals to complete work-experience and job-placements while attaining a qualification is particularly effective as it develops job-specific skills while supporting continued engagement, especially if coupled with a paid placement, and enhances the likelihood of job opportunities post-participation.²¹⁴ In comparison, schemes that provide work experience in order to receive Government support payments, as required through 'Work for the Dole', is associated with a significant reduction in employment outcomes. This is likely due to reduced jobseeker engagement in job search activities.²¹⁵

Optimal attributes of job-specific training that targets disadvantaged cohorts include:

- provision of training that aligns with, and is adaptive to, local labour market needs
- integration of work experience/job placements into an accredited training program
- close connections between training providers, human services, local industry and employers
- delivery of case management that provides an integrated mix of targeted assistance to support participants in overcoming personal barriers to learning.²¹⁶

Delivering training opportunities and modes of education that align to the needs, goals and preferences of the individual is also considered best practice.²¹⁷ For instance, culturally appropriate mentoring that is cognisant of cultural norms, participant backgrounds and skill level may be employed to deliver learning activities that meet individual needs.²¹⁸

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Caddy, I. and Mortimer, D. (2012). 'Solving' Unemployment: An analysis of two Australian policy initiatives', *International Employment Relations Review*.

²¹³ Department of Education, Skills and Employment. *Benefits of Educational Attainment* (2019) <<https://docs.education.gov.au/node/53004>>.

²¹⁴ Borland, J, and Tseng, Y.-P. (2011) 'Does 'Work for the Dole' work?: an Australian perspective on work experience programmes', *Applied Economics*. 43 (28), 4353-4368.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Deloitte Access Economics, *Evaluation of Skilling Queenslanders for Work* (2012).

²¹⁷ Borland, J., Considine, M., Kalb, G. and Ribar, D. (2016). 'What Are Best-Practice Programs for Jobseekers Facing High Barriers to Unemployment?' *Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research*; Isherwood, L., Moskos, M., King, D., Walker, R. and Brown, L. (2017). 'Multiple disadvantage, service delivery and client outcomes in a strengths-based employment program', *ABL* 43(1) 1-20.

²¹⁸ Deloitte Access Economics, *Evaluation of Skilling Queenslanders for Work* (2012); Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2015). 'The Evaluation of Job Services Australia

The quality and appropriateness of job-specific training has been criticised under past Australian employment programs and under the current *jobactive*. In 2019, the Senate Inquiry heard evidence that participants are placed into courses that are “below their existing skill level and/or irrelevant” to assisting in finding and maintaining work.²¹⁹ The Committee heard several examples of participants being made to undertake courses that were misaligned with their skills and experience.²²⁰ For instance, a participant with over 10 years of retail assistance was required to attend a retail ready course.²²¹ In addition, examples also included participants being forced to attend training that interfered with their paid employment simply because it was a required activity and tied to payments.²²²

Job-matching

Job matching refers to the alignment of experience, capabilities and interests with employment roles and responsibilities. **Job matching has been found to support increased productivity, sustained engagement, earning growth and reduced searching for external employment opportunities – leading to lower turnover rates.**²²³

Employment and training programs that provide tailored assistance to individuals, by providing targeted learning that meets participant interests and abilities while also aligning opportunities to local labour market needs, support increased workforce participation.²²⁴ It has also been found to be more effective where prolonged support has been provided, ensuring individuals that participate in a training/employment program are able to seek ongoing support in identifying opportunities, submitting applications and transitioning into a work environment.²²⁵ As such, flexibility in program design and delivery is essential in responding to individual capability and needs in addition to employment opportunities available in a community.

In order to realise success in employment/training programs that are designed to respond to participant capabilities and interests, individuals that engage in training/employment programs may also need to exercise choice and articulate aspirations. Offering choices to jobseekers promotes self-determination as it provokes greater self-regulation and motivation, by allowing job seekers to align programmatic features with individual strengths, goals and working needs.²²⁶ In supporting this, the provision of strengths-based case management can assist in generating the self-determination that effectively supports job-matching.²²⁷

Mutual obligation requirements and compliance frameworks

Set out in the *Social Security Act 1991*, mutual obligation requirements (MORs) have been a common feature of Australian mainstream employment programs for several decades.²²⁸ MORs seek to ensure that job seekers receiving an activity-tested income support payment are complying with

2012-2015. Accessed from:

https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/the_evaluation_of_jsa_2012-2015_0.pdf

²¹⁹ Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Failla, V. et al. (2017) 'Entrepreneurship and employment stability — Job matching, labour market value, and personal commitment'. *Journal of Business Venturing*. 32 (2), 162–177.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Deloitte Access Economics, *Evaluation of Skilling Queenslanders for Work* (2012).

²²⁶ Card, D., Kluve, J. and Weber, A. (2016). 'Active labour market policies and long-term unemployment', *Centre for Economic Policy Research*.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2017). 'Evaluation of jobactive: Interim Report.'

their obligations, unless they have an exemption from such requirements.²²⁹ Required activities typically involve activities that will support job seekers to get into work, such as job search activities, attendance at appointments, and engagement in work-oriented activities.

According to compliance frameworks, if job seekers do not satisfy their requirements, their payments are suspended until a required activity is fulfilled. **MORs are intended to encourage job seekers to work towards building the skills, behaviours and attitudes necessary for sustainable employment.**

MORs have received mixed results across jobseeker cohorts with respect to improving employment outcomes. For cohorts of jobseekers that are more job ready, there is evidence that MORs can enhance sustained employment.²³⁰ However, for more disadvantaged cohorts experiencing structural and enduring barriers to employment, compliance frameworks in the Australian context have been perceived as inflexible and inappropriate to support sustained employment for this group. This is because they reportedly they “reduce the ability of providers to respond to the individual needs and circumstances of participants”, as the required activities do not allow for a sufficiently differentiated approach.²³¹

There are some known preconditions for MOR success within the Australian context. First, **it is imperative that participants are aware of and understand their required activities**, as well as the process for applying for an exemption.²³² In addition, **a diverse offering of activities for participants to select from allows for the tailoring of activities to individual needs, strengths and aspirations** – this is especially important for disadvantaged cohorts.²³³ When these elements were incorporated into the design of the jobactive MOR feature, improved employment outcomes were observed.²³⁴

Outcome driven funding

Outcome driven funding in the form of milestone payments are a longstanding feature of mainstream employment programs, and it is understood that they were first introduced under Job Network, though have undergone changes.²³⁵ They are intended to ensure the provider focuses on achieving employment results and that all their service support activities are geared towards achieving this end.

Consultations have indicated that ongoing internal analysis, undertaken by the federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment, has supported the ongoing use of the 26-week milestone, which has been an aspect of employment services for over two decades.²³⁶ As this analysis is not publicly available, the evidence for the 26-week milestone has not been validated

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2017). 'Evaluation of jobactive: Interim Report'; 'Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

²³³ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2017). 'Evaluation of jobactive: Interim Report'; 'Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

²³⁴ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2017). 'Evaluation of jobactive: Interim Report.'

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

in this literature scan, and it is unclear whether the appropriateness of the 26-week dosage has been tested.

While research supporting this milestone is not available within the public domain, there is mixed evidence from employment program evaluations that supports the use of milestone payments.²³⁷ Criticism of outcome driven funding includes:

- There is insufficient upfront funding for providers to cover necessary costs, and hence the intensity of services provided may rely on the goodwill of the provider and may be harmful to the viability of non-for-profit or small providers.²³⁸
- This model of funding may inadvertently encourage 'creaming', whereby participants who are considered easiest to place and remain in employment are chosen over participants experiencing greater challenges to entering the workforce.²³⁹
- This model also directs efforts towards short-term employment outcomes and disincentivises providers to invest in interventions that support medium and long-term employment.²⁴⁰
- The focus on the short-term can lead to increased 'churning', whereby participants engaging in short-term, precarious employment cycle back to employment programs as they quickly gain and then lose employment.²⁴¹

To address these criticisms and ensure that jobseekers receive the support they need to enter sustainable employment, the jobactive evaluation recommended that **future employment services should include a payment model that "balances higher up-front payments with outcome payments linked to performance"**. The rationale for this is that higher up-front payments will allow providers to immediately invest in jobseekers, especially more disadvantaged, harder-to-place participants.²⁴²

Place-based approach

A common feature of employment programs (and programs seeking to enhance social outcomes more broadly) is a place-based approach, which is also a critical component of Indigenous employment programs. Within a place-based approach, decision-making power is decentralised (rather than a top-down structure) to ensure the complex community needs and local labour market opportunities are understood, allowing for program tailoring to ensure sustainable employment outcomes. Further, this approach supports preventative and cost-effective responses, as it allows for whole communities to build resilience and protective factors to reduce reliance on acute services and programs.²⁴³

According to the Victorian Government's *A framework for place-based approaches*, there are two key avenues that can be used to promote effective place-based based approaches.

- **Partnering with community to deliver on outcomes agreed upon locally** – this avenue is generally adopted when the social issue, such as high unemployment, is concentrated within a local community. It is acknowledged that the local contextual knowledge is key to ensuring the program is designed with specific local sensitivities and factors in mind and to building local support for the program.²⁴⁴

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Commonwealth of Australia. 'Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve', *Education and Employment References Committee*.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Victorian Government. (2020). 'A framework for place-based approaches'. Accessed from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/framework-place-based-approaches/print-all#executive-summary>

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

- **Enabling the community to continue progressing a program or approach that aligns with government priorities** – this avenue is typically used when local communities are already mobilising change and government supports the direction in motion.²⁴⁵

A place-based approach incorporates the views, expertise and lived experiences of a range of stakeholders, including:

- government at the Commonwealth or State/Territory level, responsible for designing the policy and program brief;
- community members, responsible for providing insight into their unique needs, background and context to guide the design and continuous implementation of initiatives and services;
- local government, responsible for partnering in the design phase and delivery within local communities;
- Traditional Owners, responsible for providing a cultural lens to the design and implementation of initiatives;
- other community stakeholders, including businesses and philanthropy, responsible for reflecting their needs and experiences on initiative design and implementation.²⁴⁶

In essence, programs that are community-focused, holistic and tailored to local contexts ensure that the diversity of each community is captured and ensures relevance, acceptance and appropriateness, which can, in turn, heighten participant buy-in and enhance long-term employment outcomes.

Post-placement support

It is considered effective practice to offer post-placement support for participants who experience significant barriers to employment to address issues likely to affect their employment sustainability.²⁴⁷ Post-placement support for employers is also considered good practice, as it assists employers or managers in supporting the job seeker to remain in employment by linking them with services to address their specific needs.²⁴⁸ The 2012 *Good Practice in Job Services Australia* report, developed by DEEWR, identifies high-performing sites as those that offer both participant and employee post-placement support, and continuously monitor the placement for any problems.²⁴⁹

The intensity and type of post-placement support should differ for each participant and employer and should be aligned with not only their needs but also their expectations and desires.²⁵⁰ To allow for this, the level of post-placement support should be determined in consultation with both the participant and employer before and during placement.²⁵¹ An example of post-placement support required by employers may be cultural capability building training for their employees, to ensure there is a understanding of the benefits of diversity in the workplace, and also to ensure that culturally appropriate processes are embedded within workplace policies.

This is because there may be factors and sensitivities on the participant or employer side that need to be taken into consideration. For example, participants may feel uncomfortable with the repeated

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2015). 'The Evaluation of Job Services Australia 2012-2015. Accessed from: https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/the_evaluation_of_jsa_2012-2015_0.pdf

²⁴⁸ Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. (2012). 'Good Practice in Job Services Australia.' Accessed from: https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/good_practice_in_job_services_australia.pdf

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. (2012). 'Good Practice in Job Services Australia.' Accessed from: https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/good_practice_in_job_services_australia.pdf

²⁵¹ Ibid.

contact and perceive that the ongoing support may result in the stigma of being a 'dole bludger' who doesn't know what to do; while employers may become frustrated and tired of the additional time burden, and as a result, may be less inclined to engage participants in the future.²⁵² **It is critical that providers strike a balance between the employer and participant preferences, to safeguard job placements and encourage future business with employers.**²⁵³

An interesting trend in Australia is that post-placement support has reduced in Commonwealth mainstream employment services over the last decade. For example, according to JSA's Employment Pathway Fund expenditure, spending on post-placement support reduced significantly between 2009 and 2012, from \$13.5 million to \$3.5 million, and the most recent evaluation of *jobactive* does not include figures of post-placement support spending.²⁵⁴

A.4.2. Success principles for Indigenous employment assistance programs

Indigenous specific employment programs are intended to be designed and implemented with a greater sensitivity to cultural expectations and appropriateness when compared to general employment programs. While the success principle of self-determination deployed for general employment programs naturally applies to Indigenous programs, it is intended to extend beyond the singular provision of choices and require greater program design flexibility to provide autonomy for Indigenous groups, individuals and employers to adapt programs to community specific needs.

It is true that the program features and principles outlined in this section are not exclusive to Indigenous jobseekers and are likely to work for other employed groups too (see Box 2 below); however, there is evidence that Indigenous participants are more likely to achieve employment outcomes when engaging in Indigenous-specific employment programs/services compared with mainstream employment programs.²⁵⁵ For example, the *2017 Report for the Review of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy* found that, after accounting for the differences in individual program characteristics and the state of the labour market, Indigenous participants achieved higher 26-week outcomes for VTEC placements compared to Indigenous participants engaging with *jobactive* and JSA.²⁵⁶

The available literature on employment programs designed for Indigenous Australians presented strong patterns of recurring success factors of effective employment programs for Indigenous Australians. The success factors or successful program features were recorded and thematically organised and synthesised into four key principles.

These principles have been strongly guided by two large-scale research papers:

- Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia, an OECD report that considered quantitative and qualitative opportunities for Indigenous Australians.
- *The effectiveness of implementation in Indigenous Australian healthcare: an overview of literature reviews*, a research paper that synthesised 107 Indigenous health initiatives and reported on key findings relating to successful program features.

The key principles below overlap and are therefore not mutually exclusive:

- Indigenous engagement and self-determination

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2015). 'The Evaluation of Job Services Australia 2012-2015. Accessed from: https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/the_evaluation_of_jsa_2012-2015_0.pdf

²⁵⁵ Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne. (2017). 'Report for the Review of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy.'

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

- Leadership advocacy
- Sustained wrap-around support with an Indigenous lens
- Sustained focus on building skills

Each of these principles is discussed below and brief illustrative examples are included to exemplify the principles in action.

Indigenous engagement and self-determination

Chapter 2 outlined the evolution of employment programs designed specifically for Indigenous Australians to address the enduring low Indigenous employment rate, which has not improved despite significant government policy and program investment. As a result, Indigenous Australians and indeed Indigenous communities have not had access to their share of Australia's prosperity.²⁵⁷

Historically, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers have used the 'whiteness' theory as a critical reason for the lack of success in past and current program and policy.²⁵⁸ The 'whiteness' theory attributes responsibility for past policy and program failure to the absence of, or limited inclusion of, Indigenous voice and perspectives in the design and implementation of programs and policies.²⁵⁹ As such, it is imperative that going forward, Indigenous engagement and self-determination, at both the national and local level, is understood and respected as a critical feature enabling program and policy relevance to the needs and aspirations of the people such programs and policies seek to serve.

Sitting beneath this overarching principle of Indigenous engagement and self-determination are several key ingredients.

- **Indigenous voice should be captured at the local level, reflecting a placed-based approach.**²⁶⁰ The decentralisation of decision-making power to Indigenous community leaders ensures that the specific and complex needs and values are understood and addressed, which in turn has a cascading effect on Indigenous participant motivation and behaviour.²⁶¹ This approach ensures Indigenous leadership within the management, implementation and in the development of measures of success for employment outcomes.²⁶² As a result, participants may perceive their needs and wants reflected in the program's implementation, building buy-in, support and trust in the program.
- **Employment service activities and supports align with Indigenous value systems** – this ensures that Indigenous participants' conception of work and broader culture and values are considered and built into the design and implementation of programs and policies. This may contribute to a greater sense of empowerment and ensure activities and supports have intrinsic and extrinsic cultural value. The provision of flexibility for Indigenous autonomy and input, safeguards the design and service implementation with cultural expectations, norms and values.
- **Local entrepreneurship opportunities for Indigenous Australians should be promoted** – It is true that the rate of Indigenous business ownership has rapidly increased in the last decade, but the challenges are varied (such as access to capital or equity) and thus Indigenous

²⁵⁷ Wendt, R. (2008). 'Indigenous governance: does it improve indigenous employment outcomes? And if so how? *Queensland University of Technology*. Accessed from: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/17194/1/c17194.pdf>

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ An understudied area of research is the notion that place based work is also likely to magnify intrinsic and extrinsic cultural value, especially where that work generates benefit for the community, such as care for people, land, community or cultural heritage. The value of this work is not merely cultural but also likely to impact health and wellbeing outcomes for participants and beneficiaries of the care.

²⁶¹ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁶² Ibid.

Australians require additional support.²⁶³ A focus on local entrepreneurship opportunities can foster economic and social participation in which Indigenous Australians can generate income independently and raise living standards.²⁶⁴

In essence, programs that allow for Indigenous engagement and self-determination at the local level ensure that they are community-focused, holistic and tailored to local contexts ensure that the diversity of each community is captured and ensures relevance, acceptance and appropriateness, which can, in turn, heighten participant buy-in and enhance long-term employment outcomes.

Box 4: Yarrabah, northern Queensland

The Indigenous community of Yarrabah has received Australian Government funding for a trial place-based employment program. This has culminated in the creation of a local community organisation tasked with delivering employment support to the community.²⁶⁵

Involving local residents in the service delivery ensures that the specific challenges jobseekers face in Yarrabah are understood and targeted through program design and implementation.²⁶⁶ The flexible funding offered through this program assists Yarrabah in building the capacity to deliver this employment service, such as through a community skills and training activity.²⁶⁷

Key aspects of this place-based model include:

- local community leadership
- culturally appropriate service delivery
- community input into decision-making

targeting the interests of participants to training and employment.²⁶⁸

Box 5: Canada's city of Thunder Bay

The city of Thunder Bay in Canada established an Aboriginal Liaison Strategy, with the objective to enhance the wellbeing of the city's local communities.²⁶⁹

Established through formal and informal gatherings with local Indigenous leaders, service providers and community groups, this strategy seeks to prioritise the city's role as an employer of Indigenous people.²⁷⁰ To achieve this, the city plans to ensure recruitment materials and internship programs are developed with culturally sensitive and specific lens.

This Aboriginal Liaison Strategy is reviewed annually, with key indicators of success relating to:

- statistics on employment, education attainment, homelessness and poverty

²⁶³ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Australian Government – Department of Education Skills and Employment. (2018). 'Indigenous employment service being trialled in Yarrabah'. Accessed from < <https://www.employment.gov.au/newsroom/indigenous-employment-service-being-trialled-yarrabah> >

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

- increased participation in city services and programs
 - increased engagement of Indigenous community members and leaders in municipal politics and governance
 - increase sense of belonging and respect towards Indigenous people within the city
- increased and continuous involvement with Mayor, Council and Administration.²⁷¹

Leadership advocacy

Employer leadership that actively promotes and facilitates strong program ownership is key. Leadership advocacy can shift workplace culture and ensure the supports and systems are in place to enhance program success.

Existing research indicates the following aspects are enabling features of successful leadership advocacy:

- A 'buddy' system for day-to-day support for Indigenous participants and/or a mentor – Indigenous if possible.²⁷²
- Indigenous cultural capability training within workplaces and championed by employers that covers (a) Indigenous culture, (b) the impact of British and European arrival on Indigenous culture and identity, and (c) how workplace processes and supports can be customised to meet the needs and culture of Indigenous Australians.
- The existence of RAPs and embedding of cultural change and training within the workplace. See Section 5.6.2 for further detail.

These measures assist to build trust and respectful relationships as well as contribute to a more inclusive workplace.²⁷³ An invested leadership is also more likely to engage the local Indigenous community, which – as mentioned above – can incentivise community buy-in, program adoption and improved likelihood of long-term employment.

It is worth emphasising that a magnifying form of leadership in this context is the availability of Indigenous leadership and mentoring within the employer, so that patterns of work and cultural engagement can be normalised for all parties.

Box 6: NAB's Indigenous employment agenda

To promote greater corporate social responsibility, in 2008 National Australia Bank (NAB) developed a RAP to enhance employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians.²⁷⁴ Through this, NAB developed their employment program, which sought to increase the number of Indigenous employees.

To achieve this goal, NAB committed to providing 20 School Based Traineeships per year, 20 Indigenous tertiary and leadership scholarships, as well as 'on the job' training for Indigenous students through traineeships, cadetships and apprenticeship programs.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

²⁷³ McCalman, J., Bainbridge, R., Percival, N. and Tsey, K. (2016). 'The effectiveness of implementation in Indigenous Australian healthcare: an overview of literature reviews.' *International Journal for Equity in Health*

²⁷⁴ RAPs are considered successful in assisting organisations to develop their own Reverse Discrimination policies.

²⁷⁵ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*.

Seeking to enhance an inclusive workplace culture, NAB also developed cross-cultural awareness activities and provides volunteering opportunities in Indigenous organisations to foster communication connections and the sharing of knowledge.

Findings from the firm's first year operating their IEP showed positive results with respect to both Indigenous and NAB perspectives.

- the number of Indigenous employees more than doubled, with 77 Indigenous employees in 2010 compared with 35 in 2009²⁷⁶
 - the vast majority of managers and other NAB staff interviewed were strongly in favour of the IEP, and over half believed that having an Indigenous person in the workplace made customers and NAB employees break down negative views and stereotypes of Indigenous Australians²⁷⁷
- using the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey Indigenous participants in the IEP reported improved work and personal outcomes, including job satisfaction, reduced financial stress, improved wellbeing and the majority believed that their NAB experience helped them plan for the future.²⁷⁸

Sustained wrap-around support with an Indigenous lens

Wrap-around support is a term used for supports and services offered to disadvantaged participants facing structural barriers to employment, similar to job-readiness training outlined in Section 0. While this is imperative for *all* disadvantaged jobseekers, it is important that Indigenous participants access wrap-around support that is underpinned by an Indigenous cultural focus.

The following features are deemed effective in attracting and retaining Indigenous staff:

- **The provision of culturally appropriate mentoring programs is key.** Embedding mentoring in the training and development of Indigenous job seekers can support Indigenous job seekers in overcoming key barriers, such as fear of failure and navigating the workplace.²⁷⁹ It is important that mentoring programs are outsourced to Indigenous organisations or the local community to both build capability at the local level and to allow for more open and culturally relevant support.²⁸⁰
- **The provision of family and community support programs assist Indigenous jobseekers and employees to overcome significant life barriers.** An example is provided in the Rio Tinto program whereby families are assisted in settling into the working environment and residential mining towns.²⁸¹
- **Connecting participants to external/specialist services in the community can assist Indigenous jobseekers and employees to access care and support to address ongoing**

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Daly, A., Gebremedhin, T. and Sayem, M. (2013). 'A Case Study of Affirmative Action Australian-style for Indigenous People,' *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*.

²⁷⁸ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*; Daly, A., Gebremedhin, T. and Sayem, M. (2013). 'A Case Study of Affirmative Action Australian-style for Indigenous People,' *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*.

²⁷⁹ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Gray, M., Hunter, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

life barriers. Examples may include counselling or psychology services, and other allied health support.²⁸²

- **The provision of post-participation support is a trait of programs oriented to improving longer-term outcomes.** Examples may include facilitating transitions into employment, such as the provision of more flexible hours to cater for family and cultural responsibilities.²⁸³
- **The provision of case management allows for assistance to be tailored to the Indigenous participant's most pressing needs.**²⁸⁴ A case manager serves a conduit to other services, such as in relation to housing and mental health services.
- **A long-term focus that adopts a 'life-first' as opposed to 'work first' approach,** supporting Indigenous jobseekers to address challenges associated with health, housing and other lifestyle barriers stemming from enduring disadvantage.²⁸⁵

Box 7: Rio Tinto's Indigenous employment agenda

Rio Tinto's Indigenous employment program is referred to as an 'active' initiative in that the design and implementation of adjustments and supports are 'hands on'. The success of this initiative centres on the adaption of workplace processes and the provision of tailored supports.

Rio Tinto uses alternative recruitment methods, demonstrating their understanding that traditional methods of recruitment, such as psychometric testing and formal interviews, can be daunting and form a significant barrier to participating in employment.²⁸⁶

The program also provides a range of educational, wellbeing and family support to assist Indigenous employees overcome and manage factors inhibiting retention. Examples include:

- Foundational skills, including job readiness training, literacy and numeracy support, safety training
- External/expert support, including alcohol and drug support and personal financial management
- Prevocational training, traineeships and apprenticeships

Career support and advice, including mentoring programs (usually conducted by an Indigenous employee)

Box 8: Indigenous Mentoring Pilot

The Indigenous Mentoring Pilot commenced in July 2012, as a part of JSA's offering for Indigenous participants. This initiative was intended to enhance the sustainability of employment for the most

²⁸² Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>; OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁸³ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁸⁴ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

²⁸⁵ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁸⁶ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

disadvantaged Indigenous jobseekers who commenced work by providing ongoing mentoring support during and post-placement for an additional 26 weeks.²⁸⁷

An evaluation of the pilot in 2015 found that the key successful ingredients include the following.

Mentors should:

- have experience of work, an understanding of the income support system, and have links to support services, the local community and employers;
- be selected from local Indigenous communities who are known and respected;
- be trained and mentored themselves, to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities and accessible services and supports available to their participants;
- work closely with the families of jobseekers;
- have or develop strong relationships with assisting organisations, such as the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Health service.²⁸⁸

Providers should:

- support mentors to manage their workloads, as their role is often similar to the role of a case manager, supporting participants to work through a range of significant and complex barriers;
- have a RAP and some form of cultural capability training;
- consider providing mental health training to Indigenous mentors;
- consider ways to retain their Indigenous mentors to allow for continuity of mentors.²⁸⁹

Sustained focus on building skills

It is well recognised that Indigenous Australians face a multitude of barriers to accessing education, training and employment, and that a coordinated and sustained approach to building the skills of Indigenous Australians is necessary. With respect to employment programs, this means that training should be tailored but should also be supplemented by external supporting services and programs, such as those outlined in Section 5.6.1.

Low education attainment (school and further training, such as vocational training) is a key contributor to the long-term trend of Indigenous unemployment. A focus on raising the skill levels of Indigenous Australians within urban and remote areas is a key factor in narrowing employment gaps.²⁹⁰ In particular, the research stresses the importance of aligning training and development opportunities to sectors with shortages, such as health care and education.²⁹¹

Vocational education and job-readiness training can ease the transition from school to work, which is perceived as a challenge for Indigenous students.

According to the OECD report, the following are key principles underpinning successful Indigenous skills-based employment programs:

- **Employer engagement in skills development opportunities** – this ensures employers are actively aware and involved in skill development and enables them to create workplace in which Indigenous Australians can integrate the skills they have learned

²⁸⁷ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2015). 'The Evaluation of Job Services Australia 2012-2015. Accessed from:

https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/the_evaluation_of_jsa_2012-2015_0.pdf

²⁸⁸ Australian Government, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2015). 'The Evaluation of Job Services Australia 2012-2015. Accessed from:

https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/the_evaluation_of_jsa_2012-2015_0.pdf

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

- **Sector-based approach can assist in meeting future labour market demands** – this ensures that training is relevant and translates into employment
- **Provision of training within a workplace setting** – this ensures that training is easily transferrable to employment, as in many cases Indigenous Australians may not have prior work experience in the field they are seeking employment in
- **Culturally appropriate mentoring programs** – this assists in ensuring that all aspects of the workplace (such as recruitment and training) are culturally sensitive and respectful. Ideally, the mentor should be Indigenous but where this is not possible, the mentor should undertake extensive training in Indigenous cultures, customs and values.
- **Foundational skills training** – this ensures that Indigenous Australians have necessary generic skills – such as literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and presentation skills – essential in accessing, participating and retaining employment.²⁹²

Box 9: Yarn'n Aboriginal Employment Services

Based in Sydney, Yarn'n Aboriginal Employment Services focuses on promoting Indigenous employment within the health sector by partnering with local employers to develop employment programs that focus on training, development and adapting 'mainstream' employment practices that can create additional barriers to sustaining employment.²⁹³

For employers, Yarn'n Aboriginal Employment Services provides advice on culturally appropriate recruitment practices, support for Indigenous candidates, as well as support to supervisors to build culturally sensitive workplaces.²⁹⁴

For Indigenous jobseekers, the 'Health Jobs Connect' initiative provided training and employment, with 150 placements into health sector employment. This approach ensures that training is relevant, job-specific and easily transferrable to employment.²⁹⁵

A.5. Conclusions

The literature scan presented in this report has been added to and refined over the course of the evaluation, as new evidence and lines of inquiry came to light. This review provides the evaluation guidance on where existing evidence is strongest, and where evaluation findings will be required to shed more light.

5.6.3 Limitations of existing literature

The paucity of available literature on successful IEPs generates several challenges for this evaluation, but also more generally for the continued development and roll out of IEPs, as it demonstrates the need for a rigorous body of evidence to support design and implementation. The lack of evidence in this sphere is particularly hindered by an absence of extensive, collaborative and Indigenous-led research to inform ongoing improvement of outcomes relating to Indigenous Australians.

A long-standing limitation of existing literature is the scarcity of Indigenous voices in studies pertaining to employment strategies and outcomes. Promisingly, research is increasingly capturing the insights of Indigenous participants, and increasingly research is being undertaken by Indigenous

²⁹² OECD. (2019). 'Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia', OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dd1029ea-en>.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

researchers. While a welcome evolution, there remains risks associated with how the current literature affects the way that IEPs are developed and evaluated.

As Constable (2009) notes, privileging employer (and non-Indigenous) voices often results in the use of deficit language and a deficit approach to appraising Indigenous employment initiatives.²⁹⁶ By privileging employer views, research centres on the failings of Indigenous participants and does not as strongly consider the role that employers, the environment and the context have.

This type of analysis identifies the scale of what remains unknown, exposing the limitations in the research to quantify factors linked to Indigenous Australian labour market disadvantage. Research gaps appear to include:

- factors influencing Indigenous Australians to seek paid employment, in what ways these influences are different from non-Indigenous employment seekers and how public policy can respond to these differences;
- whether – and to what extent – a tension exists between cultural practices and maintaining paid employment, for some Indigenous Australians; and
- the extent of labour market discrimination of Indigenous Australians and how to reduce it.²⁹⁷

Quantitative evidence of Indigenous employment, if not the determinants of this employment, has been facilitated by the available data. This includes:

- **The Australian Census** which captures data on Australian individuals, families and dwellings and provides insights into levels of education, income, and family and living arrangements
- **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSIS)** which captures data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and provides insights into areas of social concern including health, education, culture, and labour force participation, and is conducted every 6 years
- **Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)** which captures data on Australian households and their occupants and provides insights into economic and personal wellbeing, labour market dynamics and family life
- **Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS)** which captures data on workplace employees and employers and provides insights on enterprise operations and indicators of performance, employment practices, wage-setting and outcomes, and employee experiences.

These sources of data can be useful, but they contain relatively small Indigenous samples and often do not collect data in *very remote* areas of Australia. To fill these gaps, research in this area largely uses qualitative methods and evidence, noting that this form of research presents different limitations, including the dominance of employer and non-Indigenous voices.

Due to these overarching strengths and limitations of the existing IEP literature, the evaluation has been designed and executed with the following considerations in mind:

- Indigenous voices are not always represented so the evaluation deliberately includes greater collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders through an in-depth regional consultation process
- the limited quantitative data means that the limitations of quantitative data will be factored into analysis and qualitative data will be fundamental to developing evaluative findings

²⁹⁶ Constable, J. (2009). 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector: A Consultative Report into Aboriginal Employment Strategies and Initiatives', *Diversity Council Australia*.

