

# Advancing New Jersey's Employment First Practices and Policies

## A Comprehensive Review and Analysis

February 2022

This work is supported with funding by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, in part by grant number 2001NJSCDD-02, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.

**RUTGERS**

Edward J. Bloustein School  
of Planning and Public Policy  
JOHN J. HELDRICH CENTER  
FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Report Structure</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Section 1: The National Environment</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Section 2: Analysis of New Jersey's Alignment with Employment First</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Section 3: Systems Change Recommendations for Advancing Employment First</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Section 4: High-Performing States Framework Issues and Recommendations for Advancing Employment First</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Section 5: Advocacy Plan and Implementation</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Section 6: Overview of New Jersey Service System</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>About the Heldrich Center</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>About the Institute for Community Inclusion</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendix A: Resources on Integrated Employment</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Appendix B: New Jersey Stakeholder Online Survey Results</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix C: References</b>	<b>56</b>

# Introduction

---

In 2012, New Jersey became an Employment First state to “proactively promote competitive employment in the general workforce for people with any type of disability” (New Jersey Office of the Governor, 2012), thereby “joining the national movement to deliver meaningful employment, competitive wages, and career ladder opportunities for people with disabilities” (New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities [NJCDD], 2020). New Jersey is currently one of 39 states with an Employment First policy (Hoff, 2021). This initial announcement was followed by a policy statement further defining Employment First in New Jersey: “Competitive employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred post education outcome for people with any type of disability” (New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities, n.d.).

In spite of this policy shift toward Employment First almost a decade ago, the mainstream labor force participation rate for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in New Jersey has not significantly increased and continues to lag behind national trends. To address this issue, in March 2021, NJCDD contracted with the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey to evaluate New Jersey’s Employment First policies and practices, and develop recommendations and an advocacy plan to increase meaningful competitive employment for people with I/DD in New Jersey. This work was done in partnership with the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston (ICI). The goal was to better understand the strengths, challenges, and opportunities New Jersey faces in implementing its Employment First policy and to identify strategies to support more New Jersey residents with I/DD to succeed in integrated employment.

This project used multiple information collection approaches to understand the experiences, barriers, and opportunities related to integrated employment in New Jersey, and to ensure that New Jersey stakeholders had opportunities to participate. Information collection included:

- ▶ Key informant interviews
- ▶ Virtual stakeholder forums
- ▶ Policy and operational document review
- ▶ Secondary data analysis
- ▶ Online survey

This project resulted in collection and review of an enormous amount of information, with the goal of fully describing the current system of employment services and supports for individuals with I/DD in New Jersey, the strengths and challenges of the system, and recommendations for advancing Employment First. In developing this report, sincere effort has been made to represent diverse viewpoints, and portray the status of employment services and supports for individuals with I/DD in New Jersey as accurately as possible.

# Report Structure

---

This report consists of the following sections:

- ▶ **Executive Summary:** Summary of the report findings and recommendations.
- ▶ **Section 1: The National Environment:** An examination of the current national environment, including federal policies, regarding employment of individuals with I/DD.
- ▶ **Section 2: Analysis of New Jersey's Alignment with Employment First:** A review of the history and status of Employment First in New Jersey for individuals with I/DD.
- ▶ **Section 3: Systems Change Recommendations for Advancing Employment First:** Recommendations for using the High-Performing States Framework as a comprehensive systems change approach.
- ▶ **Section 4: High-Performing States Framework Issues and Recommendations for Advancing Employment First:** Comprehensive review of issues, organized under the seven elements of the High-Performing States Framework, with recommendations.
- ▶ **Section 5: Advocacy Plan and Implementation:** Strategies for applying the information contained in this report to improve employment for individuals with I/DD.
- ▶ **Section 6: Overview of New Jersey Service System:** Detailed background information on the various elements of the New Jersey system of employment supports for individuals with I/DD.
- ▶ **Appendix A: Resources on Integrated Employment:** Includes links to an array of resources with further background on issues discussed, and tools for addressing report recommendations.
- ▶ **Appendix B: New Jersey Stakeholder Online Survey Results:** Summary of results of online survey conducted as part of information gathering for this report.
- ▶ **Appendix C: References:** A comprehensive bibliography for citations in this report.

A note on the language used in this report: unless otherwise specified, the term "employment" refers to working in the community in individual or group employment. When referring to "competitive integrated employment" (as defined in the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [WIOA]), "individual employment," "group employment," and "extended employment" (working in a sheltered workshop), these terms will be specified.

# Executive Summary

---

In 2012, the State of New Jersey made a commitment to improving employment outcomes for residents with disabilities by adopting an Employment First policy. Despite this directive intended to prioritize policies and resources to increase employment of individuals with disabilities, there has been little progress in the workforce participation rate for New Jerseyans with I/DD.

