



Employment First (E1st): A Family Perspective

Employment First Is...

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Integrated community employment refers to *work* that is performed by a person with a disability who:

- **Is paid at or above minimum wage,**
- **Receives the same benefits,**
- **Interacts with other employees, and**
- **Has the same opportunities for advancement as employees without disabilities doing the same or similar work.**

Employment First (E1st) is based on the idea that “Employment is the first priority and preferred outcome of publicly funded services for people with disabilities.” (*Iowa APSE*) It may sound like another “new thing” but really it isn’t. Instead, it is a way for Iowa services to increase integrated work options for Iowans with disabilities. E1st is one way Iowa is meeting requirements of the **Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act** (WIOA). WIOA is a federal law supporting integrated community work experiences and employment for *ALL* citizens.

E1st requires a positive view of everyone’s work potential in integrated community settings. Iowa systems no longer ask whether a person can work, but instead ask what employment best matches a person’s strengths, skills, interests and conditions for success.

To summarize, E1st changes the employment question from “Can a person work?” to “How can a person work?”. E1st emphasizes that with a good job match and the right supports **Everyone CAN work!**



Everyone Benefits!

- Integrated employment provides Iowans with disabilities with increased income, opportunities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, and community involvement.
- Our economy benefits when people with disabilities are in the workforce, paying taxes and spending their earnings.
- Iowa benefits from reduced costs to Medicaid and income support programs.
- Businesses benefit from the contributions of employees with disabilities.



Integrated community employment decreases dependency on public benefits programs.

*Employment is also one of the best ways to **increase:***

- *Dignity*
- *Self-reliance*
- *Responsibility*
- *Economic independence*
- *Positive attitudes*
- *And community acceptance of **people with disabilities.***

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services 2001 Report to the President

Pursuing Integrated Employment

We all know change can be good but it can also be hard. It can take time to get used to new ideas. For some people the idea of integrated community employment for people with disabilities is a new one, but considering all the benefits discussed we know it is the right thing to do and worth the efforts!

Listed below are links to stories and videos that demonstrate different benefits integrated employment offers individuals, their families, co-workers and employers. No matter where people are in the process of pursuing integrated community employment these stories will show the benefits using real life examples. Please view and share as much as you would like!

⇒ www.jobhonor.org Videos of different employment successes

⇒ www.idaction.org/videos Videos of people with disabilities living and working in their communities

⇒ www.iowawins.org Stories of employees & employers with disabilities

⇒ www.apse.org/resources/videos-stories The **Association of Persons Supporting Employment First (APSE)** has a collection of video stories

⇒ [US Dept. of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy](http://www.dhs.gov/office-of-disability-employment-policy)

“ALL citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life.” Office of Disability Employment Policy

Iowans with disabilities at Work

It is important to remember throughout this process that WORK can and will look different for each individual. Goal setting, job exploration, volunteering, internships and skills training are experiences job seekers may have on their way to having a job to be proud of! Through this process in addition to earning their own money they develop strong self-determination and advocacy skills. Click the image below to read some employment success stories in Iowa.



Support Available for Integrated Employment

Some supports, services and funding options available to assist Iowans with disabilities obtain employment are listed below. Not ALL possibilities are listed—talk to your team if you don't see what you are looking for!

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) helps people with disabilities to prepare for, find and keep employment. Visit www.ivrs.iowa.gov for details.

Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) helps educate, train and empower blind or visually impaired individuals, including providing integrated employment services. www.idbonline.org

Iowa Medicaid—Department of Human Services (DHS) Provides many supports to people with disabilities, including the ID, BI waivers and Habilitation services, for those eligible, that can be used for employment related assistance.

Mental Health and Disability Services (MHDS) There are regional services and funding for eligible people who may be on waiting lists or not Medicaid eligible. www.dhs.iowa.gov/mhds/disability-services/employment.

Iowa Workforce Development (IWD). There are **IowaWORKS** Centers around the state that offer accommodations and assistance to increase or improve a person's capabilities and possible job skills. Find an IowaWORKS center near you at www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/iowaworks-centers.

Iowa Department of Education (DE) strives to provide ALL students with educational opportunities and successfully participate in Iowa's workforce. Beginning at age 14 student IEP's should include specific work goals. Read more at www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/special-education/special-education-programs-services/secondary-transition.



Working Together
so all can work



*"I love working in my greenhouse!"
Marissa at **Strawhat Farms**.
Click to read Marissa's story.*



Answers to common questions—FAQs

Below are answers to frequently asked questions about Employment First.

Q: How do I find an IVRS office in my area?

A: They are listed by county on the [IVRS website](#).

Q: Will pre-vocational services go away?

A: NO. They will just look different.

Q: If a person with a disability is not on a waiver and wants to work, can they still receive employment training?

A: Yes! IVRS, IowaWORKS, and MHDS Regions serve eligible Iowans with disabilities.

Q: Are there any services to bridge the gap between pre-vocational and integrated community employment?

A: Yes! Opportunities for individuals to move from prevocational to integrated employment can include job shadows, volunteer work, on the job training or training programs with businesses or community colleges.

Q: Why is there all this talk about employment for people with disabilities now?

A: There is more national attention and recognition of integrated community employment as a civil right. The U.S. Department of Justice and Supreme Court require states to direct Medicaid funds to integrated settings.

Q: What jobs can people with the most significant disabilities expect to get?

