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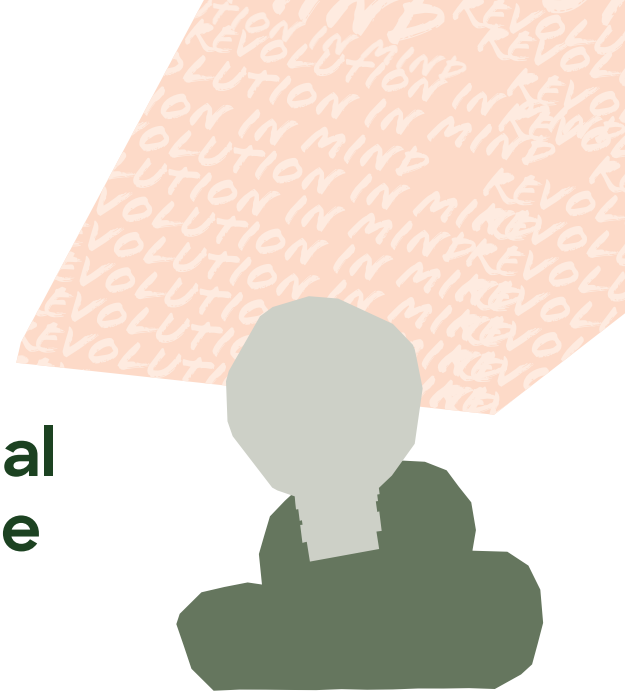


Futureproofing vocational support for young people with mental ill-health – the role of technology

POLICY LAB

Participation in employment and education is a key to improved wellbeing for young people with mental ill-health. In October 2025, representatives from government, community and employment services, professionals, researchers and young people collaborated to inform policy development for the role of technology in vocational support. Two priority policies were developed for the use of AI scribes within employment services and data control for young people.

Policy directions

Artificial intelligence

Industry self-regulation of AI scribes in employment services

Data control

Feasibility study for youth-controlled digital data and consent infrastructure

There is mounting interest in the potential role of technology as a 'disruptor' of accepted practice and an associated promise of productivity gains. Two examples include the emergence of generative AI via accessible platforms and growth in datasets, and computing power for rapid and/or large-scale data analysis. These examples are widely discussed both in the media and in policy debate with an explicit expectation that governments, organisations, and individuals will adopt or engage with technology.

To consider the potential role for technology and preparation for its adoption, Orygen hosted a Policy Lab in October 2025. The Policy Lab facilitated collaborative consideration of how policy might guide the implementation of technology in the future delivery of vocational support for young people with mental ill-health. Participants included employment service providers, digital innovators, young people, vocational support professionals, program designers, researchers, peak bodies and policy professionals.

The Policy Lab was guided by the policy question: **How can technology enhance vocational support programs for young people with mental ill-health while leveraging evidence-based service design?**

Vocational support

Vocational support for young people with mental ill-health contributes to increased social participation and functional recovery. (1, 2) This support might be accessed through employment services or other supported employment programs, such as the Individual Placement and Support program within community-based mental health services. Technology provides an opportunity to design and deliver more accessible and engaging vocational support programs.

Policy Lab

A Policy Lab is a structured workshop that gathers a range of expertise and perspectives to inform policy development. Participants are provided with a briefing pack that includes a summary of the policy issue and available evidence.(3, 4) Representatives from within government are also included, which facilitates knowledge exchange, and provides an 'insider' perspective to support the development of realistic, implementable policy proposals.

The Policy Lab in Melbourne in October 2025 included 20 participants representing the Federal Department of Social Services and Tasmanian Department of State Growth, community and employment services, digital innovators, researchers, industry peak bodies and two young people represented a youth perspective.

