



Submission: **Shaping the future of employment services**

July 2026

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Acknowledgement of Country

The National Rural Women's Coalition pays our respects to the ancestors, elders and especially the women who are a part of the longest living civilisation on earth, the First Nation peoples of Australia. We acknowledge their strength and resilience. They are the custodians of the land, and we celebrate together their right to continue with cultural practices on the land and water where they live.

About the National Rural Women's Coalition

The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) is a national advocacy organisation representing women in rural, regional and remote Australia. We advance gender equity in health, education and economic opportunity by amplifying the voices of rural, regional and remote women and ensuring their unique challenges, such as geographic isolation, limited service access and economic disparity, are recognised and addressed through policy advocacy and targeted programs.

NRWC works to reduce systemic inequities affecting women, children, families and communities across rural, regional and remote Australia. We recognise that gender inequality is shaped by entrenched power structures that disproportionately impact rural women, and we advocate for targeted policy reform that dismantles structural barriers and promotes genuine social and economic inclusion.

Introduction

The NRWC makes this submission to the consultation on the design of the future mainstream employment services. Our submission supports the proposed move away from a standardised, compliance-led model towards more tailored and sustainable employment pathways. However, geography and gender must be treated as core design settings. Rural, regional and remote (rural) women can be work ready yet unable to take available work because care, schools, transport, training, housing, telecommunications or appropriate jobs are unavailable. These are not simply personal barriers; they are features of local labour markets and service systems that providers must help resolve and report to government.

We thank the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations for the opportunity to provide a submission informed by the lived experience of rural, regional and remote women, and we acknowledge and thank these women for generously sharing their expertise and experiences.

Employment services in rural areas

Rural and gender responsive design must be central to employment services reform because labour market conditions and access to support vary substantially by location. Persistent disadvantage is experienced in many rural labour markets. Jobs and Skills Australia assessed 38% of regional labour markets as below average or poor in March 2026, with all six remote SA4¹ labour markets rated poor.²

Women also enter this system from a comparatively disadvantaged labour market position. In May 2026, women's labour force participation was 63.3%, compared with 70.8% for men.³ Rural women experience this gender inequality alongside distance, limited transport, weaker digital connectivity, caring responsibilities and fewer nearby services. In 2025, difficulty accessing service providers was reported by 35% of people in remote Australia, 34% in outer regional Australia and 28% in inner regional Australia, compared with 24% in major cities.⁴ Whilst this is a general service access measure rather than an employment measure, it illustrates that geographical and service disadvantage should be accounted when designing any national system.

¹ **Note:** A remote SA4 is a large Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical region that groups small, localised labour markets around regional towns according to their geographic, social and economic similarities, enabling labour-force activity across regional and remote areas to be reported.

ABS. (2021). *Statistical Area Level 4*. Edition 3, July 2021 – June 2026. Accessed on 30 July at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs/edition-4-july-2026-june-2031/main-structure-and-greater-capital-city-statistical-areas/statistical-area-level-4>

² Jobs and Skills Australia. (2026). *Regional Labour Market Indicator (RLMI) results—March 2026*. Australian Government. Accessed on 30 July at https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-06/rlmi_results_-_march_2026.pdf

³ ABS. (2025). *Labour Force, Australia, May 2025*. Accessed on 30 July 2026 at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2025>

⁴ ABS. (2026). *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2025*. Accessed on 30 July 2026 at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release>

Guiding Questions

Three service streams to respond to different needs

1. What are the key factors that should place a person in online and brief intervention services versus targeted provider services versus intensive services?

Stream placement needs to reflect what a participant requires to obtain and retain suitable work, not digital ability or how long she has been unemployed. A rural woman may have strong skills and recent experience but require human brokerage because there are few local vacancies, no public transport, incompatible school hours or no reliable internet.

Assessment should consider:

- skills, qualifications, work history, goals, confidence and need for career transition
- availability, quality, security and hours of work within a realistic travel area
- access to a vehicle, licence, public or community transport and the full cost and time of travel
- childcare, before/after school and vacation care, school location and transport, elder or disability care, and the unpredictability of caring demands
- actual mobile, internet, device and private workspace access
- health, disability, housing, family violence, financial pressure and other intersecting circumstances
- whether remote or hybrid work is feasible, and what skills, equipment or connectivity would be required
- the need for continuity when moving between service areas.

