

An Information Kit for Disability Employment Service Providers

Vocational Intervention Program: Working with clients with a brain injury



July 2021



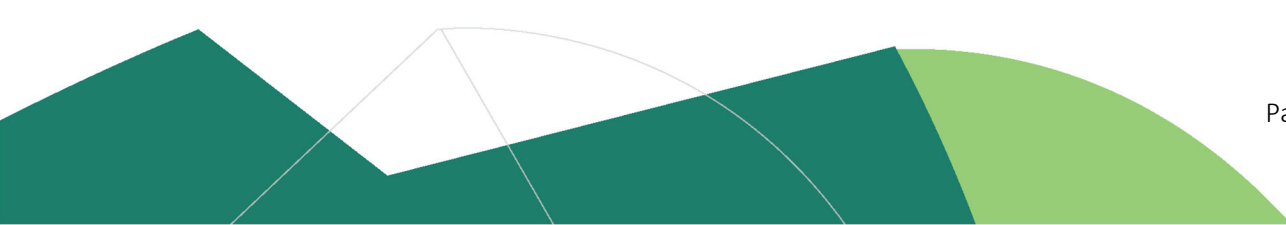


Vocational Intervention Program

An Information Kit For Disability Employment Service Providers

CONTENTS

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | Program Overview | 3 |
| 2. | Pathways and Procedures | 4 |
| | 2A. Fast Track | 4 |
| | 2B. New Track | 6 |
| 3. | Working with a Person with Brain Injury | 8 |
| 4. | Key features of an employment program | 9 |



1. Program Overview

The Program (VIP)

The Vocational Intervention Program is an employment program established within the NSW Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program (BIRP) in partnership with selected vocational providers.

The BIRP is a network of 12 adult brain injury rehabilitation services operated by NSW Health: 3 services are located in Sydney and the remainder in regional NSW.

The VIP was an initiative of two state government bodies: NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation (ACI) and icare (Insurance & Care NSW). The program was implemented initially as a pilot (VIP1, 2014-7) involving 6 BIRP sites partnered with 3 vocational providers; then scaled up as a state-wide program (VIP2, 2018-21) involving all 12 BIRP sites partnered with 20 vocational providers (including DES providers).

The aim of Vocational Intervention Program was to develop employment pathways for people with brain injury in NSW, to improve the experiences and outcomes in returning to work.

The VIP research project has concluded and the model established as a sustainable approach to manage employment programs for clients of the BIRPs.

The VIP2 Implementation report can be found here: [ACI Website Link](#).

For many years, there has been low participation of people with brain injury in employment (29%), particularly considering around 75% of these people were working at the time of their injury.

At the core of the program is the collaboration between BIRPs and vocational (including DES) providers.

The list of VIP providers across the 12 BIRP sites is at: [ACI Website Link](#).

Goals

The goals of VIP continue to be:

- a) Develop and maintain local partnerships that improve the system of support for people with brain injury in NSW.
- b) Build greater expertise for managing employment for this client group.
- c) Increase employment outcomes for people with brain injury in NSW.
- d) Improve the health and wellbeing of people with brain injury.

More information

More information about VIP and employment for people with brain injury is available at:

[TBI Training Website Link](#).

Or by email:

ACI-BrainInjuryRehab@health.nsw.gov.au

2. Pathways and Procedures

Employment services are provided using existing funding schemes:

- **Disability Employment Services** (DES)
- **Insurance schemes** (icare Lifetime Care, icare Workers Care/Workers Insurance, Income Protection, Compulsory Third Party)
- **National Disability Insurance Scheme** (NDIS).

Note: some clients will be eligible for more than 1 funding source and may benefit from

the expertise of 2 providers (e.g. DES provider plus private vocational provider funded by Lifetime Care)

Two Pathways

There are 2 pathways available within VIP:

Fast Track – for clients resuming previous employment.

New Track – for clients preparing for and seeking new work.

2A. Fast Track

Returning to the same workplace after injury is the preferred pathway for people following brain injury and most likely to succeed, due to the familiar environment, routine, tasks and social support.

Clients are referred by BIRP clinicians whilst undergoing rehabilitation that is preparing them for employment.

Fast Track is managed within the DES as a 'Work Assist' registration.

Key elements

The key elements of Fast Track:

- Early referral and preparation for work in conjunction with BIRP team.
- Assessment of the workplace involves gathering details of the cognitive and physical work demands.
- Clients usually work either partial duties or full duties on reduced hours. If their previous position is not suitable or unavailable, then all familiar roles within

their pre-injury employment should be considered ahead of new or unfamiliar roles.