²⁹⁷ Gray, M., Hunder, B. and Lohar, S. (2012). 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates', Issues paper np. 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Accessed from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

- IEP success indicators are typically short-term focused and so the evaluation will seek to measure the long-term impacts of IEPs.

5.6.4 Perspectives on the value of employment

The lived experience of Indigenous community suggests there exists a cultural clash between Western and Indigenous Australian employment norms and outcomes expectations, and the ways in which employment is intrinsically and extrinsically valued (or the strength of shared conceptions about the very nature of work).

A discrepancy in shared views on these types of first principles issues has a likely flow on effect to the success of programs, reinforcing that employment initiatives should be designed, implemented and evaluated to incorporate Indigenous conceptions of work and to ensure they are aligned to cultural, community and personal values.

The literature scan has demonstrated that research on the fact and/or strength of this cultural clash is disappointingly limited. It further reveals that there is limited literature available exploring the *difference between* Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians regarding the Anglo-Western employment perspective and none that explores the related question of differences in conception of, and relationship to, employers and the broader idea of Australia's economic institutions.

Underpinning a Western social and economic perspective relating to employment outcomes is the idea that paid employment is a 'rational' use of time with participation motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic reward and where movement into (and then through) careers is a function of equal access to tools of advancement. In this Western perspective, extrinsic reward is largely measured as individual financial reward, and intrinsic reward through conceptions of pride and self-fulfilment directed at the individual level, rather than collective achievements and outcomes.²⁹⁸

There is limited room in this 'rational, self-motivating' framework for the sometimes subtle but nonetheless affecting differences in perspectives on work and differing perspectives on personal and community value. It is further assumed that this self-motivating rationality is sufficiently rewarding to overcome any effects of entrenched, inter-generational experience that emerge as barriers at the individual level.²⁹⁹

In contrast, the value derived from employment for Indigenous Australians is less about individual financial benefit and operates in complex relationship to community and collective values.³⁰⁰ Employment offers avenues to enhance social relationships and contribute meaningfully to community, enhancing sense of belonging, pride and self-worth.³⁰¹

In line with this, research has increasingly recognised the need for a differentiated approach to employment initiatives for Indigenous Australians, in light of poor outcomes for programs that combined them in an undifferentiated 'mainstream' approach.³⁰² 'Mainstreaming' has been varyingly preferred through different government environments and so has been a common feature of many historical Indigenous employment policies.

²⁹⁸ Dillon, A. (2015). 'Valuing work: Beyond the economic benefits of employment', *Policy* 32 (1).

²⁹⁹ Dillon, A. (2015). 'Valuing work: Beyond the economic benefits of employment', *Policy* 32 (1).

³⁰⁰ Gray, M., Hunter, B. and Biddle, N. (2014). 'The Economic and Social Benefits of Increasing Indigenous Employment', *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*; GenerationOne. (2011). 'Walk in My Shoes: Employer experiences of barriers and drivers in the employment cycle for Indigenous Australians.'

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Di Giorgio, A. V. and Habibis, D. (2019). 'Governing pluralistic liberal democratic societies and metis knowledge: The problem of Indigenous unemployment.' *Journal of Sociology* 55(1), 37-53; Jordan, K. (2017). 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy and Welfare to Work: The Community Development Programme and the need for new narratives, new alliances and new institutions.' *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*.

No research could be identified that sought to deeply consider an alternative, preferred economic model of value and work to balance the inherent bias of the Western economic tradition. Perhaps this is the missing piece of the puzzle for future research investigation. At the very least it would enrich the policy environment for government and allow stronger testing for a new conception employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians and potentially all Australians.

5.6.5 Utilising the literature scan findings in the evaluation

The literature scan findings have been used both in the creation of the evaluation strategy as well as in undertaking an appropriateness assessment of the alignment of the IEPs design with evidence of best practice.

The findings from this literature scan have been used will be used to inform the creation and implementation of the evaluation framework.

The key learnings and their impact on both the evaluation strategy and appropriateness assessment include:

Key learning 1: Indigenous voices and narratives are under-represented in available literature on Indigenous employment programs.

- *The evaluation strategy has been designed and executed to ensure that the experiences of Indigenous people are central to the stakeholder engagement strategy. This has included ensuring that the employment experiences and the everyday barriers inhibiting access to and retention in employment for Indigenous participants have been prioritised, so that they can be more fully understood.*
- *When conducting stakeholder consultations, a participatory approach has been used, which has allowed for Indigenous participants to share their experiences in a way that is culturally safe and has allowed for honest reflections on participant experience with the EPI, VTEC and TAEG programs.*
- *The appropriateness assessment acknowledges that existing evidence is dominated by non-Indigenous perspectives. This means that the evaluation considers appropriateness in line with current evidence, yet also recognises that this evidence may not be tailored to reflect the experiences of Indigenous jobseekers and employees.*

Key learning 2: The current employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in the product of complex historical, cultural and social factors, and cannot be considered in isolation of this context.

- *The evaluation is cognisant of how Western values and expectations of employment have historically been privileged - whether explicitly or implicitly - and how this impacts on the design and implementation of IEPs and employment programs more generally.*
- *The evaluation is cognisant of the lived experience of Indigenous Australians in engaging with employment and employment assistance programs.*
- *The evaluation considers what successful employment outcomes look like in an Indigenous Australian context, recognising this may differ from mainstream models (such as through a focus on entrepreneurship and self-determination).*

Key learning 3: The success factors of IEPs – including a place-based approach, wrap-around support and self-determination – can be understood outside of Western economic traditions (though also have utility in general employment programs).

- *When evaluating the appropriateness of the design, implementation and impact of the IEPs in scope, these key factors are taken into consideration. Moreover, the evaluation understands that these success factors may look different in each community and so the stakeholder engagement approach has focused on uncovering how the programs work within specific circumstances.*
- *This work endeavours to complement the established economic evaluation metrics by investigating potentially different measurements for consideration of future research and/or policy design.*
- *The evaluation has an opportunity to shed light on the broader outcomes relating to the social, personal and attitudinal impacts of IEPs through the primary research undertaken. Participant and community consultations will provide in-depth insights into these personal outcomes.*

Key learning 4: Despite the limitations of the literature, the literature scan has identified an established group of principles and design features that are associated with best practice employment programs generally and Indigenous employment programs specifically.

- *The evaluation builds on the established evidence base identified in this literature scan as the list of identified principles and design features is used to anchor the appropriateness assessment within the evaluation report.*

Appendix B: State and Territory Indigenous Employment Policies

Table A.5: High-level summary of state and territory Indigenous employment policies

| State / Territory | Description of Indigenous Employment Policies |
|-------------------|--|
| Victoria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) is the Victorian Government's major activity to help Victorians facing barriers to employment into jobs. Under the first JVEN funding round, five targeted services for Aboriginal jobseekers received a total of \$5.6 million to support 480 job placements. In addition, 16 multi-target applications received a total of \$17.1 million for programs that included Aboriginal jobseekers as a target group. |
| New South Wales | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NSW Aboriginal Employment Strategy aims to increase the representation of Indigenous Australians in the state's public service to be at least 3% of all non-executive levels, and at least 114 senior leadership roles. |
| Tasmania | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tasmanian State Service has set a target of increasing the representation of Indigenous Australians in its service from 3% to 3.5% and has created 70 additional roles that are specifically for Aboriginal people. |
| Queensland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) program provides training and support to unemployed and underemployed people. The program represents a significant investment of \$420 million over six years, and features Indigenous jobseekers as being one of the key target cohorts. The Queensland Government Youth Employment Program (YEP) supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the state who are either recent high-school graduates or who have completed a Certificate III or higher and are not currently being assisted by a job agency. YEP provides jobseekers with pre-employment support along with training opportunities. The Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy (QIPP) aims to increase the value of Queensland Government procurement spend awarded to Indigenous businesses to be 3 per cent of addressable spend by 2022. |
| South Australia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The South Australian Government aims to increase the number and diversity of Aboriginal businesses winning government procurement processes. They aim to achieve this through 1) encouraging businesses to sign-up to the South Australian Aboriginal Business Register, which aims to connect businesses with procurement policies and 2) Increasing the weighting of Aboriginal |

| State / Territory | Description of Indigenous Employment Policies |
|------------------------------|--|
| | business tenders such that Aboriginal businesses are more likely to win contracts. |
| Western Australia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Aboriginal Traineeship Program provides young Indigenous Australians with the opportunity to start a career in the public service by undertaking a 12-month paid work placement and completing a nationally recognised Certificate III in Government. The Western Australian Government has created the Aboriginal Services Jobs Board to try and match Indigenous jobseekers with employment opportunities in the public and private sector. |
| Australian Capital Territory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Vocational Employment Program aims to increase the representation of Indigenous staff in the ACT Public Service by providing work experience and training to jobseekers, with an ongoing job in the public service upon program completion. The ACT Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy aims to increase the territory's procurement from Indigenous businesses. In order to achieve this the government has created the Canberra Region Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise List to provide a consolidated overview of Indigenous businesses in the region. The government has set a target of spending 2% of its 2021-22 addressable spend on Indigenous businesses. |
| Northern Territory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Aboriginal Employment Grants (AEG) program consists of the Aboriginal Workforce Grants (AWG) initiative and the Aboriginal Responsive Skilling Grants (ARSG). AWGs provide funding for businesses to pursue a project that creates employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians. The ARSG provides funding for accredited and non-accredited training for Aboriginal people living in urban, regional and remote NT communities. |

Source: State and territory government resources; stakeholder consultations. Note: state and territory stakeholder consultations are still being completed, and this table will likely be updated when additional information is obtained from these consultations.

Appendix C: Econometrics & RED data analysis

The RED dataset

Data from the Research Evaluation Database (RED) is used to estimate the long-term employment outcomes of IEP participants. The RED contains information on a sample (of approximately 85% of the total population) of IEP participants and identifies whether they are receiving income support payments or not a given period of months after they exit the IEP. This measure is intended to act as a proxy for whether participants are engaging in paid employment or not. It is acknowledged that this is unlikely to be a perfect measure of an individual's employment status, as it is possible that individuals earn income from non-employment related activities that preclude them from receiving income support.

This evaluation uses an extract from the RED that includes participants who commenced in the program from between July 2015 and July 2019. This timeframe is not identical to that used in the broader evaluation (from program inception to December 2019), as data from this extended timeframe could not be obtained from the RED. However, the sample from the RED appears to be highly representative of the broader IEP population, suggesting that there are unlikely to be issues in generalising findings.

Table A.6: Summary of participant characteristics in RED and IEP program data

| Characteristics | IEP Program Data | RED Snapshot |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Male | 56% | 57% |
| Female | 44% | 43% |
| Metropolitan | 56% | 57% |
| Regional | 28% | 29% |
| Remote | 14% | 14% |
| Under 25 | 44% | 42% |
| 25-44 | 42% | 44% |
| Over 45 | 13% | 14% |

Source: Research Evaluation Database (2015 to 2019). IEP Program Data (2014 to 2019)

For the purpose of this evaluation, data from the RED only examines whether participants are receiving payments from the Newstart or Youth Allowance (Other) programs, with other types of welfare payments being excluded.

Econometric results

Deloitte Access Economics used regression techniques to estimate the association of a set of participant characteristics on income support status, controlling for select characteristics.

Broadly, these models followed the form of:

$$\Pr(\text{Income support}_{t+1,j} | \text{Income support}_{t,j}) = f(\beta_j X)$$

Where $\Pr(\text{Income support}_{t+1,j} | \text{Income support}_{t,j})$ represents the probability that an individual is receiving income support in a future time period, conditional on the probability that they were receiving income support on program entry, and $\beta_j X$ represents the set of individual characteristics that are being controlled for, including participants' age, gender, remoteness, state of participation, year of participation and 26-week employment outcome.

Tables A.3 to A.7 below present the regression results from a selection of the logistic models that were run that are most relevant to the findings discussed in this report. The dependent variable across these models is not the same and is identified above each table.

The odds ratios derived from logistic models (which represents the likelihood of an outcome occurring relative to an outcome not occurring) cannot be interpreted as the risk ratio or probability associated with an outcome occurring where the outcome has a 10% or more chance of occurring.³⁰³ Given that this applies to labour market outcomes, several transformations were consequently required to calculate the probability values listed below.

In their original form, the logistic regression returns the log odds of the outcome variable (i.e. income support status). The coefficients were added to the 'base case' (VTEC, Male, Metropolitan, 2015, NSW, did not achieve 26-week outcome) and exponentiated in order to yield a series of odds outcomes. Finally, these odds ratios were transformed into probabilities and then compared to their corresponding base case in order to derive a set of marginal effects. These marginal effects provide an indication of the nature (either positive or negative) and magnitude of the associative relationship that exists between the outcome and explanatory variables for an individual who is VTEC, Male, Metropolitan, 2015, NSW, did not achieve 26-week outcome. Note that the effect sizes may differ for individuals with other characteristics due to the non-linear nature of the probability estimates.

When interpreting these results, the statistical significance between the relationships was also considered. Statistical significance refers to the precision of the estimate, and the confidence that an estimate is not equal to zero. For example, an estimate that is statistically significant at the 5% confidence level can be interpreted as having 95% confidence that the estimate is not equal to zero, and therefore a statistically significant relationship exists.

Note that for the income support models, 2015 was used as the base year as it is the first year that data was recorded for. However, for the 26-week income support model, 2016 was used as the base year due to 2015 being an atypical year as the program just started. The use of a separate base does not affect the interpretation of the other variables, and the sample between the two models are common.

³⁰³ Cummings, P. (2009), "The relative merits of risk ratios and odds ratios", *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2009;163(5):438-445.

Table A.7: Regression results from model 2

Dependent variable = achieved 26-week milestone

| Variable | Probability | 95% Confidence Interval | Probability difference (for central estimate) | Statistical Significance |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Intercept (VTEC, Male, Metropolitan, NSW, aged 25-44) | 0.58 | | | *** |
| EPI | 0.71 | [0.66,0.76] | 0.14 | *** |
| TAEG | 0.54 | [0.49,0.6] | -0.03 | ** |
| Female | 0.65 | [0.6,0.7] | 0.08 | *** |
| Inner Regional Australia | 0.57 | [0.5,0.63] | -0.01 | |
| Outer Regional Australia | 0.64 | [0.58,0.7] | 0.07 | *** |
| Remote and Very Remote Australia | 0.66 | [0.6,0.72] | 0.09 | *** |
| 2015 | 0.03 | [0.02,0.07] | -0.54 | *** |
| 2017 | 0.56 | [0.5,0.62] | -0.01 | |
| 2018 | 0.57 | [0.51,0.63] | 0.00 | |
| 2019 | 0.61 | [0.54,0.67] | 0.03 | * |
| Over 45 | 0.56 | [0.5,0.63] | -0.01 | |
| Under 25 | 0.56 | [0.5,0.61] | -0.02 | |
| NT | 0.61 | [0.53,0.68] | 0.03 | |
| QLD | 0.54 | [0.48,0.6] | -0.03 | * |
| SA | 0.62 | [0.54,0.69] | 0.04 | |
| TAS | 0.70 | [0.59,0.78] | 0.12 | ** |
| VIC | 0.64 | [0.58,0.71] | 0.07 | ** |
| WA | 0.54 | [0.47,0.6] | -0.04 | * |
| On income support for >1 year on program entry | 0.55 | [0.5,0.61] | -0.02 | * |

Source: DAE Regression Analysis. Note: *** = significant at the 0.1% level, ** = significant at the 1% level, * = significant at the 5% level.

Table A.8: Regression results from model 4B

Dependent variable = likelihood that an individual is receiving income support 12 months after program exit

| Variable | Probability | 95% Confidence Interval | Probability difference (for central estimate) | Statistical Significance |
|--|--------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Intercept (VTEC, Male, Metropolitan, 2015, NSW, did not achieve 26-week outcome, aged 25-44) | 0.47 | | | |
| EPI | 0.47 | [0.33,0.61] | 0.00 | |
| TAEG | 0.44 | [0.33,0.57] | -0.02 | |
| Female | 0.53 | [0.41,0.64] | 0.06 | ** |
| Inner Regional Australia | 0.54 | [0.4,0.67] | 0.07 | * |
| Outer Regional Australia | 0.48 | [0.34,0.62] | 0.01 | |
| Remote and Very Remote Australia | 0.43 | [0.29,0.57] | -0.04 | |
| 2016 | 0.42 | [0.28,0.57] | -0.05 | |
| 2017 | 0.42 | [0.25,0.6] | -0.05 | |
| Over 45 | 0.53 | [0.39,0.66] | 0.06 | * |
| Under 25 | 0.43 | [0.31,0.55] | -0.04 | * |
| ACT | 0.49 | [0.28,0.7] | 0.02 | |
| NT | 0.57 | [0.41,0.72] | 0.10 | * |
| QLD | 0.51 | [0.38,0.65] | 0.05 | |
| SA | 0.51 | [0.34,0.67] | 0.04 | |
| TAS | 0.41 | [0.21,0.65] | -0.05 | |
| VIC | 0.46 | [0.31,0.61] | -0.01 | |
| WA | 0.57 | [0.42,0.7] | 0.10 | ** |
| Achieve 26-week outcome | 0.22 | [0.15,0.32] | -0.25 | *** |
| On income support for >1 year on program entry | 0.64 | [0.52,0.74] | 0.17 | *** |

Source: DAE Regression Analysis. Note: *** = significant at the 0.1% level, ** = significant at the 1% level, * = significant at the 5% level

Table A.9: Regression results from model 4C

Dependent variable = likelihood that an individual is receiving income support 24 months after program exit

| Variable | Probability | 95% Confidence Interval | Probability difference (for central estimate) | Statistical Significance |
|---|--------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Intercept (<i>VTEC, Male, Metropolitan, 2015, NSW, did not achieve 26-week outcome, aged 25-44</i>) | 0.46 | | | |
| EPI | 0.41 | [0.28,0.56] | -0.04 | |
| TAEG | 0.41 | [0.3,0.54] | -0.04 | |
| Female | 0.49 | [0.37,0.61] | 0.03 | |
| Inner Regional Australia | 0.48 | [0.34,0.62] | 0.02 | |
| Outer Regional Australia | 0.45 | [0.32,0.6] | 0.00 | |
| Remote and Very Remote Australia | 0.35 | [0.23,0.5] | -0.10 | *** |
| 2016 | 0.40 | [0.26,0.54] | -0.06 | |
| 2017 | 0.47 | [0.29,0.65] | 0.01 | |
| Over 45 | 0.50 | [0.36,0.63] | 0.04 | |
| Under 25 | 0.39 | [0.28,0.51] | -0.06 | ** |
| ACT | 0.41 | [0.21,0.63] | -0.05 | |
| NT | 0.62 | [0.46,0.76] | 0.17 | *** |
| QLD | 0.47 | [0.33,0.61] | 0.01 | |
| SA | 0.49 | [0.33,0.66] | 0.03 | |
| TAS | 0.50 | [0.28,0.72] | 0.05 | |
| VIC | 0.39 | [0.25,0.55] | -0.07 | |
| WA | 0.57 | [0.42,0.71] | 0.11 | ** |
| Achieve 26-week outcome | 0.25 | [0.17,0.36] | -0.20 | *** |
| On income support for >1 year on program entry | 0.61 | [0.49,0.72] | 0.16 | *** |

Source: DAE Regression Analysis. Note: *** = significant at the 0.1% level, ** = significant at the 1% level, * = significant at the 5% level

Table A.10: Regression results from model 4D

Dependent variable = likelihood that an individual is receiving income support 36 months after program exit

| Variable | Probability | 95% Confidence Interval | Probability difference (for central estimate) | Statistical Significance |
|---|--------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Intercept (<i>VTEC, Male, Metropolitan, 2015, NSW, did not achieve 26-week outcome, aged 25-44</i>) | 0.59 | | | * |
| EPI | 0.55 | [0.41,0.68] | -0.04 | |
| TAEG | 0.56 | [0.44,0.68] | -0.03 | |
| Female | 0.57 | [0.45,0.68] | -0.02 | |
| Inner Regional Australia | 0.64 | [0.5,0.75] | 0.05 | |
| Outer Regional Australia | 0.61 | [0.47,0.73] | 0.02 | |
| Remote and Very Remote Australia | 0.54 | [0.4,0.68] | -0.05 | |
| 2016 | 0.54 | [0.39,0.68] | -0.05 | |
| 2017 | 0.57 | [0.39,0.74] | -0.02 | |
| Over 45 | 0.63 | [0.49,0.75] | 0.04 | |
| Under 25 | 0.56 | [0.44,0.67] | -0.03 | |
| ACT | 0.60 | [0.39,0.78] | 0.01 | |
| NT | 0.75 | [0.61,0.85] | 0.16 | *** |
| QLD | 0.65 | [0.52,0.77] | 0.06 | * |
| SA | 0.69 | [0.53,0.81] | 0.10 | * |
| TAS | 0.56 | [0.34,0.76] | -0.03 | |
| VIC | 0.56 | [0.41,0.7] | -0.03 | |
| WA | 0.72 | [0.59,0.82] | 0.13 | *** |
| Achieve 26-week outcome | 0.38 | [0.27,0.5] | -0.21 | *** |
| On income support for >1 year on program entry | 0.70 | [0.6,0.79] | 0.11 | *** |

Source: DAE Regression Analysis. Note: *** = significant at the 0.1% level, ** = significant at the 1% level, * = significant at the 5% level

As with all studies of this nature, the results are a function of the modelling assumptions and available data. There are several important limitations associated with the regression results presented in this report:

- While the analysis seeks to control for the effects of contextual factors, the effects cannot be interpreted as causal. That is, one cannot conclude which IEP program is definitively better in terms of achieving income support outcomes for participants. Instead, the relationships should only be considered associative.
- There is omitted variable bias. For example, several variables that are typically associated with labour market outcomes -such as the JSCI score, length of unemployment and educational attainment of an individual – were not available in the datasets and hence could not be controlled for. Further, there are additional unobserved variables that would likely impact an individual's employment status (such as their level of motivation) that could be not controlled for and would likely bias the estimates.
- Lastly, the econometric analysis included does not represent a counterfactual analysis. That is, it does not compare participation in the IEP program to a counterfactual where the individual does not participate in the IEP program, and therefore should not be interpreted as an estimate of the program's impact or additionality.

Appendix D: Evaluation Strategy

Note that this Evaluation Strategy was finalised in November 2020 and has not been updated to reflect any subsequent changes to the evaluation. Therefore, this document should be interpreted as a summary of the how the evaluation was intended to be completed at this point in time.

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Glossary

| Acronym | Full name |
|----------------|--|
| DESE | Department of Education, Skills and Employment |
| EPI | Employment Parity Initiative |
| ESS | Employment Services System |
| IAS | Indigenous Advancement Strategy |
| IEP | Indigenous Employment Programs |
| JLEP | Jobs, Land and Economy Programme |
| JSCI | Job Seeker Classification Instrument |
| NIAA | National Indigenous Australians Agency |
| PM&C | Prime Minister and Cabinet |
| PPM | Post-Program Monitoring (survey) |
| SVA | Social Ventures Australia |
| TAEG | Tailored Assistance Employment Grants |
| VTEC | Vocational, Training and Employment Centres |

1 Introduction

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged to undertake an evaluation of three Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs) funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) within the Jobs, Land and Economy Program (JLEP) under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) – the Employment Parity Initiative (EPI), Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs) and Tailored Employment Assistance Grants – Employment (TAEG).

This Evaluation Strategy sets out the approach to the evaluation and has been prepared in conjunction with, and complements, a literature scan and ethics application. These are both available as separate documents.

The Evaluation Strategy has been developed in line with the IAS Evaluation Framework and thus includes an evaluation approach and governance that embeds mechanisms to incorporate Indigenous cultural values and ensure data sovereignty.

The evaluation team is co-led by Deloitte Access Economics and Professor Deen Sanders OAM, a Worimi man and leader in his community. At Deloitte, Deen is the strategy leader for the Indigenous Leadership Team and National Chair of Deloitte’s Reconciliation Action Plan. The evaluation team leadership also includes Susan Moylan-Coombs, an Aboriginal woman with ancestry from the Woolwonga and Gurindji people from the Northern Territory and the Founder and Director of The Gaimaragal Group. Susan holds extensive experience working with First Australian communities, with specific expertise in community consultation, empowerment and the facilitation of voice and storytelling.

An Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) and Indigenous Evaluation Committee (IEC) will also provide expertise and evaluation leadership.

1.1 Context to this evaluation

Improving the employment outcomes of Indigenous Australians has been prominent on the national political agenda since the Closing the Gap initiative commenced in 2008. However, there is an enduring low employment rate for Indigenous Australians (currently at 49 per cent compared to 75 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians).³⁰⁴ Despite the various government programs continuing to address employment barriers, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment rates have only marginally decreased (1.3 percentage points) since the Closing the Gap Initiative was introduced.

The Australian Government has committed to the evaluation of these three IEPs in recognition of the view that appropriately designed and implemented initiatives are required to facilitate equal access to employment opportunity and associated outcomes. As such, it is intended that application of the Evaluation Strategy outlined here will enable assessment of:

- The **appropriateness** of the design of IEP programs, and how successfully the program has been implemented.
- The extent that **expected outcomes** of the programs have been achieved, and the contextual factors that influence this.
- Opportunities to **improve program design and implementation** of each program separately, and in relation to each other.

This evaluation is important to NIAA in determining the future design and management of the suite of programs, and beyond.

³⁰⁴ Australian Government. (2020). 'Closing the Gap Report 2020'. Accessed from: <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/employment>

1.2 The Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs)

The Jobs, Land and Economy Program (JLEP) was introduced on 1 July 2014 as part of the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). An overarching objective of the JLEP is to **deliver improved employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians**, by supporting adults into work, fostering Indigenous business, and assisting Indigenous people to generate economic and social benefits from the effective use of their land.

The three Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs) in-scope for review (EPI, VTEC and TAEG) are all initiatives within the JLEP. They are stand-alone programs, which are complementary to mainstream employment services, and each has a different focus. A high-level summary of the objectives and activities of each program is provided below. A more detailed summary of each program is provided at pages 3-7 of **Appendix A**.

1.2.1 Employment Parity Initiative (EPI)

The EPI was launched in March 2015. It aims to increase Indigenous employment in large Australian companies (ASX Top 200) to reflect the proportion of the Indigenous population nationally – approximately three per cent.

The overarching objectives of the EPI are to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and achieve greater employment parity for Indigenous Australians and improved cultural inclusion strategies among Australian companies.

The EPI funds participating employers (EPI Partners) to recruit, train and support Indigenous job seekers. Funding payments are linked to participant milestones. These milestones are typically participants achieving 26 weeks' of continuous employment. However, EPI is a flexible program that allows milestones to be amended to suit the needs of the employers.

As at 31 December 2019, the Employment Parity Initiative has commitments of 11,009 jobs by 15 partner organisations with nearly 7,479 Indigenous job seekers commenced employment and 4,839 employed for 26 weeks.

1.2.2 Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC)

The VTEC initiative was launched in 2014 to match Indigenous Australian job seekers with guaranteed jobs.

The overarching objectives of the VTEC program are to reduce the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and to place more Indigenous Australians in sustainable employment.

VTECs are specialised training providers that use a demand-driven approach to deliver pre-employment training that is linked to guaranteed job opportunities for Indigenous Australians. To further promote engagement with Indigenous Australian communities, a requirement was introduced in 2018 for VTEC to either be, or have a joint venture with, an Indigenous organisation.

From 2 January 2014 to 31 December 2019, VTEC has commitments of 16,214 jobs, with 11,777 Indigenous job seekers commenced employment and 6,995 employed for 26 weeks.

1.2.3 Tailored Assistance Employment Grants – Employment (TAEG Employment)

The TAEG program was initially launched in 2009, but has only existed in its current form since 1 July 2016.

TAEG connects Indigenous Australians with real and sustainable jobs via three streams of flexible grant funding, including 'Employment', 'School-based traineeships' and 'Cadetships'. However, only the Employment stream is in-scope for this evaluation.

The overarching objectives of the TAEG Employment program are the same as the VTEC program: to reduce the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and to ensure that more Indigenous Australians are in sustainable employment.

TAEG Employment funds projects that seek to deliver sustainable employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians (including high school students transitioning into the workforce) and meet

job market demands. TAEG Employment offers a flexible avenue for providers to assist Indigenous Australians into employment, when access to VTEC funds is either unavailable or inappropriate.

From 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2019, TAEG Employment projects has commitments of 13,179 jobs, with 8,399 Indigenous jobseekers commenced employment and 5,658 employed for 26 weeks.

1.3 This document

The purpose of this document is to build upon and extend the precision of the methodology of the evaluation strategy work prepared by SVA (provided for reference at **Appendix A** of this document), ahead of the evaluation implementation.

The aims of the Evaluation Strategy (read across both documents) are to clearly set out:

- The objectives of the evaluation
- The evaluation framework (the conceptual framing of the evaluation)
- The evaluation methods and analysis
- The stakeholder engagement strategy
- The evaluation implementation plan, including consideration of risks and appropriate mitigation strategies.

For ease of reading, this document should be considered the complete Evaluation Strategy. It references the original work provided in **Appendix A** where relevant.

In developing this document, a series of analytical workshops was held with members of the Evaluation Reference Group (Reference Group):

- An evaluation framework workshop covered confirmation of evaluation priorities, evaluation questions, risks and engagement strategies, as well as outcomes definitions and measurement.
- Separate workshops were held to inform the development of the stakeholder engagement strategy, and to support understanding of the current program data collected.

Feedback from the NIAA's Indigenous Evaluation Committee (IEC) on the original Evaluation Strategy (Appendix A) has also been incorporated³⁰⁵. Additionally, the stakeholder engagement strategy and data collection tools have been developed in collaboration with, and reviewed by, the Gaimaragal Group (Deloitte Access Economics' field research and Indigenous community engagement partner) to ensure it is culturally appropriate and relevant.

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction** has provided a brief overview of the context for and approach to evaluation of the IEPs, and the purpose of this document. The remainder of this document is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 2 – Evaluation framework** discusses the existing program logics (theory of change models) and the evaluation questions, as well as the key performance indicators. Data sources used to inform this evaluation are also detailed.
- **Chapter 3 – Stakeholder engagement strategy** outlines in detail the approach to both qualitative and quantitative research, including to ensuring that appropriately participatory and culturally safe methods are deployed. This chapter also describes features of the Evaluation Strategy designed to embed Indigenous leadership in the evaluation, and addresses the cultural capability in the evaluation team.
- **Chapter 4 – Evaluation implementation plan** including risk mitigation strategies, communication protocols and evaluation governance.
- **Appendix A** – SVA Consulting National Indigenous Australians Agency: Evaluation Strategies – Indigenous Employment Programs (September 2019)
- **Appendix B** – SVA Consulting National Indigenous Australians Agency: Evaluation Strategies – Indigenous Employment Programs, Program Logics).
- **Appendix C** – IEP Evaluation Strategy Data Matrix.
- **Appendix D** – Evaluation data collection tools.

³⁰⁵ The IEC were provided with a separate document detailing how their feedback was incorporated in this evaluation strategy.

- **Appendix E** – Draft regional consultations sample (locations, TAEG and VTEC providers).

2 Evaluation Framework

This chapters presents the conceptual framework underpinning the evaluation approach, including:

- Objectives and scope of the evaluation
- Conceptual framework and reporting domains
- Program logics (theory of change)
- Evaluation questions
- Evaluation indicator framework
- Data collection methods
- Data analysis and reporting techniques.

The evaluation will follow a theory-based, 'realist' evaluation approach, in order to determine 'what works, for whom and in what contexts' – recognising that effectiveness will vary across different contexts. This approach is likely to require a degree of flexibility in collecting and analysing results.