A: It is understood that not everyone will have jobs right away. The important thing is having high expectations, honoring the dreams and goals of all people, including those with significant disabilities. A person's first job is not usually their last. Customized Employment is one option being used to create jobs. Read more about Customized Employment at www.dol.gov/odep/topics/CustomizedEmployment.

Confused by Acronyms?

Here are definitions to some acronyms related to employment

CBCM—Community Based Case Manager

IME—Iowa Medicaid Enterprise

CCO—Consumer Choices Option

IPE—Individualized Plan for Employment

CMS—Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

ISP—Individualized Service Plan

CRP—Community Resource Provider

MCO—Managed Care Organization

IHH—Integrated Health Home

PASS—Plan to Achieve Self-Support

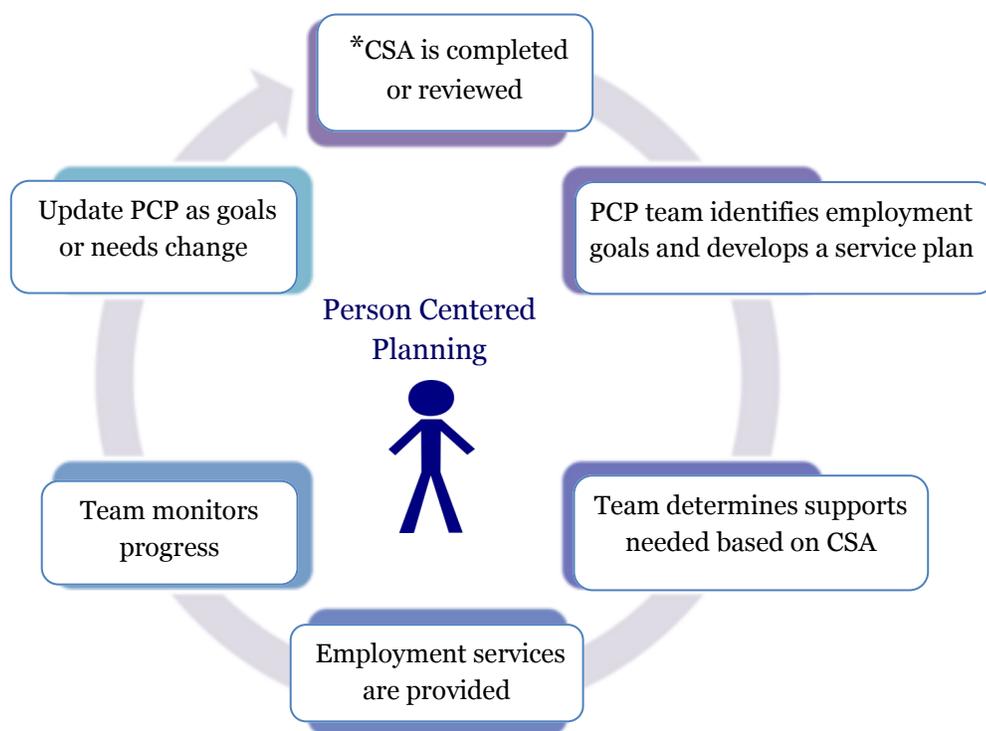


Detailed information about the Medicaid State Plan is available at dhs.iowa.gov/ime/about/stateplan.

Service Planning for Employment

The two main sources of employment services for people with disabilities are **Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS)** and **Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS)**. HCBS has the ID and BI waivers and the Habilitation Program that can offer support in the area of employment for those who qualify.

Once a person is determined eligible, the cycle of HCBS Waivers and Habilitation service planning is similar to the planning process IEP teams go through: evaluate, plan and review each year to decide if the plan is meeting the person's needs. Medicaid services designed to meet individual needs include **1) core standardized assessment (CSA)** and **2) person-centered planning (PCP)**. The picture below shows **Person Centered Service Planning**.



Important Definitions

Core Standardized Assessment (CSA) is an evaluation of the HCBS member's skills and needs for supports, including supports for employment.

Home & Community Based Services (HCBS) can provide long term supports, including employment.

Person-Centered Plan (PCP) identifies employment service needs and a plan for gainful work.

Service Prior Authorization ensures services are appropriate based on the member's assessed needs, employment goals and other funding sources that may be available for employment accommodations.



E1st Myths – CORRECTED!

Research proves the impact of high expectations and the important role families have on work success. . Family members have unique insights helpful during career development. Many myths about E1st exist... Here are some...CORRECTED!

Myth: If I (my loved one) works I/we will lose benefits or if I lose my job I will lose my services.

Fact: No. This is a very big concern for many families. There are services that can help people plan, keep benefits and insurance while working or preparing to work. Families can talk with a **Benefits Planner** through their service provider, IVRS or [Disability Rights Iowa](#).

Myth: Supports in the workplace are too costly.

Fact: Not true. Accommodations are generally NOT expensive! Actually, 15% of accommodations are free and 50% cost less than \$500. If you think about it, employers make accommodations often for employees without disabilities. For example, a flexible work schedule costs nothing! There are tax credits or deductions available for employers who create a disability-friendly and accessible environment. One example is the [Work Opportunity Tax Credit](#).

Myth: No one will hire me/my loved one.

Fact: EVERYONE can try employment. Some may need more accommodations, technology, or creative problem solving. The most important thing to have is the desire to work!

View the entire E1st guidebook on the MHDS Employment page:

dhs.iowa.gov/mhds/disability-services/employment



This publication has been developed by ASK Resource Center, based on the *Iowa Employment First Guidebook* created by staff from the Center for Disabilities Development, Iowa Department Human Services, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Rights and Iowa APSE.