Why we're sharing this

The Social Enterprise Jobs Summit was delivered in partnership with White Box Enterprises and Social Enterprise Australia. It generated insights and ideas that can help build towards a future where all have access to decent work.

We're sharing these back so you can see what was said.

Important note: this comes with no filter. It's a capture of different discussions and perspectives.

We haven't evaluated the priorities that emerged from the summit or worked through competing ideas... yet. We're sharing what we heard.

Some initial ideas on how we intend to build on the summit and these insights can be found at the end of these slides.

The 10 areas for action that emerged at the summit

- Further develop the national WISE support infrastructure
- Integrate WISEs into mainstream employment systems
- Enable cross-sector collaboration and innovation
- Embed First Nations self-determination and Indigenous-led approaches
- Reform procurement and market access
- Build sector capability and resilience
- Create cultures of wellbeing and sustainable workplaces
- Secure enabling financing
- Develop transition pathways and employer partnerships
- Regulatory and policy reform.

Theme 1: Further develop the national WISE support infrastructure

Proposal: Create a comprehensive ecosystem that enables WISEs to focus on impact rather than administration.

Emerging priorities:

- Consolidate and develop WISE aggregation: Build on White Box Enterprise's work while exploring opportunities to diversify aggregation models and grow the number of WISEs that can access government systems and large contracts.
- Strengthen identification standards and assurance: Consolidate identification systems coupled with data systems and consider greater specification for identifying different WISE models.
- Merger and transition fund: $50M fund to support consolidation, turnarounds, and graceful exits to protect sector investments and increase resilience.
- Digital infrastructure and data commons: Develop shared sector data and information systems that decrease transactional friction and generate value-creation opportunities.
- Peer learning networks: Establish communities of practice and structured peer support to combat isolation and share learnings across the sector.

Theme 2: Integrate WISEs into mainstream employment systems

Proposal: Position WISEs as a legitimate and systematically funded pathway within Australia's employment support system, with proper integration into existing services.

Emerging priorities:

- Workforce Australia and Disability Employment Service (DES) integration: Create dedicated pathways for WISEs to become providers, with adaptations recognising differences in their model.
- Impact cost recognition: Systematic assessment and funding mechanisms to cover the additional costs WISEs carry, including wrap-around support.
- Payment by Outcomes (PBO) evolution: Scale successful PBO trials with design improvements (multiple intakes, appropriate cohort selection, regional adaptations).
- Wrap-around support funding: Dedicated funding for the 75% of support work currently unpaid, including cultural responsibilities and crisis intervention.
- Transition support frameworks: Funding and recognition for both transition pathways AND retention as valid success metrics.

Theme 3: Enable cross-sector collaboration and innovation

Proposal: Strengthen approaches that multiply impact through strategic partnerships and collective action.

Emerging priorities:

- Place-based WISE clusters: Support development of value-chain clusters in major cities and regions that create ecosystem approaches.
- Innovation challenge fund: Special funding and technical support for collaborative initiatives addressing specific employment challenges across sectors.
- Collective scaling models: Develop frameworks and support for WISEs to scale impact collectively rather than individually, coupled with an understanding of different scaling dimensions (i.e. up, out, deep).
- Cross-sector partnerships: Structured programs linking WISEs with mainstream employers, education providers, and community services.
- Technology and AI integration: Support WISEs to harness technology for good while maintaining human-centered approaches.

Theme 4: Embed First Nations self-determination and Indigenous-led approaches

Proposal: Ensure First Nations communities lead the design and delivery of employment solutions on their terms, grounded in culture and Country.

Emerging priorities:

- Self-determination framework: Ensure Indigenous peoples lead design and delivery of employment initiatives in their communities.
- Cultural knowledge recognition: Develop award structures and pay scales that value 60,000 years of inherited cultural knowledge.
- Country-centred enterprise models: Support business models that integrate healthy Country, healthy people, and healthy culture.
- Two-way learning systems: Embed Indigenous and Western knowledge systems equally in WISE operations and governance.
- Community-led governance: Support structures where control and decision-making comes from the people and place.

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Theme 5: Reform procurement and market access

Proposal: Transform how governments and corporations buy to create sustainable revenue streams that value social impact alongside commercial delivery.