To determine the contextual factors that are of interest to the evaluation, and will be explored for their influence on outcomes realisation in line with the realist approach, a literature scan was undertaken. The outputs of this scan, which is available as a separate document, informed the selection of contextual factors and population sub groups that are established in the evaluation questions and indicator framework presented below. It is acknowledged that these contextual factors and sub groups will be further refined over the course of the evaluation, as the stakeholder consultation process sheds further light on how context interacts with program implementation, engagement and outcomes.

2.1 Objectives and scope of this evaluation

This evaluation is comprised of separate evaluations of three distinct programs.³⁰⁶ Utilising a nested evaluation approach, where appropriate, programs will be considered holistically and comparisons will be drawn across each. This is to facilitate a more strategic assessment of how the programs are operating together to support Indigenous Australians to gain, and retain, sustainable employment.

The evaluation will assess the individual and collective effectiveness of the IEPs and how they have been implemented, whether the programs are meeting stated objectives, and insights to inform policy-makers about possible future improvements. Specifically, the three overarching objectives of this evaluation, as stated by the NIAA, are to:

- 1. Understand program design and delivery:** Understand how the IEPs have been designed, and how the program activities have been implemented to date.
- 2. Understand program impact and effectiveness:** Understand the outcomes (intended and unintended) that the IEPs have created, and the factors that explain the achievement and non-achievement of outcomes – including size, funding, region and relationship with other programs.
- 3. Understand policy implications and potential for future impact:** Understand how the IEPs could be improved to increase impact and what the implications are for the design and implementation of future programs.

Both TAEG Employment and the VTEC initiatives have evolved since their establishment. While prior incarnations of the programs will provide important historical context, and be considered by the evaluation as such, previous iterations of the programs will not be evaluated. The evaluation will consider each of the in-scope programs in their current form. As such, this includes all EPIs

³⁰⁶ There is, however, some overlap in these programs. For instance, participants can be supported by both VTEC and EPI at the same time.

from March 2015, VTECs from January 2014, but only TAEGs as at July 2016 (revised program date) onwards.

Overall, this means the scope of the evaluation is quite broad. In line with the objectives of the evaluation, investigation of strategic insights will be prioritised over observations related to specific aspects of individual programs. Prioritisation of lines of inquiry or evaluation sub-questions will be continuously refined throughout the evaluation process, taking into account emerging findings, and advice from Indigenous leadership and participants.

2.2 Evaluation principles

SVA Consulting proposed four key principles to guide this evaluation (SVA Consulting, 2019). These principles have been refined to reflect feedback from the IEC, findings from the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Issues Paper (2019) and Deloitte Access Economics' approach to evaluation and engagement with Indigenous policy development. They are also designed to complement and act in conjunction with the NIAA's IAS Evaluation Framework (Australian Government, 2020). Of particular importance to the evaluation design is the need and opportunity to prioritise Indigenous perspectives, and the IAS evaluation framework provides guidance on this, as set out in Box 2.1.

Box 2.1: The Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS)

The IAS Evaluation Framework (2018) emphasises:

- Recognising the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures, working collaboratively should be an integral evaluation activity.
- Collaboration across different areas of expertise contributes to solving complex problems. As such, the collective views of Indigenous Australians, service providers and academics should be sought.
- Evaluation design should integrate community values, knowledge and perspectives to ensure findings are useful, credible and helpful.
- Knowledge translation will provide evidence of learning and integration of evaluation towards improvement – including generating and sharing transferable knowledge.

At all times, data collection, analysis and reporting will be undertaken with reference to these evaluation principles. These principles articulate shared expectations regarding the approach. They will be used to guide decisions in relation to method and approach, and to highlight where trade-offs may occur.

The guiding principles for this evaluation are:

- **A robust method to support evidence-based decision-making and program improvements.** This evaluation aims to generate evidence-based insights that will help strengthen the practices of EPI, VTEC and TAEG Employment. Robust methods of data analysis will be used to understand the programs' set-up and implementation, the factors that have influenced success, and the potential for future improvements. The evaluation will seek to share knowledge and thinking as it develops (and as appropriate), supporting decision making cycles and partnership with the NIAA.

This is aligned with the IAS's (2018) best practice evaluation principle of 'evidence-based' which dictates that 'robust evaluation methodologies and analytical methods are used to understand programs in real-world settings, and to inform program design and implementation'.

- **Prioritisation of Indigenous experience, perspectives and knowledge frameworks.** Evaluation activities will be informed and framed by the knowledge and perspectives of

Indigenous people. The evaluation will incorporate participatory processes³⁰⁷ to ensure these perspectives are captured and understood, and triangulated with existing program data held by government.

This is aligned with the Productivity Commission's (2020) overarching principle of 'centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges'.

- **Reflecting the place-based nature of programs and providers.** Evaluation activities will recognise the variances across communities, locations, industries and providers, as well as the challenges associated with generalisability across evaluation findings. This evaluation's approach to data collection and analysis will incorporate a mix of breadth and depth, to drive authentic and tangible findings.

This is aligned with the IAS's (2018) best practice evaluation principle of 'impact focused', which states that evaluations should rigorously test the causal explanations for program effectiveness across varying community and organisational settings.

- **Pragmatism.** Evaluation methodologies will balance rigour in the measurement and attribution of outcomes with the efficient use of time and resources, and availability of data. The evaluation framework, presenting agreed priority areas for the evaluation, will guide decision making. Insights and knowledge gathered tangential to the evaluation priorities will be considered and shared in appropriate formats.

This is aligned with the Productivity Commission's (2020) 'useful' principle, which notes that evaluation findings should inform policy and program decisions.

- **Taking a participant-centric approach.** The evaluation will be designed with participants at the centre. As far as practically possible, while still generating meaningful data insights and findings, evaluation activities will be undertaken in ways that are most useful and least disruptive for participants. This will include engaging participants in ways that are inclusive of, and responsive to, local Indigenous traditions and cultures. As appropriate, data collected will be shared back with participants, validating findings and ensuring data sovereignty.

This is largely aligned with the IAS's (2018) best practice evaluation principle of 'fit-for-purpose' that ensures that evaluation is responsive to place and is appropriate to the Indigenous communities where the programs are implemented, and the scale of effort and resources demanded by the evaluation are proportional to its potential significance and impacts.

These principles, supported by Deloitte's Indigenous Leadership Group and the Gaimaragal Group, will form the basis of our evaluative approach.

2.3 Evaluation approach

In order to evaluate IEPs across evaluation objectives and within the context described, several evaluation designs and methods have been combined to answer particular evaluation questions. The specifics of these analytical approaches are detailed later in Section 2 and 3, while the following discussion provides an overview of the theoretical approach that underpins these analytical decisions.

This evaluation focuses first and foremost on understanding program impact and it does so by combining both **realist theory-based** and **quasi-experimental methods** to understand the contexts and factors that lead to outcomes. Recognising that this evaluation exists in a cross-cultural context, participatory approaches to analysis and engagement with Indigenous people and communities will ensure that Indigenous experiences and perspectives are central and influence the way data is collected and insights are understood.

³⁰⁷ Participatory process will include involving job seekers and the broader Indigenous community (through targeted initial consultations detailed in Chapter 3) in evaluation decision making, such as influencing prioritisation of results and findings, as well as actively facilitating participant engagement and allowing participant views to inform evaluator decisions and understanding. Participatory processes require commitment to a level of flexibility in the evaluation design and implementation.

Within this framework, it is acknowledged that the three programs interact with each other, as well as operating within a broader range of complex social systems (including but not limited to Indigenous knowledge and cultural structures, broader macroeconomic and social structures, government programs, mainstream employment programs, and mainstream policy constructs such as Indigenous employment targets).

To understand how the programs operate within this environment, **a systems approach** will be utilised. The evaluation will seek to understand, and comment on – at a high level – the relationships between different actors, interventions and motivations within a system and the mechanisms through which these can be influenced or adjusted.

2.3.1 Impact evaluation

An **impact evaluation** considers the extent to which an intervention's intended beneficiaries are benefiting from an intervention rather than other factors. To achieve this, impact evaluations must consider the full scope of long-term impacts of an intervention on its final beneficiaries; this includes positive and negative, direct and indirect, intended and unintended impacts.³⁰⁸ In this instance, the impact that this evaluation is primarily concerned with is the influence that each program has on both employers and jobseekers/employees engaged in the program, and how this flows on to individual, community and societal outcomes.

Impact will be understood for this evaluation from both a quasi-experimental and theory-based approach. Both of these approaches rely on and will test in differing ways the IEP **program theory** or **theory of change**. This program theory is captured by the evaluation's program logics, which are included at different levels of granularity and interaction in Section 2.4. These theories of change exist at the following levels:

- **High-level system theory**, which illustrates how the three IEPs interact with employers and jobseekers and are influenced by contextual factors that impact supply and demand.
- **An over-arching program logic**, which combines all three IEPs, to show the similarities and differences across the three programs in the way that program inputs, outputs and outcomes are expected to interact.
- **Individual IEP program logics**, which identify the relationships between different program inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.
- **A stakeholder journey map**, which illustrates the program experience for employers and jobseekers/employees, including the assumptions underlying progress between different activities and outcomes.

As currently depicted, these theories of change are the 'explicit program theory', based on the starting assumptions of policy planners and existing evidence. The evaluation will aim to reveal the 'grounded theory', which will be based on insights from data collection, and will show how the programs occur in practice.³⁰⁹ As such, we expect these theories of change to be refined over the course of the evaluation, becoming increasingly evidence-based and nuanced.

2.3.2 Quasi-experimental and theory-based designs

This evaluation combines evaluation design and method in how it tests these theories. The **quasi-experimental approach** will include econometric analysis to estimate employment impacts that can be directly attributed to the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs. This analysis will be guided by the over-arching program logic to compare impact between the three programs, as well as mainstream employment programs (jobactive and CDP), by identifying a relevant counterfactual and creating a probability model (further detail is provided in Section 2.6.1). This analysis will enable the evaluation to undertake sub-group analysis to understand the comparative

³⁰⁸ Westthorp, G 2014, Realist impact evaluation: an introduction, Methods Lab, Canberra; Stern, E 2015, Impact evaluation: a guide for commissioners and managers. Prepared for the Big Lottery Fund, Bond, Comic Relief, and the Department for International Development, Canberra.

³⁰⁹ Stern, E 2015, Impact evaluation: a guide for commissioners and managers. Prepared for the Big Lottery Fund, Bond, Comic Relief, and the Department for International Development, Canberra.

effectiveness of employment programs and be able to understand some of the contextual conditions that are associated with greater success.

In tandem with this quasi-experimental approach, the evaluation will also examine impact using a **theory-based realist approach**. While the econometric analysis will seek to understand the relative attribution of programs to correlated outcomes, a realist approach will use a more refined interpretation of causation to focus on the processes and contexts of implementation that yield impact.³¹⁰ This approach moves beyond binary program assessments of success or failure by considering the particular context-specific patterns or mechanisms by which programs work to achieve change within specific contexts.³¹¹

This evaluation specifically aims to understand in what contexts and with what mechanisms IEPs change the behaviour of employers and jobseekers/employees. To do this, program logics have been used to map out the mechanisms and outcomes in certain contexts. The stakeholder journey map presented in Section 2.4.3 provides this basis for developing data collection tools, and data collected in alignment with this journey will be used to validate the logic presented.

2.3.3 Participatory approaches

This evaluation also deliberately includes **participatory approaches** to ensure that the evaluation holds at the centre Indigenous people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges. In the words of the recently released *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Draft*, 'evaluations of policies and programs that seek to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to engage effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people if they are to be credible, useful, ethical and transparent'.³¹²

Participatory approaches are valuable in navigating 'power differentials among stakeholders by giving 'voice' to the disempowered in our society'.³¹³ As such, participatory approaches are considered best practice when designing interventions and evaluations within Indigenous communities.³¹⁴

Participatory approaches do not describe a 'single' method, but rather, a particular way of undertaking evaluations that are meaningful to different stakeholders, and in particular to program participants. As there are multiple avenues available to use participatory approaches across the stages of an evaluation, decisions need to be made regarding which stakeholders are involved in different aspect of the evaluation, and the purpose of varying forms of participation.

For this evaluation, there is a need to ensure that Indigenous perspectives meaningfully shape the evaluation design, implementation and interpretation of findings; and that the voices of program participants and their communities are heard. In Australia, there is a tendency in research with Indigenous communities for researchers to 'enter an Indigenous community, collect the information they need, leave the community, and publish the results as they see fit'.³¹⁵ This can

³¹⁰ Adams, A, Sedalia, S, McNab, S & Sarker, M 2015, 'Lessons learned in using realist evaluation to assess maternal and newborn health programming in rural Bangladesh', *Health Policy and Planning*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 267-275

³¹¹ Westhorp, G 2014, *Realist impact evaluation: an introduction*, Methods Lab, Canberra; Katz, I, Newton, BJ, Bates, S & Raven, M 2016, *Evaluation theories and approaches; relevance for Aboriginal contexts*, Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney; Pawson, R & Tilley, N 1997, *An introduction to scientific realist evaluation* in E Chelimsky & WR Shadish (eds.), *Evaluation for the 21st Century: a handbook* – pp. 405-418. Sage Publications, California.

³¹² Productivity Commission 2020, *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Draft*.

³¹³ Chouinard, JA & Milley, P 2016, 'Mapping the spatial dimensions of participatory practice: a discussion of context in evaluation', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, vol. 54, no. 1.

³¹⁴ Chouinard, JA & Milley, P 2016, 'Mapping the spatial dimensions of participatory practice: a discussion of context in evaluation', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, vol. 54, no. 1; Chouinard, JA & Cousins, JB 2012 – *Participatory evaluation up close: an integration of research-based knowledge*, Information Age Publishing.

³¹⁵ Katz, I, Newton, BJ, Bates, S & Raven, M 2016, *Evaluation theories and approaches; relevance for Aboriginal contexts*, Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney.

often mean that 'mainstream perspectives on evaluation findings are heard, while Indigenous views are silenced or not acknowledged'.³¹⁶

This evaluation has been designed to diminish the limitations of previous research with Indigenous communities, by deliberately assembling a team that combines both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and developing a stakeholder engagement approach that prioritises Indigenous perspectives.

This evaluation is co-led by both Professor Deen Sanders OAM, a Worimi man and researcher, and Matt Wright, a non-Indigenous evaluator. As well, Susan Moylan-Coombs, a Woolwonga and Gurindji woman and the founding Director of the Gaimaragal Group, is an integral part of the team and will be so throughout the evaluation, providing advice on all stages of the evaluation as well as designing and leading regional consultations with Indigenous program participants.

A team approach like the one utilised in this evaluation can be identified as 'evaluation done with' Indigenous people, where 'power and decision making are shared and negotiated' and 'Indigenous and Western worldviews and approaches are utilised'.³¹⁷ In a day-to-day sense, this means that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members are actively involved in managing the evaluation, developing and implementing data collection tools and interpreting findings. Legitimate and sustained roles for Indigenous people within the evaluation team ensures that Indigenous perspectives are incorporated and prioritised throughout all stages of the evaluation.

The regional consultation approach specifically, also prioritises participatory approaches and is detailed in full in Section 3 of the evaluation strategy. The regional consultation process will see both Indigenous and non-Indigenous evaluators engage with Indigenous communities, including IEP participants. The designed process for conducting these consultations (detailed in Section 3.3.4) reflects this need, as significant effort will be undertaken to:

- research and understand that all team members understand the history of each community
- ensure that the evaluation team connects with community leaders or Elders prior to visiting
- have Indigenous team-members lead consultations
- design a consultation process that is responsive to community context and needs
- share findings of the evaluation with communities and sure that they are owned by communities.

These efforts will be taken to ensure that conditions are appropriate to allow Indigenous communities, including program participants, to feel safe to share their experiences and views. This is essential to ensure that, when shared, Indigenous knowledge and voices are 'afforded a 'parity of esteem' with others, and are given primacy wherever appropriate.³¹⁸

2.4 Program logic (theory of change)³¹⁹

Program logics form part of an evaluator's toolkit and provide the foundation for program planning, measurement, evaluation and implementation³²⁰. Program logics are diagrammatic theory of change models that show the causal links of the program – that is, they articulate how

³¹⁶ Katz, I, Newton, BJ, Bates, S & Raven, M 2016, Evaluation theories and approaches; relevance for Aboriginal contexts, Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney.

³¹⁷ Wehipeihana N 2019, 'Increasing Cultural Competence in Support of Indigenous-Led Evaluation: A Necessary Step toward Indigenous-Led Evaluation', Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, vol. 34, no. 2.

³¹⁸ Taylor, R 2003 'An Indigenous perspective on evaluations in the inter-cultural context: how far can one throw a Moree boomerang?', Evaluation Journal of Australasia, 3(2):44-53.

³¹⁹ This section draws directly from the report prepared by *SVA Consulting Evaluation Strategies – Indigenous Employment Programs* 11 September 2019.

³²⁰ NSW Government: Premier & Cabinet, 2020, *Evaluation Toolkit*, <<https://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/evaluation-toolkit/1-develop-program-logic-and-review-needs/>>.

the activities of a program are linked to its intended outcomes.³²¹ As such, program logics are critical in guiding the development of evaluation questions and data collection approach.

The IEP theory of change exists at several levels of granularity and synthesis. The evaluation lines of inquiry will have regard to these theories of change and interrogate the extent to which certain activities are occurring and achieving their intended outcomes or otherwise, and how and why.

It is not possible to test every element of the IEP theory of change at every level of detail. Pragmatism and emerging data about the importance of various elements will inform evaluation priorities to focus on insights specific to the evaluation objectives.

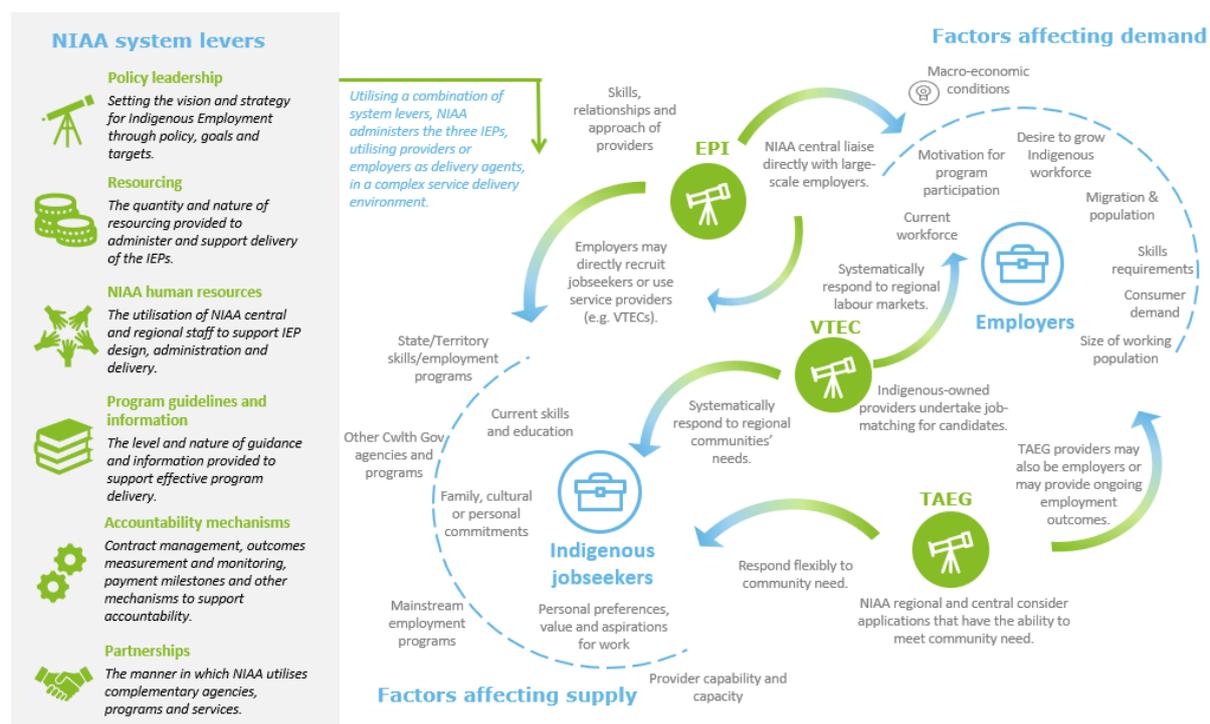
2.4.1 System-level theory of change

The IEPs operate within a broader system. Figure 2.1 outlines a stylised system level theory of change. This level of detail is useful for testing the different implementation strategies used across the three programs and for recognising the broader contexts that influence program impacts.

The diagram is not intended to be reflective of how the programs were designed, rather, for the purpose of the evaluation design, it is useful to demonstrate how they might theoretically fit together and complement each other. It highlights the system level levers, managed by NIAA, and a number of other key assumptions and contextual factors related to the programs. These factors will be explored through the evaluation, and the representation will be refined over time.

The factors affecting both supply and demand are known to vary significantly by location and to have potentially large influence on the extent to which programs realise desired outcomes.

Figure 2.1 System theory of change



Source: Deloitte Access Economics

2.4.2 Overarching program logic

The overarching program logic outlines how each of the three programs in scope of the evaluation are intended to achieve improved employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians (and for EPI,

³²¹ Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 2012, *Finding the golden thread: a new approach to articulating program logic*, < <https://www.socialventures.com.au/sva-quarterly/finding-the-golden-thread-a-new-approach-to-articulating-program-logic-statements/>>.

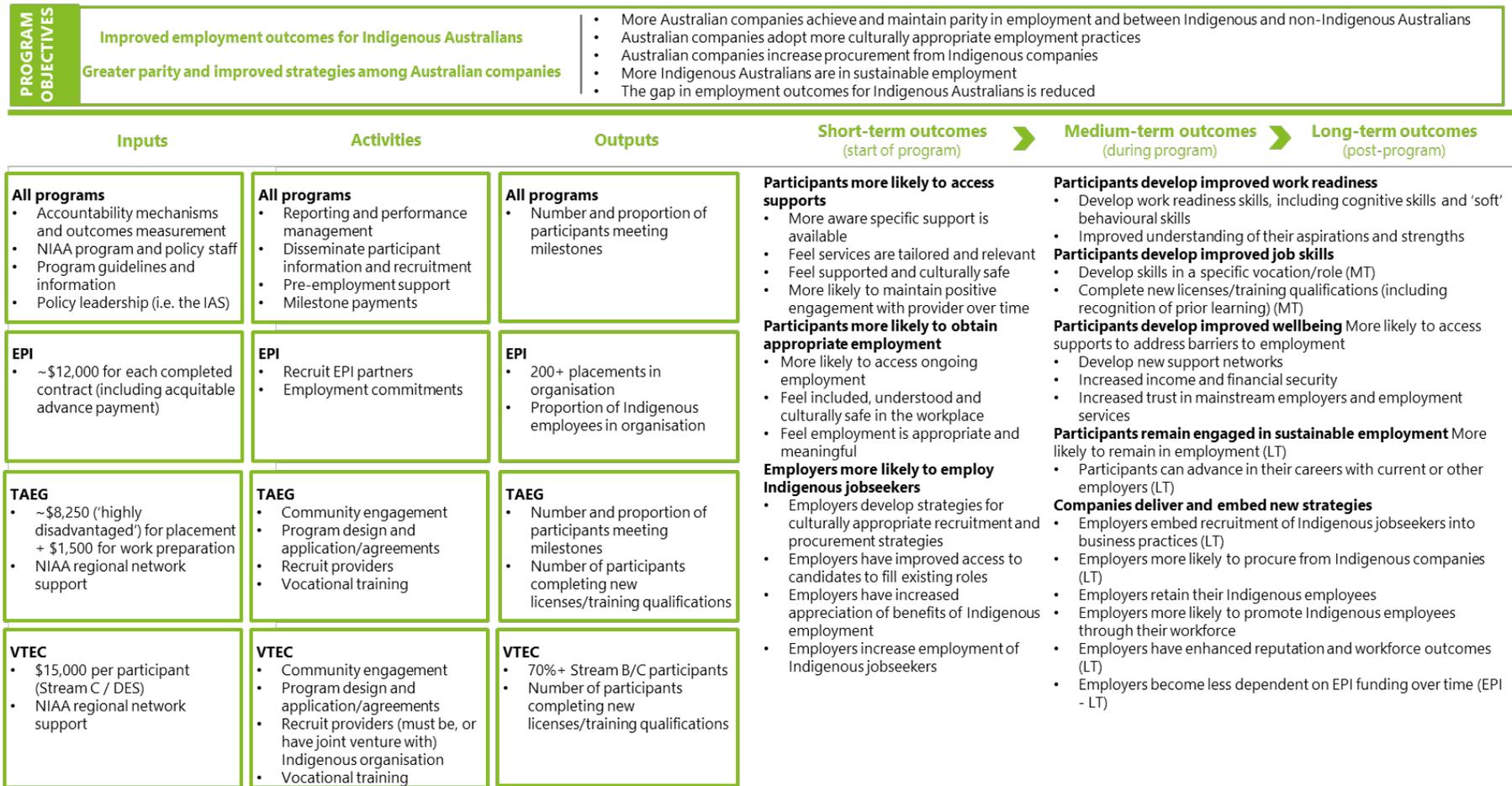
greater parity and improved cultural inclusion and competency in Australian companies), through undertaking specific activities.

This overarching program logic has been built directly from the three individual program logics (provided at **Appendix B**) that were created in collaboration between SVA and the NIAA. These program logics were developed based on a rigorous consultation with a range of key stakeholders, including service providers and partners. Both the overarching and individual program logics will be refined over the course of the evaluation.

The overarching logic highlights that there is a large degree of similarity between the objectives of the three IEPs. The headline objectives and medium/long term outcomes are the same (with minor differences for EPI), however the interventions are different.

There are a number of system levers the NIAA has to influence these outcomes (as depicted in Figure 2.1) – and the evaluation will test how effectively the three programs (together and in isolation) are realising these objectives.

Figure 2.2 IEP overarching program logic



External considerations that are beyond the direct scope of this framework, but which will have material influence over whether the objectives are met include the following (it is important to note that these factors will be able to be considered within the categories of barriers and enablers in this monitoring and evaluation framework):

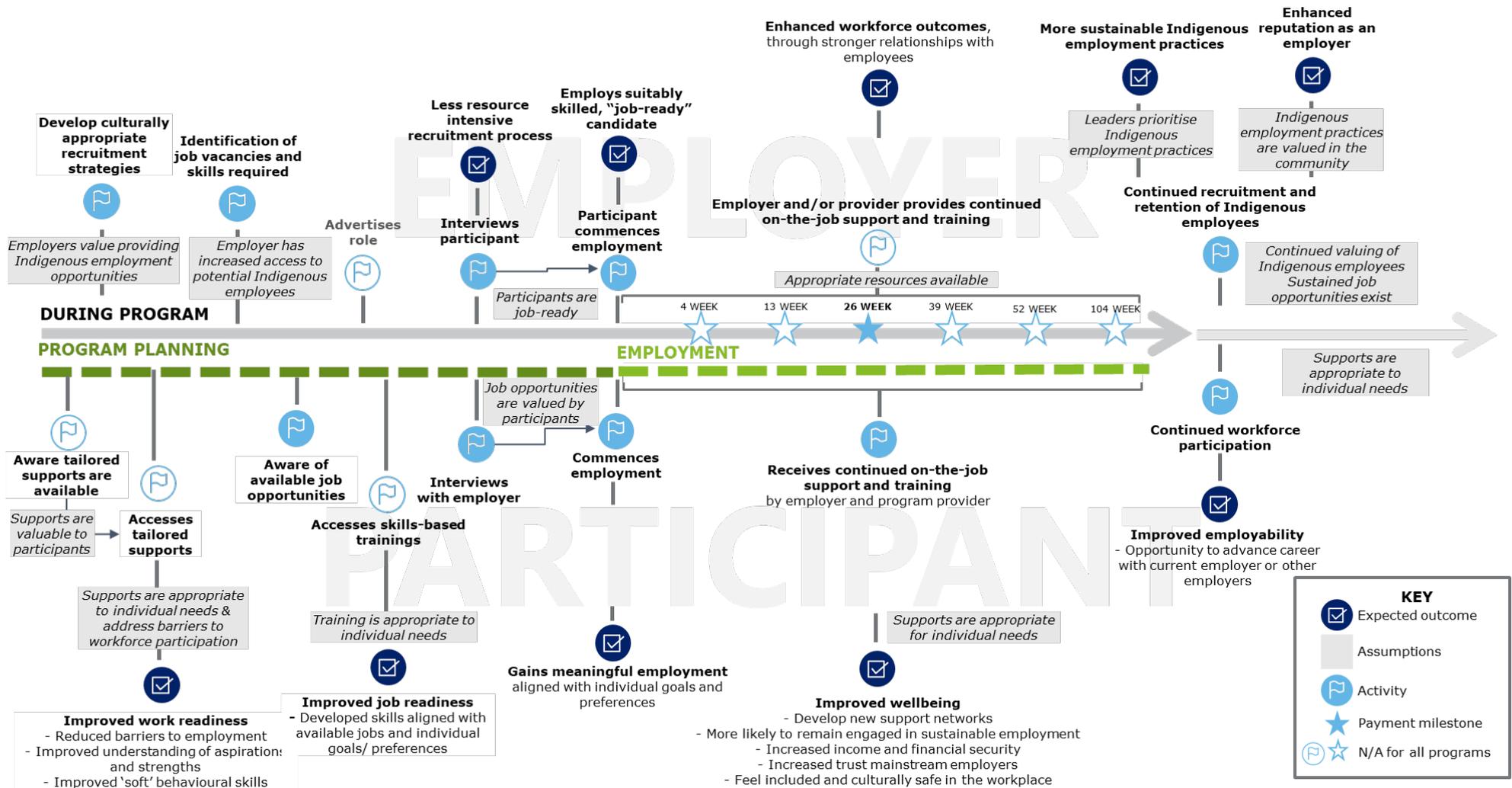
Source: Deloitte Access Economics

2.4.3 Stakeholder journey map

The stakeholder journey map at Figure 2.3 highlights some of the key assumptions that will be tested through the evaluation. The journey map shows the expected experience of employers and participants who participate in IEPs. The experience milestones, and the assumptions marked as critical for desired outcomes to be realised, are informed by evidence gathered through the evaluation literature scan and consultation with NIAA regional and program staff.

The evaluation will aim to assess the alignment between the intended journey and the lived experience of employers and participants in the IEPs.

Figure 2.3 IEP stakeholder journey map



Source: Deloitte Access Economics

2.5 Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions, clustered under the three evaluation objectives, have been adapted from the existing Evaluation Strategy to reflect feedback received from IEC committee members, and have been further validated through a workshop held with the ERG.

Associated with these headline evaluation criteria are various lines of inquiry (the italics beneath each question) to demonstrate in what ways each question will be explored. The lines of inquiry link back to the program logics and have been developed to be common across the three programs.

The lines of inquiry are anticipated to evolve throughout the evaluation. This will allow the analysis and reporting to adapt to emerging areas of focus and interest, highlight similarities and differences between programs, and prioritise information according to significance.