## Employment First: Strengths to Build On

New Jersey has numerous strengths to build on in terms of advancing employment for individuals with I/DD. These include:

- ▶ **Efforts by public agencies:** Both the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), as major funders of employment services for individuals with I/DD, have undertaken a series of policy changes over the past several years to advance employment of individuals with I/DD.
- ▶ **Support by legislature:** The state legislature has expressed increasing and ongoing support for integrated employment, as evidenced by numerous pieces of proposed and recently passed legislation.
- ▶ **Support by business community:** The business community, led by the New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA), has expressed strong support for employment of individuals with I/DD, including development of a series of action items.
- ▶ **Advocacy:** New Jersey's Developmental Disabilities Advocacy Network, the New Jersey Association of People Supporting Employment First, and other organizations have increasingly been advocating for policy and practice changes to advance Employment First.
- ▶ **Federal picture:** The federal government, through actions by Congress and federal agencies, has placed increased emphasis over the past decade on integrated employment, while encouraging the reduction in use of facility-based services (such as sheltered workshops). This federal landscape provides opportunities for New Jersey to leverage in increasing integrated employment.

## Employment First in New Jersey: The Challenges

**New Jersey is behind national trends:** While the overall rate nationally of workforce participation by individuals with I/DD is a challenge, New Jersey lags significantly behind other states. Indicative of this is that DDD is the primary agency through which adults with I/DD receive funded services in New Jersey. According to the latest available data, this represented almost 12,000 individuals in day and employment services, but less than 1,800 were either working or receiving services to assist them to become employed in the community (National Survey of State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Agencies' Employment and Day Services, [StateData.Info, 2021a](#)).

**Individuals and families are unable to get the help they need:** Individuals with I/DD and their families report a huge sense of frustration in their ability to easily access the necessary assistance and supports from public agencies and service providers to become successfully employed.

**Policy doesn't translate into practice:** New Jersey has numerous policies that are highly supportive of integrated employment, including the Employment First policy. However, the reality in practice is quite different, as indicated by lack of progress, inability to access necessary services and supports, and often indifference or active discouragement by professionals in terms of pursuing employment in the community.

**Inconsistency in culture of support for integrated employment:** Underlying many of the issues and challenges that New Jersey faces is a lack of belief in the values of Employment First that are expressed in New Jersey's [Principles of Employment for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#). These core beliefs include:

- ▶ Competitive employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred post-education outcome for people with any type of disability.
- ▶ People are "ready" to work as soon as they express an interest in doing so.
- ▶ It is presumed that all people with disabilities can and should work.

**Systems are siloed:** Service systems and supports are highly siloed, and relationships and partnerships between public systems (DDD, DVRS, New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], etc.) need significant improvement. There are inconsistencies between systems, and major challenges in accessing funding and services across systems.

**Lack of consistent quality of service providers:** New Jersey's network of service providers is inconsistent in terms of its ability to provide quality assistance and supports that result in successful employment. While some of this is due to internal operational issues, a major challenge is the complex administrative structure imposed on service providers, extensive time spent negotiating with funding agencies over service authorizations, and insufficient funding.

**Lack of consistency in transition:** While New Jersey has pockets of excellence in terms of transition from school to employment, too often youth with I/DD leave school with little work experience, and are unprepared for the workplace as adults.

## Realizing the Vision of Employment First

In order for New Jersey to make significant improvements in employment of individuals with I/DD, a comprehensive and broad series of actions, and sustained effort over the long term, is needed. The following are key recommendations.

### Systems Change Framework

1. **Use a nationally recognized comprehensive framework for change:** True systems change requires a series of inter-related factors simultaneously. The [High-Performing States Framework](#) from ICI (Hall, Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore, & Metzel, 2007) provides a model for long-term sustained change, with leadership and values serving as catalysts for change, combined with strategies (policy and goals, financing, capacity development/training and technical assistance, outcome data, and service innovation), and supported by interagency collaboration.

### Leadership and Values

2. **Establish an Employment First commission:** New Jersey has never fully articulated its vision for Employment First, nor has it developed a well-defined road map, work plan, and assigned agency responsibilities to make it a reality. A primary recommendation of this report is the establishment of an Employment First commission, comprised of a broad range of stakeholders to oversee ongoing efforts to improve employment for individuals with I/DD.
3. **Strengthen employment advocacy, including engagement of self-advocates:** There is a need to increase grassroots advocacy for employment, including more strongly engaging individuals with I/DD in efforts to advance employment. This includes helping individuals to better understand their employment options and how they can be successful working in the community, and supporting self-advocates to be "at the table" and engaged in the decision-making processes for improving employment outcomes.

## Interagency Collaboration

4. **Break down the silos:** The public agencies that support individuals with I/DD must work together to break down the silos that too often result in the inability of individuals to get the assistance they need. This includes revising and updating Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), and working together to eliminate administrative hurdles for individuals in accessing services from multiple agencies.
5. **Create a customer-responsive system:** To address the confusion and lack of responsiveness often experienced by individuals and families seeking employment assistance and support, there is a need for a more customer-centered approach to service design and delivery.

