

# Executive summary

## Context

Despite broad agreement that tailored, person-centred case management is a key component of employment outcomes, there remains limited evidence about how it can be consistently delivered within Australia's employment services system.

The Building Agency and Trust (BAT) project sought to address this gap by implementing and testing an evidence-informed approach to person-centred case management within current Workforce Australia (WFA) employment services. The project translated broad principles of person-centred practice into practical, observable behaviours that were applied by employment consultants in real-world settings.

Conducted prior to the recent Australian Government service reform announcements, the pilot aligns strongly with the policy shift toward more tailored, responsive and person-centred services.<sup>5</sup> As reform now progresses, understanding how person-centred practice can move from policy aspiration to practical service delivery has become increasingly important.

This report provides timely implementation guidance for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), employment service providers and wider stakeholders. Alongside existing work, it contributes to the design of a more consistent, adaptive and effective employment services system by identifying the conditions required to unlock person-centred practice for job seekers.<sup>5</sup>

## The challenge

WFA has historically balanced competing priorities. On the one hand, employment services are expected to move job seekers into employment quickly and ensure participation requirements are met. On the other hand, they are expected to provide tailored support that addresses individual needs and promotes sustainable employment outcomes.<sup>6</sup> This tension has constrained frontline staff's ability to provide flexible, tailored support and increasingly eroded trust among job seekers. Although person-centred support is frequently cited in policy and guidance, evidence on how to operationalise it consistently and effectively within existing services is lacking.

## The intervention

The pilot tested a scalable, person-centred case management approach in WFA services. It used evidence-informed, operationalised behaviours (the 'ASPIRE' Framework) to improve the quality of interpersonal engagement between employment consultants and job seekers.

In addition to the Framework, the intervention included training for employment consultants, a practical toolkit for holistic goal setting, and modest environmental changes to reflect the approach. The intervention drew on decades of existing evidence on behaviour change and quality engagement across a range of settings. It was co-developed and refined with subject matter experts, 20 job seekers and 21 employment consultants through a series of collaborative activities. In total, it is estimated that 100 stakeholders were consulted throughout the process, including guidance from an expert Steering Committee.

## The evaluation

To evaluate our intervention, we ran a pilot with the following characteristics:

- **Impact and process evaluation:** We assessed how the intervention was implemented in practice, and explored its potential impact on job seekers' psychological needs, wellbeing and employment progress, as well as employment consultants' confidence in delivering person-centred support and job satisfaction.
- **Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial (cluster RCT):** We partnered with two WFA providers, each supplying two well-matched job centres in Greater Sydney. One job centre within each provider was randomly assigned to receive the intervention, while the other was randomly assigned to a control condition.
- **Mixed-methods:** We collected data via a mixture of surveys, interviews and focus groups with job seekers, employment consultants, job centre senior managers, and administrative caseload data.
- **Panel study with rolling recruitment:** We collected data across six months from November 2025 to April 2026. The same cohort of job seekers and employment consultants had the opportunity to complete measures at multiple time points. The final sample sizes and demographics for all research activities and cohorts are provided in the [Appendix](#).

<sup>5</sup> Ministers of the Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio. (2026). Minister's Media Centre, Ending one-size-fits-all employment services. <https://ministers.dewr.gov.au/rishworth/ending-one-size-fits-all-employment-services>

<sup>6</sup> Whelan, N., Murphy, M. P., & McGann, M. (2021). The enabling role of employment guidance in contemporary public employment services: A work-first to life-first typology. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 49(2), 200–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2021.187937>

# Summary of findings

Overall, the findings suggest that the intervention successfully operationalised person-centred practice (Finding 1) and emphasised the importance of relational mechanisms for engagement (Finding 2). There were some promising effects on early indicators of change (Finding 3), including job seekers' psychological needs satisfaction, and employment consultants' confidence in delivering person-centred practice.

However, the uneven implementation of person-centred practice within existing service settings (Finding 4) and the need to complement person-centred case management with practical employment and holistic support (Finding 5) highlight the limits of practice change alone.

**1. Person-centred practice can be operationalised through clear, observable behaviours**

**2. Relationships are a critical mechanism for engagement**

**3. The intervention improved early leading indicators**

**4. System settings create a restrictive operating environment that constrains the consistent delivery of person-centred services**

**5. Strong relationships must be matched with practical employment support and holistic support**

**6. Creating a more adaptive employment services system will require stronger support for innovation and learning**

Overall, the findings point to a disconnect between the policy aspiration of person-centred practice and its consistent implementation within Workforce Australia's operating environment. To align policy intent with frontline practice for upcoming reform implementation, we recommend that the government consider enabling experimentation for effective system settings, defining quality practice, workforce development and system design around consistent trusting relationships. Recommendations include:

**Recommendation 1:**

**Enable experimentation to unlock effective system settings**

How? Create a permanent 'test and learn' infrastructure within DEWR to enable iterative, evidence-informed testing of changes, ensuring reforms are validated in practice before system-wide rollout.

**Recommendation 2:**

**Define and invest in workforce development to unlock effective practice**

How? Develop national practice standards for person-centred case management and define and invest in workforce capability through an embedded national capability framework to strengthen vocational, relational and holistic support.

**Recommendation 3:**

**Consider continuity of trusted relationships to unlock quality engagement**

How? Design service structures, transitions, and performance settings to preserve stable relationships between job seekers and employment consultants, recognising continuity as a core driver of engagement and effective support.