2. What types of support should be offered under each of the service streams?

Stream 1 should provide more than self-service job search. It should offer rapid access to a named adviser for short interventions, including career transition, digital support, remote work preparation and employer brokerage. Stream 2 should provide active coaching, role specific training pathways, practical support and sustained employer engagement. Stream 3 should provide lower caseload case management, coordinated supports, mentoring and nonlinear progression, with community based delivery where appropriate. Movement between streams must be simple, participant informed and triggered by changed circumstances, stalled progress, repeated unsuitable referrals or service failure.

Quality initial assessments and triaging

3. What factors should be considered to support the development of a new, high-quality assessment and triaging process?

4. What information should be collected during the assessment process to support better identification of barriers to employment and triaging to the right service?

5. What factors or circumstances should result in a participant moving between service streams?

Assessment should be conversational, strengths based and trauma informed. Participants should understand how their information will be used, and repeated disclosure should be minimised. The process should distinguish between a participant's personal circumstances, local service and infrastructure gaps, and employer or labour market conditions. This would reduce the risk of women being assessed as not job ready when the main barriers are the absence of transport, care, training or other essential services.

The assessment should record both whether a barrier exists and how it affects a person's ability to work. For example, it is not enough to record that childcare is available; the assessment should also consider available days and hours, waiting lists, travel time, cost, reliability and school holiday coverage. Similar detail may be needed for school transport, internet access, health services and training. Reassessment should be available when requested and following significant changes or events, such as job loss, a breakdown in care arrangements, relocation, repeated unsuccessful applications or when agreed provider support has not been delivered. This approach is consistent with Recommendation 29 of the Rebuilding Employment Services Report, which supported a more comprehensive assessment of participants' aspirations and barriers rather than relying on a basic profile alone.⁵

Automated scoring may assist the process, but stream allocation should also involve professional judgement and an opportunity for participant review. Participants should be able to request a different stream or provider without first having to experience service failure. Assessment information should follow the participant across services under a tell it once approach, with appropriate privacy protections. Providers should also record systemic barriers separately so recurring gaps can be reported to government. National reporting should show stream allocation, transfers, service use and outcomes by sex, remoteness and relevant intersecting characteristics.

Introducing an Employment Goal Plan

6. What elements will be important to capture in the Employment Goal Plan?

7. How can the system encourage effective use of the Employment Goal Plan by participants and providers to ensure it is meaningful, timely and relevant?

The Employment Goal Plan should operate as a reciprocal pathway agreement rather than a renamed compliance document. It should capture the participant's employment goals, strengths, qualifications and transferable skills; caring responsibilities and the practical conditions under which work is possible; identified personal and structural barriers; agreed activities; funding and referrals; review dates; and any unresolved barriers requiring escalation. Participant commitments should include reasonable actions such as undertaking agreed training, preparing applications, attending interviews, maintaining communication and meeting workplace expectations.

The plan should also clearly record what the provider has agreed to deliver. Provider requirements should include identifying suitable local, remote and hybrid opportunities; undertaking employer brokerage; discussing workable hours, job design and flexibility with employers where feasible; arranging relevant training and referrals; assisting with transport,

⁵ House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services: Final report on Workforce Australia Employment Services*. Parliament of Australia. Accessed on 30 July 2026 at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia/Report

digital access, equipment or other approved costs; coordinating support services; providing post-placement assistance; and reporting recurring local service or infrastructure gaps.

The plan should be developed jointly, written in clear language, visible to the participant and reviewed whenever circumstances or employment goals change. Provider actions should be measurable and auditable, and failure to deliver agreed support should be considered when reviewing participant obligations and provider performance. Recommendation 40 similarly proposed an individual plan that records the support the provider will deliver, reinforcing that responsibilities should be genuinely mutual.⁶

A new approach to mutual obligations

8. How do we change the way that providers and participants engage with mutual obligations to focus on positive engagement that helps people move towards employment?