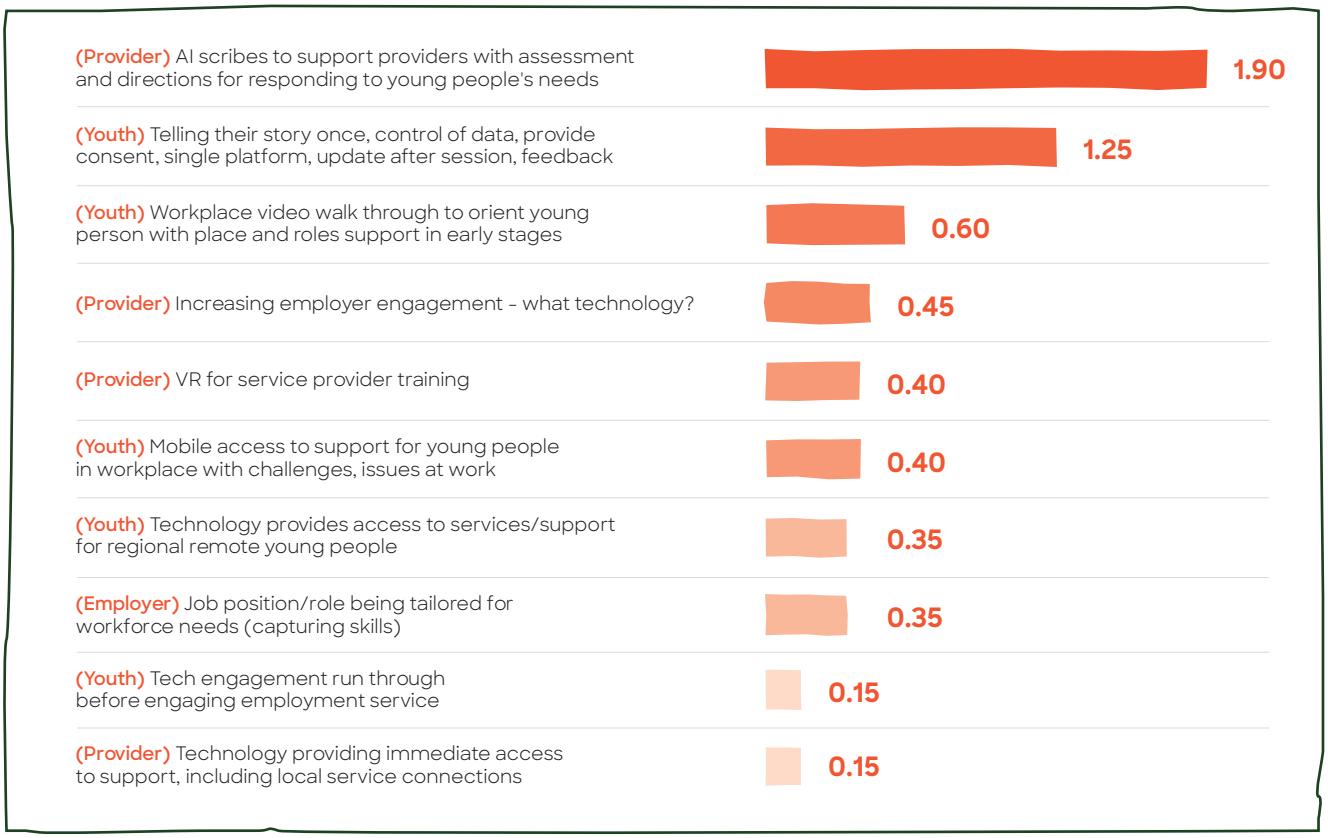
Youth participants were provided with an online pre-briefing session prior to the Policy Lab. Participants were allocated to table groups to ensure a mix of expertise to support broad discussion and knowledge exchange.

Initially table groups considered what were the features of successful employment services for young people with mental ill-health. It was identified that flexible and inclusive service models and integration with parallel services were important. Within the workforce domain, maximum case load sizes, providing hope and motivation and industry connections and navigation support were identified. Measuring success beyond employment outcomes and an ability to meet immediate needs (e.g. housing) were also raised.

Prioritising opportunities and informing policy direction

Participants then identified the opportunities that technology presented for improving vocational support services for young people with mental ill-health. Table groups reported the top opportunity for technology to improve services and support for young people from among those discussed. Through this process a priority was also identified from an employer perspective. From this list participants individually prioritised their top two opportunities from across the categories. There were two clear priorities that became the focus for policy development.

Figure 1. Prioritisation of opportunities for technology



Policy development

The two priority opportunities (AI scribes and data control for young people) were distributed between four table groups. Table groups considered the barriers to and enablers for policies to guide the use of AI scribes and how young people could have more control of their data. The available instruments for implementing policies in these two areas of technology were then identified.

Following the Policy Lab, the collected data was analysed, and draft policy proposals were shared with participants for review. Review input was received from six participants, with youth review facilitated through an online meeting. One participant noted that their group had discussed personal ownership of individual data and granting access permission rather than a central database with young people providing consent to access. Youth participants reiterated the need for ethical safeguards with technology.