- A Return To Work (RTW) plan is devised, including specific strategies to manage physical and cognitive issues (e.g. use of a diary, written notes etc) and a schedule of hours.
- RTW programs typically involves gradually increasing hours, reviewing restrictions and providing feedback.

Allied Health input is required for workplace assessment and developing a RTW plan. This input can be sourced through Job Access (Employment Assistance Fund).

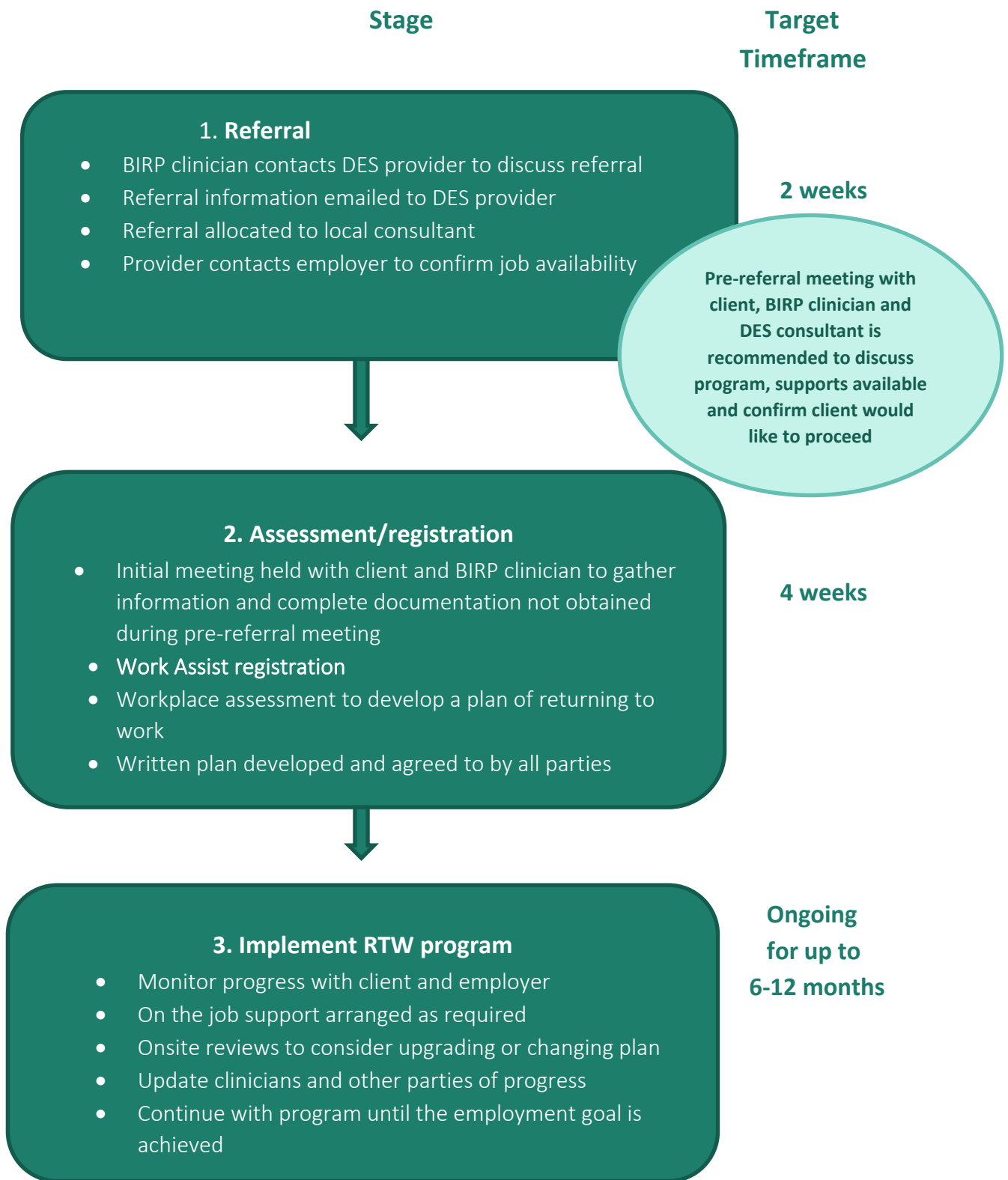
Case study videos

Phillip's Fast Track story - returning to work in aged care

Ian's story - returning to work with support of a DES provider

[ACI Website Link](#)

Fast Track ('Work Assist') Stages



2B. New Track

New Track is for clients seeking new employment. Some clients have an identified employment goal and can seek their own employment; however the majority of clients will require assistance to identify goals, plan and undertake job seeking and/or retraining.