Table 2.1: Headline evaluation criteria, questions and lines of inquiry

| 1. Appropriateness of program design and implementation | |
|--|---|
| 1.1 | <p>To what extent is the program design based on evidence?</p> <p><i>This will consider the evidence that was used to inform the program design, including desktop research and consultative processes, focusing on the extent to which the program design reflects best practice in employment assistance programs and alignment with Indigenous Australian perspectives and values. As the literature scan has found that best practice program design includes co-design principles and incorporation of Indigenous voice and input into program design (holistically and within a place-based implementation approach) – the extent to which program design included authentic collaboration with Indigenous people will be considered.</i></p> <p><i>This component of the evaluation also seeks to understand the extent to which the program design has changed over time to reflect changing policy contexts, participant and community experience and feedback on the programs, and contemporary research.</i></p> |
| 1.2 | <p>To what extent has the program been implemented by NIAA (/PM&C) in line with its design parameters?</p> <p><i>This evaluation question seeks to understand the extent to which the program was implemented as originally intended, across various domains. Key lines of inquiry may include whether the program has run to budget, how providers have been selected to participate in the program, and how implementation differs across program type and location.</i></p> <p><i>It will also consider any challenges the NIAA, or IEP providers, has encountered in implementing the program – as well as any factors deemed critical to implementation success.</i></p> |
| 1.3 | <p>To what extent have the programs been delivered in a respectful, strengths-based and place-based way?</p> <p><i>This evaluation question is grounded in the understanding that different contexts will have differing needs, values and priorities. The analysis will focus on the perspectives of Indigenous Australian people and communities (including participants, employers, providers and general stakeholders) to determine the extent to which they perceive the programs to be respectful and strengths-based.</i></p> <p><i>This will have reference to best practice principles of program design and delivery, as defined by the literature scan. The analysis will also seek to understand the extent to which evaluation findings are transferable to other locations, providers or programs.</i></p> |
| 2. Program effectiveness and impact | |

1. Appropriateness of program design and implementation

- 2.1 To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term?
This evaluation question seeks to understand the effectiveness of the programs from a participant, employer and funder perspective. Key focus areas will include the extent to which participants are more likely to access supports, obtain and retain appropriate employment, and develop improved wellbeing, work readiness and job skills, and the extent to which employers are improving Indigenous employment practices. A key area of focus for this analysis will be the extent to which these outcomes are deemed enduring and sustainable.
-
- 2.2 In what contexts has the program been more or less successful?
This evaluation question will seek to identify the factors (both internal and external) that may have impacted program effectiveness. Key lines of inquiry may include the extent to which outcomes varied across regions, industries or employment markets, programs and participant groups (such as gender, JSCI category of work readiness, school leaver or experienced professional, length and degree of program involvement). Program stakeholders, including employers, providers, participants, NIAA regional offices and others will have an opportunity to determine their key success factors, or challenges encountered.
-

3. Policy implications and potential for future impact

- 3.1 What do program outcomes tell us about effective and ineffective investment?
This evaluation question will reflect on how the findings of the evaluation contribute to a strengthened understanding of best practices for supporting Indigenous Australians into sustainable employment, and practices that are ineffective or are indicative of poor performance. This will include an analysis of cost-effectiveness across various locations, programs and industries, and provide indications as to where investment may be optimised going forward.
-
- 3.2 How can the value of each program be optimised within the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs?
This evaluation question will require a holistic assessment of the evaluation findings to examine the extent to which programs (both IEP and more general employment initiatives) may overlap, and to identify potential opportunities to streamline and optimise the in-scope programs – supporting overarching efficiency of the IEP. This will include analysis of how the IEP interacts with other employment assistance programs (at the state/territory and Commonwealth level) and where the relative effectiveness of each program is strongest.
-

2.6 Methods and analysis

This evaluation will take a **mixed-method approach** to addressing the evaluation questions, providing for both breadth and depth in data collected across various sources. For example, the analysis of system-wide program data is essential for developing a representative and statistically valid view of the impact of the programs in achieving measurable employment outcomes in different situations. Conversely, consultations will allow the evaluation to gain deep understanding of how the programs have been designed, implemented and experienced within particular contexts.

At its simplest, the mixed methods approach refers to the fact that some evaluation questions will be primarily addressed using quantitative methods (for example the quasi-experimental assessment of program impact on employment outcomes), while others using qualitative (for example testing assumptions about different ways in which supports provided do or do not lead to

improved employment outcomes through a case study approach). However, it also refers to the process by which **findings from all methods will be continuously integrated** to inform and finalise lines of inquiry and prioritise findings. These processes are discussed in more detail throughout Section 3.

Qualitative and quantitative findings will be **triangulated** where possible, to evidence conclusions with a variety of data sources. To achieve this, triangulation will be used to add depth to the data collected. Triangulation involves enhancing data capture by using multiple data collection methods to understand the same events.³²² During this evaluation, case studies will be triangulated with representative empirical (provider survey data) and secondary data (program data) to support the development of balanced and meaningful evaluation insights.

Triangulation ensures results are robust and supported by a range (and hierarchy) of evidence. To do this, findings will be assessed according to their substantive significance. To determine the substantive significance of the findings, we will consider the extent to which findings:

- are robust, coherent and consistent across the data sources,
- increase and deepen understanding of the IEP and their effectiveness,
- are consistent with other knowledge, for instance the literature scan,
- align with the evaluation principles, including the participatory approach (which means participant perspectives on the relative prioritisation of findings will be considered), and are useful to answer the evaluation questions.

2.6.1 Quantitative analysis

A combination of descriptive statistics and econometric analysis will be used to analyse the available data sources and generate insights that address the evaluation questions.

Descriptive statistics will be used to analyse program outcomes in accordance with participant, provider and employer characteristics. They will also provide an initial overview of how successful participants, providers and employers have been at meeting program milestones, what participant attitudes are towards the program (to the extent that this information is available through the PPM), and how these variables may have changed over time.

With respect to participants, this will include comparison of characteristics across the three programs. The characteristics of interest include:

- Sex
- Age
- Location
- Disability status
- Program (VTEC, TAEG, EPI)
- Program start / exit date
- Length of unemployment
- JSCI stream or score
- Highest level of educational attainment
- Outcome milestones (4 week, 13 week, 26 week, 52 week and 104 week as relevant to each program)
- Other employment program participation.

Access to jobactive data will be required to prepare the basic descriptive statistics about program participants – we understand that the ESS tables readily accessed by NIAA do not include detailed participant characteristics. In addition, further information will be required about other employment programs that IEP participants may be participating in (such as jobactive or DES).

Econometric methods will be used to estimate the employment impacts that can be more directly attributed to the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs, how these impacts vary across the three

³²² Fusch, P, Fusch, GE & Ness, LR 2018, 'Denzin's Paradigm Shift: Revisiting Triangulation in Qualitative Research', *Journal of Social Change*, vol. 10. No. 1, pp. 19-32.

programs, and how they compare with mainstream employment programs (all else equal). This analysis will be central to understanding the medium and long-term³²³ impact of the program, as described in the evaluation questions.

The econometric methods will estimate the relationships that exists between program participation and employment outcomes. It is anticipated that the analysis will involve the following steps:

- **Obtain detailed program data on IEP participants.** This would include information on individual characteristics (such as participant age, gender, disability status and geographic region) along with their employment and program outcomes. Some of this data is included in the ESS data available to NIAA; however additional job seeker information is required, and will be sought from DESE, DSS, and potentially DHS.
- **Identify a relevant counterfactual or 'control group'.** A comparison or 'control' dataset is required, with observations on individuals with broadly similar characteristics to those in IEPs but who participated in mainstream programs rather than an IEP's. Preliminary research suggests that jobactive data supplemented by Disability Employment Services data would be the most appropriate. CDP data may provide another alternative, should jobactive data not be available.
- **Create a conditional probability model.** The model will give the likelihoods that IEP and control group participants gain a positive employment outcome (however that is defined), taking into account the individuals' characteristics and circumstances, as described by the variables in the available data.
- **Determine the employment impacts that can be attributed to IEP participation.** This will consider both the statistical significance and the magnitude of this impact for each program, as compared to each other and to mainstream program participation.

A logistic regression will most likely be used for the basis of the conditional probability model. This is a commonly used form of regression model, where a binary dependent variable (e.g., did the participant achieve an outcome or not) is modelled as a function of several explanatory variables.

More specifically, the logit model will be used to examine the likelihood that an individual is in employment a certain number of months after completing the program, as a function of a variables indicating whether or not they participated in the TAEG, VTEC or EPI programs plus variables giving their personal characteristics (i.e., their sex, age, disability status, etc.). The parameters on the program variables give the estimated effects. A positive coefficient is associated with a higher outcome rate for that program.

Depending on how the characteristics of participants differ across the IEP programs, the analysis will involve either a single model encompassing all three programs, or three separate models, one per program. In the latter, three separate control groups may also be identified.

Should the data be available, a further approach is to estimate the rate at which IEP participants re-appear in the jobactive data in the years following participation, relative to the jobactive histories of participants in mainstream programs.

2.6.2 Qualitative analysis

A number of the data collection tools will generate qualitative data. This will be used to develop understanding and insights into the program implementation and effectiveness, and resulting policy implications.

A feature of the qualitative approach is the use of inductive reasoning – where analysis of the data can generate new understandings and theories that have not been anticipated. This is particularly important to ensure mainstream perspectives and frames of knowledge applied to program management and evaluation do not limit the scope for authentic Indigenous voices to be heard – in line with the participatory evaluation approach.

In other words, the data analysis methods must be designed in such a way that authentic Indigenous perspectives can emerge and inform findings. To support this approach, the data

³²³ Medium and long term impacts as described in the program logics.

collection tools have been designed to enable participant led observations on their experience of the programs, with a focus on open questions. Chapter 3 provides further detail on the strategies that will be employed to ensure cultural safety and support the openness and authenticity of consultations.

A number of analytic techniques will be used to analyse the qualitative data collected.

- **Case studies** – Case studies are useful to support realist understandings of questions such as how and why particular interventions do or don't work, in different situations. Place-based case studies will be developed, describing the variation in context for delivery of the IEPs, and the variation in program implementation and outcomes.
- **Thematic analysis** – a structured approach of review, reflect and refine will be used, and NVivo software will support this.
 - Review would involve coding topics and issues discussed or raised. This in turn allows consolidation into themes which can begin to be drawn together across the source data.
 - Reflection involves ongoing consideration of the initial thematic analysis outlined above, combined with discussion among the evaluation team of the qualitative information they have encountered.
 - Refinement is the ongoing process of describing themes as clearly and concisely as possible. This leads to the consideration of the implications of these qualitative themes in the context of the evaluation and other data analysis undertaken.
 - Coding themes will align with context, mechanisms and outcomes defined by the program logics. This will enable the qualitative data to be used to inform judgements on how programs are taking effect in different contexts.
- Indigenous leadership and perspectives will be essential to the development of case studies, and the data coding. For example, this will be achieved in relation to case studies by having Gaimaragal Group facilitators leading all regional consultations, and involved in developing cases studies. Indigenous evaluation team members (Professor Deen Sanders and Susan Moylan-Coombs) will be directly involved in coding topics and issues into themes, and prioritising these themes.
- Inductive reasoning (as described above) based on qualitative interview data and case study analysis also provides a method for testing the assumptions underpinning the theory of change, and understanding contextual factors that may be influencing program impacts.

2.7 Data sources

This section summarises the data sources included in the analytical approach to the evaluation. The stakeholder engagement components, why they provide critical participatory approach elements, and how this will be achieved, are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Table 2.2 Summary of data sources

| Data source | Description |
|---|--|
| Literature scan and program documentation | A literature scan will inform an understanding of best practice program design and contextual factors influencing the impact of the IEPs. Program and policy documentation will be sought from NIAA and analysed with a view to understanding the processes by which policies and implementation strategies were developed. Review of available literature will be ongoing through the course of the evaluation. |
| Program data | The program datasets that will be drawn on include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESS data related to job seekers, EPI, VTEC and TAEG • Provider and employer reporting data |

| Data source | Description |
|-------------------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Program Monitoring (PPM) survey (noting that there are significant limitations of this dataset, including incomplete and unreliable data). • Broader employment data – such as jobactive and Disability Employment Services (DES) data <p>Requests for these datasets will be submitted to of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and the Department of Social Services (DSS). Deloitte Access Economics will liaise with NIAA in preparing and advancing these requests.</p> |
| VTEC and TAEG provider survey | <p>The provider survey, discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, aims to gain a breadth of insights into the design, implementation and impact evaluation questions, across a large sample of providers and using survey questions that allow for comparative analysis. The survey will contain both qualitative and quantitative questions and will contribute to both the breadth and depth of understanding.</p> <p>There are substantial gaps in the ESS program data relating to the precise nature of activities undertaken by providers. The provider survey will be critical to generating information to facilitate understanding of the link between provider activity and employment outcomes, as well as other participant outcomes.</p> <p>It is intended that the provider surveys be administered over July and August 2020.</p> |
| Consultations | <p>Three rounds of consultation will be undertaken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial consultations – to understand regional and community context, the program design process, and to test the proposed approach for regional consultations. • Regional consultations – to gain an in-depth understanding of experiences and perspectives of stakeholders within communities, sampled from each of the NIAA regions. • Final program and policy consultations – will provide an opportunity to test emerging findings and themes with NIAA and other policy staff before these are reported on in the final report. <p>The purpose and method for each is outlined in Section 3.</p> |

2.8 Mapping of evaluation questions, data and indicators

As outlined, a range of methods will be used to collect data related to evaluation questions under each domain. **Table 2.2** sets out the evaluation questions, the main data sources that will be used, and examples of the indicators and analytical approach to each question. This table **is not exhaustive**, but provides examples of how the evaluation framework will inform analysis and reporting.

A detailed data matrix mapping indicators or measures and data sources to the evaluation objectives, questions and sub-questions – with links to the program logics – is provided at **Appendix B**. This document will be used and revisited throughout the evaluation.

Table 2.3: Evaluation questions, data sources, example indicators and analytical approach

| Evaluation question | Data sources | Example indicators and analytic approach |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Appropriateness of program design and implementation | | |
| To what extent is the program design based on evidence? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial consultations • Regional consultations • Literature scan • Program documentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and length of stakeholder engagement activities undertaken with Indigenous people (initial consultations) • Quality of engagement as reported by consulted stakeholders (initial consultations, regional consultations) • Comparison of evidence base used for program design and best practice literature scan findings (literature scan, consultations, program documentation) |
| To what extent has the program been implemented by NIAA (/PM&C) in line with its design parameters? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider survey • Initial consultations • Regional consultations • Program documentation • Program data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of different areas of provider activity • Summary of intended program design parameters • Participant characteristics and participation in program activities • Funding allocated and funding spent • Nature of the process for selection of providers, compared to best practice literature scan findings |
| To what extent have the programs been delivered in a respectful, strengths-based and place-based way? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider survey • Initial stakeholder consultations • Regional consultations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant perspectives on program delivery including participant journey case studies • Indigenous Australian expert group perspectives on program delivery • Summary of key features of program delivery • Context for and factors effecting delivery of the program - case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |
| 2. Program effectiveness and impact | | |
| To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESS data • Jobactive data • DES data • Post-Program Monitoring (PPM) survey • Provider survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share of participants who complete the program i.e. meet certain milestones • Time-series of program completion rates • Share of participants who are employed a period of time after completing the program • Time-series of employment outcomes • Share of providers who report that the short, medium and long-term outcomes have been met |

| Evaluation question | Data sources | Example indicators and analytic approach |
|--|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional consultations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant and employer perspectives on outcomes |
| <p>In what contexts has the program been more or less successful?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESS data Jobactive data DES data Post-Program Monitoring (PPM) survey Provider survey Regional consultations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison of program completion rates and employment outcomes for metro, regional and remote providers Comparison of program completion rates and employment outcomes for different provider sizes Comparison of provider reported outcomes by level of remoteness, size and Indigenous ownership status Factors that influence achievement of outcomes - case studies and participant journey analysis |
| <p>3. Policy implications and potential for future impact</p> | | |
| <p>What do program outcomes tell us about effective and ineffective investment?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings from the first two domains ESS Data Provider reporting/ financial documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost per positive employment outcome Sustainability of program outcomes, features of activities related to sustainable program outcomes Comparison of participant characteristics of each program Comparison of participant reported outcomes by program The extent to which program outcomes can be attributed to program participation, for each program and compared to mainstream programs (econometric analysis) |
| <p>How can the value of each program be optimised within the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings from the first two domains Initial stakeholder consultations Program area consultations (including CDP and jobactive) Provider survey Regional consultations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provider observations on overlap or comparative advantage with alternative employment assistance programs Participant observations on overlap or comparative advantage with alternative employment assistance programs NIAA regional network observations on overlap or comparative advantage with alternative employment assistance programs Comparison of outcomes and costs across programs |

3 Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

As well as providing primary qualitative data with which to investigate the evaluation questions, the approach to stakeholder engagement contains important participatory elements of the evaluation design.

3.1 Objectives of stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder consultation is a critical primary data source for this evaluation, which has been designed to:

- **Understand the breadth of experiences and activities** using large-scale surveys distributed to all providers.
- **Understand the depth of experiences** through “deep-dive” regional consultations with individuals who engage with the programs across different contexts - selected via a purposive sampling approach.
- **Generate robust findings** by establishing multiple streams of stakeholder engagement - enabling the triangulation of consultation data.
- **Reflect community voice** by incorporating participatory practices with Indigenous Australians that seek to draw out genuine insights and perspectives.

This stakeholder consultation approach has been designed in alignment with the IAS evaluation framework - detailed in Section 2.2.

3.2 Stakeholder groups

In order to obtain a wide range of perspectives on the evaluation questions, and to iteratively inform data collection and analysis with Indigenous perspectives and knowledge, the following groups will be included in the evaluation.

| Stakeholder group | Description | Reason for inclusion |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Commonwealth Government | Primarily NIAA policy and program staff, in both the central and regional offices. | NIAA staff are critical to gather information and insight about policy and program development and delivery, and to plan and undertake data collection activities. |
| State and territory government | Representatives from state and territory government agencies with responsibility for Indigenous services and programs and/or employment services. | To understand regional context, and how implementation and outcomes differ across geographies and in conjunction with each state and territory government – including state-based Indigenous advancement strategies |
| Indigenous representatives | Academics, advisory councils and peak bodies with knowledge and interest to participate in the evaluation. | These discussions will specifically investigate the extent to which programs were designed, implemented and evaluated in collaboration with |

| Stakeholder group | Description | Reason for inclusion |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. |
| Providers | VTEC and TAEG providers, funded by the NIAA to deliver the programs. | Providers are the interface between the program and participants and as such are critical to understanding the program impact, and the mechanisms by which outcomes are achieved or not. |
| Employers (including EPI Partners) | Employers who attract EPI funding, and others who have relationships with VTEC and TAEG providers. Employers who do not have a relationship with this programs will also be consulted to provide a point of comparison. | Sustainable employment is the ultimate goal of these programs. The perspective of employers is critical to understand the mechanisms by which this is achieved or not. |
| Participants/ employees | Indigenous people who are participating or have participated in one of the IEPS. | Understanding the experience and perspectives of participants is critical to understanding the program impact, and the mechanisms by which outcomes are achieved or not. |
| Other stakeholders in communities | This will include other interested or relevant parties identified through the course of the review. They could be Elders, local community groups, potential employers or training providers. | Other stakeholders will be included for a number of reasons and this will vary by location. Reasons for engaging with other stakeholders in communities may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - So that they can support discussion with and/ or accurate representation of the experiences of participants and their communities. - To gain greater understanding of contextual issues in the location or community. |

3.3 Types of stakeholder engagement

The proposed stakeholder engagement process is extensive, bringing together stakeholders from various regions. Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the stakeholder engagement activities, categorised by the stakeholder group.

Table 3.1: Summary of stakeholder engagement activities

| Stakeholder group | Purpose | Design | Quantity and frequency (month) |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|
| Commonwealth government | To guide the regional consultation approach (including testing of focus group participants and piloting strategies) and give an understanding of regional community contexts. | Semi-structured interviews (teleconference) with each NIAA regional network office. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One 60 minute consultation with each NIAA regional network office in April (twelve in total). |
| | To gain an understanding of the evidence base and research activities that informed the design of in-scope programs. | Semi-structured interviews (teleconference) with relevant DESE and NIAA program and policy officers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to five 60-90 minute consultations in April. |
| | To gain an understanding of the objectives, operations and implementation of the in-scope programs. This would also include an observation of how program implementation and outcomes differ across regions. | Semi-structured interviews with NIAA regional network office. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One 60 minute consultation with NIAA regional offices of the communities that will be visited in July – September (at least six consultations). |
| | To test emerging findings and themes across geographies. | Facilitated participatory workshop held with the regional network office of each region. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One 120 minute workshop in October. |
| | To test and validate findings and themes across both Indigenous and general employment programs. | Semi-structured interviews (teleconference) with relevant DESE (jobactive) and NIAA (CDP, EPI, TAEG and VTEC) program and policy officers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to five 60-90 minute consultations in October. |

| Stakeholder group | Purpose | Design | Quantity and frequency (month) |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| State and territory government | To understand regional context, and how implementation and outcomes differ across geographies and in conjunction with each state and territory government – including state-based Indigenous advancement strategies. | Semi-structured interviews with discussion themes aligned with evaluation questions and specific jurisdictional questioning on complementary programs and policies. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One 90 minute consultation with each state or territory government (eight in total). These consultations would likely take place at the same time as the provider, employer and participant consultations in July-September. These consultations may also be completed earlier in the year by teleconference and could feed into the interim report. |
| Indigenous representatives | To explore the extent to which programs were designed, implemented and evaluated in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. | Semi-structured interviews (teleconference) with discussion themes aligned with evaluation questions and areas of expertise of the interviewee. The participants for this series of interviews would be chosen in collaboration with the NIAA, and would expect to include a series of academics, advisory councils and peak bodies. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to eight 60-90 minute consultations with Indigenous organisations involved in program design or delivery, or relevant Indigenous peak bodies or advisory councils in April. |
| Providers | To gather evidence from a breadth of providers on the IEP design and implementation , as well as an understanding of the nature of activities undertaken through the IEP. | Online survey administered to all TAEG and VTEC providers. Survey to include a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey administered over May 2020. |
| | To build on insights gained through the provider surveys to develop a deeper understanding of program implementation and effectiveness. | Semi-structured interview on the evaluation themes will be held in NIAA regions that are visited in July-September. | <p>The quantum and nature of provider interviews will be determined in the sampling process and with input from NIAA, but will be held in July-September and are expected to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An invitation for VTEC providers to attend a participatory workshop at a regional level, with a minimum of 10 represented nationally. An invitation for TAEG providers to attend a participatory workshop at a regional level, with a minimum of 10 represented nationally. |

| Stakeholder group | Purpose | Design | Quantity and frequency (month) |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Employers (including EPI Partners) | To gain insights into how employers perceive the value of the programs and perspectives on opportunities/ challenges . This includes employers working with the VTEC and TAEG assisted job seekers and EPI Partners | Semi-structured interviews , with consistent questioning to allow comparison across provider types, with place-based case study development a desired output. To take place on site or at NIAA regional office. | The quantum of interviews to be determined in the sampling process, but will be held in July – September and are expected to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 24, 90 minute consultations (with the option of two 60 minute interviews – with employer leadership/ program officers if preferred). • Ten 60 minute consultations with EPI employers. • Five 60 minute consultations with large target employers that are not currently participating in the EPI (to provide a counterfactual) |
| Participants/ employees | To gain insights into how participants (Indigenous job seekers and employees) perceive the value of the programs and perspectives on opportunities/challenges | Semi-structured group facilitated discussions or semi-structured interviews , with consistent questioning to allow comparison across provider types. Each conversation would be facilitated by an Indigenous evaluator (from Deloitte or the Gaimaragal Group) and a Deloitte evaluator. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 20 90 minute facilitated participants group discussions (quantum is dependent on sampling), with at least one taking place in each NIAA region, held in July - September. • Approximately four to eight participants in each session, with NIAA or providers to provide insight into desired number of participants in each group. • If COVID 19 restrictions prevent face to face interactions then an alternative approach based on a combination of video-conferencing, and in location facilitators will be used, depending on the features of each group. |

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020).

3.3.2 Initial consultations

Broadly, the purpose of the initial consultations is to test the stakeholder engagement approach with each NIAA region, and to understand how collaborative the design, implementation and evaluation process has been.

As discussed, this round of stakeholder engagement will include consultations with:

- representatives from each of the NIAA regions
- NIAA and DESE program area and policy staff
- Indigenous representatives

All initial consultations will be held via teleconference. To mitigate potential technical difficulties during this process, interviewees will be given the opportunity to elect a platform for the consult that best suits them and ensures interoperability. Deloitte Access Economics is able to hold teleconferences via Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or over the phone. With participants permission, the evaluation team will record these consultations and then transcribe these sound recordings, to enable qualitative data analysis using NVivo software (further detail on the data collection and storage process is provided in Section 4.4).

All of these consultations will be held in April-May 2020, with two Deloitte Access Economics project team members in attendance. The proposed interview guides for these consultations are provided at **Appendix E**.

3.3.2.1 NIAA regional network consultations

The purpose of the NIAA regional network consultations is to understand different regional contexts, though it will also be used to test the proposed stakeholder engagement approach. Responses will inform decisions for the design of the regional consultations, including who should be consulted, whether the selected communities are appropriate for the purposes of this evaluation, and provide advice on how the regional consultations should be run.

More broadly, the initial consultations with the NIAA regional network will provide an opportunity for the network to be introduced to the evaluation, ahead of multiple touchpoints throughout the year, and for the evaluation to begin to understand the regional context and variation of IEP delivery.

Members of the NIAA regional network, including at least one member from each of the twelve regions, will be selected by the NIAA. As IEP program activity varies across regions, the consultations have been designed to account for the differing levels of understanding that interviewees may have with each of the programs.

3.3.2.2 NIAA program staff

The purpose of these consultations is to understand the evidence base and decision-making behind the design of the programs. These consultations will also provide information regarding the intended design of the programs. This will enable the evaluation team to compare findings from the regional consultations to understand the extent to which the programs were implemented as intended.

The NIAA central office will recommend appropriate interviewees for these consultations. While it is preferred that some individuals consulted will have knowledge of all in-scope programs, at a minimum, the selected individuals will have a detailed understanding of at least one of the three of the programs in-scope.

3.3.2.3 Indigenous representatives

The purpose of these consultations is to understand the strengths and limitations of the programs' design from the perspective of Indigenous Australians, as well as to test the degree to which the programs were designed in collaboration with Indigenous Australians. These consultations will support the evaluation's assessment of the appropriateness of program design. This data will be triangulated with findings from the literature review. Findings will be reported on in the interim report.

A number of these individuals or groups will be chosen for their expertise in Indigenous social policy, and particularly in employment policy. This is likely to include individuals from Indigenous Australian organisations and relevant Indigenous peak bodies or advisory councils. Further, a number of the consultations are expected to be held with Indigenous organisations or people that were involved in the design of the IEPs.

Both the NIAA and Indigenous Australian experts within the evaluation team will recommend individuals or parties to be consulted.³²⁴ Noting the individuals within this stakeholder group are likely to have varying degrees of expertise and experience with the programs being evaluated, the consultation guides have been designed to be flexible to account for these differences.

3.3.3 Provider survey

The purpose of the provider survey is to gather evidence from a breadth of providers on the nature of the activities undertaken through the program. The survey provides an opportunity for all VTEC and TAEG providers (including those that may not be party to further consultation) to provide their feedback on the appropriateness, effectiveness or efficiency of the in-scope programs. This will enable comparison across the programs and provide a critical data source for triangulation.

Various research activities were undertaken to inform the survey's development, including:

- **a document review** of the existing Evaluation Strategy and other program documentation
- **consultation with NIAA staff** to gain a better understanding of the programs' similarities, differences and where they interact
- **a data workshop with NIAA staff** to understand the quality of the data already in existence and what gaps needed to be filled.

These research activities provided insights that informed thoughtful design features of the survey, such as the use of:

- **targeted questions** exploring a wide range of provider views regarding design, implementation, impact and policy implications.
- **free text boxes** which enable the collection of detailed responses to facilitate deeper analysis using NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software tool).

Additionally, it will be made clear to survey respondents any information gathered through the provider surveys will be de-identified in all reporting back to the NIAA.

The provider surveys will be developed using Deloitte's in-house survey capability operating through the Qualtrics research suite, which is capable of a wide variety of question types and is accessible across a variety of devices. The survey will be piloted with two organisations (one large and one small TAEG or VTEC provider) prior to being launched.

If NIAA has personalised provider email addresses, then individualised survey links will be sent to providers. This will allow survey completion to be tracked and reminders to be sent to providers who have not yet completed the survey yet. The finalised survey will be sent out to all providers in May 2020.

The survey will be sent to all providers and will aim to achieve at least a 30 per cent response rate to ensure the validity of results. The evaluation team will also seek to gather responses from a representative sample of TAEG and VTEC providers with consideration of the following parameters:

- providers' geographical dispersion
- size of provider
- program type.

³²⁴ From consultation with the NIAA, this is expected to include Generation One, an Indigenous representative from the National Employment Services Association and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, as well as other smaller and larger Indigenous providers and employers associated with the IEPs. Indigenous advocacy groups or academics with employment expertise (such as Professor Dennis Foley) will also be considered.

If the initial survey fails to gather a representative sample across these characteristics, the use of individualised survey links will ensure that targeted reminder emails can be sent to prompt specific providers that have not completed the survey.

The draft provider survey is included in Appendix E.

3.3.4 Regional consultations

The purpose of the regional consultations is to gain in-depth understanding of the contexts of community and lived experiences of Indigenous people, as well highlighting any challenges with programs' design and delivery and identifying potential improvement opportunities. Findings from these consultations will be instrumental inputs for the final report.

The following section will provide further detail on:

- the **stakeholders involved** in and the **NIAA regional structure** which will help define the consultation approach
- the **sampling approach** to define which communities within regions the evaluation team will engage with
- the **community research approach** for gaining further understanding of the 12 communities to be visited as part of the regional consultations
- considerations for **building relationships in communities** so as to ensure a genuinely participatory approach to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders
- potential approaches to **data sovereignty** for communities.

3.3.4.1 Regional consultation stakeholders and NIAA regional structure

To gain a range of perspectives, regional consultations will be held with at least five different stakeholder groups, including:

- **State and territory governments** to understand their influence on program implementation and outcomes.
- **NIAA regional staff** to gain their view of program implementation and outcomes.
- **Providers** to understand how programs have implemented, and their effectiveness. This may also include general employment service providers (such as jobactive or CDP) if appropriate.
- **Employers (including EPI partners)** to share their experiences with the programs, including their understanding of the value, opportunities and challenges of the programs.
- **Participants and job seekers** to share their experiences with the programs, including their understanding of the value, opportunities and challenges of the programs.
- **Other community stakeholders** that may contribute to understanding the local context, or be able to support the participation of participants and job seekers or speak on their behalf (for example Elders, other community members, program providers or advocates).

It is intended that consultations occur across most of the NIAA regions. The NIAA regions are highlighted in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1: Map of NIAA’s regional network



Source: NIAA (2020).

The evaluation team expects to visit a community for two to three days. These consultations will take place across July to September 2020.

3.3.4.2 Sampling approach

A purposive sampling method will be used to identify the regions that will be visited as part of the regional consultation process. This qualitative sampling technique aims to identify information-rich cases that exhibit variation in a set of variables of interest.³²⁵

In contrast to probabilistic or random sampling, this method does not intend to identify a representative sample that can be used to make statistical inferences. Instead, this method aims to capture a diverse and insightful group of stakeholders using a degree of researcher discretion. This discretion adds a level of flexibility to the sampling strategy that will allow for:

- Leveraging the expertise of the NIAA in understanding which providers/communities are likely to be willing and able to participate in the consultation process
- Ensuring the identified sample of providers within each NIAA region are clustered around a particular location.

This sampling method will be used to identify a group of VTEC and TAEG providers. 10 current EPI employers will be consulted, as well as five like employers to form a counterfactual.³²⁶ Sampling of participants and employers will be undertaken based on location.

Sampling process for regional consultations

In order to select the VTEC and TAEG provider sample, the following steps will be followed:

³²⁵ Palinkas, Horwitz et. al. 'Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research', *Administration and policy in mental health* (2015)

³²⁶ As the EPI employers are located across Australia, these consultations may fall outside the regional consultation process – and instead occur by teleconference or as a separate consultation.