## Policy and Goals

6. **Create a culture of informed choice:** While much lip service is paid to the concept of "informed choice," in practice many individuals with I/DD and their families are unaware of or don't understand the choices available to them in terms of employment, with decision-making deferred to others. Detailed policies need to be created, implemented, and monitored that ensure individuals have the necessary information, knowledge, skills, and experiences to make informed decisions regarding employment.
7. **Strengthen support for families:** There is a need to more strongly support families in efforts to advance employment, with a goal of having a system that does not require continuous involvement of families in order for individuals with I/DD to become successfully employed. This effort must include working with families who do not currently support integrated employment for their family member, to help them consider steps forward to consider employment possibilities.
8. **Improve support coordination:** DDD support coordination must be enhanced to ensure community employment options are fully considered and explored, within an atmosphere of presumption of employability.
9. **Increase access to DVRS services:** Increase the number of individuals with I/DD served by DVRS, through ensuring consistent application of policies, and staff development.
10. **Strengthen transition:** Students with I/DD leaving school prepared to go to work is a major component of advancing Employment First over the long term. School districts in New Jersey need to create an expectation of employment and careers for youth with I/DD, which includes gaining work experience while in school, with the state providing supports through both policies and resources.
11. **Address extended employment and subminimum wage:** Ensure that individuals currently in extended employment (sheltered work) and earning subminimum wage have every opportunity to consider and succeed in integrated employment paying minimum wage or better.
12. **Strengthen administrative support for service providers:** Streamline the administrative processes for employment service providers, to reduce the need to continuously negotiate authorization for services, and cumbersome billing.

## Capacity Development: Training and Technical Assistance

13. **Enhance training and technical assistance:** Enhance existing training and technical assistance for service providers to improve service quality, diversity of employment opportunities, and ensure alignment with national best practices, including greater availability of customized employment services. In addition, support service providers to undertake innovations to help address staff shortages.
14. **Develop a comprehensive communications strategy:** While New Jersey has created some informational materials in support of Employment First, they are scattered and insufficient. A comprehensive communications strategy is needed, including a website that provides centralized access to the full range of policy and practice documents, and user-friendly guides and resources for individuals, families, and others.

## Financing

15. **Rebalance funding:** Analyze current use of funds for day and employment services, and determine how funding can be shifted and increased over time to prioritize employment in the community.
16. **Revise current rate structure for employment services:** Reimbursement rates need to be addressed, as current rates result in service providers operating employment services at a loss.

## Outcome Data

17. **Strengthen data tracking and transparency:** New Jersey needs to examine its current data system regarding employment of individuals with I/DD, to ensure that progress is fully and properly tracked, and that there is transparency regarding availability of data.

## Service Innovation

18. **Address benefits preservation:** Concerns over the negative impact of income on eligibility for vital public benefits is a major barrier to employment. Steps need to be taken that increase the ready availability of assistance in managing benefits, combined with shifting the messaging on benefits to one that is "pro-employment". This includes increasing the use of the online tool [Disability Benefits 101](#).
19. **Address transportation challenges:** Transportation for employment is a major challenge. It is recommended that: (a) stronger linkages be made with transportation officials at local, state, and regional levels; (b) knowledge of transportation issues be incorporated into required staff competencies; and (c) youth and adults with I/DD be given tools and training to understand their transportation options.
20. **Meet the needs of underserved communities:** Individuals with I/DD in diverse communities may lack access to necessary services and supports regarding employment, either because of a lack of availability, or the services do not reflect their cultural needs. As part of overall efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion, steps must be undertaken to build employment services and supports within these underserved communities. Similarly, rural and urban areas often lack service options, and efforts must be made to expand availability of services in these areas.
21. **Pursue innovative practices:** New Jersey should consider an array of innovative practices to expand employment of individuals with I/DD, including greater use of the general workforce development system, increased use of technology, supporting individuals to participate in career pathway efforts (career and technical education, apprenticeships, etc.), and increased employment in the public sector.

There are a variety of changes in policies and practices in New Jersey that can lead to increased employment of individuals with I/DD. However, for these to become reality requires a stronger and more universal belief in Employment First throughout the state. Policymakers and practitioners must start from a place of truly believing that individuals with I/DD can be successfully employed, and share that optimism with others, including people with I/DD and their families. They must also take actions that support that belief. It is only through having a clear vision for Employment First, and acting upon that vision consistently and on a day-to-day basis, that the promise of Employment First for individuals with I/DD will become reality.



# Section 1: The National Environment

---

## Federal Legislation and Policies

In analyzing efforts at advancing employment of people with I/DD in New Jersey, it is important to understand the national context within which New Jersey operates. Throughout the past decade, an array of legislation and policies have created a consistent federal intent that publicly funded employment services and supports should focus on meaningful jobs integrated in the community.

**Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS):** A primary funder of employment services and supports for individuals with I/DD in New Jersey and nationally are Medicaid funds administered under Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). Guidance from CMS in 2011 and in the 2019 1915(c) Technical Guide make it clear that individual competitive integrated employment is the preferred outcome of HCBS employment-related supports (CMS, 2011; 2014, p. 249; 2019, pp. 149–150).

**The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act:** WIOA is the federal legislation that authorizes the public workforce development and public vocational rehabilitation (VR) systems. Passed in 2014, WIOA establishes “competitive integrated employment” as the optimal outcome of VR services (in New Jersey these are services provided by DVRS and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired [CBVI]). WIOA defines competitive integrated employment as full-time or part-time work at minimum wage or higher, with wages and benefits similar to those without disabilities performing the same work, and fully integrated with co-workers without disabilities. WIOA increased the role of VR in transition through creation of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and also placed new restrictions on the use of subminimum wage.

**U.S. Department of Justice:** In recent years, the U.S. Department of Justice has initiated numerous legal actions in states related to access to integrated employment. For example, settlement agreements with Rhode Island in 2014 and Oregon in 2015 required the states to take action to ensure that employment is offered as a priority outcome, and to improve both participation in integrated employment and the quality of employment outcomes.

## The Rise of Employment First Policies

In addition to federal initiatives, Employment First has become a national initiative, with policies in 39 states, including New Jersey (Hoff, 2021). These policy commitments include executive orders, state agency policy statements, or legislation that prioritize community employment for people with disabilities who receive publicly funded services. Employment First represents a commitment by a state that all working-age individuals with I/DD: (a) are capable of performing work in typical integrated employment settings; (b) should receive, as a matter of state policy, employment-related services and supports as a priority over other facility-based and non-work day services; and (c) should be paid at minimum or prevailing wage rates (Kiernan, Hoff, Freeze, & Mank, 2011; Rogan & Rinne, 2011).

## Section 2: Analysis of New Jersey's Alignment with Employment First

---

### Development of Employment First Policy

On April 19, 2012, Governor Chris Christie **announced** that New Jersey would become an Employment First state. The statement accompanying this announcement included the expectation that New Jersey's Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDL) and Department of Human Services (DHS) would coordinate to deliver services that advance Employment First, with the expectation that all state government entities examine their respective policies and regulations to prevent barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities. This announcement was followed by a policy statement defining Employment First: "Competitive employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred post education outcome for people with any type of disability." In turn DDD issued the **Principles of Employment for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**, which further articulated the vision for Employment First. In 2016, the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) (the state workforce board), issued its own definition of Employment First that was specifically inclusive of individuals with I/DD: "Competitive integrated employment will be seen as the first and primary option for all individuals with disabilities, including individuals with the most significant intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), who apply through informed choice for workforce services" (SETC, 2016a).

### Efforts to Advance Employment

Since New Jersey became an Employment First state, there have been various efforts to increase employment of individuals with disabilities in general, and specifically those with I/DD.

#### Disability Agency Initiatives

As the primary agencies from which individuals with I/DD receive employment supports, DDD and DVRS have undertaken various efforts to advance Employment First, including the following.

#### DDD

- ▶ Throughout DDD program manuals, guidance, materials, and communication with various stakeholders, Employment First is a key theme for services and supports. In the program manuals for its HCBS Medicaid waivers that fund employment supports, DDD states that "Division personnel, Support Coordinators, planning team members, etc. must begin with the presumption that everyone receiving Division-funded supports and services will work in the general workforce."
- ▶ As part of service planning, DDD has created a *Pathway to Employment* structure, aligned with Employment First's presumption of employability.
- ▶ Training and capacity building with stakeholders has occurred, including support coordinators, service providers, educators, individuals, and families.

## DVRS

DVRS made a series of commitments in the WIOA state plan in both 2016 and 2020 regarding Employment First (SETC, 2016b, 2020).

- ▶ DVRS staff members, vendors, and state partners will have the expectation that employment is the first and preferred option for adult activity for those with I/DD.
- ▶ Individuals with I/DD will have increased opportunities to become DVRS consumers, obtain job skills, and obtain competitive employment that matches their interests, skills, and capabilities.
- ▶ Through a leverage of services with DDD, DVRS will serve an increased number of individuals with I/DD. (The 2016 WIOA plan included a specific goal of a 50% increase in the number of individuals with I/DD applying for DVRS services by September 1, 2017. Data indicate this was not achieved.)
- ▶ DVRS has undertaken efforts to transition individuals out of extended employment (sheltered work) into community employment, and has committed to increasing those efforts.

