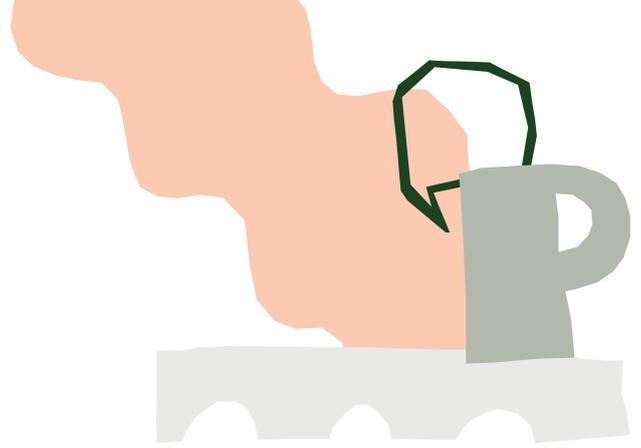


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Expanding IPS in the Asia-Pacific: learning from Japan

POLICY LAB

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an evidence-based approach that supports people living with mental ill-health to find and sustain competitive employment while assisting employers to support them. In October and November 2025, representatives from Japan and Malaysia, and members of the Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community collaborated to inform and develop policies that support the expansion of IPS programs and services in the Asia-Pacific region. While the model has been implemented in several Western countries, there is an opportunity to expand current service delivery in the Asia-Pacific. The implementation experiences of IPS services in Japan informed the Policy Lab.

The Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community used the Policy Lab method to develop policy proposals to support the ongoing expansion of IPS in the Asia-Pacific region. Contextual factors are an important consideration in expanding IPS to new settings.(1) There are factors at play at a government, organisational and local implementation level. The Policy Lab was guided by the policy question: **What lessons from implementing IPS will inform implementation of the model in the Asia-Pacific region?**

Orygen is grateful to the Australia-Japan Foundation for supporting experts from Japan to travel to Australia to participate in the Policy Lab. This collaboration builds upon existing connections and demonstrates the value of international evidence-sharing and relationship-building in supporting the expansion of the IPS model and other successful youth mental health interventions.

Policy directions



Government

Establishing a framework for a cross-departmental strategy



Lived experience

Lived experience informs IPS development



Australian Government



豪日交流基金
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Mental health benefits of improving employment outcomes

Nearly one-in-four (23.6%) young people are not in education, employment or training in the Asia-Pacific region.(2) The longer someone is unemployed the worse their mental health outcomes.(3) Young people having access to employment, including providing decent work for those experiencing mental ill-health, is part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8). A review of 'what works' in youth employment support in the Asia-Pacific region found that intermediation interventions (e.g. job preparation, searching and matching) that orient young people to the job market and match them with employers are best delivered in combination with other support aligned with each young person's needs (i.e., mental health support).(4) The potential for IPS to improve mental health through employment has been identified in OECD countries.(5)

Policy Lab

A Policy Lab is a structured workshop to inform policy development with participants bringing a range of expertise and perspectives.(6, 7) Most participants were members of the Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community with additional participants from Malaysia and Japan. The process, typically conducted over the course of a day, was split into two workshops to facilitate participation of experts travelling from Japan. The workshops were held in Melbourne, Australia in October and November 2025.

Prioritising opportunities and informing policy direction

During the first workshop, participants considered the **experience** of implementing the IPS model in different countries, then identified the **support** needed to pilot IPS in a new country, including roles for government, services and the workforce. These were **prioritised** and would be the focus of the second workshop in which policy factors were explored to inform the development of a policy proposal.

The experiences of implementing IPS model to different countries were mostly related to government and services. This provides direction for policy development. Observations from participants about the current context and what might be needed were identified.

Government

- Revitalise representation of IPS for policymakers to communicate who it is relevant for.
- Explaining a model of implementation in a framework for policymakers.
- Government (in Australia) has seen the value of service fidelity.
- Different funding models in different countries - these are clearer in some countries than others.
- Potential for the model to extend into diverse mental health service contexts.
- The possible need to adapt key principles for different contexts.

Services

- Ethical vs contractual obligations (different cohorts).
- Fidelity vs adaptation to business as usual.
- Staggered process from pilot and success builds excitement and initial growth but then slows - there is also a risk of growing pains.
- Cultural adaptations within a country.
- Positive experience is the opportunity for creativity⁵in engagement with different cohorts.