- The key provider characteristics of interest will be selected (see Table 3.2 below for a draft list of characteristics)
- Provider data will be obtained that either contains or can be used to calculate all the characteristics of interest
- The locations of all VTEC and TAEG providers will be plotted using a visualisation tool
- Clusters of providers in close geographical proximity to one another (i.e. candidate locations) will be identified using the visualisation
- A series of candidate locations (at least one in each NIAA region) will be selected, such that in total the threshold limits for the below strata are met (see Table 3.2). For example, this means that in the final sample, at least five providers must be based in metropolitan areas and at least ten providers must have high levels of activity.

Table 3.2 Sampling strata and minimum sample size threshold levels

| Sampling strata (i.e. provider characteristic) | Rationale for inclusion | Minimum number of providers in final sample |
|---|--|---|
| Program type | To distinguish between VTEC and TAEG providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >10 of each program type |
| Geographical location | To understand how metropolitan, regional and remote providers may differ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >3 metropolitan • >3 regional • >3 remote |
| Level of activity | To understand how high-activity and low-activity providers may differ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >15 high activity • >5 low activity |
| Variation in outcomes | To understand provider success factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >10 high proportion of program completions • >10 low proportion of program completions |
| Indigenous ownership | To understand the impact that Indigenous ownership may have | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >5 Indigenous owned organisations |

Note: These characteristics are not mutually exclusive, and it is likely that some providers will meet multiple of these criteria.

Draft location and provider sampling is provided at Appendix E. This is a working document and will be finalised in collaboration with the NIAA.

3.3.4.3 Community research approach

The sampling approach will seek to identify a diversity of communities to visit as part of the regional consultations. This diversity means that the consultation approach in each community needs to be designed *for* and *by* that community. Community research will be undertaken to enable these consultations to be tailored to their community and ensure that the approach places Indigenous perspectives at the centre.

This research phase will ensure that the consultation process in each community is culturally appropriate and safe, comprehensive in its understanding of the community ecosystem and participatory in approach. This is important to ensure that stakeholders are comfortable expressing genuine and meaningful feedback on their experiences with EPI, VTEC and TAEG programs.

This research will impact on how the provider, employer and participant consultations are conducted. This process of community research will aim to:

- **Increase the cultural competency of non-indigenous evaluation team members.** This will be achieved through partnering with Gaimaragal Group facilitators and through formal and regional specific training prior to undertaking fieldwork.
- **Build relationships with members of the communities** before the evaluative team arrive, so that some community members already know who the evaluative team are and what is the purpose of the visit.
- **Understand the context of the community** and what consultation format will enable stakeholders to best engage with the consultation process.
- **Identify other stakeholders in the community**, beyond the current list of stakeholders, so that the evaluation team is comprehensively capturing the community ecosystem.
- **Understand how to best acknowledge and thank the community** for their participation in the consultation process.

This community research will include the following activities:

- **Initial consultations with NIAA regional networks:** As discussed in Section 3.3.2, initial consultations with NIAA regional staff will be utilised to test the stakeholder engagement approach. This consultation will also provide an opportunity for the evaluative team to identify key contacts within communities, who can provide further contextual insights.
- **Follow-up conversations with community contacts:** The evaluative team will then have follow-up phone conversations with key community contacts. It is expected that these community contacts will include VTEC and TAEG providers, as well as community leaders. The evaluative team will be guided by the NIAA network and will utilise a compounding approach to identify any further key community contacts.

These conversations with key community contacts are expected to provide the evaluation team with:

- An understanding of which stakeholders, beyond the list of stakeholders already identified, should be involved in the stakeholder consultation. This means that other program providers, employers, job seekers and/or community members may also be a part of the stakeholder engagement process.
- Contextual community information that will guide how the consultations will look in each community and who will be involved.

This research process will identify the community members that will be a part of the consultations. These consultations in communities aim to speak to providers, employers, participants as well as other stakeholders that can help to understand the community context. These stakeholders will be selected based on the following principles:

- Their **relevance** to the evaluation project
- Their **authority** to speak on IEPs, gained through their first-hand knowledge and experience
- The **accessibility** of these stakeholders, including the probability of being able to get time and space to speak with them
- The **advice** of NIAA regional network staff and/or key community contacts.

This research process will also shape the format of the regional consultations in communities, though the consultation themes and questions will remain the same across communities. Community contextual understanding is important as the success of these consultations hinges on its ability to provide adequate and accessible opportunities for participants to share their views, and for these perspectives to systematically and meaningfully input into the evaluation findings.

The regional consultation approach will maintain consistency in terms of the research questions and rigorous application of data collection methods, though certain aspects of the consultations are expected to be flexible to community needs. Elements that are expected to be flexible include:

- **Language and use of interpreters:** some community members may not be fluent in English, so having an interpreter would be important to ensure meaning is understood. Accredited interpreters will be used to ensure
- **Stakeholder groupings:** the consultation format should take into consideration the dynamics of community groups. Some communities may wish to have male and female-only groups or may wish to influence the make-up of stakeholders in a focus group.
- **Facilitators:** the consultation process has been designed for a co-facilitation model between a member of the Gaimaragal Group and a Deloitte evaluator. In some instances, however, it might be more appropriate to have a particular person facilitate, such as a Gaimaragal Group team member, or someone of a particular sex.
- **Location:** the location of the consultations may change, as some communities may see it as more appropriate to hold consultations in different places, such as inside community centre or outside by a river.

The consultations with regional NIAA networks and key community contacts will help to guide how these elements change for each community.

The regional consultations have been deliberately designed to allow for the evaluative team to visit for several days to build relationships with participants. Indigenous communities are highly consulted, though often these processes involve consultants visiting for a short period of time. This stakeholder engagement process instead aims to:

- **Take the time needed to build relationships:** With two to three days to complete these regional consultations, the schedule can allow for the evaluative team to first establish rapport and build relationships with the community before undertaking formal consultations. Depending on the community context, this may mean that some consultations do not begin immediately upon arriving in communities.
- **Build community and engage in community events:** Building community refers to fostering a sense of belonging between community members, united by a shared common need or interest. The consultations will aim to deliberately build community, by including community events across the visiting days and participating in community practices, where possible.

These processes will better ensure that a sense of trust is established with community members, that will help to increase consultation participants' level of comfort. Moreover, this will allow the process to create community and invite people into the consultative process.

3.3.4.4 Alternative consultation approach if visits to community is not preferred

As part of this evaluation it is essential to ensure the protection of remote and regional communities and the vital elder and traditional owner community. The success of this project depends on deep engagement with the community and traditional owners where the employment assistance programs operate.

As such, each community will be offered the opportunity to opt out of face-to-face consultations – given the COVID-19 health risks associated with face-to-face visits. In this case, we will utilise our (and the regional NIAA network) relationships with Indigenous community and eldership connections to establish a consultation training facility to skill local leaders to support our virtual consultation methodology. This will ensure a local, trusted and culturally appropriate connection to a virtual consultation as well as delivering the added benefit of building local capability and leaving behind a new community skill.

This facilitator will be compensated for their time in training and delivery, under an appropriate sub-contractor arrangement.

This approach can also be used if travel restrictions due to COVID 19 apply.

3.3.4.5 Pre-pilot and pilot testing

The community research phase will also enable pre-pilot and pilot testing of the consultation guides. The draft consultation guides will be shared with NIAA regional network staff in initial consultations and with key community contacts in follow-up conversations.

These conversations will ensure that the evaluation team can:

- test stakeholders' comfort with the questions being asked
- test that the questions are contextually relevant for participants
- ensure cultural safety of participants.

Pilot consultations will be completed once the consultation guides have been reviewed and approved by NIAA. The instruments will be piloted in full during two different regional community consultations. Ideally these pilot consultations will occur in two varied settings, such as a remote community and metropolitan community. This will allow for the pilot consultations to test the appropriateness of the consultation guides across varied settings.

These pilots will also constitute the first consultations completed, and will involve interviews with all regional stakeholders. A debrief session after each pilot consultation will decide on any necessary changes to the data collection tools.

This process of both pre-pilot conversations and pilot consultations will allow for an iterative approach to developing data collection tools, and will ensure that the tools are designed so as to best meet the objectives of the evaluation.

Consultation guides for regional consultations are included in Appendix E.

3.3.4.6 Ensuring data sovereignty

The term 'data sovereignty' refers to the management of data in a manner consistent with the laws, practices and customs of the region in which the data is located. Specifically, 'Indigenous data sovereignty' recognises the Indigenous right to 'govern the collection, ownership and application of data about Indigenous communities, peoples, lands, and resources'.³²⁷ In collecting data intended to inform and measure Indigenous priorities and agendas, Walter (2018) reiterates the importance of data that is 'meaningful and useful' for Indigenous peoples, and reflects a nuanced narrative of Indigenous peoples' identity, culture and communities.³²⁸

In alignment with this research, the evaluative team recognises that Australian Indigenous communities have a right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as their right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over these.

Accordingly, the regional stakeholder engagement process will ensure data sovereignty for all stakeholders by enabling both opt-in and out processes throughout the entirety of the study, as well as ensuring the data collected is shared back with individuals and organisations where possible. For regional consultations, these methods of sharing information back with the community will be tailored to the community. In general, this will be in the form of case study write ups of employment success stories that the community can use going forward.

In particular communities, if there is interest, other products could be developed and may include:

- a video which collates footage taken during the evaluation team's time in the community
- a group painting that is completed during the consultation period and left in the community.

In these cases, additional ethics approval will be obtained prior to commencing data collection. A further dimension of data sovereignty that will be considered is the ongoing communication of the purpose, use and nature of evaluation products such as data and analysis (including the final report). Time will be allocated to understand participant and community needs in relation to use of this information for their local advocacy, decision making or planning purposes. Every effort will be

³²⁷ AIATSIS, 2019, *Delivering Indigenous data sovereignty*, 2 July, <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/publications/presentations/delivering-indigenous-data-sovereignty>>.

³²⁸ Walter, M 2018, 'The voice of Indigenous data', *Griffith Review*, vol. 60, no. [N.K].

made to ensure evaluation products are made accessible in a manner that works for the community and meets their needs.

3.3.4.7 Incorporating community views and perspectives

It is essential that community views and perspectives are incorporated into findings. A number of strategies will be used to ensure this is done effectively.

Specific time will be allocated during each consultation, particularly the focus group sessions, for the evaluation team to play back what they have heard and recorded from the sessions. In particular, the evaluation team will be looking to check that they have heard and prioritised the things that are most important to participants.

Participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts, and case study write-ups, and to provide further comment on these to the evaluation team.

Indigenous facilitators will ensure that conversation picks up on and follows the path of areas of interest driven by participants, rather than the preconceptions of the non-Indigenous members of the evaluation team.

3.3.5 Final program and policy consultations

The final aspect of the stakeholder engagement approach will involve testing emerging themes and findings with NIAA and DESE program and policy staff. This will include:

- a facilitated participatory workshop with NIAA regional network staff
- semi-structured interview with program and policy staff across jobactive, CDP, EPI, TAEG and VTEC programs.

The facilitated participatory workshop with NIAA regional network staff will be an interactive opportunity for the evaluation team to share emerging findings and ensure that geographical differences are accounted for in the way that findings are reported.

Semi-structured interviews with both policy and program staff across both general employment programs and Indigenous employment programs will aim to ensure that the broader employment policy context is accounted for in the way that findings are reported. This will allow for the final report to make the distinction between findings that relate to employment programs generally, those that are specific to Indigenous Employment programs broadly, and those that are specific to the in-scope programs.

Workshop participants will ideally include NIAA regional staff across all networks, even if community consultations did not occur in their region. Employment program and policy staff will be selected in collaboration with NIAA.

These consultations will be completed in October and consultation guides/workshop materials will be developed in prior and tested with NIAA.

4 Evaluation implementation plan

This section of the Evaluation Strategy outlines practical considerations around implementation of the framework in the broader context of the project. The key aspects of evaluation implementation covered are:

- Timeline
- Governance arrangements
- Ethics approval
- Risk identification and mitigation.

4.1 Implementation timeline

Figure 4.1, on the following page, sets out the timeline for the evaluation, including the data collection, analysis and reporting activities to which this strategy is a key input.

The Evaluation Strategy will be provided to the NIAA on 9 April 2020, for consideration and agreement by the ERG. The Strategy will then be used immediately and on an ongoing basis to inform data collection, analysis and reporting activities.

Other key dates and deliverables include:

- May 2020 – provider survey in field
- 4 June 2020 – early finding presented to ERG
- July-Sep 2020 – regional consultations undertaken (*noting this timing is likely impacted by COVID-19, as discussed in section 4.4*)
- 16 November 2020– draft report to NIAA
- 14 December 2020 – final report to NIAA
- 24 January 2021 – final presentation of findings.

These and other matters are set out in further detail in the Evaluation Project Plan, provided separately.

4.2 Governance arrangements

The NIAA has established the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) to oversee and guide the evaluation using established practices in line with the IAS Evaluation Framework principles. The ERG will provide feedback on the evaluation scope, review evaluation progress and findings, and discuss the implications for future directions of the program.

The ERG will meet regularly and will monitor implementation of the Evaluation Strategy.

In addition, weekly project reporting will include an update on progress on the Evaluation Strategy. This will include monitoring of:

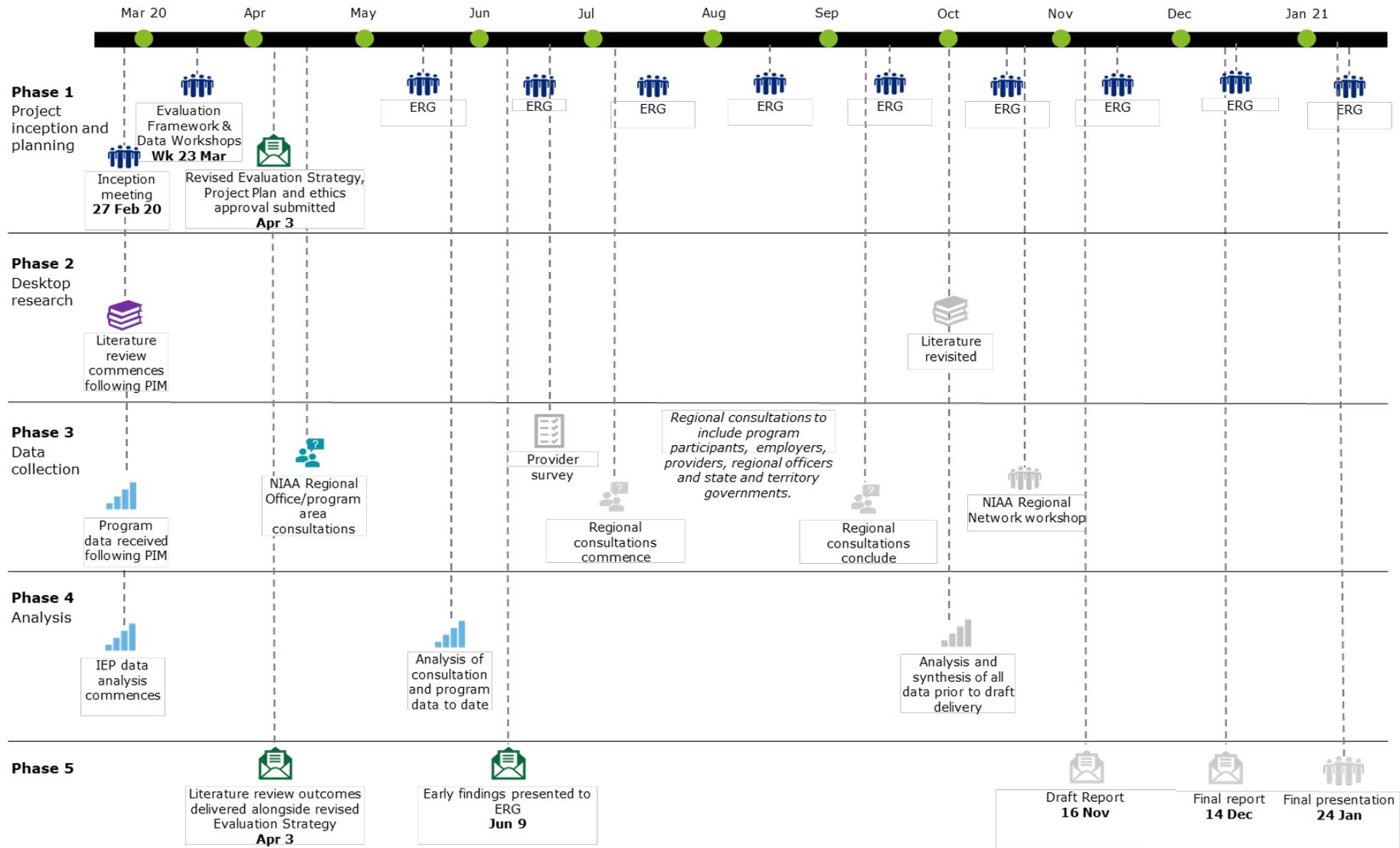
- Ethics approval
- Provision of program data
- Updates on evaluation activities
- Emerging findings and their relevance to the evaluation objectives
- Emerging risks

Any changes to this strategy would need to be agreed by Deloitte and NIAA, via the ERG.

The evaluation team is co-lead. In the combination of Professor Deen Sanders OAM and Matt Wright, the evaluation will benefit from Indigenous leadership and governance at its centre, as well as leading skills and training evaluation expertise. A full overview of the project team is provided in the evaluation project plan.

As part of the governance for the evaluation, the NIAA's Indigenous Evaluation Committee (comprised of Professor Maggie Walter, Blair Exell, Doctor Anthony Dillon and Doctor Wendy Jarvie) will provide advice on the evaluation strategy, implementation and findings. This provides the opportunity for the evaluation to be independently assessed by a panel of Indigenous academics.

Figure 4.1 Project timeline



4.3 Ethics and research approval

As part of the method includes consultations with participants, a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) ethical clearance is required. The ethics submission will be completed after the Department approves the Project Plan and Evaluation Strategy, drawing heavily on the Evaluation Strategy as input into the submission.

It is expected that the following documents will form part of the ethics application:

- Cover letter (sent as a separate document)
- Completed e-protocol (online application document)
- Deloitte's public liability insurance certificate of currency (sent as a separate document)
- Deloitte's professional indemnity insurance certificate of currency (sent as a separate document)
- HREC form of indemnity (sent as a separate document)
- This evaluation strategy, which includes contextual information, study objectives and key lines of enquiry, methodological framework, selection of participants – recruitment information, all consultation tools (including piloting), data sources, data management and reporting
- Information regarding all researchers involved in the evaluation and participant information sheets and consent forms.

While the HREC submission is the primary ethics approval for the evaluation, the methodology outlined also complies with the principles of the National Health and Medical Research Council's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies.

Changes to the research process may result in the need to submit an amendment to the original proposal. For example, specific information and consent forms will be required if a community elects to receive knowledge sharing via video-recording.

4.4 Data collection management and security

Deloitte Access Economics will take every precaution to ensure that survey data is handled, stored, and accessed in a secure way that ensures the confidentiality of user information, and complies with all relevant privacy legislation. Deloitte Access Economics has secure data storage systems that are regularly monitored and maintained.

All data collected or generated will be located in a directory dedicated to the project on Deloitte Access Economics' network. Access to this data will be managed by having restricted access to the folder containing the project information. Only dedicated members of the project team will have access to this folder for the purpose of conducting the evaluation. Any workbooks used to analyse data will be stored in the secure project directory. Only aggregated data will be presented in the evaluation report.

With the consent of stakeholders, the evaluation team will be digitally recording parts of the stakeholder consultations, with these recordings transcribed through internal services within Deloitte. As well, the evaluation team will take notes to support the accurate collection of information. The evaluation team will record names and site location into consultation notes that will be securely stored (hard copy) or in a secure computer file requiring password access (digital).

The purpose of recording consultations is to ensure that the most accurate record of consultation data available, and to undertake analysis of consultation notes in bulk. Secure formats (primarily Skype and Zoom) will be used to conduct the recordings. Attendees will be monitored to ensure privacy on the line, and all team members will be introduced prior to commencement. Consent and recording protocols will be covered at the start of each teleconference, including that the individuals can stop participating at any time. Participants are able to maintain privacy by dialling in rather than supplying Deloitte with their personal phone numbers.

Participant names and details will not be identified as part of the evaluation. Due to the nature of this analysis, some stakeholder regions and administrative areas may be provided to NIAA. Any

summary consultations content, or direct quotations from the consultations that are made available to NIAA will be anonymised, and the evaluation team will take utmost care to ensure that other information in the consultations that could identify individuals is not revealed.

Any personal information that is provided to Deloitte Access Economics, such as name and contact details, will be destroyed following the completion of the project with the Department.

Other material relating to the project including sound recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after seven years.

Individual notes from the consultations or transcripts of the recorded sections of the interviews can be provided to participants upon request.

More information about how Deloitte handles personal and project information is set out in the firm's privacy policy at <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/legal/privacy.html>.

4.5 Evaluation strategy risk identification and mitigation

Identification of risk and mitigation strategies is a process of reducing or eliminating adverse events encountered (or which have the potential to occur) during the evaluation process.

The approach to manage evaluation risk involves:

- identifying encountered or potential risks to the evaluation process;
- assessing the likelihood and resulting impact of risks in the context of consequences to the evaluation; and
- identifying and implementing strategies to mitigate or lessen evaluation risks from occurring during the evaluation process.

There are a number of general risks to this evaluation, including some specific risks related to the emerging situation in relation to COVID-19. The identified risks to the execution of this Evaluation Strategy, and suggested strategies for mitigation are presented in **Table 4.1** below.

This is not suggested to be an exhaustive list. Additional risks may arise throughout the evaluation process, for which mitigation strategies will be developed in collaboration with the ERG.

Project level risks are set out in the Project Plan, provided as a separate document.

Table 4.1: Risks and mitigations

| Potential risk | Likelihood and consequence | Mitigation strategies |
|---|---|---|
| Consultations cannot be conducted face to face due to impact of COVID-19 | Likelihood: Medium Consequence: High | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One option is to adjust the timing of consultations to enable face to face consultations to occur, dependent on NIAA preference. • The team is also preparing approaches to individual and regional consultations that does not require face to face consultation. • Analysis and reporting to be transparent about any impacts on or implications for the quality of qualitative data, if face to face consultations are not possible. |
| Stakeholder perspectives and other data is influenced by COVID-19 situation | Likelihood: High Consequence: Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment outcomes may already be impacted by COVID-19 impacts – data on COVID-19 related labour market effects will be considered where appropriate. • Consultations will be sensitive to the possible impacts of COVID-19, and lines of questioning adjusted accordingly, |

| Potential risk | Likelihood and consequence | Mitigation strategies |
|--|---|--|
| | | in order to identify additional factors influencing stakeholder engagement with the IEPs. |
| Stakeholder availability for consultation | Likelihood: Medium Consequence: Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key contacts early in the evaluation. Develop consultation strategy so key stakeholders are aware at which points they would be engaged and for what purpose. Seek input on suitable contacts to interview and appropriate methods for contacting them. Factor flexibility into planning. |
| Delay in provision of required data and/or program data has limitations and gaps | Likelihood: Medium Consequence: Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Securing access to program data, particularly where it needs to be provided by organisations other than the NIAA, is a priority from project commencement. NIAA to escalate and expedite data requests. If any required data cannot be provided by the NIAA, or broader DESE, DSS, or DHS data is not possible, alternative methodologies using publicly available data (such as NCVER and HILDA) will be developed. |
| Low survey response | Likelihood: Medium Consequence: Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response rate will rely on effective communication to target survey respondents. This will be done in partnership with the NIAA and will ensure respondent have sufficient time to complete the survey. Surveys will be succinct, clear and user-friendly to promote uptake. Surveys will be distributed using individualised links to allow targeted follow-up inquiries. |

Appendix B SVA Consulting Evaluation Strategy

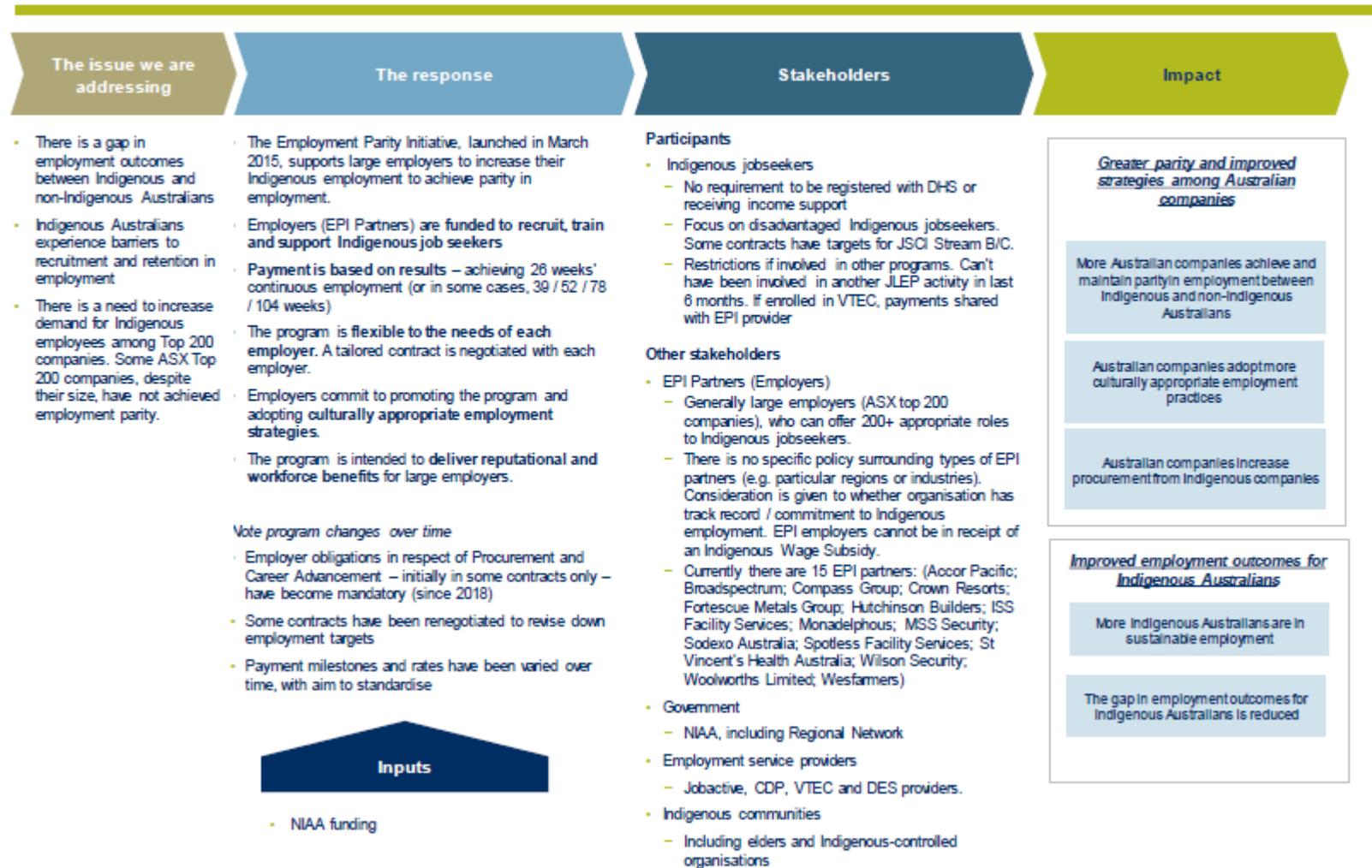
Attached as separate document (SVA Consulting National Indigenous Australians Agency: Evaluation Strategies – Indigenous Employment Programs).