## Commitment by Legislature

The state legislature has shown a strong commitment to employment of individuals with disabilities and I/DD in particular. In May 2021, legislation ([S-1937/A-1957](#)) was signed into law, establishing a task force to promote employment of individuals with disabilities in state and local government, and in January 2022 six additional pieces of legislation were signed into law, focused on transition, employment by state government, transportation, funding of reasonable accommodations, and direct support staffing. Among the focus areas of additional bills introduced in the last two legislative sessions include: (a) tax credits for employers for hiring people with disabilities; (b) expanding the number of individuals who can maintain public health benefits and go to work; (c) establishing a commission on supportive technology for individuals with I/DD; (d) establishment of a commission to improve employment of people with disabilities; and (e) creation of a public awareness campaign on employment of people with disabilities. This support by the state legislature is encouraging in terms of advancing Employment First efforts.

## Engagement of Business Community

New Jersey, like many states, has strong labor market demand and is experiencing significant labor market shortages. This labor market environment is conducive to development of employment opportunities for individuals with I/DD, and business leaders in New Jersey have been highly engaged regarding employment of individuals with I/DD. A coalition of New Jersey's major business associations, led by NJBIA, has been working to advance employment for people with I/DD. This coalition has made a series of recommendations ranging from greater business awareness regarding the capabilities of people with I/DD, stronger career pathways, and improving point of entry for businesses and contact connections to work with community partners (NJBIA, 2020, 2021).

## Data Show Limited Progress in Advancing Employment

Despite concerted efforts, including those outlined above, in the almost decade since New Jersey became an Employment First state, there has emerged a clear disconnect between New Jersey's stated Employment First policy and the reality of what often occurs on the ground, with limited progress in increasing the number of individuals with I/DD who are employed.

**Level of participation in employment services is below national averages:** The percentage of individuals who receive integrated employment services from their state I/DD agency is a strong indicator of a state's progress in advancing employment. (Individuals in integrated employment services either have a job or are on a pathway to employment.) Based on state responses to ICI's National Survey of Day and Employment Services, nationally in FY 2019 (most recent data available), this percentage varies widely from state to state, from 3% to 85%, with an average of 22%. While this

national average is itself problematic, New Jersey is well below this average. Of the individuals receiving day and employment services from DDD, only 14% are in integrated employment services, which is the eighth lowest in the nation). The remainder of the approximately 12,000 individuals served, are in non-work day programs (this does not include extended employment/sheltered work, which is administered by DVRS). On a positive note, this percentage has increased from 10% in FY 2018. New Jersey's transition to fee-for-service billing has created changes in data collection, and DDD staff feel the FY 2019 data are a more accurate reflection of the current status of employment services and supports than previous years ([StateData.Info](#), 2021a).

**A majority of individuals want to work:** Data from the [National Core Indicators Project](#) (2020) indicate that in 2018–2019, 54% of adults served by DDD who were not working in the community wanted a job, but that many of these individuals (38%) did not have a goal to get a job in their service plan.

**VR outcomes are positive but access to services is an issue:** The public VR system (DVRS and CBVI) is a very mixed picture in terms of persons with I/DD (Winsor et al., 2021, p.109).

- ▶ On the positive side, individuals who are able to access VR services get fairly good outcomes. The rehabilitation rate (the percent of people who entered employment out of those who completed a VR individual plan for employment) for individuals with I/DD in New Jersey has varied, from a high of 63% in 2007 to a low of 40% in 2011, but has hovered around 55% since 2014. The 2019 rate of 55% is essentially equivalent to the state average for all individuals, which in previous years it lagged. In addition, for the past few years, the rehabilitation rate for individuals with I/DD in New Jersey has been six to seven percentage points higher than the national average. For individuals with I/DD in 2019, the average weekly earnings at case closure in New Jersey were \$231.49, and the average hours worked at closure were 23, essentially equivalent to the national averages.
- ▶ While the outcomes being achieved for those able to get services is a positive, access to VR services is a significant issue. Relatively few individuals with I/DD are receiving VR services, particularly as compared to other states. On average, there have been slightly less than 600 individuals with I/DD cases closed annually by VR. As a percentage of overall cases, this is approximately half the national average (five-year average of 4.7% in New Jersey vs. 8.9% nationally).

Additional data reinforce the current challenges of employment for individuals with I/DD.

- ▶ **U.S. Census Data:** Per the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) data, in FY 2019, 77% of adults in New Jersey without disabilities were employed vs. 30% of adults with a cognitive disability, essentially equivalent to the national average. These percentages have essentially been stable for the past several years ([StateData.Info](#), 2021b). (While ACS does not collect information on people with I/DD specifically, an individual with a cognitive disability has indicated that because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting six months or more, s/he has difficulty learning, remembering, and concentrating.)
- ▶ **Social Security Data:** While Social Security data are not broken down by type of disability, given that most individuals with I/DD are Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program recipients, these data are an indicator of the challenges of employment for individuals with I/DD. In FY 2019, the percent of SSI program recipients working in New Jersey was only 5.13%, slightly more than the national average of 4.88%. In FY 2019, only 16 people in New Jersey who received SSI used a Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) and only 94 participated in the Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) program. (PASS and IRWE are work incentives to assist individuals to become employed.) To place this in context, in FY 2019, 143,542 adults in New Jersey with disabilities received SSI payments, suggesting that many adults are not given the support needed to make use of work incentive programs ([StateData.Info](#), 2021c).
- ▶ **Individuals in Extended Employment (Sheltered Work) and Subminimum Wage Employment:** During FY 2019–20, approximately 2,840 individuals were in extended employment (NJDOLE, 2020a). According to July 2021 data from the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) (USDOL, 2021), there are 2,200 individuals in New Jersey earning subminimum wage. Although these data are not broken down by disability, most of these are likely individuals with I/DD.