Mutual obligations should be proportionate, useful and connected to the agreed pathway. Applications for work that cannot be reached, is incompatible with unavoidable caring responsibilities or is plainly unsuitable should not be required merely to meet a numerical target. Participants should be responsible for genuine engagement; providers should be responsible for meaningful support. A participant should not be penalised for the absence of childcare, school transport, telecommunications, local training or suitable vacancies, or for a provider's failure to act. Recommendations 56 and 60 support broader, individually tailored requirements and activities that genuinely assist progress towards employment.⁷

Volunteering may be a meaningful activity and already has a place within employment services, but it must not be represented as paid employment or used to replace proper jobs. Rural volunteering is particularly significant. In 2025, 34% of people in remote Australia, 28% in outer regional and 27% in inner regional areas volunteered through an organisation, compared with 21% in major cities.⁸ The system should recognise skills and community contribution, reimburse reasonable participation costs, protect genuine choice and help convert essential, ongoing community functions into paid or shared roles where viable. Recommendation 49 also proposed a voluntary and paid Work in the Community trial in regional areas and places with entrenched disadvantage.⁹ This supports converting some essential community functions into paid roles rather than relying indefinitely on unpaid labour.

New approach to employer engagement

10. How can employment services best support small to medium enterprises?

12. What supports do employers need to recruit and retain people?

Small rural businesses often lack dedicated human resources capability and operate in thin labour markets. The gap between metropolitan and regional job vacancy fill rates widened to

⁶ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

⁷ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

⁸ ABS. (2026). *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2025*.

⁹ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

4.6 percentage points in the March quarter 2026.¹⁰ The future system should operate as a practical local workforce development service.

Employment services should also help employers broaden their understanding of who may be suitable for a role. In some rural industries, recruitment can still be influenced by traditional assumptions about gender, age, caring responsibilities, physical capacity or the need for unrestricted full-time availability. This can result in capable women being overlooked, including women returning to work, older women and women with transferable skills from other industries or unpaid caring and community roles. Providers should work with employers to focus recruitment on the genuine requirements of the job, distinguish essential capabilities from skills that can be trained, and consider whether duties, hours or recruitment practices can be adjusted without compromising operational needs.

A provider's employer service should include:

- At least one accountable local contact who understands the workplace, duties, hours, location, seasonal variation, essential requirements and training needed.
- High quality screening and matching based on genuine interest, transport, care, physical and digital requirements, licences, safety readiness and work expectations.
- Realistic job previews, workplace visits or role demonstrations so candidates understand the work before accepting it.
- Help to write accurate job descriptions, separate essential from trainable requirements, advertise through existing private platforms and local networks, shortlist and onboard.
- Support for employers to review recruitment criteria and challenge assumptions about who can perform a role, including by using inclusive job descriptions, skills based assessment and consideration of transferable skills.
- Role specific preparation, including licences, tickets, equipment, communication skills, digital systems and foundational safety literacy.
- Supported and lawful staged entry, paid trials where appropriate, mentoring, wage subsidy navigation and early post-placement intervention. Where appropriate, this could include properly designed paid work experience with structured training and a gradual increase in hours based on capacity, as proposed in Recommendation 55.¹¹
- Assistance to pool or share workers across compatible businesses, create regional labour pools, combine small roles or use trusted intermediaries where one business cannot offer sufficient hours.
- Ongoing support for up to 52 weeks, including help to resolve transport, care, training, performance and communication problems. Recommendation 42 proposed career progression assistance, which is relevant for women entering low paid, entry level or insecure work who need support to move into more secure employment.¹²

Family friendly conditions

¹⁰ Jobs and Skills Australia. (2026). *Occupation Shortage Report: March quarter 2026*. Australian Government. Accessed on 30 July 2026 at <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/download/19956/occupation-shortage-report-march-2026/4025/occupation-shortage-report-march-2026/pdf>

¹¹ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

¹² Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

Providers should be required to explore mutually workable arrangements such as school hours work, part time or staged hours, predictable rosters, job sharing, adjusted start and finish times, remote or hybrid delivery and flexibility during school holidays. This is not an entitlement to conditions that a business cannot operationally or financially provide. The provider's role is to understand the job, identify what is fixed and what is negotiable, and broker a sustainable match rather than assume either the worker or employer must absorb all constraints.