Appendix C SVA program logics

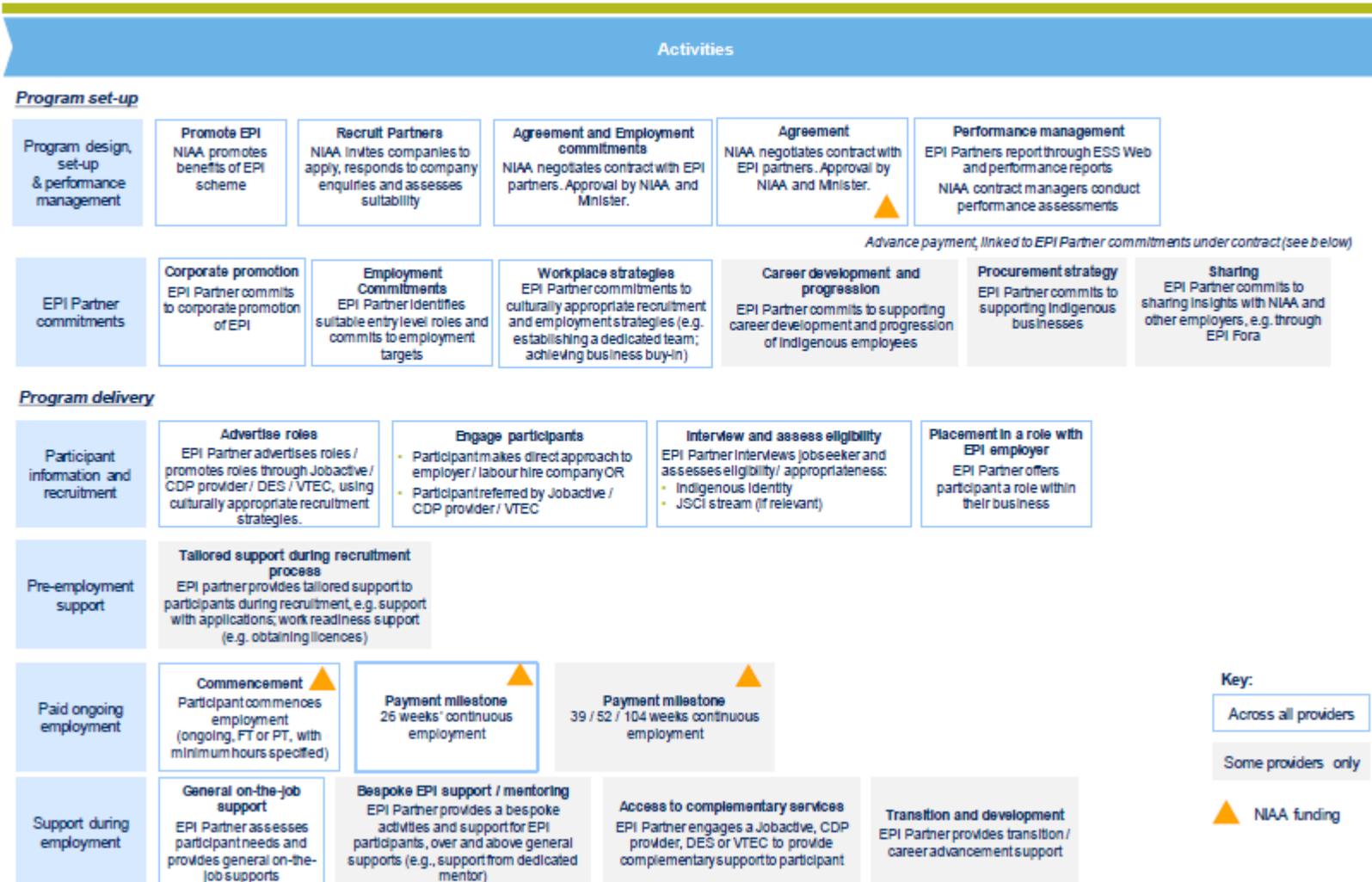
Overview of EPI, VTEC and TAEG Employment

| | EPI | VTEC | TAEG Employment |
|---|---|--|---|
| Participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Indigenous jobseekers (with some providers focused very disadvantaged jobseekers) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous jobseekers, with strong focus on very disadvantaged jobseekers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous jobseekers, with strong focus on very disadvantaged jobseekers |
| Provider and selection process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Top-200 companies By invitation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any organisation Application by invitation for grant funding Requirement to be Indigenous organisation, or in joint venture with Indigenous organisation (since 2018) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any organisation Open grant applications throughout the year Approx. 50% are Indigenous organisations |
| Payment milestones | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquitable advance payment (in most cases) Employment milestone payments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment milestone payments Option for equitable advance payment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment milestone payments Some discretionary pre-employment payments |
| Maximum payment per completed placement (Approx only. Based on Feb18-June20 rates advised by NIAA. Using 26 wk milestone) | <p style="text-align: center;">~\$12,000 (varies under each tailored contract)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">\$15,000 (Stream C / DES) (fixed payment model, with standard rates across all providers based on job-seeker type)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">\$8,250 ('Highly disadvantaged') for placement + \$1,500 for work preparation (can be negotiated by providers up to maximum participant cost)</p> |
| Direct employment by provider vs placement with 3rd party | <p style="text-align: center;">Direct employment by EPI partner (with use of sub-contractors by exception)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Almost all 3rd party employment (only 1 VTEC provides direct employment)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix of direct employment by TAEG and 3rd party employment. |
| # Placements per provider per annum | <p style="text-align: center;">Large to very large</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers must commit to 200+ placements Range from 200 to 700+ placements | <p style="text-align: center;">Small to medium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ranging from less than 70 placement, to 200+ placements | <p style="text-align: center;">Small to medium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ranging from less than 30 placements, through to 177+ placements |
| First stage of support | <p style="text-align: center;">Support in recruitment process</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Case management and work readiness</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Pre-placement support (including work readiness and structured mentoring)</p> |
| Final stage of support | <p style="text-align: center;">Support during employment for 26 weeks (up to 104 weeks for some providers)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Support during employment for 26 weeks</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Support during employment for 26 weeks</p> |
| Community engagement | <p style="text-align: center;">Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers are not Indigenous organisations Approach to community engagement varies by employer and location. Some have strong focus. Most providers have Indigenous procurement obligations under their contracts | <p style="text-align: center;">Strong</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers must be Indigenous Organisation, or in joint venture with Indigenous Organisation Community engagement is a key element of VTEC model and 'brand' | <p style="text-align: center;">Moderate to Strong</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approx. 50% of providers are Indigenous organisations Approach varies by employer and location Some providers operate very similarly to a VTEC in terms of community engagement |

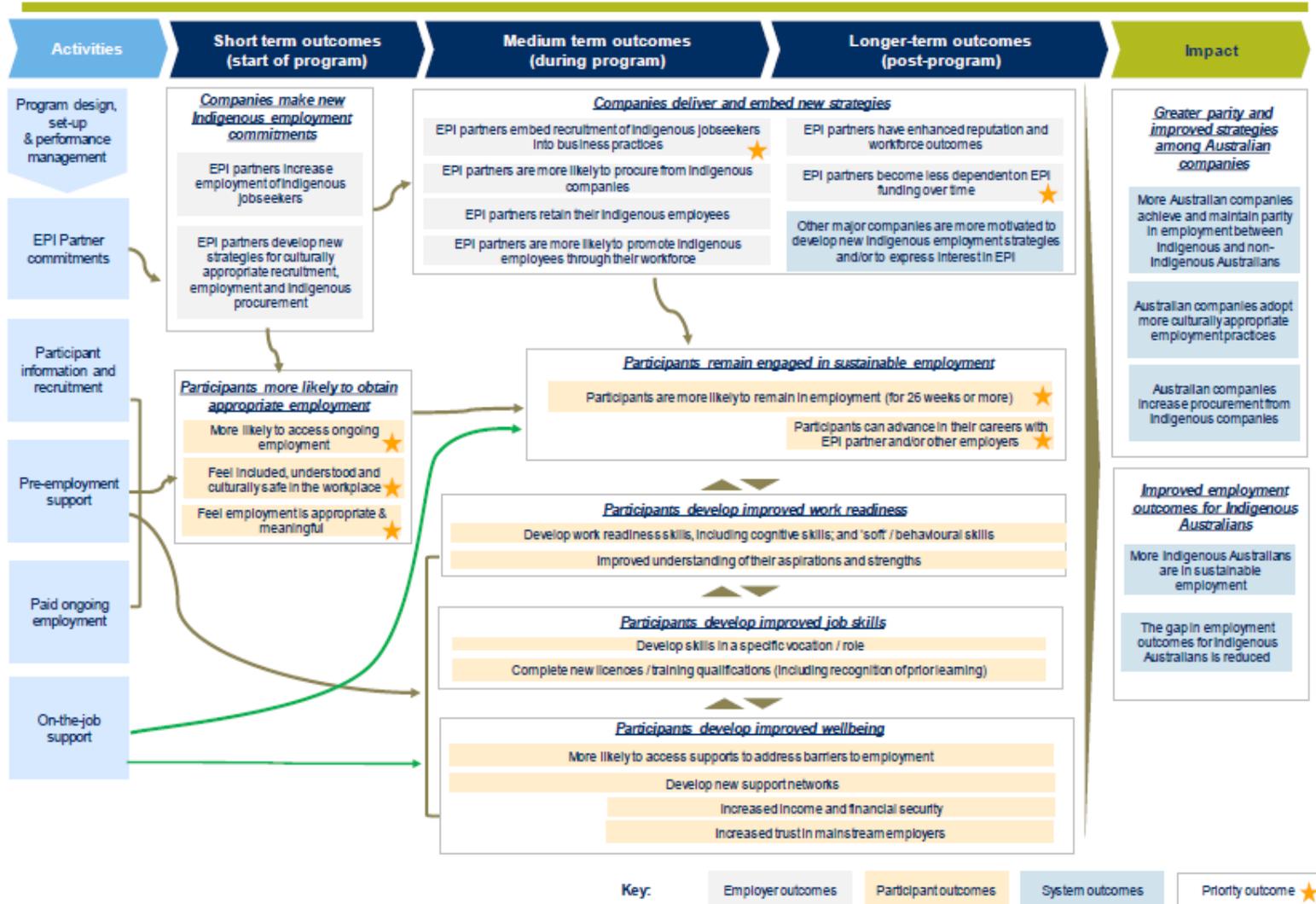
EPI Program Logic - Issue, response, stakeholders and inputs



EPI Program Logic - Activities



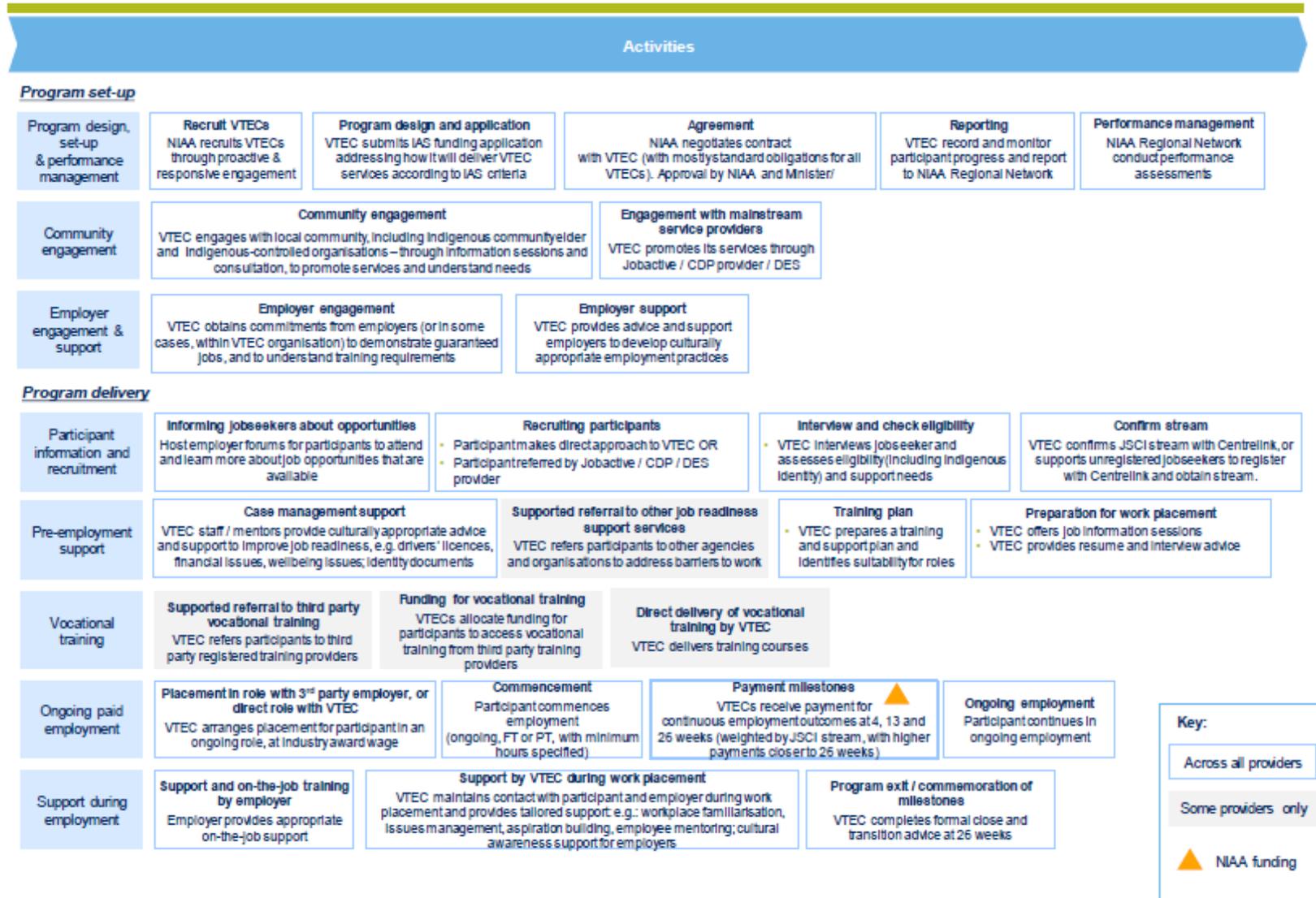
EPI Program Logic – Outcomes and Impact



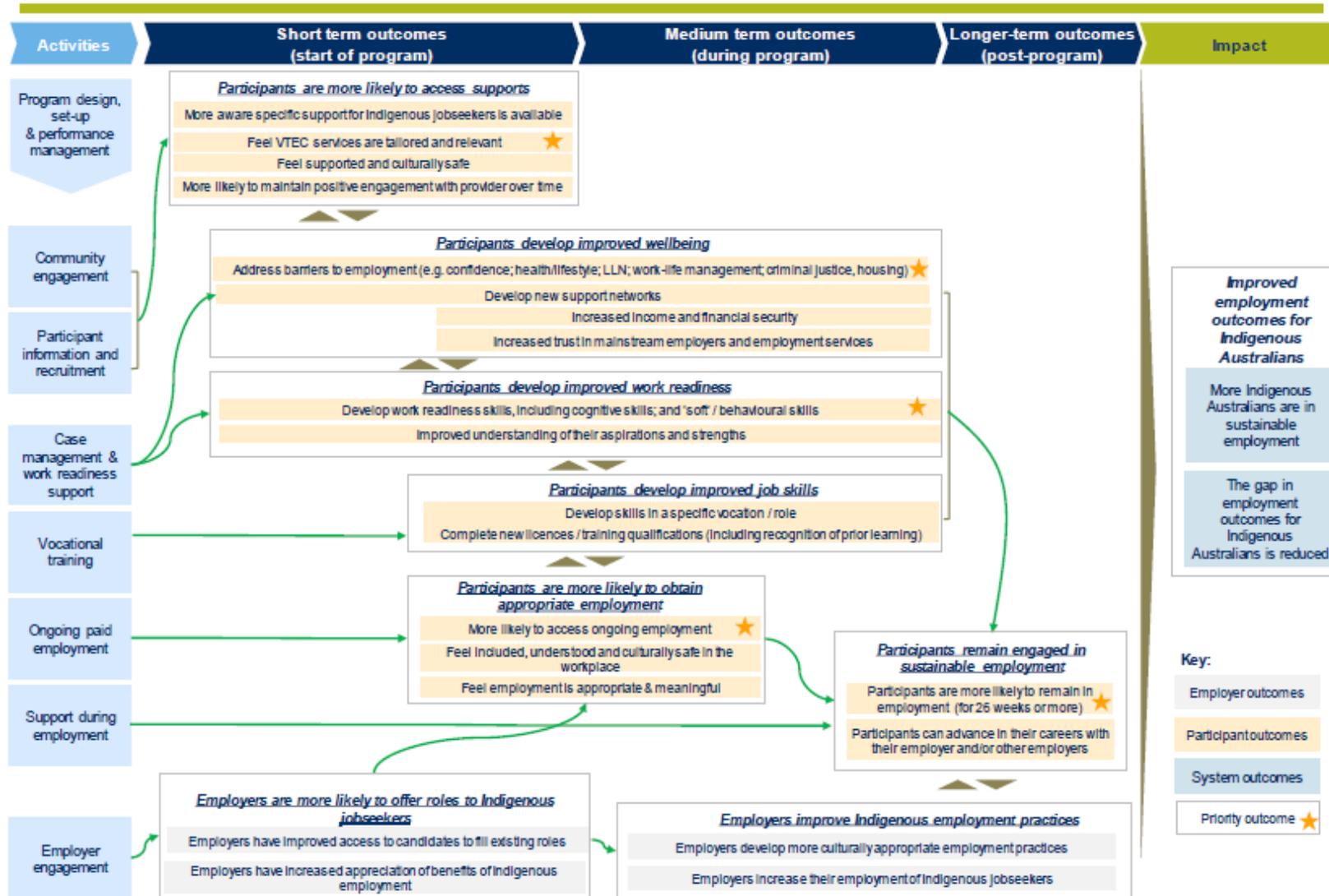
VTEC Program Logic - Issue, response, stakeholders, impact



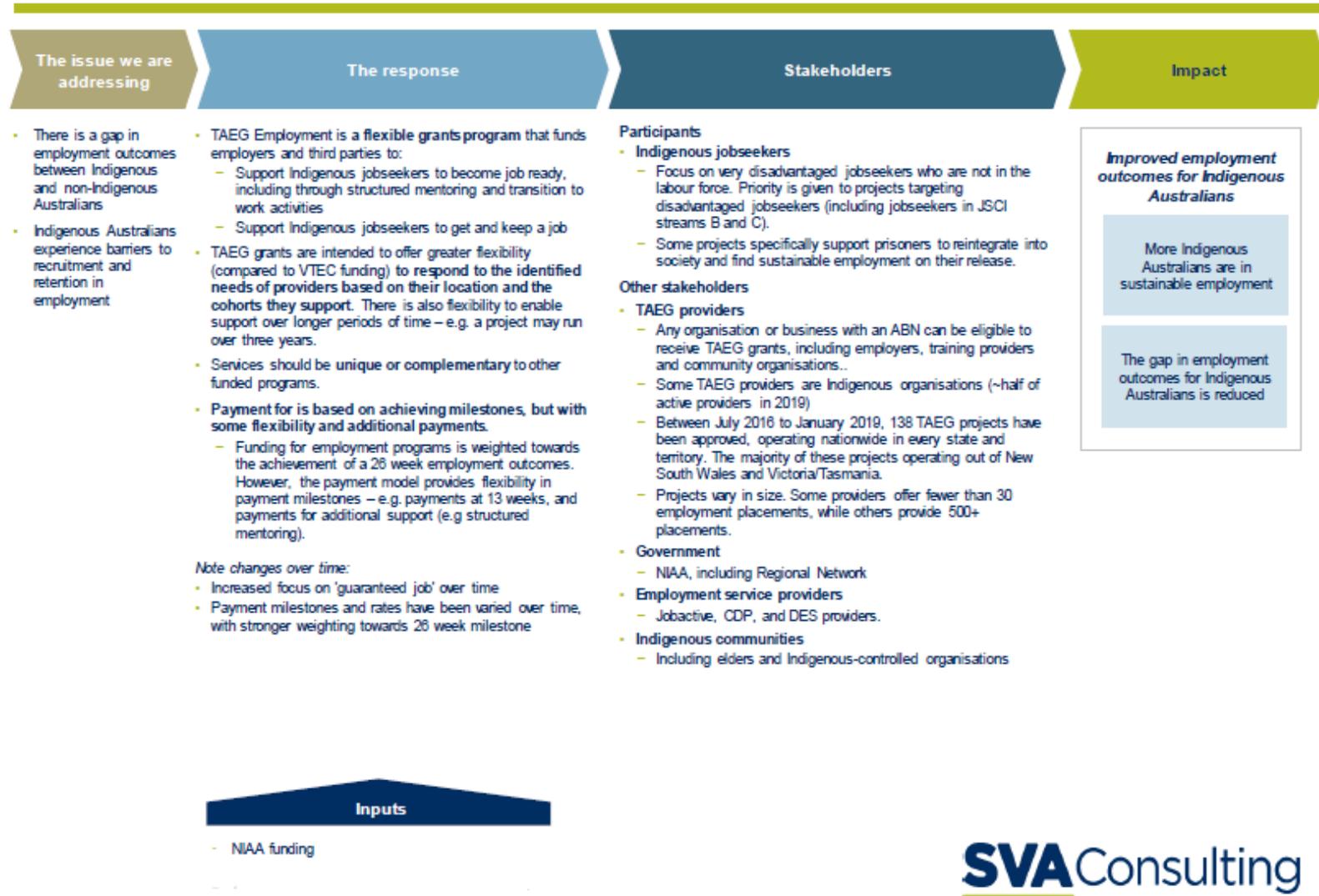
VTEC Program Logic - Activities



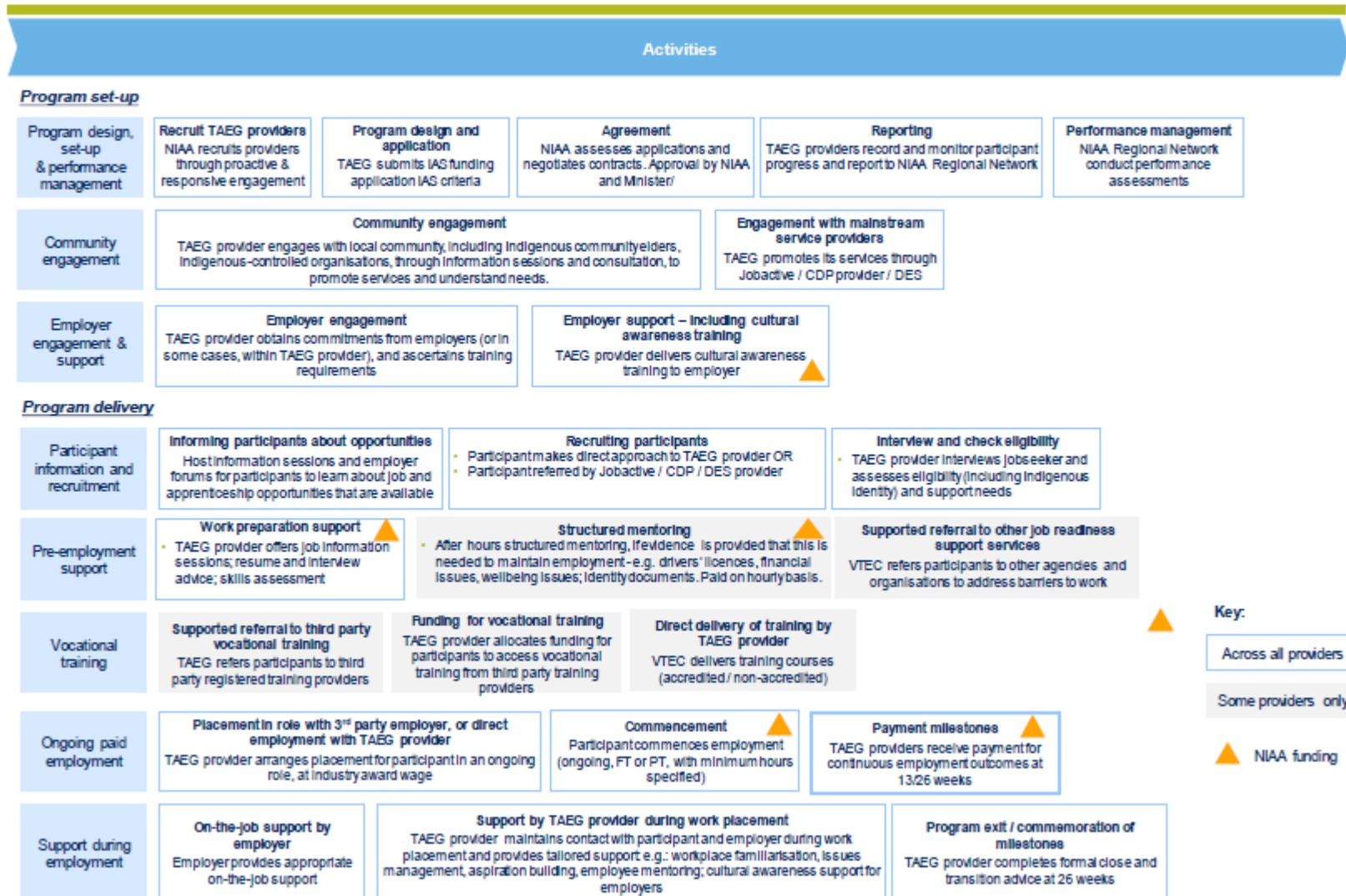
VTEC Program Logic – Outcomes and Impact



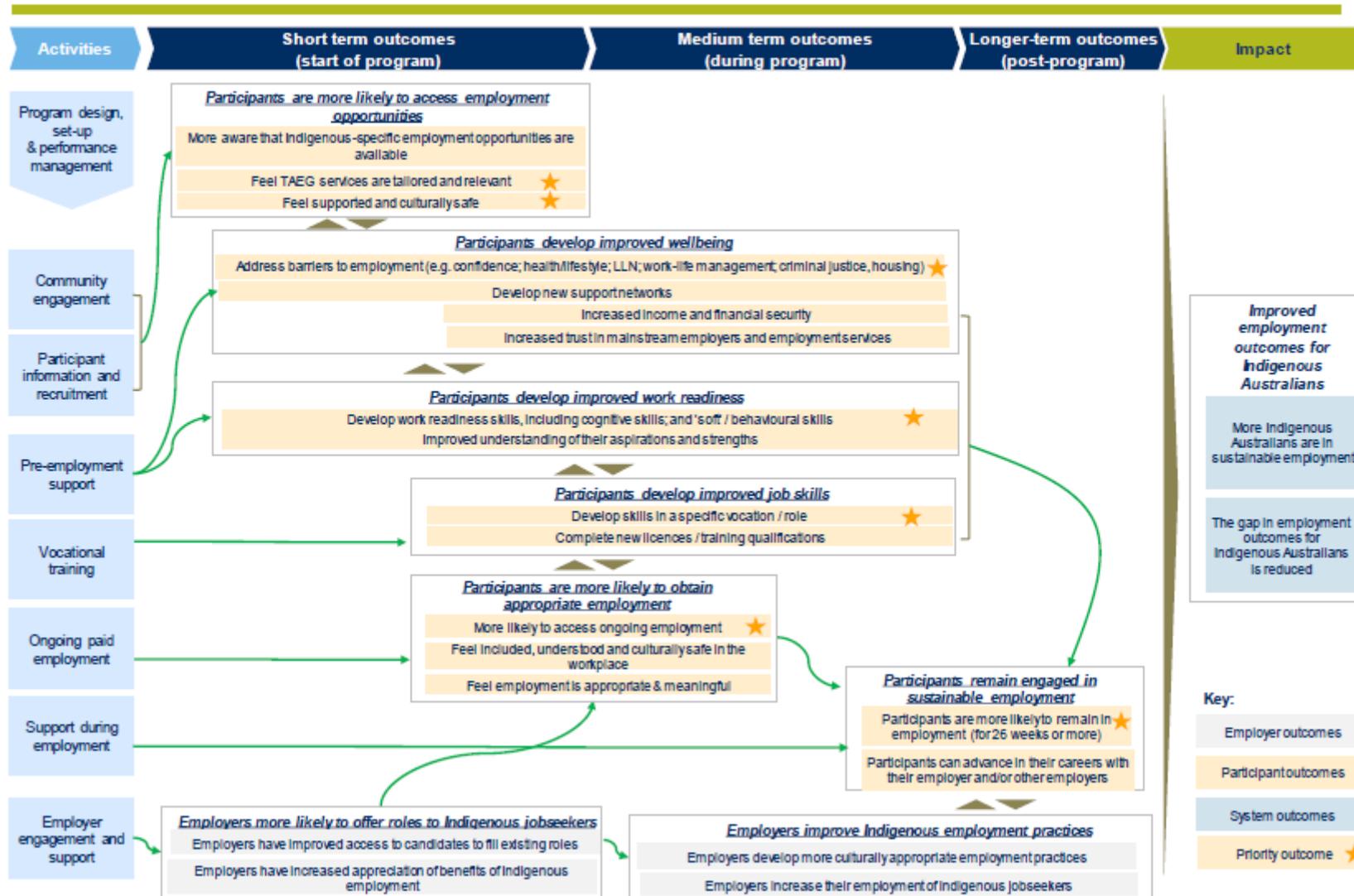
TAEG Employment Program Logic - Issue, response, stakeholders, impact



TAEG Program Logic - Activities



TAEG Program Logic – Outcomes and Impact



Appendix D Data matrix

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|--|---|---|------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Appropriateness of program design and implementation | | | | | |
| To what extent is the program design based on evidence? | To what extent were the suite of programs designed in collaboration with Indigenous Australian people? | Number and length of stakeholder engagement activities undertaken with Indigenous people to inform the design of the suite of programs | Activities | - Program documentation detailing engagement activities undertaken (if available) | - Descriptive analysis (if data availability permits) |
| | To what extent were each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI designed in collaboration with Indigenous Australian people? | Number, timing and nature of stakeholder engagement activities undertaken with Indigenous people to inform the design of VTEC, TAEG and EPI | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Program documentation detailing engagement activities undertaken (if available) | - Descriptive analysis (if data availability permits) |
| | What evidence informed the design of the suite of programs? | Quality of evidence base used for design of suite of programs (i.e. research reviewed was relevant and rigorous) | Activities | - Literature scan - Program documentation detailing scoping research | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |
| | What evidence informed the design of each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI? | Quality of evidence base used for design of each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI (i.e. research reviewed was relevant and rigorous) | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Literature scan - Program documentation detailing scoping research | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |
| | To what extent has the design of the suite of programs changed over time to reflect new evidence, | Quality of engagement undertaken to inform the design of the suite of programs | Activities | - Initial consultations (program and policy staff, regional offices) | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|---|--|---|------------------------------------|---|--|
| | and feedback from Indigenous Australian people? | | | - Regional consultations (participants, providers) | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |
| | | | | - Program documentation detailing new evidence changes to design (if available) | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |
| | To what extent has the design of each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI changed over time to reflect new evidence, and feedback from Indigenous Australian people? | Quality of engagement undertaken to inform design of VTEC, TAEG, EPI | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Initial consultations (program and policy staff, regional offices) | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |
| | | | | - Regional consultations (participants, providers) | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |
| | | | | - Program documentation detailing new evidence changes to design (if available) | - Thematic analysis - Mapping against best practice literature findings |
| To what extent has the program been implemented by NIAA (/PM&C) in line with its design parameters? | What is the nature and quantity of activities being delivered by VTEC and TAEG providers and EPI partners? | Nature and quantity of activities delivered by provider (including recruitment and program activities) | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey | - Descriptive analysis of the quantity and category of activities delivered |
| | | | | - Program documentation | - Descriptive analysis of the quantity and category of activities delivered |
| | | | | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis |
| | To what extent are VTEC and TAEG providers and EPI partners deviating from the intended delivery of the program? | Proportion of activities delivered by each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI aligned with intended program features | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey | - Thematic analysis of delivered activities - Mapping of implemented design features against intended design features |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|----------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| | | | | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis of delivered activities - Mapping of implemented design features against intended design features |
| | | | | - Program documentation detailing intended and implemented activities (if available) | - Thematic analysis of delivered and intended activities - Mapping of implemented design features against intended design features |
| | How have providers been selected to participate in the program? | Identification of selection criteria for participating providers | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Initial consultations | - Mapping of actual provider characteristics against formal selection criteria |
| | | | | - Regional consultations | - Mapping of actual provider characteristics against formal selection criteria |
| | | | | - Program documentation detailing eligibility criteria | - Mapping of provider characteristics against formal selection criteria |
| | What are the characteristics of participating providers? (e.g. type of organisation; location; focus industries; direct employer versus intermediaries). | Characteristics of participating providers (e.g. type of organisation; location; focus industries; direct employer versus intermediaries) | Inputs; Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey | - Descriptive analysis of provider characteristics |
| | | | | - Program documentation (e.g. provider reporting) | - Descriptive analysis of provider characteristics |
| | What challenges has the NIAA encountered in implementing the suite of programs as intended? | Evidence of how and why the suite of programs were not implemented | Inputs; Outputs; Activities | - Initial consultations | - Thematic analysis of challenges faced |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| | | according to intended program design parameters | | | - Mapping of implemented design features against intended design features |
| | | | | - Program documentation detailing intended and actual program design features | - Thematic analysis of challenges faced - Mapping of implemented design features against intended design features |
| | What challenges has the NIAA encountered in implementing each of VTEC, TAEG, and EPI? | Evidence of how and why each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI were not implemented according to intended program design parameters | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Initial consultations | - Thematic analysis of challenges faced - Mapping of implemented design features against intended design features |
| | | | | - Program documentation detailing intended and actual program design features | - Thematic analysis of challenges faced - Mapping of implemented design features against intended design features |
| | What funding has been allocated and/or spent to date for each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI? | Proportion of funding budget - allocated and spent compared to date | Inputs; Activities; Outputs (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Program documentation (financial reporting) | - Descriptive analysis of financials |
| | How many participants have been involved in each of VTEC, TAEG, EPI in different ways? | Number of participants at different phases each program (e.g. commenced program, mid-program, completed program) | Activities; Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Program documentation detailing participant numbers and milestone reporting | - Descriptive analysis of participant numbers |
| | What are the characteristics of participants within each of VTEC, | Participant characteristics (e.g. age, gender, job readiness) | | - Program data detailing participant characteristics | - Descriptive analysis of participant characteristics |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| | TAEG, EPI (including age, gender, level of disadvantage, whether relationship with Jobactive/CDP/Centrelink)? | | Outputs; Short-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | (e.g. age, gender, JSCI classification) - Jobactive/CDP data (to link with program data if necessary) | - Descriptive analysis of participant characteristics |
| To what extent have the programs been delivered in a respectful, strengths-based and place-based way? | Are there observable differences in how the program is delivered between different types of VTEC and TAEG providers and EPI partners? | Perspectives on the context for, and factors affecting, delivery of the program | Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Initial stakeholder consultations - Regional consultations - Provider survey | - Thematic analysis – high-level understanding of important contextual factors - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives - Thematic analysis of key differences - Descriptive analysis of response to related ten-point scale questions |
| | To what extent do participants feel that VTEC, TAEG and EPI are respectful, and based on strengths? | Participant perspectives on program delivery | Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |
| | To what extent do other Indigenous Australians (non-participants) feel the suite of programs is respectful, and based on strengths? | Indigenous Australian expert group perspectives on program delivery | Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |
| | To what extent do other Indigenous Australians (non-participants) feel the VTEC, TAEG | Indigenous Australian expert group perspectives on program delivery | Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|---|--|--|--|---|---|
| | and EPI are respectful, and based on strengths? | | | | |
| 2. Program effectiveness and impact | | | | | |
| To what extent are the activities achieving their intended outcomes, in the short, medium and long term? | To what extent are VTEC, TAEG and EPI participants meeting program milestones? | Proportion of participants (and characteristics of participants) who complete the program (i.e. meet certain milestones) | Short-; Medium-outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - ESS data - Program documentation | - Descriptive analysis - Descriptive analysis |
| | | Proportion of providers who report that the short- and medium- outcomes have been met | Short-; Medium-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey | - Descriptive analysis |
| What evidence (or early indication) is there that activities for each of VTEC, TAEG or EPI have (or will) lead to medium-and long-term intended outcomes? | | Participant and employer perspectives on the nature of outcomes realised, and the extent of these outcomes | Short-; Medium-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |
| | | Proportion of participants who are employed a period of time after completing the program | Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - ESS data | - Descriptive analysis - Mapping against employment outcomes for different provider types (i.e. geographical location/rurality, provider size) |
| | | Proportion of participants who have demonstrated other long-term outcomes (i.e. improved work readiness, job skills and wellbeing) | Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Regional consultations (participants, providers, employers) | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |
| | | Proportion of companies who have delivered and embedded new strategies | Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Program documentation (if available) - Regional consultations (providers, employers) | - Descriptive analysis - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| | To what extent have outcomes for VTEC, TAEG and EPI participants improved over time? | Time-series of program completion rates | Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - ESS data - Jobactive and CDP data | - Descriptive/regression analysis - Descriptive/regression analysis |
| | | Time-series of employment outcomes | Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - ESS data - PPM survey | - Descriptive/regression analysis - Descriptive/regression analysis |
| | | Provider and NIAA asked to share their perspectives on explanations for pattern of outcome achievement over time | Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Regional consultations (providers) | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |
| | Were the dosage, frequency and duration of activities sufficient to achieve the outcomes for each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI? | Providers, employers and participants asked to share their perspectives on appropriateness of dosage, frequency and duration of activities that influence achievement of outcomes | All (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey - Thematic analysis | - Descriptive analysis of ten-point scale responses |
| | | | | - Regional consultations (providers, employers, participants) - Literature review - Document review | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives - Thematic analysis - Data analysis (i.e. length of programs/activities) |
| | What factors caused participants to leave each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI before milestones are completed? | Providers, employers and participants asked to share their perspectives on factors influencing completion of program | Short-, medium-, long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Regional consultations (participants, employer, provider) | - Thematic analysis - Case studies/ journey analysis |
| | What challenges have VTEC and TAEG providers and EPI partners | | All (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey | - Descriptive analysis of ten-point scale responses |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|--|--|---|--|--|---|
| | encountered in delivering the program? | Providers asked to share their perspectives on challenges in the delivering program | | - Regional consultations (providers) | - Thematic analysis - Case studies |
| | What unintended outcomes have occurred as a result of the delivery of VTEC, TAEG and EPI (positive or negative)? | Identification of unintended outcomes | N/A | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis - Case studies |
| 3. Policy implications and potential for future impact | | | | | |
| What do program outcomes tell us about effective and ineffective investment? | Are each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI achieving employment outcomes in a cost-effective manner? | Cost per positive employment outcome, and how this compares to similar programs | Inputs; Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Findings from the first two domains - Program documentation (i.e. financial data, outcomes reporting) | - Descriptive/regression analysis - Benchmarking |
| | How sustainable are program outcomes for each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI? | Identification of features of activities related to sustainable program outcomes | Activities; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Literature review - Regional consultations (NIAA program staff) | - Thematic analysis - Thematic analysis - Case studies |
| | To what extent have outcomes differed by cohort for VTEC, TAEG and EPI participants (e.g. by JSCI stream, gender, disability)? | The extent to which outcomes systematically differ across defined cohorts | Outputs; Short-term; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - DES data - Program documentation detailing participant characteristics (e.g. provider reporting) | - Descriptive/regression analysis |
| | To what extent have outcomes differed by program for participants? | The extent to which participant outcomes systematically differ across programs | Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Regional consultations (participants) | - Thematic analysis - Case studies that establish an ecosystem of perspectives |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|
| | | | | - PPM survey | - Thematic analysis - Descriptive analysis (where data allows) |
| | What program features are correlated with improved outcomes for each of TAEG, VTEC or EPI? | Assessment of the extent to which different providers for each of TAEG, VTEC or EPI have delivered on their outcomes | All (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey | - Descriptive analysis of ten-point scale responses - Thematic analysis |
| | | | | - Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis - Case studies |
| | | | | - Program documentation | - Descriptive analysis (where data allows) - Thematic analysis |
| | To what extent did funded activities contribute to outcomes for each of EPI, TAEG and VTEC? | The extent to which program outcomes can be attributed to program participation, for each program and compared to mainstream programs | Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - ESS data - jobactive data | - Econometric analysis: controlling for participant, regional differences |
| | To what extent have outcomes for each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI differed across different regions and industries/employment markets? | Assessment of the extent to which the program is delivering on its outcomes | Outputs; Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | - Provider survey - Thematic analysis: effective/ ineffective program components | - Regression analysis - Mapping against time and financial cost of delivering discussed activities |
| | | | | - Regional consultations (providers) | - Thematic analysis - Case studies |
| | To what extent have outcomes for the IEPs differed across different regions and industries/employment markets? | Providers asked to share their observations on program effectiveness (i.e. achievement of outcomes) | Outputs; Short-; Medium-; Long-term outcomes | - Provider survey - Thematic analysis: effective/ ineffective program components | - Regression analysis - Mapping against time and financial cost of delivering discussed activities |

