

**EMPLOYMENT FIRST INITIATIVES
RESPONSES**

Over the past decade, a growing number of states have created “employment first” initiatives. These initiatives are intended to promote integrated employment as the preferred and first option for individuals with disabilities. Employment first initiatives implement a variety of strategies to promote this goal. We are interested to learn more about employment first activities in your state.

Alaska

Has your agency or organization been, or is it currently involved in, delivering, managing and/or funding an employment first initiative?

Yes

If yes, please indicate which types of activities have been undertaken (please indicate all that apply):

- Creating a vision statement for the employment of people with disabilities.
- Convening stakeholders through employment summits, community forums, coalitions, or other strategies.
- Conducting public outreach and education to raise expectations concerning employment among individuals, families, employers, and others.
- Defining “employment” to emphasize community, integrated employment.
- Developing employment first policies, directives, executive orders, proclamations, or written guidance for the service delivery system.
- Reallocating or restructuring public funding (vocational rehabilitation or Medicaid, for example) to promote and support integrated employment.
- Implementing supported and/or customized employment practices.
- Developing the capacity of staff and service providers through training, technical assistance, quality improvement initiatives, etc.

If yes, please provide a brief description of your agency’s employment first initiative (if information is available online, please provide a link).

We are still in the beginning stage but we convened a task force to study the issues and recommend strategies for advancing employment first policies. We are using Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) funds to hire staff responsible for "fleshing out" and coordinating the implementation of these recommendations. The 12 recommendations are: 1. Undertake a formal values clarification process within the State’s DD section. 2.

Set a specific target for increasing the number of people with developmental disabilities receiving supported employment services. 3. Develop a clear written state agency policy and convene a meeting of providers to overview values, assumptions and expectations. 4. Create a core leadership team dedicated to implementation of the new policy and the systems change needed to translate that policy into practice. 5. Develop an effective data collection system designed to track progress on implementation of the new policy and to measure the ongoing cost-effectiveness, quality and community impact of supported employment. 6. Continue to participate actively in the Alaska Works Initiative's activities to increase the employment rate of Alaskans with severe disabilities, help facilitate similar structures at the local level and assist in disseminating information about state-level activities to other SDS staff and providers. 7. Update or develop a collaborative agreement with DVR for individuals deemed eligible for supported employment services from both agencies and with DVR and the Department of Education & Early Development to address the needs of transition-aged youth. 8. Develop and implement specific rules, regulation and statutory language changes to support increasing integrated employment outcomes for people with DD. 9. Develop an ongoing, collaborative partnership with provider organizations that actively encourages organizational transformation and reallocation of human, fiscal and capital resources to programs and services that emphasize integration and employment. 10. Explore how to stimulate the development of a wider array of providers for supported employment services and new organizational sponsors for supported employment programs. 11. Explore new ways to fund supported employment services. 12. Develop a method for providing an ongoing program of technical assistance, training and support for purchasers and providers of day and vocational services in Alaska.

If yes, what agency(s) and/or organization(s) have been leading the state's employment first efforts? Who are the primary stakeholders and partners? Please describe below.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education and the Division of Senior & Disabilities Services are leading Alaska's employment first efforts. Primary stakeholders and partners are individuals with developmental disabilities, family members, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Education & Early Development (special education) and developmental disability service providers. Other partners, which will become more involved once needed policy change occurs, include all other MIG partners and stakeholders.

If yes, is your agency taking steps to track and evaluate the outcomes of your employment first activities?

Yes

If yes, please provide a brief description of your evaluation activities.

Current focus is on policy change - whether or not it occurs and once implemented, the impact of those changes will be evaluated. Also, we will be tracking the number of people who secured employment, number of hours worked, wages paid and type of jobs.

Does your state participate in the Alliance for Full Participation?

Yes

If yes, in what stage of formation is your state team? Please describe below.

The MIG leadership team services as the overall state team. However, a smaller group comprised of the entities and individuals leading the employment first initiative will comprise the working state team. This group is meeting June 14 to discuss specific action steps for "fleshing out" the employment first recommendations; one of the items to be discussed is the Alliance for Full Participation. In addition, funding from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority has been secured to convene self-advocates with developmental disabilities (youth and adults) at a statewide employment leadership forum focused on creating a social agenda and action plan for making fully integrated employment a reality for all people with developmental disabilities. Peer Power components include 1) a peer mentoring program; 2) educating youth and adults with developmental disabilities about work options, incentives and resources; 3) statewide advocacy coordination; and 4) planning for participation in the 2011 National Alliance for Full Participation Summit in Washington, D.C.

Your agency or organization and state:

Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education

Please provide contact information for further information on the responses above.

Millie Ryan, millie.ryan@alaska.gov, (907) 269-8992

Connecticut – Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

Has your agency or organization been, or is it currently involved in, delivering, managing and/or funding an employment first initiative?

