



System navigation

Reducing complexity to improve productivity

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Proposed reform

Navigators help service users ‘find their way’ around and between government systems (Early Childhood Education and Care, Employment Services, Health, Disability, Aged Care) in order to access the services they are eligible for and need. To improve productivity in the human services systems, government should test and invest in a ‘life-stage’ navigator, as opposed to siloed system navigators proposed in many recent reforms across government. A Life Stage Navigator works with a person or family to access multiple services/systems through different life stages, rather than a single service/system. This could be enabled by inter-governmental agreements that support collaborative design, implementation and continued service delivery across jurisdictions.

Why is this important?

Australia’s human services systems are overly complex and difficult for people to navigate. This reduces their ability to get services they need and imposes unnecessary costs on both service users and government. In response, ‘navigator’ roles have been proposed or created in almost every major human services system – and are generally specific to each system. However, the introduction of multiple system-specific navigators risks creating overlapping and duplicate roles, reinforcing existing siloes in service systems, and directly impacting on the experience of service users. It is very common that the one person or family will need navigation support across multiple systems.

How this will advance productivity and resilience

A Life Stage Navigator that works across different systems can generate productivity gains and build resilience by connecting people to the right support, identify system gaps, reduce administrative burden on individuals and families, and reduce system wastage and duplication for government. It can also build lessons and practice improvements that support the ultimate long-term goal to reduce overall system complexity, which over time will lessen the need for navigators at all.

A Life Stage Navigator who helps a person access the right support early can also unlock downstream productivity gains including improved educational outcomes, greater workforce participation and reduced reliance on later health, justice, housing or employment services.¹

How it will be budget neutral/positive

Creating Life Stage Navigators rather than system-specific navigators could yield substantial budget savings (relative to current proposals for system-specific navigators) in both the medium and longer term:

- **Medium term** – Life Stage Navigators can reduce budget costs by removing potential duplication. If government were to adopt current recommendations for separate navigators across Early Childhood Education and Care, Employment Services, Health, Disability and Aged Care it is very likely that multiple navigators would be performing the same functions or working with the same communities, creating significant wastage in spending.
- **Longer term** – Navigators who are effective can reduce longer-term budget outlays in service areas (Health, Disability, Aged Care) by supporting people to access the services they need sooner, and avoiding later (larger) demands on government services and associated costs.

There may be some short-term costs involved in the design and pilot stage; however, it is anticipated this can be accommodated within existing departmental budgets. To the degree additional budget funding is required, a complementary BSL submission recommends tax reform options.

Implementation considerations

- The design of the Life Stage Navigator role will likely require consultation, design and piloting involving relevant government departments and community organisations. Consultation may also be required between relevant levels of government (Commonwealth and state/territory).
- The roll-out of Life Stage Navigators may require underpinning intergovernmental agreements, to support data-sharing and integrated service system design.
- Navigator design should be shaped by common/agreed design principles. Navigators should be place-based, independent from the systems they are supporting people to access, scalable to need and include proactive outreach.
- A competency framework and practice guidance will need to be developed to ensure a suitably qualified and trained workforce to deliver navigation services.

¹ For a summary of the literature see, for example: <https://cpd.org.au/work/avoidable-costs/>