Artificial intelligence technology

AI scribes and generative AI (GenAI) have emerged as promising technologies in health settings to support clinicians by alleviating administrative workloads and enhancing the quality of client engagement. These tools streamline documentation processes, enabling clinicians to increase direct client engagement. Evidence suggests that their use can strengthen key elements of the positive therapeutic alliance, such as eye contact and attentiveness, while delivering measurable productivity gains.(5, 6)

Effective implementation of these technologies in vocational support settings will require addressing challenges related to accuracy, adaptability and integration into existing workflows.(6, 7) Currently, the need for human oversight to prevent errors, can increase clinician workload and demand higher levels of digital literacy.(8)

Evidence demonstrates that targeted investment across several key areas is essential for effective and equitable implementation of these technologies or vocational support, including within clinical practice. These include comprehensive training for vocational support staff, clinicians, sector-specific AI tools supported by appropriate digital infrastructure and the establishment of robust monitoring and accountability frameworks.(8-10)

Personal data

Personal data is collected when people access services, including public support services (e.g. health, employment) or commercial online services (e.g. social media). Young people want to have the ability to control access to their private information. For example, young people 'have strong preferences for data governance' in relation to mental health,(11) but also recognise the compromises they make to connect with friends via online platforms, including how their data is used.(12) The United Nations have provided guidance on how states should implement the Convention on the rights of the child in relation to the digital environment, including legislative and policy guidance.(13)

Protecting personally identifiable information is necessary to reduce the risks of being scammed, identity theft, personal safety, and targeted marketing. Australian government departments and contracted service providers have privacy policies to meet legal obligations. Data collected by employment services might include psychometric tests, police checks, employment and training records including payslip and earnings information or health information.

Policy proposals

Proposal	Rationale	Outcomes
 **Industry self-regulation of AI scribes in employment services**		
The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations commission the development of guidelines for industry self-regulation of the transparent use of AI scribes in employment services. Compliance measures developed, including but not limited to: • Informed client consent, including future use of data • Training resources for staff • An audit tool for monitoring accuracy and self-compliance • Quarterly complaints reporting and response procedure.	Purpose-built AI-assisted software has the potential to enable employment service staff to focus more on engaging and supporting young people through reducing the time required for generating outputs (i.e. resumés, application letters, vocational assessments). Human oversight of outputs will offset efficiency gains. The use of generic generative AI tools is less reliable and may have only marginal benefits. Existing tools used in health services and associated regulation (see Therapeutic Goods Administration) provide direction for developing guidelines. Services, staff and clients need to be aware of regulatory compliance requirements (e.g. privacy) in using AI scribes.	Services are guided on the requirements, including regulatory compliance of AI scribes in making procurement decisions and providing staff training. The workforce is informed about the scope of permitted use of AI scribes and generative AI and any regulatory compliance. Clients understand the purpose of using AI tools and are confident in the privacy protections for their data.
Instrument Self-regulation framework		

Proposal	Rationale	Outcomes
Feasibility study for youth-controlled digital data and consent infrastructure		
The Department of Social Services commission a feasibility study to explore the development of a central data sharing permissions portal. This could potentially be developed as a feature of existing infrastructure, such as the MyGov platform. This infrastructure would enable young people to view, manage, and selectively share their personal data across government and service systems, providing agency in data sharing consent, safety and privacy. Embed youth co-production throughout the study to ensure the infrastructure reflects young people's expectations and accessibility needs and that it is effectively communicated and promoted.	Young people often lack knowledge and control over how their personal data is collected, used and shared when accessing mental health and vocational support services. Services face challenges in managing data and require structural support to share young people's data more securely and efficiently (with consent). The My Health Record platform provides an example of how users can manage privacy and data, including the ability to hide specific documents, however the complexity of functions and the lack of information/rollout can limit trust. Simpler controls could increase accessibility for young people (i.e. toggle-style permissions).	The Department has an evidence base for deciding on the benefits and risks of the proposed data control option. Developing the digital data control and sharing infrastructure would: • improve coordination and secure data sharing for services • provide young people with accessible control of their data.
Instrument Feasibility study		

Participants

Orygen is grateful for the considered and enthusiastic engagement from all participants who represented a range of stakeholders.

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Disclaimer

The findings reflect the discussions and directions of a broad range of participants, but do not necessarily reflect individual participant's agreement or their organisation's policy.

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