Yes

If yes, please indicate which types of activities have been undertaken (please indicate all that apply):

- Convening stakeholders through employment summits, community forums, coalitions, or other strategies.
- Conducting public outreach and education to raise expectations concerning employment among individuals, families, employers, and others.
- Defining "employment" to emphasize community, integrated employment.
- Developing employment first policies, directives, executive orders, proclamations, or written guidance for the service delivery system.

- Implementing supported and/or customized employment practices.
- Developing the capacity of staff and service providers through training, technical assistance, quality improvement initiatives, etc.

If yes, please provide a brief description of your agency's employment first initiative (if information is available online, please provide a link).

Through a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant that we administer, we are funding Employment First initiatives through our Department of Developmental Services. Activities include outreach, an Employment First conference, evaluating policies and procedures, and identifying best practices.

If yes, what agency(s) and/or organization(s) have been leading the state's employment first efforts? Who are the primary stakeholders and partners? Please describe below.

Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is the lead, with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services as the VR partner. DDS is also working to strategically link to the supports and services of our DOL and our One Stop Career system.

If yes, is your agency taking steps to track and evaluate the outcomes of your employment first activities?

Yes

If yes, please provide a brief description of your evaluation activities.

DDS is now collecting data on the number of consumers who are competitively employment.

Does your state participate in the Alliance for Full Participation?

Yes

If yes, in what stage of formation is your state team? Please describe below.

We are in the early stages, and send updates to the Alliance on our activities.

Your agency or organization and state:

Bureau of Rehabilitation, Connecticut

Please provide contact information for further information on the responses above.

Amy Porter, Bureau of Rehab Services, 25 Sigourney Street Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 424-4864; amy.porter@ct.gov

Connecticut – Department of Developmental Services

Has your agency or organization been, or is it currently involved in, delivering, managing and/or funding an employment first initiative?

Yes

If yes, please indicate which types of activities have been undertaken (please indicate all that apply):

- Convening stakeholders through employment summits, community forums, coalitions, or other strategies.
- Conducting public outreach and education to raise expectations concerning employment among individuals, families, employers, and others.
- Defining “employment” to emphasize community, integrated employment.
- Reallocating or restructuring public funding (vocational rehabilitation or Medicaid, for example) to promote and support integrated employment.
- Implementing supported and/or customized employment practices.
- Developing the capacity of staff and service providers through training, technical assistance, quality improvement initiatives, etc.

If yes, please provide a brief description of your agency’s employment first initiative (if information is available online, please provide a link).

DDS had an Employment First "kickoff" conference in June 2008. Since that time a variety of employment trainings have been offered and work has occurred on re-writing our waiver amendments so that they better support the attainment of community-based work outcomes. In 3/2010, we received \$500,000 from our state Connect-Ability MIG grant. This will allow DDS to continue providing training and technical assistance to further integrated competitive employment outcomes.

If yes, what agency(s) and/or organization(s) have been leading the state’s employment first efforts? Who are the primary stakeholders and partners? Please describe below.

DDS has an employment committee consisting of consumers, family members, providers and state agency staff.

If yes, is your agency taking steps to track and evaluate the outcomes of your employment first activities?

Yes

If yes, please provide a brief description of your evaluation activities.

Our agency business plan tracks the number of people who become competitively employed. It also has business goals to enhance the number of people in supported employment.

Does your state participate in the Alliance for Full Participation?

Yes

If yes, in what stage of formation is your state team? Please describe below.

Our employment committee reports on their activities to the Alliance. CT DDS is also a member of SELN (State Employment Leadership Network).

Your agency or organization and state:

Connecticut Department of Developmental Services

Please provide contact information for further information on the responses above.

Robin Wood, Self Determination Director, robin.wood@ct.gov; 860-418-6138

Connecticut - Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services

Has your agency or organization been, or is it currently involved in, delivering, managing and/or funding an employment first initiative?

Yes

If yes, please indicate which types of activities have been undertaken (please indicate all that apply):

- Creating a vision statement for the employment of people with disabilities.
- Convening stakeholders through employment summits, community forums, coalitions, or other strategies.
- Conducting public outreach and education to raise expectations concerning employment among individuals, families, employers, and others.
- Defining “employment” to emphasize community, integrated employment.
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If yes, please provide a brief description of your agency's employment first initiative (if information is available online, please provide a link).

Employment and educational services are integral to DMHAS' goal of offering a recovery-oriented system of care for persons in recovery who experience behavioral health conditions. One of the first significant steps to be taken in this direction is to ensure that all DMHAS consumers have both the necessary opportunities and supports to become involved in meaningful activities of their choice as well as to contribute to the broader community. Individuals with behavioral health conditions consistently express their desire for employment. From the recovery perspective, meaningful employment and education also have been shown to promote recovery from psychiatric and addiction disorders and to facilitate improvements in diverse domains from symptom relief to successful community integration.