Emerging priorities:

- Commonwealth procurement targets: Mandatory targets for WISE engagement with accountability measures to prevent gaming.
- Value-based procurement model: Shift from price-only to value-based assessment recognising social outcomes.
- Contract unbundling: Break large contracts into WISE-accessible components while supporting consortia approaches.
- Corporate partnership standards: Guidelines for authentic, long-term partnerships that share risk and reward.
- Regional procurement strategies: Tailored approaches recognising different market conditions and WISE capabilities across regions.

Theme 6: Build sector capability and resilience

Proposal: Strengthen capabilities to deliver quality employment outcomes.

Emerging priorities:

- Leadership development pipeline: Programs addressing governance, succession planning, and preventing burnout.
- Commercial capability building: Strengthen business acumen while maintaining social purpose, including cashflow management tools.
- 'Collaboration ready' capability: Build capabilities for WISEs to engage effectively in ecosystem approaches.
- Evidence and learning infrastructure: Systematic capture and sharing of what works, moving beyond individual case studies.
- Lived expertise pathways: Structured development for people with lived experience to become sector leaders, not just participants.

Theme 7: Create cultures of wellbeing and sustainable workplaces

Proposal: Promote workplace models that demonstrate how supporting staff wellbeing drives both social impact and business sustainability.

Emerging priorities:

- Wellbeing-first workplace models: Develop and share approaches that prevent burnout and support staff mental health.
- Person-centred flexibility: Share learning and guidelines for tailoring support to individuals rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.
- Psychological safety standards: Frameworks for creating belonging and preventing "us and them" dynamics.
- Staff retention strategies: Recognise and resource the intensity of WISE work with appropriate support systems.
- Boundary setting frameworks and mentoring: Help WISEs manage the tension between meeting all needs and organisational sustainability.

Theme 8: Secure sustainable financing

Proposal: Build a mature investment ecosystem that provides appropriate capital for different WISE needs and growth stages.

Emerging priorities:

- Sector Infrastructure Fund: Patient capital for sector-wide assets and platforms that benefit multiple WISEs.
- Working capital facilities: Address cashflow challenges that threaten WISE sustainability, especially for smaller enterprises.
- Further develop blended finance models: Combine grants, loans, and investment to match different stages of WISE development, while creating open-source resources to further the sharing of successful financing approaches across the sector.
- Funder coordination: Convene funders to align around shared sector strategies increasing the potential for investments to be coherent and complementary.
- Impact investment readiness: Build WISE capacity to assess and access appropriate funding that matches their growth stage and mission, including understanding concepts of 'right-sizing' and declining financing opportunities that may lead to unsustainable growth.

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Theme 9: Develop transition pathways and employer partnerships

Proposal: Further build bridges between WISEs and mainstream employment that prepare both workers and workplaces for success.

Emerging priorities:

- Employer education program: Systematic approach to preparing mainstream employers for inclusive hiring.
- Two-way learning frameworks: Structured programs where WISEs and employers learn from each other.
- Transition coaching fund: Resources for intensive support during the critical transition period.
- Industry-specific pathways: Develop deep partnerships in industries with strong job growth and WISE alignment.
- Young people employment strategy: Specific focus on retail and other youth-employing sectors to shift attitudes and practices.

Theme 10: Regulatory and policy reform

Proposal: Foster an enabling regulatory environment that recognises WISEs' hybrid nature and removes barriers to their success.

Emerging priorities:

- Regulatory review and harmonisation: Reduce burden on enterprises navigating multiple compliance frameworks across jurisdictions.
- NDIS integration pathways: Clear and simplified mechanisms for WISEs to access disability services funding.
- Industrial relations recognition: Award structures that recognise cultural knowledge, flexibility needs, and WISE-specific roles.
- Tax and legal clarity: Resolve hybrid status challenges and explore appropriate tax benefits for genuine WISEs.
- Safe harbour provisions: Protections for WISEs taking on higher-risk employees while maintaining quality employment standards.

What's next?

At the heart of the national strategy for social enterprise, the sector named 'access to decent work' as one of the four challenges it can help shift the dial on.

As part of its role in working with the social enterprise sector to develop and lead its national strategy, Social Enterprise Australia will use the insights and ideas shared at the summit to inform future work.

Social Enterprise Australia will:

- Use these insights to inform a draft national strategy for social enterprise and develop the 'access to decent work' focus within it.
- Come back to the sector with the draft for feedback and further development.
- Put what is developed to its Members for endorsement at an AGM.

This is the beginning of the conversation, not the end. Thank you for contributing to the summit and helping shape our sector's future.