Remote and hybrid work

For rural participants, job search should not stop at commuting distance. Where work can reasonably be performed remotely or in hybrid form, providers should be required to develop and pursue that pathway. This includes identifying transferable skills, preparing the participant for remote work, addressing equipment and connectivity, searching nationally across established private recruitment systems, approaching employers about location flexible delivery, and agreeing clear expectations for communication, supervision, hours, privacy and performance.

Responsibility should be shared. The provider must demonstrate reasonable brokerage and practical support. The jobseeker must undertake relevant training, apply for suitable roles, participate in employer discussions, communicate and meet reasonable remote work expectations. Neither should be held responsible for matters outside their control, such as the absence of vacancies, employer decisions or telecommunications failure. Provider performance should recognise documented effort and service quality rather than crediting a referral to independent online search.

Safety and work readiness

Mining, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, construction, transport and other rural industries can involve significant risk and require workers who can manage themselves responsibly. Employment services should provide foundational work health and safety preparation and assess whether a participant can follow instructions, participate in induction, use protective equipment, communicate uncertainty, report hazards and incidents, and manage fatigue and fitness for work. Jobseekers must accept responsibility for their own safe conduct and the safety of others. This does not transfer the employer's legal responsibility to provide a safe workplace, job specific instruction, training, supervision and risk controls.

9. How can employment services best partner with industry and large employers?

Partnerships with industry and large employers can create clearer employment pathways for rural women, particularly in agriculture, mining and renewable energy. This could include local recruitment, targeted training, paid work experience, mentoring and support for women entering industries in which they remain underrepresented. Large employers could also offer a broader range of roles, including professional, administrative, technical, part time, school hours, remote and hybrid positions, rather than assuming regional employment is limited to full time operational work. Industry partnerships also provide an opportunity to challenge entrenched assumptions about women's suitability for operational, technical and leadership roles and promote skills based, inclusive recruitment and progression practices.

Mining and renewable energy projects should be expected to demonstrate how they will recruit, train and retain people from nearby towns before relying heavily on fly-in fly-out workforces. Where employers bring in large external workforces without adequate accommodation planning, they can increase pressure on already limited local housing and make it harder for residents, including women seeking work, to remain in the community. Employment service partnerships should therefore connect major employers with local providers, councils, training organisations and community services so that workforce planning supports local employment, housing capacity and long term regional development.

11. What is the value of having a government job matching platform? How can we increase this value?

The submission does not support expanding a separate government job platform or duplicating private and local systems. Providers should use established recruitment platforms, local job boards, councils, chambers of commerce, Regional Development Australia bodies, industry organisations and specialist remote work recruiters, supported by interoperability and simple referral arrangements. Recommendation 45 supports employer brokerage, job design and job carving, in-employment support and collection of local labour market intelligence, while Recommendation 46 supports greater use of intermediaries and bridging services.¹³ This submission supports those functions through capable contracted providers, private platforms and existing local and industry networks rather than a new public service delivery structure.

Delivery of high-quality services

13. What qualifications and experience should be expected of frontline staff within each stream?

Frontline capability should match the stream. Staff in targeted and intensive services should have demonstrated competence in career development, case management, trauma informed practice, rural service navigation, employer engagement, vocational pathways and the safe handling of sensitive information. Rural consultants also require knowledge of local industries, travel and care constraints, remote work pathways and community services. Qualifications should be accompanied by support, continuing development and reasonable workloads. Recommendation 15 also called for frontline competencies to account for regional variations and labour market contexts.¹⁴

Caseloads should be lower and weighted in rural and remote delivery. High caseloads leave staff less time to connect participants with supports or contact employers. In 2016, ratios of frontline staff increased from 1:100 in 2008 to 1:148 in 2016, while most Workforce Australia tender commitments were 80:1 or lower.¹⁵ Rural caseload formulas should recognise travel, outreach, thin service markets, employer brokerage and longer post-placement support.

¹³ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

¹⁴ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

¹⁵ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

14. How could the future service accommodate the needs of diverse cohorts, including better linkages to other services?

Care infrastructure is employment infrastructure. The Productivity Commission found that some areas have few or no early childhood education and care services, called for additional funding in persistent thin markets and recommended outside-school-hours care in public schools wherever there is sustainable demand.¹⁶ In rural areas, women's capacity to work can also depend on access to an appropriate school, long daily school transport, vacation care, disability support, aged care, health services and respite.