Often in rehabilitation, a 'stepping-stone' approach is required, to gradually gain skills and the work capacity required to achieve the employment goal. This might involve a work experience placement or training course. These activities, along with vocational counselling, will often assist the person to clarify their post-injury capacity, explore realistic opportunities and determine future pathways.

A BIRP client will usually require an ESAT to commence a DES program. It is important the DES Provider arranges and supports this assessment to ensure accurate and comprehensive information is conveyed.

Key elements

The key elements of New Track:

- Program adjusted to the pace of the client.
- Client goals are based on their current strengths.
- Client choice of work goal needs to be balanced with consideration of safety and suitability.
- Gradual/stepping- stone approach, including work experience placements.
- On-job support (for new learning).
- Creating a feedback system & providing advocacy.

Case study videos

For an example of a client trialling new employment, see 3 New Track case stories here:

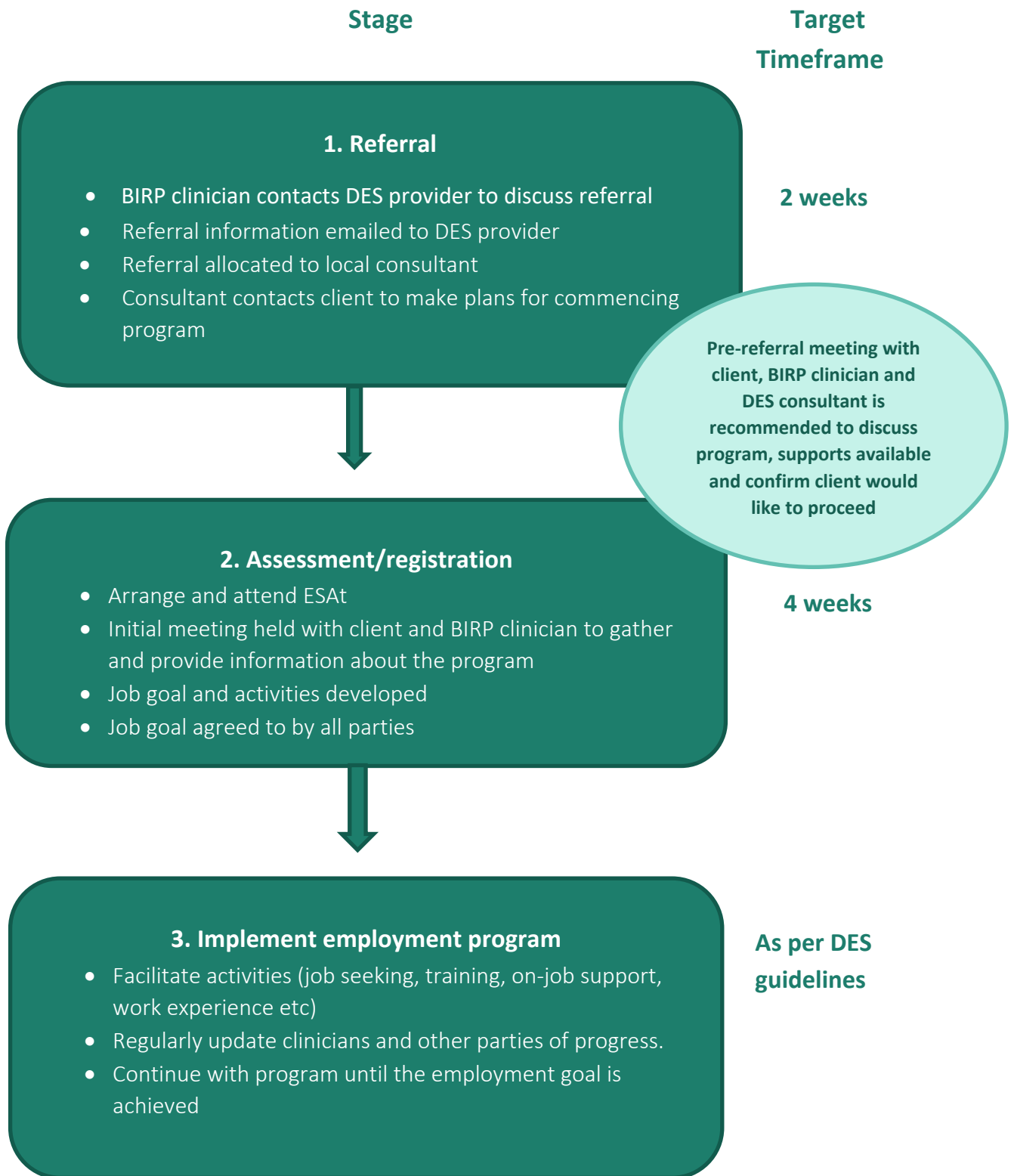
Julian's story - finding a new job as a gardener

