

Employment services: good practice guide

Purpose and scope of this document

Given the large number and diversity of labour market programs in Victoria, this resource has been developed to improve members' knowledge of best practice in employment services. This information will assist community housing organisations (CHOs) to identify effective employment programs and connect with those best suited for their renters. This resource is a component of a larger CHIA Vic project exploring renter employment pathways and assisting CHOs to maximise their social impacts.

In looking at promoting tenant employment outcomes, CHIA is responding to: 1) interest among members in ensuring that their tenants benefit fully from secure housing, including via greater economic participation, financial wellbeing, and connection with their communities; 2) a need for CHOs to maximise rental revenues as part of their core business activities; and, 3) the growing focus on social outcomes for target groups in commissioning processes, including social procurement. These issues support the case CHOs seeking to develop employment pathways.



What is good practice in employment services?

By providing stable accommodation at sub-market rates, community housing organisations provide a strong foundation to improve renter outcomes – including by supporting people to take up work, maximise their incomes, and improve their financial wellbeing. For employment services, the following activities are noted to be most important for sustained outcomes:

- Complex barriers require intensive services, tailored to each jobseeker. Such flexible, 'wraparound' services are a key step in addressing disadvantage and (where needed) should focus on both vocational and non-vocational barriers
- Evidence demonstrates that training that is targeted, accessible and has a focus on work-ready and/or industry-specific skills is most effective in promoting long-term employment outcomes
- Jobseekers with high levels of disadvantage are unlikely to shift seamlessly into employment, even with preparation. Some people may require jobs to be redesigned (i.e. job carving) or for there to be an intermediary to manage workplace needs or issues that could lead to conflict
- Ongoing mentoring and on-the-job supports are of particular importance. Likewise, strong engagement with employers and post-placement supports ensure both employers and employees have the assistance they need to make jobs 'stick' and support longer-term outcomes.¹

Each of these elements will vary depending on the needs of individual jobseekers. However, mainstream employment services often focus on job placements over coordinated, holistic support. CHOs should look to programs that offer variations on the above supports to ensure the best outcomes for tenants.

¹ Borland J, Considine M, Kalb G and Ribar D (2016), *What are best-practice programs for jobseekers facing high barriers*

to employment?, Policy Brief no. 4/16, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research: 10.

In summary, effective employment supports can be characterised by the below practice elements:

TIMING / PHASE	CHARACTERISTICS
Initial engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timely, in-depth and personalised ▪ ‘Joined up’ with other services (e.g. ‘warm’ handovers) ▪ Assesses strengths as well as barriers
Assessment & planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forward looking (e.g. identifies goals, strengths, actions) ▪ Improve work readiness or link to education / training ▪ In own words (e.g. personal statements and commitments) ▪ ‘Contractual’ – works two/both ways ▪ Includes success measures (i.e. know how goals have been met)
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-directed and directed job search ▪ Job matching and job brokering activities ▪ Face-to-face (but not only this) ▪ Access to additional resources with the right supports ▪ Group and individual support – confidence, preparation, application ▪ ‘Better off in work’ calculations and financial planning
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post-placement support with the right hand-off/s ▪ Regular and frequent (depending on needs of participant) ▪ Forward looking, supportive – what will you do next? what do you need? ▪ Comprehensive review points (e.g. every 2-3 months)

Figure 1: Elements of best-practice employment supports. Derived from: Wilson et al (2015), *Worklessness, welfare and social housing: A report for the National Housing Federation*, CESI, London UK: 59, et al.

What services can I start referring renters to?

Community housing tenants are entitled to access mainstream employment services. These services are available to all jobseekers, wherever they live, but can differ based on individual circumstances. All employment services work with jobseekers experiencing some degree of labour market disadvantage. The key difference is service/s offered (e.g. targeted v universal, specialist v generalist, place-based v state-wide).

Multiple services are available in Victoria, including Jobs Victoria employment services, Workforce Australia (formerly Jobactive), Skills and Jobs Centres, Reconnect, Learn Locals, Work and Learning Centres, Social Housing Employment Program (SHEP), and others. These programs provide employment pathways for smaller organisations and at scale. Some of these services, like Jobs Victoria, are considered ‘non competitive’ and can support jobseekers who are also engaged with other employment services (e.g. Workforce Australia). Employment solutions are available both for smaller organisations and at scale

Local, personalised services that recognise individual circumstances are key to sustained employment outcomes.² Most employment supports fall somewhere on a 'continuum' based on complexity and needs:

- Information and linkages services support jobseekers to understand and navigate the employment services system. Although interactions may be short-term or transactional, information and navigation services are a soft entry point for jobseekers looking for where to go. The Victorian Government also funds **Skills and Jobs Centres** and **Reconnect** which can provide advice on education and training options to assist jobseekers navigate career change, employment barriers, and other issues.
- Job search activities can look different depending on the program and provider, but generally help participants source jobs and connect with employment opportunities. An example of this is the former **Jobs Victoria Online Hub** or Commonwealth digital service model, where jobseekers can manage their service and/or search for advertised jobs via a central 'jobs board'. As opposed to visiting multiple sites or engaging with multiple different employers, these services simplify job search and/or job advertising processes.
- At an intermediary level there are job matching and upskilling initiatives. These initiatives are targeted to specific job opportunities and/or sectors and may be time limited. An example is support for a jobseeker to gain a forklift license in order to become a forklift driver. Employment services may also support jobseekers to engage with formal education or training. In these instances, there is typically either a clear need for those skills or an opportunity gap that can only be resolved through education. Supports may also be shared across employment services and education and training. **Skills and Jobs Centres**, for example, are embedded within the skills and training system (i.e. TAFEs) to connect people with jobs and other opportunities.
- At the end of the spectrum are different forms of case management, targeted towards jobseekers with longer experiences of unemployment or higher barriers. Less intensive approaches rely on digital platforms. For example, anyone who receives the JobSeeker Payment is required to report job-search activities and income via the Commonwealth's digital platform.³
- Finally, some services, like **Jobs Victoria Mentors** or community employment programs like **Work and Learning Centres**, provide tailored case management for jobseekers with high barriers to participation. These services typically operate on a face-to-face and individual basis. Programs and providers offering a combination of services are better equipped to support jobseekers and their distinct needs.

Further information and resources

CHIA Victoria is committed to supporting CHOs to maximise their social impacts, including through stronger employment referral networks and sharing of best practice. In 2022-23, CHIA will continue to support members to understand and strengthen employment pathways for tenants. This work will include:

- Developing policy and practice resources
- Hosting sector briefings and training
- Creating opportunities for CHOs to connect with local employment service providers
- Identifying and collating information to support tenant referrals.

CHIA is keen to provide support and information that is relevant for members, and to effectively represent the sector's priorities to Homes Victoria and other areas of government. If there is any other support needed or if you have feedback on specific resources that are a priority for your organisation, please contact James Finnis, Policy Officer Social Outcomes, via james.finnis@chiavic.com.au or CHIA Victoria via admin@chiavic.com.au

² Lynch L (2016), *Linking tenants to employment, training and education*, CHIA NSW, Sydney: 8-9.

³ It is important to observe that experiences of mainstream Commonwealth employment services can be negative, as these services may have higher caseloads, less tailoring, or a more generic service offering. Commonwealth employment services are also closely aligned with welfare compliance activities. Emphasis on digital servicing can disregard the 'digital divide' and any jobseekers who are less digitally skilled, supported, or who face barriers due to poverty or other disadvantage. It is worth noting that the new Commonwealth employment services system, Workforce Australia, commits to greater individual supports.