Four key support needs were identified for establishing IPS pilots in new settings in the Asia-Pacific region. They were **mapping** (for example, service need, workforce availability), **explaining the model, implementation** (including support), and **evaluation**. Specific supports were also identified that could sit across these thematic categories.

Participants identified a list of policy instruments across government, services and workforce for the implementation of a pilot IPS program. An additional role was identified for lived experience. Participants then voted for the top three priorities across these categories individually (see Figure 1).

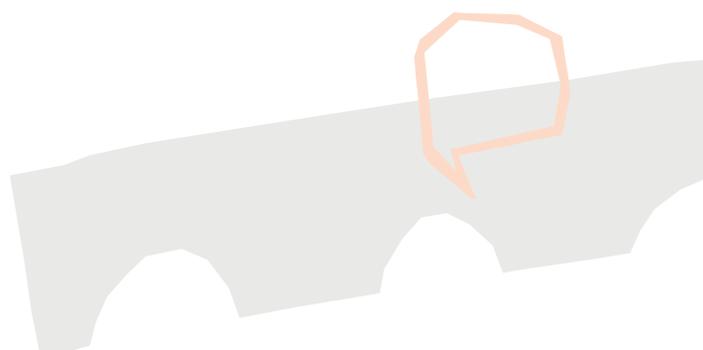
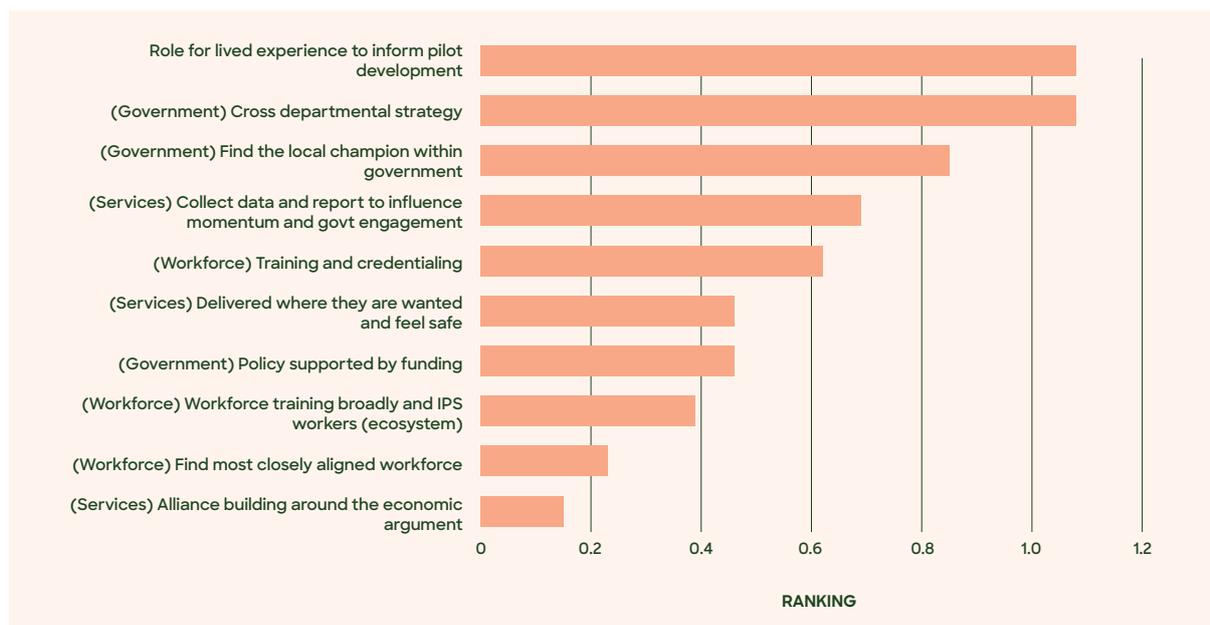


Figure 1 Prioritised roles for implementing an IPS pilot in a new country.

Policy development

At the second workshop, participants considered the barriers and enablers to establishing cross-governmental IPS strategies and involving people with lived experience in IPS pilot program design. The experiences of establishing IPS programs in Australia and Japan informed policy development.

Establishing a framework for a cross-departmental strategy

Identified barriers to establishing a cross-departmental strategy were the role of **evidence**, departments working in **silos**, and **assumptions** about mental health and employment. Participants noted that evidence is not always treated as a priority in decision-making and highlighted challenges in identifying and engaging the appropriate stakeholders to present an evidence-based case. Multiple barriers to a cross-departmental strategy were attributed to government departments working in 'silos'. In both countries, employment, social services and mental-health are the responsibility of different government departments. Even with recognition within government agencies of the interrelationship between mental ill-health and employment, barriers to cross-sector integration can persist.(8) These barriers included misaligned systems, outcomes and funding streams, as well as a lack of departmental ownership for programs that address both mental ill-health and employment. Preconceptions about mental ill-health and employment outcomes, unfamiliarity with the IPS model, and assumptions about the complexity of its implementation, can further exacerbate these barriers.