**Table 1: New Jersey – Employment Data Snapshot**

**Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

	New Jersey		National	
DDD: Total in day and employment services <sup>1</sup>	11,971		657,826	
DDD: Total in integrated employment services <sup>1</sup>	1,723	14%	141,678	22%
Individuals not working who want to work <sup>2</sup>		54%		44%
Community employment as goal in service plan <sup>2</sup>		60%		29%
I/DD cases closed by public VR <sup>3</sup>	577	4.6% of all cases	44,487	9.3% of all cases
VR I/DD – cases closed by VR into employment <sup>3</sup>	211	5.8% of all cases	16,254	10.8% of all cases
VR I/DD – mean weekly earnings at closure <sup>3</sup>	\$216		\$228	

<sup>1</sup> National Survey of State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Agencies' Employment and Day Services – 2019

<sup>2</sup> National Core Indicators, In Person Survey State Report, 2018-2019, New Jersey

<sup>3</sup> Rehabilitation Services Administration 911 – 2018

**Lack of Progress on Employment First: Stakeholder Perspectives**

The lack of progress regarding Employment First indicated by the most recently available data was reinforced by comments from stakeholders who reported a “say, do” gap, where policy does not translate into practice.

- ▶ Self-advocates expressed frustration that their efforts to make New Jersey an Employment First state have only been effective on paper in terms of written policies and procedures, but have not led to more people with significant support needs gaining equitable community employment.
- ▶ Comments and responses indicated that DDD’s requirements regarding addressing employment during service planning were inconsistently implemented, and often given cursory attention by service coordinators. While DDD’s *Pathway to Employment* procedures are based on a presumption of employability, one survey respondent felt that the system was still one where individuals had to “opt in” and prove their employment worth.
- ▶ There is wide variation in addressing employment in transition, despite requirements to do so. As one family noted, “My granddaughter is 22 and this issue has not been discussed.”

A fundamental issue is a culture that despite having a stated policy of “Employment First,” there is a belief as indicated by both words and actions, that employment in the community is simply not an option for many individuals with I/DD. Consensus from forum and key stakeholder discussions, as well as the survey, consistently noted that employment as an option is often given limited consideration.

- ▶ One survey comment stated:  
*For our son, we were told that he was not a candidate for employment, although we are not sure exactly why, as this wasn’t explored with us. We’re thinking that it would be great to think in an innovative fashion to try and help figure out if he could be employed in some fashion.*
- ▶ Another parent noted, “Many professionals believe a person can’t work; many parents will believe what professionals say.”
- ▶ In some cases there is antagonism toward the concept of prioritizing employment. One parent commented in a survey response, “As the mother of a person who is so severely disabled intellectually, physically, and medically that they cannot be employed, your premise on page one is an insult” (referring to the definition of Employment First).

Another parent, however, shared the story of successful employment for their non-verbal son with complex support needs, which only occurred through strong advocacy with the school and DVRS. This parent noted:

*Unless we change the culture of this state with the systems of service, we can't help parents realize the ability of their children. I never met anybody that I didn't feel could do something as far as employment if they chose, and yet we still have a culture of the inability of folks with disabilities to actually hold employment.*

Efforts to increase employment have too often been haphazard and isolated. As one survey respondent stated, "There is intent and then there is coordinated action, and in New Jersey we are lacking this. There is knowledge of what needs to get done and a lack of strategic implementation to make it happen."

## Section 3: Systems Change Recommendations for Advancing Employment First

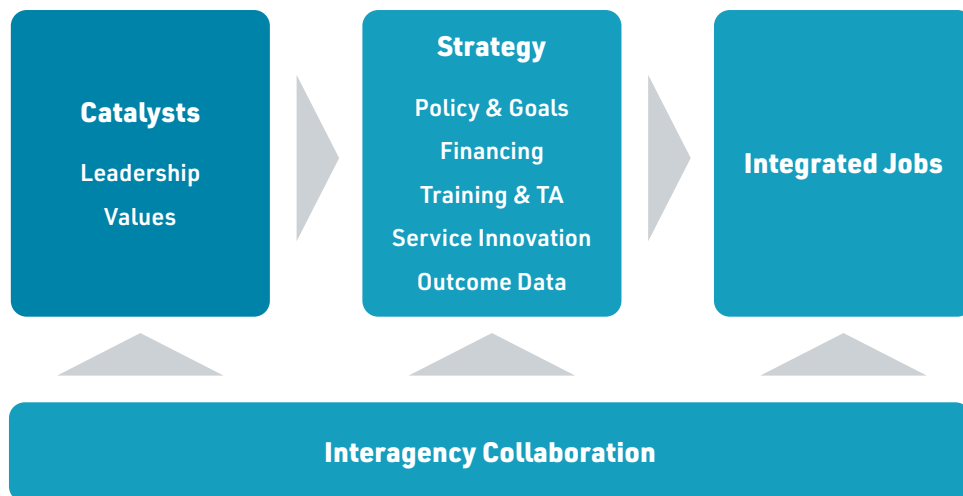
**Systems Change Issue:** Specific policy and practice issues need to be addressed to improve employment outcomes. However, for those changes to be successful and sustaining, requires addressing them through a comprehensive systems change approach.