Women continue to carry more unpaid work. Females averaged 4 hours and 53 minutes of unpaid work each day, compared with 3 hours and 52 minutes for males.¹⁷ Among parents of children under 15, females averaged 7 hours and 29 minutes, compared with 5 hours and 2 minutes for males.¹⁸ In rural communities, service shortages can increase this unpaid load because care that might be provided formally in a city falls back to families.

The reform should help shift Australian employment culture by recognising that many families now need two incomes, while care, school and transport systems have not consistently evolved around contemporary working patterns. This does not mean assuming that all parental care should be outsourced. A parent who chooses to provide substantial care should not be treated as unmotivated. Providers should instead develop realistic part time, school hours, predictable, staged, remote or hybrid pathways where feasible. Conversely, where a parent wants to work more and is willing to use formal care, the system should actively help secure workable care and transport arrangements and report unmet demand to government.

Providers should be required to map and actively assist participants to navigate childcare, school age care, school transport, aged care, disability, health, housing and transport services, rather than simply supplying a referral. They should record when a job, interview or training opportunity is lost because a service is unavailable, inaccessible, unaffordable or unreliable, and submit regular local barrier reports to government using standard categories, trend data and deidentified evidence. Providers should also participate in local cross sector forums with councils, schools, care providers, community organisations, employers and training bodies. Volunteering should not be imposed on top of substantial unpaid caring responsibilities, and unpaid care should be recognised as having social value even where it does not demonstrate immediate employability.

15. How can a nationally consistent service respond to local circumstances?

National consistency should mean a minimum service guarantee, participant rights, transparent provider duties and comparable outcomes rather than identical delivery. Accessibility should be measured by road travel time, transport availability, cost, opening frequency and digital reliability, rather than by distance in kilometres alone.

¹⁶ Productivity Commission. (2024). *A path to universal early childhood education and care: Inquiry report*. Australian Government. Report No. 106, Vol. 1. Accessed on 30 July 2026 at

<https://assets.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childhood/report/childhood-volume1-report.pdf>

¹⁷ ABS. (2025). *How Australians use their time, 2024*. December. Accessed on 30 July 2026 at

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/how-australians-use-their-time/latest-release>

¹⁸ ABS. (2025). *How Australians use their time, 2024*.

The future system should require:

- regular mobile and visiting services in communities without practical access to a staffed office
- appointments through trusted locations such as libraries, councils, neighbourhood centres and training facilities, including school hours outreach
- continuity with the same consultant where possible and public schedules stating location, frequency and service level
- telephone or video servicing as a participant choice or practical supplement but not an automatic substitute for face-to-face support
- devices, data, software, secure local access points and alternatives where mobile or internet service is inadequate; connectivity failures must not trigger compliance action
- publication of the proportion of participants within specified road travel times of a staffed or scheduled outreach service, together with transport and digital access indicators
- clear interfaces between mainstream services and Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES) so non-Indigenous and Indigenous remote residents, including those outside designated RAES boundaries, receive equivalent access and continuity.

Pathways to training

Providers should broker training linked to a real vacancy or documented regional workforce need. This includes prerequisites, licences and tickets; course timing around care and work; transport and accommodation; equipment and connectivity; mobile or pooled delivery across nearby towns; blended delivery where appropriate; and continued support from training completion into employment. Where needed training is repeatedly unavailable, providers should report the gap and work with employers, TAFEs, independent registered training organisations and communities to aggregate demand. Recommendation 43 supports direct access to transport, data and driver licence assistance, as well as digital access, travel and accommodation required for training in rural areas.¹⁹

Employment providers should not deliver or refer participants to their own training. The parliamentary inquiry found that almost 20% of Employment Fund expenditure from July 2022 to September 2023 related to goods or services delivered in-house or by related entities, and recorded concerns about conflicts of interest and poor quality training.²⁰ This is an issue witnessed on the ground by rural communities. A default separation protects participant choice, keeps training decisions focused on participant and employer needs, and is supported by Recommendation 44.²¹

¹⁹ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

²⁰ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

²¹ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

Redesigned system incentives for service providers

16. How should providers be incentivised to support participants into suitable, sustainable jobs, not just any job across both provider-led service streams?