Two themes were identified as enablers for supporting the establishment of a cross-departmental strategy. These reflected the barriers that had been identified. Participants recognised the importance of demonstrating **examples of successful** IPS programs and **developing relationships** to promote and advocate for an IPS strategy. The approach to relationship development would reflect the existing context within a country, including organising forums to raise the profile of IPS where relationships with government needed to be established. Previous experiences in developing relationships and promoting programs provide direction, in the Netherlands collaboration and shared funding models are part of the plan for sustainable implementation of vocational rehabilitation for people with mental disorders.(9)

Lived experience informs IPS development

There is increasing recognition that incorporating consumer experiences of programs or services can improve their design and delivery. However, there are differences in the recognition and mechanisms for Lived experience involvement within and across countries in the Asia-Pacific. The Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community's prioritisation of Lived experience in informing IPS expansion in the Asia Pacific should be guided by a clear understanding of what greater involvement might look like in practice. Identified opportunities for involving Lived experience included **formal engagement** mechanisms, **case-studies** to promote the value of the form of expertise and including **peer roles** in the delivery of IPS.

Policy directions

Policy solution	Evidence and rationale	Outcome
 <h3>Establishing a framework for a cross-departmental strategy</h3>		
<p>The Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community should apply for grant funding to commission the development of an adaptable template for cross-departmental engagement to support the implementation of IPS.</p> <p>The template would be informed by, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an evidence review of existing international cross-departmental project funding models, • an integrated health and education, employment and training framework, • the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, • differences in national economic and government contexts, and • sector mapping and engagement, including identifying department contacts. 	<p>IPS supports functional recovery that provides direct and indirect benefits for an individual, the community, and economy. A cross-department strategy would embed the link between improved well-being through competitive employment.</p> <p>Social and economic benefits are varied (e.g., greater social participation, increased tax revenue, and decreased health and social welfare costs) and may be realised over different timeframes. Expenditure on IPS services and resultant benefits are not limited to one government department or budget cycle.</p> <p>The siloing of function and objectives in government departments is a barrier to funding the implementation of IPS. A cross-departmental approach is required to balance spending in one department and savings in another.</p>	<p>A government relations strategy that is tailored to a national context is available to advocate for expanding IPS.</p> <p>A strong case can be made for public investment that accounts for differences in funding and outcomes.</p>
<p>Instrument: Government relations tool</p>		



Policy solution

Evidence and rationale

Outcome



Lived experience informs IPS development

As with all forms of expertise, Lived experience needs to be built into decision-making processes.

The Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community should explore international opportunities to support the development of guidelines in partnership with a Lived experience association to inform the development and implementation of IPS programs in new settings across the Asia-Pacific region.

These guidelines should include:

- a formal engagement mechanism tailored to a country's context (i.e., an advisory group),
- representation on pilot oversight committee,
- role in decision-making processes,
- illustrative case studies, and
- peer worker roles.

Development should be undertaken in consultation with consumer stakeholders (including young people), relevant sectors, and government/s across the region. Staged models that reflect progress in establishing Lived experience roles in national contexts are required.

Involving Lived experience in the design and delivery of IPS in new settings, ensures the program is centred on those it aims to support.

Examples of success can support further progress and development where the profile and role of Lived experience in IPS is nascent or yet to establish a presence.

Greater involvement of Lived experience in the expansion of IPS services across the Asia-Pacific region.

IPS programs are more acceptable to and appropriate for consumers.

Instrument: Sector-developed guidelines



Participants

Orygen is grateful for the considered and enthusiastic engagement from all participants across the two workshops. Additional comments were provided by Helen Lockett, Strategic Lead, Department of Public Health, University of Otago.

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Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community

The Asia-Pacific IPS Learning Community facilitates connection, learning and collaboration within our region to support the delivery of IPS programs. A learning community is a group of people who share a common interest and exchange ideas and information to provide mutual support.

Disclaimer

The findings reflect the discussions and directions of a broad range of participants, but do not necessarily reflect individual participants' agreement, their organisations' policy or endorsement by the Australia-Japan Foundation.

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