Antony's story - finding a new role in IT.

Daniel's story – getting started within a supported workplace.

[ACI Website Link](#)

New Track Stages



3. Working with a person with brain injury

Brain injury

Brain Injury refers to the multiple disabilities arising from damage to the brain acquired after birth. It results in changes to cognitive, physical, emotional or independent functioning. It can be as a result of accidents, stroke, brain tumours, infection, poisoning, lack of oxygen, degenerative neurological disease etc. (Brain Injury Australia).

Brain injury incurred through an accident (such as motor vehicle accident, fall, assault) is known as 'Traumatic Brain Injury' and this is the primary group serviced by the NSW Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program (BIRP)

Service context

The BIRP is a network of 12 adult and 3 paediatric rehabilitation services operated by NSW Health. The 3 adult services based in Sydney (Liverpool, Ryde and Westmead) comprise inpatient beds as well as outpatient therapy and case management. The 9 services outside Sydney provide outpatient therapy and case management. Some services also have a "Transitional Living Unit", a residential setting allowing clients to practise skills for independent living. These 12 services collectively work with approximately 800 people with severe brain injury living in the community, at any point in time.

The location of the BIRP services can be found at: [ACI Website](#).

A few facts about brain injury:

A brain injury affects people differently, depending on the severity of injury and part of

the brain affected. Some people make a full functional recovery whilst others will continue to experience changes to physical, cognitive and/or psychological function. A minority do not regain a level of consciousness and require ongoing care.

Recovery following severe brain injury will occur most rapidly over the first 6 months, with further recovery and adjustment extending for 2 years and beyond.

Common issues include fatigue, affects to memory and other cognitive functions (e.g., planning, problem solving, concentration), emotional instability, co-ordination/strength changes and sensory changes (e.g., vision).

It is important to consider that the person with brain injury will often lack full awareness of the changes resulting from the injury (particularly the cognitive changes) and therefore it is important to consult with other people (family, clinicians, case manager, doctor) in considering the suitability and safety of suggested work goals.

Resources

TBI Staff Training website (www.tbistafftraining.info) has a number of tools and report formats available for VIP providers.

Further information can be found at:

[ABI Staff Training Website](#)

[Synapse Website](#)

[BIA Website](#).

4. Key features of an employment program for a person with a Brain Injury

Implementation of the VIP and feedback obtained throughout the program from clients, BIRP clinicians and vocational providers highlighted the following key features in supporting clients with a brain injury with employment

- **Commence services with a pre-referral** ('meet and greet') meeting so the client understands what a DES program involves.
- **Get the timing right** – together with the BIRP clinician, determine the client is ready to commence employment considering medical, cognitive, physical, behavioural and psychological factors.
- **Flexibility** of servicing that is **responsive** and adjusts to individual needs of the participant.
- Provision of **education** on brain injury to the **employer** if client is agreeable to disclosure of injury
- For Fast Track clients –
 - **Thorough assessment** of a client's work role, including allied health input.
 - **Regular monitoring** of the RTW through contact with client and employer including workplace visits as required.
 - Continually upgrading the RTW program, introducing new tasks and hours at a **pace suitable to the client**
- For New Track clients –
 - **Thorough initial assessment** to determine a suitable job goal, in conjunction with the BIRP clinician.
 - **Utilisation** of all appropriate interventions and incentives to support the client achieve a successful outcome ie. work experience, employer incentives, supported wages, on the job support.
- **Ongoing collaboration between BIRPs and providers** through joint appointments with clients, case reviews and progress updates
- **Work collaboratively** with other providers for clients eligible for dual funding ie, icare, NDIS to explore pre-vocational options, extended work experiences, on the job support etc.