Currently DMHAS funds 35 agencies across Connecticut to provide a broad menu of employment and education services. While employment and education strategies must be tailored to meet individual needs, agencies generally offer a range of services including career planning, job search assistance, job placement, on- and off-the-job coaching and career advancement services and supported education. Approximately 3000 persons per year are assisted in finding and keeping employment through the DMHAS system. DMHAS is in the fourth year of a multi-stage process for reconfiguring its employment and educational service delivery systems. In response to increasing demand on the part of consumers for meaningful employment and educational opportunities, including the feedback of multiple stakeholders who participated in statewide focus groups, DMHAS coordinated and hosted a large employment services consultation in April of 2003. This event resulted in a series of recommendations that will guide the Department in the process of designing a more flexible, comprehensive array of career development services, which will serve as a critical component of its recovery-oriented system of care.

The following recommendations are based on this consultation and incorporate extensive feedback from consumers and practitioners, the DMHAS preferred practices initiative, clinical research outcomes and the overarching DMHAS mission to deliver recovery-oriented care. They outline the steps that DMHAS will pursue to reconfigure its employment and educational service delivery system, fully integrating employment and education services within the Department's clinical treatment system, broadening the existing array of opportunities and supports offered consumers who choose to go to work or school, and building on existing resources, both public and private, to foster community integration. These recommendations are further described in the document, "DMHAS Recovery-Oriented Employment Services: Vision Statement & System Interventions."

Providing education and training on employment: The DMHAS Recovery Institute is offering a module within its Supported Community Living course that promotes awareness of the critical role of employment and education in recovery. This training is offered throughout the system and addresses the impact of employment and education on recovery, the myths that underlie many of the current employment practices, evidence-

based employment practices and recommendations for strengthening the service delivery system. In addition, extensive training is being conducted for consumer groups and staff at the lead mental health authorities, provider agencies and advocacy organizations.

Providing hopeful messages on the impact of employment and education on recovery: It is critical that staff convey hope regarding the positive impact of employment and education on recovery as part of the admissions process. All individuals who are new to the DMHAS system will be given the optimistic message that work is good for one's mental health and that people can work successfully if they are offered meaningful job experiences that are consistent with their talents and interests and offer a fair wage. People will be informed of available employment and educational resources, both within and outside the DMHAS system, and will have the opportunity to consult with an employment/education specialist regarding their interests. Other information to be distributed routinely at intake will highlight success stories from persons in recovery and the impact of employment earnings on benefits. In addition, DMHAS will move toward requiring employment and educational outcomes in all treatment plans unless the individual indicates that this is not a primary goal.

Reconfiguring the addictions employment system: DMHAS is working with persons in recovery, advocates and providers to recommend strategies for promoting employment and educational opportunities for individuals with addictions disorders. This is an ongoing process that will result in the dissemination of effective strategies for promoting employment and education as well as other recommendations for improving career-related outcomes for persons in recovery from substance abuse disorders.

Promoting interagency collaboration: Staff are pursuing opportunities to coordinate education and employment services with those of such agencies as the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (capitalizing on an existing shared staff position between BRS and DMHAS that promotes collaborative employment programming), the CT WORKS one stop career centers, the state university system, community colleges, adult education programs and skills training courses. Of particular interest is the linkage with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services' Connect-to-Work benefits counselors, who are available to provide accurate and comprehensive information regarding the impact of earnings on benefits.

Integrating clinical treatment and employment services: Multiple efforts are underway to promote integrated service planning and monitoring. DMHAS is working with Dartmouth University to implement a Johnson & Johnson grant at three DMHAS mental health facilities. The grant supports the implementation of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) evidence-based supported employment model, which features the inclusion of employment specialists as valued treatment team members, a zero exclusion policy from employment services based on diagnosis or symptomatology, rapid job placement in positions that match individual interests, and customized follow-along supports for as long as needed. A number of clinical facilities are placing employment specialists on their treatment teams to enhance service integration and increase the visibility of employment as a critical recovery resource. This team approach also implies that all team

members assume responsibility for facilitating the successful employment of consumers, i.e., that employment becomes “everyone’s business”.

Enhancing educational opportunities: DMHAS has convened a stakeholder committee to advise the Department on strategies for enhancing educational opportunities for persons in recovery. As part of the process, DMHAS will conduct an educational needs assessment of individuals in the system to determine their educational needs and desires, as well as a study of best practices in the field. The committee has recommended that DMHAS facilitate linkages with existing resources including supported education programs, post-secondary disability offices and adult education systems.

Encouraging peer-run businesses: Wherever possible DMHAS will look for opportunities to contract out services to peer-run businesses (e.g., transportation or food services) that can serve the dual purposes of performing necessary functions while promoting the employment and recovery of people with psychiatric and/or addictions disorders.