17. How should employment outcomes and progress towards employment be measured? How should this differ between targeted provider services and intensive services?

Provider incentives should reward the quality and durability of the pathway, not merely commencement in any job. Payments should combine adequate service funding with outcomes at 4, 12, 26 and 52 weeks and should consider job suitability, lawful pay, hours, security, participant and employer satisfaction, use of skills, resolved barriers and whether the participant quickly returns to employment services. Intensive services should also recognise meaningful intermediate progress, while keeping paid employment as a goal where realistic. This is in line with recommendations 41, 70 and 72.²²

Performance frameworks must adjust for thin labour markets and service infrastructure without excusing poor service. Providers should not be penalised for the absence of vacancies, childcare or telecommunications, but should be accountable for assessment quality, employer brokerage, remote work efforts, delivery of agreed support, outreach, training pathways and post-placement assistance. Conversely, participants should be responsible for genuine engagement and reasonable work readiness commitments within their capacity.

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations should publish stream and provider results by sex, remoteness, employment region and relevant cohorts, including access, referrals, transfers, starts, retention and job quality. The current lack of retention measures disaggregated by rural and metropolitan location limits accountability.

Improved commissioning and contracting

18. What commissioning approaches will best support increased provider diversity?

Commissioning should use smaller service areas that reflect natural labour markets and communities of interest; value demonstrated local relationships rather than promises to build them later; support community based and specialist organisations; allow consortia and subcontracting without shifting unmanageable risk; provide longer contracts with continuity arrangements; and include rural, remote and outreach loadings. Provider replacement should not repeatedly destroy local employer and service relationships. Lower caseloads, travel and outreach must be funded rather than absorbed by fewer staff or reduced sites. This is consistent with Recommendation 66, which called for boundaries to better reflect natural labour markets and communities of interest.²³ However, in thin rural markets where only one provider is viable, strong performance monitoring, transfer options and access to specialist or alternative servicing should be maintained.

²² Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

²³ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

Driving continuous improvement

19. How can employment services foster continuous improvement? For example, what strategies would improve the sharing of best practice?

Providers should be a formal conduit between jobseekers, employers, communities and government. Each provider should submit standardised, deidentified regional intelligence on barriers that repeatedly prevent work: childcare and outside-school-hours care, school and care transport, housing, health and disability services, training, mobile and internet coverage, employer needs, volunteer shortages and availability of suitable jobs. Government should publish regional summaries, identify the agency responsible for each cross system issue and report action taken.

Local advisory mechanisms should include participants, women's and community organisations, employers, councils, training and care services. Improvement should draw on existing private and local systems rather than duplicate them. Contract management should reward providers that identify emerging problems, test practical solutions, share evidence and improve outcomes, rather than discourage transparent reporting of local failures. Recommendations 1 to 3 and 45 support coordinated systems, permanent stakeholder input and collection and sharing of local labour market information.²⁴ This submission extends that approach to care, school access, transport, connectivity and service shortages that repeatedly prevent employment.

Conclusion

The redesign of employment services must treat geography and gender as core design considerations. Care responsibilities, school access, transport, digital connectivity, housing, training availability and local job opportunities are structural employment factors, not simply participant deficits. Providers should pursue suitable local, remote and hybrid employment pathways, help negotiate family friendly conditions where feasible, and record reciprocal responsibilities in the Employment Goal Plan. Rural access should be based on actual travel time, transport and connectivity, supported by weighted caseloads and regional funding that recognise the additional work involved in outreach, coordination and employer brokerage.

Employment services cannot themselves create childcare places, school transport, telecommunications or housing, but the system must not ignore these barriers or transfer their consequences to individual women. Government should respond to recurring structural gaps, providers should actively broker pathways and report local shortages, and outcomes should be measured by suitability, retention and job quality and published by sex and remoteness. The central test should be whether a woman living outside town, with caring responsibilities, limited transport and unreliable connectivity, can access meaningful support, suitable training and a safe, sustainable job.

²⁴ Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding employment services*

NRWC member organisations