### **Recommendation: Adoption of the High-Performing States Framework**

New Jersey has made sincere efforts to increase employment of individuals with I/DD, but they have been isolated, sporadic, and lacking in consistency and follow-through. Increasing employment of individuals with I/DD requires a comprehensive, multi-prong approach that addresses a broad range of inter-related elements.

Since 2007, ICI, in partnership with the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities, has used the High-Performing States Framework (see Figure 1) to guide systems change to expand integrated employment in its work across the United States. The model identifies seven elements working together to advance integrated employment (see Table 2). High-performing states maintain a consistent focus on employment in policy, procedure, and infrastructure within each of the elements, using a holistic approach (State Employment Leadership Network, 2020). This type of comprehensive approach is necessary in order for New Jersey to realize its vision of Employment First and increased employment for individuals with I/DD.

**Figure 1: High-Performing States Employment Framework**



Hall et al. (2007)

**Table 2: Elements of High-Performing States**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Description</b>
Leadership and values	Leadership is defined as taking responsibility for the transition of youth and young adults with I/DD from high school to competitive integrated employment or postsecondary education, and for working-age adults with I/DD from non-integrated employment services to competitive integrated employment. Leadership is dispersed through the state, regional, and local agencies that play a role in the transition and employment of these groups.
Policy and goals	State and local agencies' goals and operating policies require and support competitive integrated employment and postsecondary education as the first and preferred option in planning and service delivery for youth and working-age adults with I/DD.
Financing	Funding strategies prioritize and support competitive integrated employment and postsecondary education for transitioning youth and working-age young adults with I/DD.
Capacity development/ training and technical assistance	There is a sustained and significant investment in education, training, and technical assistance to support statewide goals regarding the transition of youth and young adults with I/DD from school to postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment, and for working-age adults with I/DD from non-integrated employment services to competitive integrated employment. These investments are targeted at the staff of state agencies, schools and providers, youth and young adults, their families, and employers.
Interagency collaboration	There is a shared statewide intra-agency and interagency responsibility and authority for coordinating transition services and achieving competitive integrated employment of youth and working-age adults with I/DD. This collaboration draws on the participation of a broad consortium of stakeholders across the state. Collaborating public agencies should at a minimum include state and local education, VR, workforce, I/DD, and Medicaid agencies.
Service innovation	State agencies create opportunities for schools, providers, youth, and working-age adults with I/DD and their families to use best practices and creatively develop supports for transitioning to postsecondary education and competitive employment.
Outcome data	Data on service delivery and employment outcomes for youth and working-age adults with I/DD are shared by state agencies, and used to track progress and support state agencies and policymakers in developing policies and procedures.



## Section 4: High-Performing States Framework Issues and Recommendations for Advancing Employment First

---

The following section discusses a wide variety of issues related to employment of individuals with I/DD, which are categorized within the seven elements of the High-Performing States Framework. For each of these 25 issues, context is provided, followed by specific recommendations. For each item, links and references to source documents are provided, along with links to resources on the topic area.

Some of these issues align with more than one element in the High-Performing States Framework, and in such cases, the issue is categorized under the primary element. While categorization is helpful in terms of understanding the breadth of items to be addressed, most important is recognizing the need to address the full range of issues.

### High-Performing States Element: Leadership and Values

#### Leadership and Values Issue 1: Need for a Leadership Structure for Employment First

There is a need for strong cross-agency leadership and support for Employment First in New Jersey. While the state has undertaken a range of initiatives to advance employment for individuals with I/DD, these efforts have often been inconsistent and not coordinated. New Jersey has never fully articulated its vision for Employment First, nor has it developed a well-defined road map, work plan, and assigned agency responsibilities to make it a reality. To significantly advance the workforce participation rate of persons with I/DD, many policies and practices still need improvement and reform, and this must be done within a culture of consistent belief in the ability of individuals with I/DD to be successful in the workplace.