Establishing key outcome indicators: As part of the process of realigning the outcome indicator system to reflect recovery-oriented outcomes, DMHAS is reviewing employment and educational performance indicators. The Department is developing ways to track progress over time across service types, ultimately to monitor the extent to which programs help people who are unemployed to advance toward employment, and those who are working, to advance toward self-sufficiency.

Making employment everyone’s business: As the employment indicators are refined and the outcome monitoring system becomes fully operational, these quality assurance indicators should be seen as key outcome indicators for the total service delivery system and a critical measure of the success of its recovery-oriented services.

Person-centered care: The Department is promoting the widespread use of person-centered planning to move the focus of treatment beyond the maintenance of clinical stability/abstinence to include a greater emphasis on community integration. Person-centered planning processes would require that all treatment plans document areas such as physical health, social relationships, employment, education, spiritual life, housing satisfaction, etc. These practices are being disseminated through the DMHAS Recovery Institute and extensive technical assistance. Visit <http://www.ct.gov/dmhas/cwp/view.asp?a=2902&q=335274>.

If yes, what agency(s) and/or organization(s) have been leading the state’s employment first efforts? Who are the primary stakeholders and partners? Please describe below.

Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Department of Social Services - Bureau of Rehabilitation and the Department of Labor - CT. Works Along with Connect-Ability, the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) funded State of Connecticut project to identify and remove barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities.

If yes, is your agency taking steps to track and evaluate the outcomes of your employment first activities?

Yes

If yes, please provide a brief description of your evaluation activities.

We have just finished a major revamping and updating of our data collection system (DDAP/Avatar) which collects data from all state operated mental health facilities along with all DMHAS funded PNP provider agencies. During that process, employment services, attributes, definitions, rules and data requirements were set up.

[Further information on these services, attributes, definitions, rules and data requirements was provided in the survey response; if you would like this information, please email nrelave@aphsa.org].

Your agency or organization and state:

Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Connecticut

Please provide contact information for further information on the responses above.

Sharon R. Wall, Program Manager for Mental Health Employment & Education Services
Statewide Services Division, 410 Capitol Ave., 4th flr. P.O. Box 341431 Hartford, CT.,
06134
Tele.: 860-418-6659; email: sharon.wall@po.state.ct.us

New Jersey

Has your agency or organization been, or is it currently involved in, delivering, managing and/or funding an employment first initiative?

No

If your agency is not currently involved in an employment first initiative, are you interested in or thinking about using this approach?

Yes

Does your state participate in the Alliance for Full Participation?

Yes

If yes, in what stage of formation is your state team? Please describe below.

A group has been formed under the guidance of the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey's Boggs Center, which is the Center for Excellence funded by the DD Act.

Your agency or organization and state:

NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Please provide contact information for further information on the responses above.

brian.fitzgibbons@dol.state.nj.us

Oregon

Has your agency or organization been, or is it currently involved in, delivering, managing and/or funding an employment first initiative?

Yes

If yes, please indicate which types of activities have been undertaken (please indicate all that apply):

- Creating a vision statement for the employment of people with disabilities.
- Convening stakeholders through employment summits, community forums, coalitions, or other strategies.
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- Implementing supported and/or customized employment practices.
- Developing the capacity of staff and service providers through training, technical assistance, quality improvement initiatives, etc.

If yes, please provide a brief description of your agency's employment first initiative (if information is available online, please provide a link).

Visit http://www.dhs.state.or.us/dd/supp_emp/.

If yes, what agency(s) and/or organization(s) have been leading the state's employment first efforts? Who are the primary stakeholders and partners? Please describe below.

Seniors and People with Disabilities' Office of Developmental Disability Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Addictions and Mental Health Division; Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities

If yes, is your agency taking steps to track and evaluate the outcomes of your employment first activities?

Yes

If yes, please provide a brief description of your evaluation activities.

Providers and personal agents report monthly on employment of people with DD; Addictions and Mental Health evidence-based supported employment reports quarterly on employment of people diagnosed with serious/persistent mental illness and Voc Rehab reports monthly on employment opportunities for all people served.

Does your state participate in the Alliance for Full Participation?

Yes

If yes, in what stage of formation is your state team? Please describe below.

The DD Employment Task Force has been meeting since 2004 and has been the main driving force for the State of Oregon to adopt an Employment First Policy. The DD Council was also the driving force in legislative change for students with DD graduating from school to get a diploma certificate. The goals and objectives developed by the Task Force are located on AFP's Facebook page.

Your agency or organization and state:

State of Oregon Department of Human Services, Children Adults and Families Division,
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services/Medicaid Infrastructure Grant

Please provide contact information for further information on the responses above.

Sara Kendall, sara.kendall@state.or.us, 503-945-5857