| Evaluation question | Evaluation sub-question | Indicators | Program logic / logics link | Data sources | Analytic approach |
|---|---|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| | | | | - Regional consultations (providers) | - Thematic analysis - Case studies |
| How can the value of each program be optimised within the broader IEP and other employment assistance programs? | What are the most effective uses of funding for each of VTEC, TAEG and EPI, in the context of other similar programs? | Providers and employers asked to share their perspectives on overlap or comparative advantage with alternative employment assistance programs | Activities (VTEC, TAEG, EPI) | Findings from the first two domains Initial consultations Regional consultations (including CDP and jobactive) | N/A - Thematic analysis - Case studies - Thematic analysis - Case studies |
| | What changes or enhancements to each program would enable delivery of better outcomes? | Providers, employers and participants asked to share their perspectives on improvement areas | All | Provider survey Regional consultations | - Thematic analysis - Thematic analysis |
| | | Consolidation of above findings | All | Evaluation findings | - Thematic analysis - Literature scan |
| | How could these learnings be leveraged to drive better outcomes for Indigenous Australians more broadly? | Consolidation of above findings | All | Evaluation findings | - Thematic analysis - Literature scan |

Appendix E Data collection tools

This Appendix contains the following draft products:

Data collection tools for **NIAA regional staff** stakeholder engagement

- semi-structured interview information sheet and consent form
- initial consultation interview questions
- regional consultation interview questions

Data collection tools for **Indigenous representative** stakeholder engagement

- semi-structured interview information sheet and consent form
- regional consultation interview questions

Data collection tools for **state and territory government** stakeholder engagement

- semi-structured interview information sheet and consent form
- regional consultation interview questions

Data collection tools for **provider and employer** stakeholder engagement

- TAEG and VTEC provider survey information and consent sheet
- TAEG and VTEC provider survey
- providers and employers semi-structured interview information sheet and consent form
- providers (not employers) regional interview questions
- employers regional interview questions

Data collection tools for **program participants/employee** stakeholder engagement

- focus group information sheet and consent form
- regional consultation interview questions

Regional NIAA network staff initial semi-structured interview participant sheet

Introduction

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged to undertake an evaluation of three Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs) funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) – the Employment Parity Initiative (EPI), **Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs) and Tailored Employment Assistance Grants – Employment (TAEG)**.

In conducting this research, Deloitte Access Economics is undertaking extensive stakeholder engagement with various stakeholder groups, **including government representatives, representatives of the Indigenous Australian community, VTEC and TAEG providers, EPI partners, employers, and IEP participants. This stakeholder engagement process also involves consultations with representatives from each of the NIAA regional offices.**

This consultation will be a 60 minute semi-structured interview **with yourself held via teleconference.**

In support of these consultations, this document comprises a guide for our discussion with you and your staff. It includes:

- background information about the purpose of this research and topics to be covered in consultations.
- information regarding our consultation with you, including matters relating to privacy and confidentiality
- a short list of consultation questions which we will use to guide our conversation with you.

Purpose and topics for consultations

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the NIAA with evidence-based policy advice as to the effectiveness of the programs' implementation, whether it is meeting the programs' objectives and to inform policy makers about possible improvements and direction.

Consultations with regional NIAA offices have been designed to understand different regional contexts and to test the proposed stakeholder engagement approach for planned community consultations. Specifically, we are interested to hear your views in relation to the following topics:

- the context of the region you are based in
- any perspectives you have on the communities that could be selected for regional consultations
- recommendations for the way in which we may undertake regional consultations.

Privacy

Participation in the consultation is entirely voluntary. However, if you choose to participate, we will collect information about you including your name, contact details and organisation-related information. However, no identified information will be passed on to the NIAA. All information will be thematically analysed and de-identified for reporting purposes. If we have a quote or case study we wish to attribute to your consultation, we will seek permission from you prior to the report being sent to NIAA.

We will protect your personal information to the same standards that we use to protect our information at Deloitte. This information may be shared with an Australian transcription service, OutScribe Transcription Services, to assist in the transcription of sound recordings. Importantly, your information will be continued to be protected.

More information about how we will handle your personal information, how you can lodge a complaint, how you can contact us and how you may access and seek correction of your information are set out in our privacy policy

at <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/legal/privacy.html>

For any other enquiries, you may contact Deloitte at privacy@deloitte.com.au

How we will protect your information

With your consent, we will be digitally recording parts of the consultations, with these recordings transcribed through internal services within Deloitte. We will also take notes to support the accurate collection of information. We will record names and site location on our notes that will be securely stored (hard copy) or in a secure computer file requiring password access (digital).

The purpose of recording the consultations is to ensure that we use the most accurate record of our consultations available, and to undertake analysis of consultation notes in bulk.

We will never reveal your name or your personal details. Due to the nature of this analysis, we may provide the name of your region and administrative area to the Department. Any summary consultations content, or direct quotations from the consultations that are made available to the Department will be anonymised, and we will take utmost care to ensure that other information in the consultation that could identify yourself is not revealed. However, we cannot guarantee that your opinions will not be identified (e.g. by your colleagues).

Any personal information that is provided to Deloitte Access Economics, such as name and contact details, will be destroyed following the completion of the project with the Department.

Other material relating to the project including sound recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after seven years.

Individual notes from the consultations or transcripts of the recorded sections of the interviews can be provided upon request.

Questions

For all other general enquiries about the IEP evaluation, please contact NIAA's evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au

NIAA regional network staff initial semi-structured interview questions – initial consultations

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I'd like to get to know you a bit better.
 - a) How would you describe your experience at NIAA?
 - b) How would you describe your experiences with the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs or other employment programs / service providers?

Regional context

2. What can you tell us about NIAA's work in the region?
 - a) What can you tell us about the history of the NIAA in the region?
 - b) How would you describe the main activities that the NIAA undertakes in this region?
3. Can you tell us a bit more about employment in your region?
 - a) What can you tell us about the main industries and jobs available in the region?
 - b) What other non-IAS programs exist in the region that are similar to the EPI, VTEC and TAEG programs?

Community context

4. What can you tell us about the specific community we have selected for this study?
 - a) What social, cultural or political considerations at the community level should the evaluation team be sensitive to?
 - b) What do you think we would learn from visiting this community in comparison with other communities in your region?
5. What can you tell us about the programs within this community?
 - a) How long have the programs been running in this community?
 - b) How well have the programs been implemented in this community?
 - c) How are providers/ TAEG employers/EPI partners working together in this community?
 - d) Are some providers working more effectively than others?
 - e) What do you see as the ingredients to success for program implementation?
 - f) What other similar programs exist in this community?
 - g) How are providers/ TAEG employers/EPI partners working with other programs in this community?

Consultation logistics

Deloitte to give an overview of the information they are seeking to gather from regional consultations.

6. What is your opinion on how we would best run these regional consultations?
 - a) Who are the influential people in the community that could help us understand who to speak with?
 - b) How should the evaluation team best engage with these stakeholder groups (i.e. face to face, Skype)?
 - c) What sensitivities should the evaluation team should be aware of when consulting with these stakeholder groups?
 - d) How do you think we could best identify individuals who have not participated in the program or not found success in it?

NIAA program and policy staff semi-structured interview questions

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I'd like to get to know you a bit better.
 - a) How would you describe your background and experiences?
 - b) How would you describe your role in NIAA?
 - c) How would you describe your involvement in the design of the programs?

Evidence-based design

2. What can you tell us about the history of these programs?
 - a) How have these programs evolved over time?
 - b) How have these programs been influenced by changing policies?
3. What can you tell us about the process of designing these programs?
 - a) What engagement was undertaken with Indigenous people when designing the program(s)? How did this impact on the program design?
 - b) What other research was undertaken when designing the program(s)? How did this impact on the program design?
 - c) How did you decide which aspects of the program design to keep? Were there any trade-offs?
4. How do these programs continue to change?
 - a) What evidence is used to make these decisions?
5. What aspects of the program design do you think are effective?
6. What aspects of the program design would you like to change?

Strategic design

7. To what extent were the programs designed as a collective, compared to a standalone program? (i.e. how do you imagine the programs working together?)
8. To what extent were the programs designed with consideration of existing employment programs?

Program implementation

9. To what extent has the program(s) has been implemented in line with its intended design?
 - a) Why is it that some aspects have changed during implementation? What is the cause?
 - b) What factors impacted how the programs were implemented?
 - c) How did implementation vary according to regional features, different labour markets, industries and/or cohort groups?
10. With the benefit of hindsight, how (if at all) would you have designed the programs differently?

Indigenous representatives Information Sheet – Indigenous Employment Programs evaluation

Introduction

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged to undertake an evaluation of three Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs) funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) – the Employment Parity Initiative (EPI), **Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs) and Tailored Employment Assistance Grants – Employment (TAEG)**.

In conducting this research, Deloitte Access Economics is undertaking extensive stakeholder engagement with various stakeholder groups, **including government representatives, representatives of the Indigenous Australian community, VTEC and TAEG providers, EPI partners, employers, and IEP participants. This stakeholder engagement process also involves consultations with representatives from each of the NIAA regional offices.**

This consultation will be a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview **with yourself held via teleconference.**

In support of these consultations, this document comprises a guide for our discussion with you and your staff. It includes:

- background information about the purpose of this research and topics to be covered in consultations.
- information regarding our consultation with you, including matters relating to privacy and confidentiality
- a short list of consultation questions which we will use to guide our conversation with you.

Purpose and topics for consultations

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the NIAA with evidence-based policy advice as to the effectiveness of the programs' implementation, whether it is meeting the programs' objectives and to inform policy makers about possible improvements and direction.

Consultations with regional NIAA offices have been designed to understand different regional contexts and to test the proposed stakeholder engagement approach for planned community consultations. Specifically, we are interested to hear your views in relation to the following topics:

- the context of the region you are based in
- any perspectives you have on the communities that could be selected for regional consultations
- recommendations for the way in which we may undertake regional consultations.

Privacy

Participation in the consultation is entirely voluntary. However, if you choose to participate, we will collect information about you including your name, contact details and organisation-related information. However, no identified information will be passed on to the NIAA. All information will be thematically analysed and de-identified for reporting purposes. If we have a quote or case study we wish to attribute to your consultation, we will seek permission from you prior to the report being sent to NIAA.

We will protect your personal information to the same standards that we use to protect our information at Deloitte. This information may be shared with an Australian transcription service, OutScribe Transcription Services, to assist in the transcription of sound recordings. Importantly, your information will be continued to be protected.

More information about how we will handle your personal information, how you can lodge a complaint, how you can contact us and how you may access and seek correction of your information are set out in our privacy policy at <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/legal/privacy.html>

For any other enquiries, you may contact Deloitte at privacy@deloitte.com.au

How we will protect your information

With your consent, we will be digitally recording parts of the consultations, with these recordings transcribed through internal services within Deloitte. We will also take notes to support the accurate collection of information. We will record names and site location on our notes that will be securely stored (hard copy) or in a secure computer file requiring password access (digital).

The purpose of recording the consultations is to ensure that we use the most accurate record of our consultations available, and to undertake analysis of consultation notes in bulk.

We will never reveal your name or your personal details. Due to the nature of this analysis, we may provide the name of your region and administrative area to the Department. Any summary consultations content, or direct quotations from the consultations that are made available to the Department will be anonymised, and we will take utmost care to ensure that other information in the consultation that could identify yourself is not revealed. However, we cannot guarantee that your opinions will not be identified (e.g. by your colleagues).

Any personal information that is provided to Deloitte Access Economics, such as name and contact details, will be destroyed following the completion of the project with the Department.

Other material relating to the project including sound recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after seven years.

Individual notes from the consultations or transcripts of the recorded sections of the interviews can be provided upon request.

Questions

For all other general enquiries about the IEP evaluation, please contact NIAA's evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au

CONSENT FORM FOR _____

RESEARCH TITLE: Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation

RESEARCHERS: Deloitte Access Economics

Deloitte Access Economics have given me information about the *Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation*.

I voluntarily consent to my participation in the evaluation and in doing so acknowledge that the details regarding the evaluation and my involvement have been explained to me.

I confirm that I:

- received the Participant Information Sheet
- have read, or had someone read to me in a language I understand, the Participant Information Sheet
- understand all information included in the Participant Information Sheet.

In accordance with this Participant Information sheet, I understand:

- what this project is about
- participating in an interview will assist the research team in evaluating the effectiveness of the Indigenous Employment Programs
- my information will be analysed by the evaluation team and used to inform the findings of a report
- this evaluation will be completed in December 2020
- I have been provided contact details for the research team and am able to ask questions/lodge complaints regarding the evaluation and my participation at any time
- I am satisfied with the information I have received
- **participation is voluntary**
- **I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time** and if I decide not to continue the interview after it has started, my information will not be used
- what participation will involve, including the nature and expected length of interviews, when interviews will take place and the timeframe of this evaluation (as described in the Participant Information Sheet and contact made by Deloitte)
- I will not be paid for participating in this evaluation
- due to the potential risks of participating, I am able to include a support person in the interview and am able to contact the external support agencies listed on the Participant Information Sheet
- that the **information I provide will remain confidential** and my name, contact details and organisation details will be collected for administrative purposes only. I have the right to access personal information. **Personal details, and any culturally sensitive information that is collected, will only be accessible to the research team** and such information will be destroyed after the completion of this project.
- If I give consent for the interview to be recorded, these recordings will be kept on a secure server for seven years, only accessible to the evaluation team, for the purposes of this evaluation. This consent to be recorded can be withdrawn at any time and I have the right to access this recording.
- I am able to contact AIATSIS regarding any ethical concerns at ethics@aiatsis.gov.au
- If I have any questions, concerns or complaints I can contact the evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au.

To be completed:

I consent to the interview being recorded Yes / No (please circle)

Consent to participate in the interview

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT: _____ DATE:/...../.....

DELOITTE ACCESS ECONOMICS USE ONLY

I, the researcher, have described the details on the Participant Information Sheet to the interviewee and believe he/she has understood and agreed to it.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Indigenous representative semi-structured interview questions

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I'd like to get to know you a bit better.
 - a) How would you describe your background and experiences?
 - b) How would you describe your experiences with Indigenous policy?
 - c) What is your understanding of employment programs for Indigenous people?

Optional: Background (if participant was involved in the IEP design)

2. How would you describe your involvement in the design of the programs?
 - a) What did you think of the design process?
 - b) How well was your input fed into the actual design of the programs?

Program design

3. In your opinion, what features would need to be a part of an effective employment program for Indigenous people?
 - a) What kinds of incentives should be included?
 - b) What role can employers play?
 - c) What approach should a program take to working with Indigenous people?
4. Based on your understanding of the EPI, TAEG and VTEC programs, how well do you think these programs are designed?
 - a) What do you think of the programs' objectives?
 - b) What do you think about the role that employers play?
 - c) What works well about the design of these programs?
 - d) What could be improved about these programs?

Program delivery

5. In your opinion, what would a program look like if it were respectful of Indigenous people?

Program recommendations

6. In your opinion, what do you think is working about the current TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs?
7. In your opinion, what do you think could be improved about the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs?
8. In your opinion, what does the ideal version of these Indigenous Employment Programs look like?

State and territory government Information Sheet – Indigenous Employment Programs evaluation

Introduction

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged to undertake an evaluation of three Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs) funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) – the Employment Parity Initiative (EPI), **Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs) and Tailored Employment Assistance Grants – Employment (TAEG)**.

In conducting this research, Deloitte Access Economics is undertaking extensive stakeholder engagement with various stakeholder groups, **including government representatives, representatives of the Indigenous Australian community, VTEC and TAEG providers, EPI partners, employers, and IEP participants. This stakeholder engagement process also involves consultations with representatives from each of the NIAA regional offices.**

This consultation will be a 90 minute semi-structured interview **with yourself held via teleconference.**

In support of these consultations, this document comprises a guide for our discussion with you and your staff. It includes:

- background information about the purpose of this research and topics to be covered in consultations.
- information regarding our consultation with you, including matters relating to privacy and confidentiality
- a short list of consultation questions which we will use to guide our conversation with you.

Purpose and topics for consultations

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the NIAA with evidence-based policy advice as to the effectiveness of the programs' implementation, whether it is meeting the programs' objectives and to inform policy makers about possible improvements and direction.

Consultations with regional NIAA offices have been designed to understand different regional contexts and to test the proposed stakeholder engagement approach for planned community consultations. Specifically, we are interested to hear your views in relation to the following topics:

- the context of the region you are based in
- any perspectives you have on the communities that could be selected for regional consultations
- recommendations for the way in which we may undertake regional consultations.

Privacy

Participation in the consultation is entirely voluntary. However, if you choose to participate, we will collect information about you including your name, contact details and organisation-related information. However, no identified information will be passed on to the NIAA. All information will be thematically analysed and de-identified for reporting purposes. If we have a quote or case study we wish to attribute to your consultation, we will seek permission from you prior to the report being sent to NIAA.

We will protect your personal information to the same standards that we use to protect our information at Deloitte. This information may be shared with an Australian transcription service, OutScribe Transcription Services, to assist in the transcription of sound recordings. Importantly, your information will be continued to be protected.

More information about how we will handle your personal information, how you can lodge a complaint, how you can contact us and how you may access and seek correction of your information are set out in our privacy policy at <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/legal/privacy.html>

For any other enquiries, you may contact Deloitte at privacy@deloitte.com.au

How we will protect your information

With your consent, we will be digitally recording parts of the consultations, with these recordings transcribed through internal services within Deloitte. We will also take notes to support the accurate collection of information. We will record names and site location on our notes that will be securely stored (hard copy) or in a secure computer file requiring password access (digital).

The purpose of recording the consultations is to ensure that we use the most accurate record of our consultations available, and to undertake analysis of consultation notes in bulk.

We will never reveal your name or your personal details. Due to the nature of this analysis, we may provide the name of your region and administrative area to the Department. Any summary consultations content, or direct quotations from the consultations that are made available to the Department will be anonymised, and we will take utmost care to ensure that other information in the consultation that could identify yourself is not revealed. However, we cannot guarantee that your opinions will not be identified (e.g. by your colleagues).

Any personal information that is provided to Deloitte Access Economics, such as name and contact details, will be destroyed following the completion of the project with the Department.

Other material relating to the project including sound recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after seven years.

Individual notes from the consultations or transcripts of the recorded sections of the interviews can be provided upon request.

Questions

For all other general enquiries about the IEP evaluation, please contact NIAA's evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au

CONSENT FORM FOR _____

RESEARCH TITLE: Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation

RESEARCHERS: Deloitte Access Economics

Deloitte Access Economics have given me information about the *Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation*.

I voluntarily consent to my participation in the evaluation and in doing so acknowledge that the details regarding the evaluation and my involvement have been explained to me.

I confirm that I:

- received the Participant Information Sheet
- have read, or had someone read to me in a language I understand, the Participant Information Sheet
- understand all information included in the Participant Information Sheet.

In accordance with this Participant Information sheet, I understand:

- what this project is about
- participating in an interview will assist the research team in evaluating the effectiveness of the Indigenous Employment Programs
- my information will be analysed by the evaluation team and used to inform the findings of a report
- this evaluation will be completed in December 2020
- I have been provided contact details for the research team and am able to ask questions/lodge complaints regarding the evaluation and my participation at any time
- I am satisfied with the information I have received
- **participation is voluntary**
- **I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time** and if I decide not to continue the interview after it has started, my information will not be used
- what participation will involve, including the nature and expected length of interviews, when interviews will take place and the timeframe of this evaluation (as described in the Participant Information Sheet and contact made by Deloitte)
- I will not be paid for participating in this evaluation
- due to the potential risks of participating, I am able to include a support person in the interview and am able to contact the external support agencies listed on the Participant Information Sheet
- that the **information I provide will remain confidential** and my name, contact details and organisation details will be collected for administrative purposes only. I have the right to access personal information. **Personal details, and any culturally sensitive information that is collected, will only be accessible to the research team** and such information will be destroyed after the completion of this project.
- If I give consent for the interview to be recorded, these recordings will be kept on a secure server for seven years, only accessible to the evaluation team, for the purposes of this evaluation. This consent to be recorded can be withdrawn at any time and I have the right to access this recording.
- I am able to contact AIATSIS regarding any ethical concerns at ethics@aiatsis.gov.au
- If I have any questions, concerns or complaints I can contact the evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au.

To be completed:

I consent to the interview being recorded Yes / No (please circle)

Consent to participate in the interview

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT: _____ DATE:/...../.....

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I, the researcher, have described the details on the Participant Information Sheet to the interviewee and believe he/she has understood and agreed to it.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

State and territory government semi-structured interview questions

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I'd like to get to know you a bit better.
 - a) What can you tell me about your role within the Department, and how this relates to Indigenous employment?
 - b) What can you tell me about your experiences with the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs or other employment programs / service providers more broadly?

Delivery

2. In your experience, what are the unique Indigenous employment policy challenges that are present in your state/territory?

Policy / program landscape & collaborative design

3. What can you tell me about the Indigenous employment programs in your state/territory?
 - a) What kinds of programs are there?
 - b) What programs are the most/least active?
 - c) What programs are the most/least effective?
 - d) Do any specific programs come to mind?
4. How would you describe the process for developing Indigenous employment policy in your state/territory?
 - a) *What role do federal and state/territory policymakers play?*
 - b) Who designs which programs?
 - c) Who else is involved in the design process (e.g. Indigenous representatives)?
 - d) How have policies changed over time?
 - e) How does policy impact what programs are developed and implemented?
5. How would you describe the role of the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs in your state/territory?
 - a) *How do these policies interact with other employment programs?*
 - b) *What is valuable about these programs?*
 - c) How were these programs designed (e.g. in collaboration with Indigenous people)?
 - d) *Which programs do you believe are most effective? Why?*

Success factors

6. In your opinion, what do you think is working about the programs in your state/territory?
7. In your opinion, what do you think is working about the current TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs?
8. In your opinion, what do you think could be improved about the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs?
9. In your opinion, what does the ideal version of these Indigenous Employment Programs look like?

NIAA regional office semi-structured interview questions – regional consultations

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I'd like to get to know you a bit better.
 - a) What can you tell me about your history with the NIAA?
 - b) What can you tell me about your experiences with the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs?

Delivery and collaborative design

2. How would you describe the role that NIAA play and their relationship with providers/employers?
 - a) *How often do you interact with providers and employers?*
 - b) What support do you provide?
 - c) What accountability measures are there between NIAA and providers/employers?
 - d) What role does NIAA have in assessing providers programs before they receive funding?
3. What can you tell me about the variation between TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs?
 - a) *What types of activities do you see providers/employers running?*
 - b) What different issues are these programs hoping to solve?
 - c) How do providers choose what to focus their activity on? Who gets to decide?
4. How have the TAEG, VTEC and EPI programs changed over time?
 - a) What was the reason for these changes?
 - b) *What impact, positive or negative, has this had on the program?*

Outcomes

5. In your experience, what impact have you seen of these programs?
 - a) On communities, employers and individuals?
 - b) What feedback have you heard about these programs? Who do you hear this feedback from?
 - c) How does this impact vary depending on the program?
 - d) How does this impact vary depending on the provider/employer?

Success factors

6. In your experience, do you think these programs are really working?
7. In your experience, what influences whether a provider is more or less successful?
8. In your experience, what influences whether an employer is more or less successful?
9. In your experience, what influences whether a participant is more or less successful?
10. Given your experience with the programs, how do you think they could be improved?
11. In your opinion, what does the ideal version of these Indigenous Employment Programs look like?

TAEG and VTEC provider/employer survey information sheet

Welcome,

We acknowledge the elders past present and emerging across the country on which this survey is being created and completed.

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to conduct an independent evaluation of Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs), including the Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC) and Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) programs. As a current provider of one of these programs, your organisation is invited to participate in this short 20-minute survey to inform the evaluation.

This survey is completely voluntary and has been designed to give you an opportunity to describe the activities you have undertaken as part of the program, rate different aspects of the program's effectiveness and have an opportunity to provide comments and suggestions.

The survey is in five parts and 24 questions in total.

- Section 1: Your organisation
- Section 2: Program delivery
- Section 3: Program impact
- Section 4: Suggestions for improvement
- Section 5: The impact of COVID-19

This is an individualised survey link, which should only be completed by one person within your organisation. If you are not the most appropriate person to complete the survey, you can forward it onto someone else involved in the delivery of the Indigenous Employment Programs, however it should not be sent to multiple people. If the link is accessed by multiple people, previous responses will be overridden.

How does the COVID-19 pandemic impact the survey?

We understand that many providers have been profoundly impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst there is considerable uncertainty, employment programs are likely to be a priority in the future as the pandemic influence's employment opportunities for Australians.

We ask that for Sections 1-4 of this survey you base your responses on how your organisation was operating in the second half of 2019 (before the pandemic's impact was felt in Australia). We know that this is a strange way to fill in a survey, but we ask this so that we can get the best information to make the best decisions in the future. Finally, in Section 5 of this survey we will ask you to directly consider how the pandemic has impacted your organisation.

The survey will be open from the [insert date] 2020 until the [insert date] 2020. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact the Deloitte Access Economics team by email NIAAevaluation@deloitte.com.au.

Please see the attached participant information sheet for information about how your information will be handled. If you complete and submit this survey, we will assume this is consent for your information to be used by the evaluation in line with the protocols outlined in the attached sheet.

Thank you for your assistance,

The Deloitte Access Economics Evaluation Team

TAEG and VTEC provider/employer survey

Section 1: Your organisation

1. What is the name of your organisation? *Drop down list of providers.*
2. Which of the below Indigenous Employment Programs does your organisation deliver? *Drop down of TAEG, VTEC or both.*
3. Is your organisation also a direct employer of participants? *Yes/No.*
4. How long has your organisation been delivering an IEP for? *Years and months option for numerical filling.*
5. In which NIAA region(s) do you currently deliver programs? *Check list of NIAA regions.*
6. Do you deliver broader programs beyond TAEG or VTEC? If so, please describe. *Open text box.*

Section 2: Program delivery

Program design and implementation

7. To what extent have the following inputs influenced the way the IEP is delivered by your organisation?
 - a. Community feedback (including that of community organisations and / or elders)
 - b. Participant feedback
 - c. Employer feedback – *note, this option would not come up for those that ticked they were also an employer.*
 - d. Organisational / employee experience
 - e. NIAA regional guidance

Scale from 1-10, no influence to significant influence.
8. To what extent does the implementation of the program differ in accordance to the following? (If applicable)
 - a. Employer industry – *note, this option would not come up for those that ticked they were also an employer.*
 - b. Employer location – *note, this option would not come up for those that ticked they were also an employer.*
 - c. Job-seeker level of education
 - d. Job-seeker level of employment experience
 - e. Job-seeker involvement in other employment programs
 - f. Job-seeker level of motivation / expectations

Scale from 1-10, little change to significant change.

