

**MEDIA RELEASE
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National Skills Week highlights the missing piece in Australia's skills agenda: says peak body

As National Skills Week 2026 (24–30 August) celebrates the "life changing" impact of vocational education and training, the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) is calling on policymakers to recognise career guidance as a necessary investment, not an afterthought, in the national skills, training and jobs agenda.

CICA says that while significant public investment continues to flow into apprenticeships, traineeships and VET pathways, including the Australian Government's Fee-Free TAFE program, now a permanent feature of the national VET system under the Free TAFE Act 2025 and backed by more than \$1.6 billion in funding to 2034-35, Australia still lacks a matching national policy framework for lifelong career guidance, the service that helps people find and commit to those pathways in the first place.

The cost of inaction is real, according to CICA. Australians who lack access to quality career guidance are more likely to make poorly informed education and training choices, less likely to navigate labour market transitions successfully, and more vulnerable to long-term unemployment and underemployment. At a systemic level, the current fragmented approach contributes to skills mismatches and labour market inefficiencies that constrain productivity, a structural weakness the OECD has repeatedly identified.

CICA says these costs fall hardest on those least able to absorb them, including young people without access to quality school-based career education, adults in regions with limited service infrastructure, and workers navigating industries undergoing rapid structural change.

CICA Executive Director David Carney said the absence of a coordinated national approach was a structural gap, not a minor administrative one.

"Governments are investing heavily in skills and training, and rightly so. But that investment only pays off if people are matched to the right pathway in the first place. Career guidance is what connects people to training and training to jobs. Without a national framework for career guidance, we are leaving that connection to chance," Mr Carney said.

CICA points to international precedent, including the European Union's Cedefop reference framework for lifelong guidance, as evidence that comparable countries have made sustained policy commitments in this area, including dedicated governance structures, funding models and workforce standards for career practitioners. CICA argues Australia is increasingly out of step with this international benchmark.

CICA has called for a National Lifelong Career Guidance Framework, developed collaboratively by the Australian Government with state and territory governments and the career development sector, and covering the following:

- clear national goals for career guidance across education, training and employment settings;
- cross-portfolio governance, potentially including a dedicated national body;
- professional standards and registration requirements for practitioners working in publicly funded settings;
- a national audit of service reach and equity, particularly for underserved populations;
- an evidence and data framework, developed through Jobs and Skills Australia; and
- a formal review of public funding for career guidance services.



Mr Carney said National Skills Week was a timely moment for policymakers and stakeholders across the skills, training and employment system to consider where career guidance sits in the broader reform agenda.

"Skills reform, VET reform, employment services reform: career guidance touches all of them, but it rarely gets its own seat at the table. National Skills Week is a chance to ask whether that needs to change," Mr Carney said.

The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) is the national peak body for the career development profession in Australia. It represents ten state, territory, and national member associations, providing a unified voice for career practitioners across the country. CICA's work spans policy advocacy, professional standards, and stakeholder engagement, positioning it as the key point of contact for government, education, and industry on matters relating to career development and career guidance.

National Skills Week is an initiative of SkillsOne, supported by federal and state governments, running from 24 to 30 August 2026.

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