Free text box where significant change is picked, "Can you tell us more about this?".
9. To what extent have the following factors supported implementation, or proved challenging to implementation?
 - a. Funding arrangements
 - b. Availability of quality staff
 - c. Community awareness
 - d. Other employment programs – *note, this option would not come up for those that ticked they were also an employer.*
 - e. Relationships with employers– *note, this option would not come up for those that ticked they were also an employer.*

f. Guidance from the NIAA

Scale from 1-10, significant implementation challenge to significant enabler in successful implementation

Free text box where an extreme answer (1-3, or 7-10) is picked, "Can you tell us more about this?".

Program activities

10. Thinking back to the last six months of 2019, approximately how much of your organisation's effort would have been spent working across the following activities?

- a. Working directly with program participants
- b. Working with other providers (i.e. jobactive, Disability Employment Services, Community Development Program)
- c. Working with employers – *note, this option would not come up for those that ticked they were also an employer.*
- d. Working with community organisations or leaders

Boxes that allow a % of effort to be input across the four categories, adding to 100%.

Following questions only asked if more than 0% picked for each category.

11. Does your organisation deliver the following?

- a. Pre-employment support, if so – which activities
 - i. Case management support or mentoring
 - ii. Referrals to other agencies / organisations
 - iii. Resume and interview advice
 - iv. Job information sessions
 - v. Preparing a training and support plan
 - vi. English language training
 - vii. Literacy and numeracy skills
 - viii. Overview of workplace expectations
 - ix. Other (please specify)

If tick a box, asked for extent from some participants to most participants.

- b. Vocational training, if so – how is this delivered?
 - i. Participants referred to third-party registered training provider
 - ii. Funding allocated to participants to access vocational training from a registered third-party training provider
 - iii. TAEG / VTEC provider delivers training course
What level of certifications are offered?
 - iv. Certificate I
 - v. Certificate II
 - vi. Certificate III
 - vii. Certificate IV
- c. Participant recruitment or information sessions, if so –
 - i. How many in an average month? *Numerical text box*

- d. Support to participants during employment? If so – which activities
 - i. Workplace familiarisation
 - ii. Issues management
 - iii. Employee mentoring
 - iv. Aspiration building
12. On average, how many hours per participant does your organisation spend delivering support through the following channels? *Numerical text box*
- i. Face-to-face
 - ii. Phone
 - iii. Online / email
 - iv. Other

Section 3: Program impact

13. Which components of the program delivered by your organisation do you feel are the most effective in supporting participants into sustainable employment? *Pick top two, with text box to say why.*
- a. Pre-employment support
 - b. Vocational training
 - c. Ongoing employment support
 - d. Relationships with employers – *note, this option would not come up for those that ticked they were also an employer.*
 - e. Relationships with other participants
14. To what extent have you observed participation in the program leading to the following outcomes for *participants*? *Scale from 1-10 from no observation to consistently high observations.*
- a. Improved soft-skills (e.g. problem solving, critical thinking, communication skills)
 - b. Increased engagement in lifelong learning
 - c. Improved physical health and wellbeing
 - d. Improved mental health/wellbeing
 - e. Increased self-confidence and self esteem
 - f. Greater life satisfaction
 - g. Increased social networks
 - h. Increased support networks (such as increased connections to social security or health providers)
 - i. Increased likelihood of accessing employment support in the future
 - j. Improved outcomes for participant's family (e.g. partner, children, dependants)
 - k. Improved economic security
15. To what extent have you observed participation in the program leading to the following outcomes for *employers*? *Scale from 1-10 from no observation to consistently high observations.*
- Note, for providers that ticked that they were also a direct employer, this questions would state 'to what extent have you observed participation in the program leading to the following outcomes for your company'.*
- a. Increased likelihood of hiring Indigenous jobseekers in the future

- b. Increased cultural competency
 - c. Increased understanding of Indigenous culture
16. To what extent have you observed participation in the program leading to the following outcomes for *communities*? *Scale from 1-10 from no observation to consistently high observations.*
- a. Increased collaboration between local government and organisations (e.g. community organisations and service providers)
 - b. Increased collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
 - c. Enhanced social cohesion and inclusivity
 - d. Greater community resilience and ability to cope with social, economic and environmental change
 - e. Improved local economies or labour markets (e.g. local businesses have access to pool of local skilled workers)
 - f. Reduced burdens on social security, the justice system and health system
 - g. Reduced burdens on other social services in the region
17. Which of the following (if any) do you believe most strongly enable the IEP to support jobseekers? *Pick up to three, and describe why.*
- a. Tailored support and mentoring
 - b. Fostering connections with the local community
 - c. Addressing work-preparedness challenges
 - d. Encouraging employers to improve their cultural competency practices
 - e. Creating flexible working arrangements for participants
 - f. A focus on transparency and accountability
 - g. Leveraging other employment programs
 - h. Adopting a place-based approach

The following question would only be asked to those providers that indicated they were an employer.

18. As an employer as well as a provider, do you choose to outsource any elements of TAEG program provision?
- a. If so, what which parts and why? *Free text*
 - b. If not, what do you see as the key benefits of delivering the program internally? *Free text*

Section 4: Suggestions for improvement

19. How would you rate the success of the IEP compared to other job readiness/placement initiatives? *Scale from 1-10 with free text box asking for justification of rating.*
20. How do you think the effectiveness of the program shifts over time or within different contexts? *Free text*
21. How do you think IEPs could be improved? *Free text*
22. Which elements of the IEP you would like to see more or less investment into? *Why?*
23. Is there anything else you would like to share about the program? *Free text*

Section 5: The impact of COVID-19

24. In your experience, in 2020 to what extent has your organisation's activities been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic? *Sliding scale of significant to not at all, free text box.*

25. How do you feel the pandemic will change your organisation and program delivery over the next 12 months? *Free text*
26. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us? *Free text*

Employers/providers Information Sheet – Indigenous Employment Programs evaluation

Introduction

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged to undertake an evaluation of three Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs) funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) – the Employment Parity Initiative (EPI), **Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs) and Tailored Employment Assistance Grants – Employment (TAEG)**.

In conducting this research, Deloitte Access Economics is undertaking extensive stakeholder engagement with various stakeholder groups, **including government representatives, representatives of the Indigenous Australian community, VTEC and TAEG providers, EPI partners, employers, and IEP participants. This stakeholder engagement process also involves consultations with representatives from each of the NIAA regional offices.**

This consultation will be a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview **with yourself held via teleconference.**

In support of these consultations, this document comprises a guide for our discussion with you and your staff. It includes:

- background information about the purpose of this research and topics to be covered in consultations.
- information regarding our consultation with you, including matters relating to privacy and confidentiality
- a short list of consultation questions which we will use to guide our conversation with you.

Purpose and topics for consultations

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the NIAA with evidence-based policy advice as to the effectiveness of the programs' implementation, whether it is meeting the programs' objectives and to inform policy makers about possible improvements and direction.

Consultations with regional NIAA offices have been designed to understand different regional contexts and to test the proposed stakeholder engagement approach for planned community consultations. Specifically, we are interested to hear your views in relation to the following topics:

- the context of the region you are based in
- any perspectives you have on the communities that could be selected for regional consultations
- recommendations for the way in which we may undertake regional consultations.

Privacy

Participation in the consultation is entirely voluntary. However, if you choose to participate, we will collect information about you including your name, contact details and organisation-related information. However, no identified information will be passed on to the NIAA. All information will be thematically analysed and de-identified for reporting purposes. If we have a quote or case study we wish to attribute to your consultation, we will seek permission from you prior to the report being sent to NIAA.

We will protect your personal information to the same standards that we use to protect our information at Deloitte. This information may be shared with an Australian transcription service, OutScribe Transcription Services, to assist in the transcription of sound recordings. Importantly, your information will be continued to be protected.

More information about how we will handle your personal information, how you can lodge a complaint, how you can contact us and how you may access and seek correction of your information are set out in our privacy policy at <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/legal/privacy.html>

For any other enquiries, you may contact Deloitte at privacy@deloitte.com.au

How we will protect your information

With your consent, we will be digitally recording parts of the consultations, with these recordings transcribed through internal services within Deloitte. We will also take notes to support the accurate collection of information. We will record names and site location on our notes that will be securely stored (hard copy) or in a secure computer file requiring password access (digital).

The purpose of recording the consultations is to ensure that we use the most accurate record of our consultations available, and to undertake analysis of consultation notes in bulk.

We will never reveal your name or your personal details. Due to the nature of this analysis, we may provide the name of your region and administrative area to the Department. Any summary consultations content, or direct quotations from the consultations that are made available to the Department will be anonymised, and we will take utmost care to ensure that other information in the consultation that could identify yourself is not revealed. However, we cannot guarantee that your opinions will not be identified (e.g. by your colleagues).

Any personal information that is provided to Deloitte Access Economics, such as name and contact details, will be destroyed following the completion of the project with the Department.

Other material relating to the project including sound recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after seven years.

Individual notes from the consultations or transcripts of the recorded sections of the interviews can be provided upon request.

Questions

For all other general enquiries about the IEP evaluation, please contact NIAA's evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au

CONSENT FORM FOR _____

RESEARCH TITLE: Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation

RESEARCHERS: Deloitte Access Economics

Deloitte Access Economics have given me information about the *Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation*.

I voluntarily consent to my participation in the evaluation and in doing so acknowledge that the details regarding the evaluation and my involvement have been explained to me.

I confirm that I:

- received the Participant Information Sheet
- have read, or had someone read to me in a language I understand, the Participant Information Sheet
- understand all information included in the Participant Information Sheet.

In accordance with this Participant Information sheet, I understand:

- what this project is about
- participating in an interview will assist the research team in evaluating the effectiveness of the Indigenous Employment Programs
- my information will be analysed by the evaluation team and used to inform the findings of a report
- this evaluation will be completed in December 2020
- I have been provided contact details for the research team and am able to ask questions/lodge complaints regarding the evaluation and my participation at any time
- I am satisfied with the information I have received
- **participation is voluntary**
- **I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time** and if I decide not to continue the interview after it has started, my information will not be used
- what participation will involve, including the nature and expected length of interviews, when interviews will take place and the timeframe of this evaluation (as described in the Participant Information Sheet and contact made by Deloitte)
- I will not be paid for participating in this evaluation
- due to the potential risks of participating, I am able to include a support person in the interview and am able to contact the external support agencies listed on the Participant Information Sheet
- that the **information I provide will remain confidential** and my name, contact details and organisation details will be collected for administrative purposes only. I have the right to access personal information. **Personal details, and any culturally sensitive information that is collected, will only be accessible to the research team** and such information will be destroyed after the completion of this project.
- If I give consent for the interview to be recorded, these recordings will be kept on a secure server for seven years, only accessible to the evaluation team, for the purposes of this evaluation. This consent to be recorded can be withdrawn at any time and I have the right to access this recording.
- I am able to contact AIATSIS regarding any ethical concerns at ethics@aiatsis.gov.au
- If I have any questions, concerns or complaints I can contact the evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au.

To be completed:

I consent to the interview being recorded Yes / No (please circle)

Consent to participate in the interview

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT: _____ DATE:/...../.....

DELOITTE ACCESS ECONOMICS USE ONLY

I, the researcher, have described the details on the Participant Information Sheet to the interviewee and believe he/she has understood and agreed to it.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Provider semi-structured interview questions

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I want to explore more with you about your organisation.
 - a) How would you describe your experience/role within your organisation?
 - b) What can you tell me about the history of your organisation?
 - c) Can you describe your organisation's involvement in the TAEG/VTEC/EPI program?
 - d) What can you tell me about your organisation's involvement in other employment programs?

Delivery

2. How would you describe your program and what it offers?
 - a) What are the main services you offer?
 - b) Who do you work with?
 - c) What types of pre-employment or ongoing employment support do you offer?
 - d) What training do you provide?
 - e) How do you collaborate or work with other providers?
 - f) What types of community engagement work do you do?
3. In your experience, what are the things that are difficult or useful when implementing your program?
 - a) Are there any impacts with the funding arrangements? Positive or negative?
 - b) How do you staff your program?
 - c) How do you build community awareness?

Outcomes

4. In your experience, what new skills do participants learn through the program?
 - a) What are the most important skills they learn?
 - b) What job specific skills do they learn?
 - c) How useful are the skills they learn?
5. What do you hear from program participants about their experiences in the program?
 - a) What do they say they enjoy?
 - b) What parts of the program do they not enjoy?
 - c) What other feedback do you get?
 - d) What's been your observations?
 - e) How do you think the programs are culturally safe?
6. What do you hear from employers about their experiences in the program?
 - a) What do they say they find useful for their company?
 - b) What parts of the program do they find difficult?
 - c) What other feedback do you get?
7. In your experience, are there any unintended consequences or outcomes of the program?
 - a) Does participating in the program mean that participants miss out on other activities?

Success factors & policy / program landscape

8. In your experience, what influences how successful a provider can be in delivering the program?
9. In your experience, what influences whether a participant has more or less success in the program?
10. In your experience, how is the TAEG/VTEC/EPI program different to other employment programs?
11. How much do you collaborate with other program providers and employers?
 - a) What activities do you usually collaborate on?
 - b) What influences the level of collaboration?
 - c) What opportunities for further collaboration are there?
12. What advice would you give another provider who is interested in participating in this program?
13. Given your first-hand experience with the program, how do you think it could be improved?

14. In your opinion, what does the ideal version of these Indigenous Employment Programs look like?

Employer/provider semi-structured interview

This is for EPI employers and TAEG providers that are also employers.

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I want to explore more with you about your organisation.
 - a) How would you describe your experience/role within your organisation?
 - b) How would you describe the history of your organisation?
 - c) How would you describe your organisation's involvement in the TAEG/VTEC/EPI program?
 - d) What can you tell me about your organisation's involvement in other employment programs?

Delivery

2. What can you tell us about how the IEP operates in your company, and what it offers?
 - a) What are the main services you offer?
 - b) Who do you work with?
 - c) What types of pre-employment or ongoing employment support do you offer?
 - d) What training do you provide?
 - e) How do you collaborate or work with other providers?
 - f) If you don't outsource your delivery of the program, what do you see as the benefits of managing the program internally?
 - g) Would you consider using a service provider for elements of program delivery? Why/why not?
 - h) What types of community engagement work do you do?
3. In your experience, what are the things that are difficult or useful when implementing your program?
 - a) Are there any impacts with the funding arrangements? Positive or negative?
 - b) How do you staff your program?
 - c) How do you build community awareness?

Outcomes

4. In your experience, what new skills do participants learn through the program?
 - a) What are the most important skills they learn?
 - b) What job specific skills do they learn?
 - c) How useful are the skills they learn?
5. What do you hear from program participants about their experiences in the program?
 - a) What do they say they enjoy?
 - b) What parts of the program do they not enjoy?
 - c) What other feedback do you get?
 - d) What's been your observations?
 - e) How do you think the programs are culturally safe?
6. What do you hear from your colleagues and company about their experiences in the program?
 - a) What do they say they find useful?
 - b) What parts of the program do they find challenging?
 - c) What other feedback do you get?
7. In your experience, are there any unintended consequences or outcomes of the program?
 - a) Does participating in the program mean that participants miss out on other activities?

Success factors & policy / program landscape

8. In your experience, what influences how successful a company can be in delivering the program?
9. In your experience, what influences whether a participant has more or less success in the program?
10. In your experience, how is the TAEG/VTEC/EPI program different to other employment programs?
11. How much do you collaborate with other companies or organisations?

- a) What activities do you usually collaborate on?
 - b) What influences the level of collaboration?
 - c) What opportunities for further collaboration are there?
12. What advice would you give another company who is interested in participating in this program?
13. Given your first-hand experience with the program, how do you think it could be improved?
14. In your opinion, what does the ideal version of these Indigenous Employment Programs look like?

Employer semi-structured interview questions

This is for employers that are not directly funded by NIAA

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I want to explore more with you about your organisation.
 - a) What can you tell me about yourself and your involvement with your organisation?
 - b) How would you describe the history of your organisation?
 - c) How would you describe the products or services you offer?
 - d) What's been your organisation's involvement in the TAEG/VTEC/EPI program?
 - e) Has your organisation ever been involved in similar employment programs?

Delivery

2. How would you describe your experiences with the TAEG/VTEC/EPI program?
 - a) What has been your experience working with providers?
 - b) What has been your experience working with program participants?
 - c) How did the people in your organisation feel about the program?
 - d) Can you tell us about a particularly positive or negative experience you had with the program?
3. From your perspective, what are the things that make implementing the program easier or more difficult?
 - a) Are there any impacts with the funding arrangements?
 - b) What kind of support do you receive from the program provider?

Cultural understanding & outcomes

4. In your experience, what is the programs impact on participants?
 - a) Do participants learn new skills?
 - b) Does the program have an impact on the wellbeing of participants?
 - c) What do you hear participants say about the program?
5. What impact has the program had on your organisation?
 - a) Have you changed the way you work?
 - b) Have you introduced any new Indigenous work practices?
 - c) What is the likelihood of your organisation employing Indigenous job seekers in the future?

Success factors

6. In your experience, what influences whether an employer has more or less success implementing the program?
7. In your experience, what influences whether a participant has more or less success in the program?
8. What advice would you give another employer who is interested in participating in this program?
9. Given your first-hand experience with the program, how do you think it could be improved?
10. In your opinion, what does the ideal version of these Indigenous Employment Programs look like?

Program participant/employee Information Sheet – Indigenous Employment Programs evaluation

Background to this evaluation

We (Deloitte Access Economics) are evaluating three programs (funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency):

- Employment Parity Initiative
- Vocational Training and Employment Centres
- Tailored Employment Assistance Grants – Employment.

As part of this research, we are speaking with a range of people who fund, deliver and/or participate in the program.

The evaluation will take place over 2020, with a final report delivered to the Department in December 2020.

Purpose of this information sheet

This information sheet is provided to let you know about the work we are doing.

Please sign the consent form below to show you have read and understood the information sheet and wish to participate in this interview.

If you would like to discuss this letter, please contact NIAA's evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au

This evaluation

What is the purpose of this evaluation?

The purpose of this evaluation is to explore how well the three programs are supporting employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The evaluation is an opportunity to hear opinions on what is and what is not working well about these programs.

The findings of this evaluation will be used to improve these, and other related programs, into the future.

Who will be conducting these evaluations?

We (Deloitte Access Economics) have a lot of experience assessing programs. We will also be working with the Gaimaragal Group on this research project, who have specific skills in storytelling and community interviewing.

Further information on Deloitte Access Economics can be found at the following link:

<https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/solutions/education-policy-analysis.html>.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency. No member of the research team will personally benefit from this research project (other than their ordinary wages).

Who will be consulted?

The following groups of people will be invited to interviews:

- Commonwealth government representatives
- State and territory government representatives
- Indigenous representatives
- Program providers
- Employers (including EPI Partners)
- Participants/employees.
- Other stakeholders who have an interest in the employment programs (including community members, other employment program providers and individuals who chose not to participate in the program).

Only people aged over 18 will be allowed to participate.

When will the evaluation be finalised?

The research findings will be provided to the NIAA in January 2021.

Your involvement

Why have I been invited to participate?

Each person has been invited to participate because we believe their opinions on Indigenous employment programs are important.

This research is an opportunity for people who have experienced the program to share their views on what is or is not working well. This will ensure that these, and other related programs, can be improved into the future.

Do I have to take part in this evaluation?

Participation in this research project is voluntary and you will not receive any payment for choosing to take part.

If you decide to take part, you will be given this Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to sign and a copy to keep.

If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. You may also withdraw consent at any time by contacting IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au. This will not affect your relationship with the NIAA or Deloitte Access Economics.

What is required of you?

Everyone will be invited to participate in a 90 minute group discussion (four to eight participants in each session) between July and September.

Some of these interviews will be held face-to-face, and some via teleconference – depending on your location and your preference. If the interview is held over teleconference, you will be given the opportunity to elect a platform that you are comfortable using. We are able to hold teleconferences via Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or over the phone.

For interviews that can be held face-to-face, Deloitte Access Economics is willing to work with you to schedule the interview at a time and location that is suitable for you.

What are the potential risks?

You may experience some emotional distress by taking part in the discussion. If you do so at any stage, you may ask for a break in the interview, skip the question, or end the interview without consequence. We may pause or conclude the discussion if we detect you are experiencing distress and encourage you to let the Deloitte Access Economics research team know if you have any concerns. We are also happy for a support person to be present with you during the interview, such as a case worker or carer.

If you want to talk to a confidential support service, you may like to contact one of the following organisations:

Lifeline, on 13 11 44 (24 hours / 7 days a week)

Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 (24 hours / 7 days a week).

Management of information collected

Do I need to complete a consent form?

If you decide to take part in an interview, you will be asked to sign a Consent Form to confirm you have read the participant information sheet, or have had it read to you by someone you trust and understand all content included within. You may ask questions about this interview by contacting the research team using contact details provided at the end of this letter.

What information will be collected?

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. With your consent, we will be digitally recording parts of the consultations, with these recordings transcribed through internal services within Deloitte. The purpose of recording the consultations is to ensure that we use the most accurate record of our consultations available, and to undertake analysis of consultation notes in bulk. These recordings will not be shared with any other party.

You also have the option of removing a statement after you've made it, or withdrawing your contributions.

How will information be stored?

Deloitte Access Economics will take every precaution to ensure that survey data is handled, stored, and accessed in a secure way that ensures the confidentiality of user information, and complies with all relevant privacy legislation. Deloitte Access Economics has secure data storage systems that are regularly monitored and maintained and suited to protecting confidential and sensitive information. We will store the consent form and record names and site location in our notes. This information will be securely stored (hard copy) or in a secure computer file requiring password access (digital).

Any personal information that is provided to Deloitte Access Economics, such as names on consent forms, will be destroyed following the completion of the project with the Department.

Other material relating to the project including sound recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after seven years.

Individual notes from the interviews or transcripts of the recorded sections of the interviews can be provided upon request.

How will confidentiality be protected?

All interviews will be confidential, and you should only provide information that you are comfortable sharing with Deloitte.

Deloitte will never reveal your name or your personal details. However, we may provide the name of your region and administrative area to NIAA. Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the consultations that are made available to the Department will be anonymised, and we will take utmost care to ensure that other information in the consultation that could identify yourself is not revealed.

Can I access data that is collected about me?

You have the right to request access to the information about you that is collected and stored by the research team. You also have the right to request that any information with which you disagree be corrected. Please inform the research team by contacting IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au

What if I wish to lodge a complaint or seek more information regarding privacy?

More information about how we will handle your personal information, how you can lodge a complaint, how you can contact us and how you may access and seek correction of your information are set out in our privacy policy at <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/legal/privacy.html>

For any other enquiries, you may contact Deloitte at privacy@deloitte.com.au

Ethics Committee Clearance

This research project has been approved by the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee.

Further Communication

For general enquiries about the IEP evaluation, or if you wish to make a complaint, please contact NIAA's evaluation team at IEPevaluation@deloitte.com.au. You may also wish to contact AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee at ethics@aiatsis.gov.au to discuss ethical concerns.

CONSENT FORM FOR _____

RESEARCH TITLE: Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation

RESEARCHERS: Deloitte Access Economics

Deloitte Access Economics have given me information about the *Indigenous Employment Programs Evaluation*.

I voluntarily consent to my participation in the evaluation and in doing so acknowledge that the details regarding the evaluation and my involvement have been explained to me.

I confirm that I:

- received the Participant Information Sheet
- have read, or had someone read to me in a language I understand, the Participant Information Sheet
- understand all information included in the Participant Information Sheet.

In accordance with this Participant Information sheet, I understand:

- what this project is about
- participating in an interview will assist the research team in evaluating the effectiveness of the Indigenous Employment Programs
- my information will be analysed by the evaluation team and used to inform the findings of a report
- this evaluation will be completed in December 2020
- I have been provided contact details for the research team and am able to ask questions/lodge complaints regarding the evaluation and my participation at any time
- I am satisfied with the information I have received
- **participation is voluntary**
- **I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time** and if I decide not to continue the interview after it has started, my information will not be used
- what participation will involve, including the nature and expected length of interviews, when interviews will take place and the timeframe of this evaluation (as described in the Participant Information Sheet and contact made by Deloitte)
- I will not be paid for participating in this evaluation
- due to the potential risks of participating, I am able to include a support person in the interview and am able to contact the external support agencies listed on the Participant Information Sheet
- that the **information I provide will remain confidential** and my name, contact details and organisation details will be collected for administrative purposes only. I have the right to access personal information. **Personal details, and any culturally sensitive information that is collected, will only be accessible to the research team** and such information will be destroyed after the completion of this project.
- If I give consent for the interview to be recorded, these recordings will be kept on a secure server for seven years, only accessible to the evaluation team, for the purposes of this evaluation. This consent to be recorded can be withdrawn at any time and I have the right to access this recording.
- I am able to contact AIATSIS regarding any ethical concerns at ethics@aiatsis.gov.au
- If I have any questions, concerns or complaints I can contact the evaluation team at IEPEvaluation@deloitte.com.au.

To be completed:

I consent to the interview being recorded Yes / No (please circle)

Consent to participate in the interview

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| NAME OF PARTICIPANT: _____ | |
| SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT: _____ | DATE:/...../..... |

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I, the researcher, have described the details on the Participant Information Sheet to the interviewee and believe he/she has understood and agreed to it.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Participant focus group questions

Background

1. In order to best understand your perspective, I'd like to get to know you a bit better.
 - a) How would you describe your prior experiences with employment or training?
 - b) What's been your experience, positive or negative, with employment or training programs?
2. How would you describe your experiences with the TAEG/VTEC/EPI program and other similar programs?
 - a) How long have you been involved in the program for?
 - b) Have you worked with any other employment providers before? For example, jobactive or CDP.
 - c) If you have experience with other providers, how do these programs compare?

Delivery and cultural understanding

3. How would you describe your experience with the program?
 - a) What was your experience like with the provider you worked with?
 - b) What was your experience like with the employer you worked with?
 - c) How did you get on with the other participants?
 - d) Can you tell us a bit about a particularly positive or negative experience you had with the program?
 - e) What kind of input or decisions did you get to make as part of the program?

Outcomes

4. What kind of an impact has the program had on you?
 - a) Can you tell us about your experience finding employment through the program?
 - b) What aspects of the program were really useful or not useful at all?
 - c) What do you enjoy or not enjoy about the work you are currently doing?
 - d) What positive or negative impact did the program have on your overall wellbeing?
 - e) Is there any impact we have not discussed so far?

Success factors & policy / program landscape

5. What advice would you give to another participant who is interested in being involved in one of these programs?
6. Given your first-hand experience with the program, how do you think it could be improved?
7. In your opinion, what does the ideal Indigenous Employment Programs look like?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience?

Appendix F Draft regional consultation sample (location, TAEG and VTEC providers)

| NIAA Region | Location | Managing Office | Program | Provider Name | Provider Activities | Contract Manager | Remoteness | Activity Level | Milestone completion | Indigenous Ownership |
|----------------------------------|----------|--------------------|---------|------------------------------------|--|-------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Greater Western Australia | Perth | Greater WA - Perth | TAEG | Ngalla Maya Aboriginal Corporation | <input type="checkbox"/> Ngalla Maya - WA Prison Reintegration Program <input type="checkbox"/> Ngalla Maya - Indigenous Prison Reintegration Program -2019 | Zara Pitt | Metropolitan | High | Low | Yes |
| | | Greater WA - Perth | TAEG | Newmont Boddington gold | <input type="checkbox"/> NBG -Gnaalla Work Ready Program | Michelle Depiazzi | Metropolitan | low | Low | No |
| | | Greater WA - Perth | VTEC | The Wirrpanda Foundation | <input type="checkbox"/> VTEC The Wirrpanda Foundation Limited 2018 | Jane Arlow | Metropolitan | High | High | Yes |
| South Australia | Adelaide | SA - Adelaide | VTEC | Tapa Warpulayl-itya | <input type="checkbox"/> VTEC - i-itya Pty Ltd | Kylie Cederblad | Metropolitan | Low | Low | No |

| NIAA Region | Location | Managing Office | Program | Provider Name | Provider Activities | Contract Manager | Remoteness | Activity Level | Milestone completion | Indigenous Ownership |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---|--|--------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| VIC TAS | Melbourne | VIC TAS - Melbourne | TAEG | AFL Sportsready | <input type="checkbox"/> AFL Sportsready JLEP National Traineeships 2017-2019 | Janelle Searle | Metropolitan | Low | High | No |
| | | VIC TAS - Melbourne | VTEC | Goal Indigenous Services | <input type="checkbox"/> VTEC - GOAL Indigenous Services Vic/Tas 2019-2020 | Janelle Searle | Metropolitan | Low | TBC | Yes |
| Gulf and North QLD | Mt. Isa | Gulf and North QLD - Mount Isa | TAEG | Dugalunji Aboriginal Coporation | <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Industries and Infrastructure Program | Matthew Galvin | Regional | Low | Low | Yes |
| Eastern NSW | Sydney | Eastern NSW - Sydney | TAEG | Cbeyond Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Pathology Employment Pathways Project | Alain Du Buisson-Perrine | Metropolitan | Low | TBC | No |
| | | Eastern NSW - Sydney | VTEC | NSW Aboriginal Land Council | <input type="checkbox"/> VTEC NSWALC Employment and Training - Sydney and Illawarra | Judy Johnson | Metropolitan | Low | Low | Yes |
| | | Eastern NSW - Sydney | VTEC | Yarn'n Aboriginal Employment Services | <input type="checkbox"/> VTEC Yarn'n Sydney | Connor Chambers | Metropolitan | High | High | No |
| Western NSW | Dubbo | Western NSW - Orange | VTEC | Regional Enterprise Development Institute | <input type="checkbox"/> VTEC - MPREC - Western NSW <input type="checkbox"/> VTEC 2018 Murdi Paaki Enterprise Corporation Ltd Western NSW | Gargi Ganguly | Regional | High | Low | Yes |
| | | Western NSW - Dubbo | TAEG | Fletcher International Exports | <input type="checkbox"/> Fletcher Aboriginal Cultural Employment Strategy (FACES) | Carrin Parkins | Regional | Low | Low | No |
| Central Australia | Alice Springs | Central Australia - Alice Springs | TAEG | Centre for Appropriate technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Centre for Appropriate Technologies (CAT) Direct Employment | Renton Kelly | Remote | Low | TBC | Yes |

| NIAA Region | Location | Managing Office | Program | Provider Name | Provider Activities | Contract Manager | Remoteness | Activity Level | Milestone completion | Indigenous Ownership |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|---|-------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | | Central Australia - Alice Springs | VTEC | Saltbush Social Enterprises | □ VTEC Saltbush | Dianne Bramich | Remote | High | Low | No |
| Far North QLD | Cairns | Far North QLD - Cairns | VTEC | Australian Training Works | □ VTEC - Australian Training Works Far North Qld | Glenys Huyser | Regional | Low | TBC | Yes |
| | | Far North QLD - Cairns | TAEG | Lone Star Company | □ Lone Star- Film and Television Employment Project | Glenys Huyser | Regional | Low | TBC | No |
| South Queensland | Brisbane | South QLD - Brisbane | VTEC | Yourtown | □ Yourtown - School Based Traineeship Project - 2018 | Katherine Jurd | Metropolitan | Low | Low | No |
| | | South QLD - Brisbane | VTEC | Indigenous Workstars | VTEC -Indigenous Workstars VTEC- Central Qld & Sunshine Coast | Cathy Irwin | Metropolitan | Low | Low | No |
| Top End and Tiwi Islands | Darwin | Central Australia - Alice Springs | VTEC | Karen Sheldon Group | VTEC Karen Sheldon NT | Dianne Bramich | Metropolitan | Low | Low | No |
| Kimberley | Kimberley | Greater WA - Perth | VTEC | Group Training Australia | VTEC NAEN National 2018 - 2019 Kimberley Region | Michelle Depiazzi | Remote | Low | Low | No |
| Arnhem Land | TBC | | | | | | | | | |

Limitation of our work

General use restriction

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