#### Recommendation: Establish a statewide Employment First commission

To address the need for a more comprehensive strategic approach based on the High-Performing States Framework, it is recommended that New Jersey develop a statewide Employment First commission, with representation from the full cross-section of stakeholders. A similar strategy has been used in many states to support Employment First implementation. The responsibilities of such a taskforce would include:

- ▶ Development of a cross-agency definition for Employment First, and the implications of this definition for policy and practice, using New Jersey's [Principles of Employment for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#) as a starting point.
- ▶ Development of a shared action plan for advancing Employment First, with clear benchmarks, using the recommendations in this report as a basis.
- ▶ Providing oversight and accountability for the work plan's implementation, and serving as a forum for information sharing and dialogue on issues.

Suggested members of the group include: DDD, DVRS, CBVI, self-advocates, family advocates, NJCDD, New Jersey Medicaid Authority, NJDOE Special Education Division, SETC, New Jersey Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), New Jersey ACCSES, New Jersey Association of Community Providers, Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, and others.

- ▶ While New Jersey's Employment First policy is cross-disability, it is recommended that the commission focus on individuals with I/DD, including those with complex needs, to ensure clarity of mission and purpose, and engagement of task force members.

- ▶ It is also recommended that dedicated resources be identified to support the commission, including staff to lead and/or support the task force to help maintain momentum, and manage commission logistics. Some states have used staff from external organizations such as the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (e.g., Massachusetts), while other states (e.g., Ohio, Colorado) have received substantial budget allocations from their state legislatures, and hired staff specifically to manage and support Employment First efforts.

### **Leadership and Values Issue 2: Need for Increasing Advocacy Efforts**

Over the past few years, the [Developmental Disabilities Action Network](#), a network of self-advocates, family members, support providers, and disability stakeholders, has proposed a series of policy changes and undertaken efforts to advance employment for individuals with I/DD, including improving the quality of employment staff through incentives for credentialing, addressing staff turnover, improving benefits counseling services, addressing issues with DVRS, enhancing WorkAbility (the New Jersey Medicaid Buy-In program), and improving Pre-ETS. [New Jersey APSE](#), through its governmental affairs committee, has also advocated for advancement of Employment First.

However, stakeholders felt there is still a lack of a sufficiently strong grassroots advocacy regarding Employment First, especially among self-advocates.

- ▶ Some self-advocates expressed that when given proper support and encouragement, Employment First can become a reality and would like more people to experience the benefits of competitive, integrated employment. During a community forum, one self-advocate, who in her words “escaped” the sheltered workshop by finding a job on her own, said, “We as self-advocates need to talk more about how people can work in the community.”
- ▶ Self-advocates also felt that government agencies value self-advocacy as a concept but maybe aren’t as keyed into how much the agencies can learn from the self-advocates. A community forum participant noted, “Agencies value self-advocacy as a service, but do not listen or change based on information from self-advocates.”

### **Recommendation: Increase advocacy**

1. Expand the coalition of organizations engaged in employment advocacy, resulting in a stronger collective voice.
2. Advocates should review the large number of bills focused on employment of individuals with disabilities pending in the state legislature, and consider focused efforts on those bills that are most critical in order to get them reintroduced and passed in the next legislative session.
3. Encourage and support individuals with I/DD and family members to participate in [Partners in Policymaking, trainings from the New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project](#), and similar advocacy trainings.
4. Groups, agencies, and organizations that are committed to Employment First in New Jersey should engage and promote leadership from self-advocates in their advocacy efforts. Undertake efforts to expand the number of self-advocates in New Jersey with a passion for employment through developing peer-to-peer trainings for self-advocacy leaders to share their experiences and teach others how to exercise informed choice and self-determination and how to advocate – individually and systemically – for competitive, integrated employment opportunities.
5. Expand the self-advocacy employment materials currently available in New Jersey. [Green Mountain Self-Advocates](#) has a number of examples of self-advocacy employment materials, including an Employment First statement. Other examples of self-advocacy employment materials are available from [SABE](#) and [SARTC](#).

## High-Performing States Element: Interagency Collaboration

### Interagency Collaboration Issue 1: Siloed Services and Lack of Interagency Coordination

Individuals with I/DD needing employment supports typically requires working with two funding sources: DDD and DVRS. Under federal law, DDD cannot pay for Medicaid-funded employment services and supports that are available from DVRS. Therefore, individuals must apply for DVRS services, and either be accepted or turned down for those services before using DDD-funded employment services.

The report authors received extensive feedback regarding the challenges of siloed services, particularly in regard to DDD and DVRS, as well as a lack of effective coordination of transition services between schools and other agencies. On paper there is a clear process regarding individuals initially receiving employment services from DVRS (if determined eligible), with DDD then taking over. However, for individuals, families, and service providers, the reality is often quite different. Issues include:

- ▶ Confusion among agencies regarding who is responsible for specific services and the sequencing of services.
- ▶ Lack of coordination and consistency between DDD and DVRS in provision of services for individuals.
- ▶ Multiple players (DVRS, DDD, support coordinators, service providers) often passing the ball, and not working in a consistent way aligned with Employment First and responsive to individual needs.
- ▶ Extensive time and resources spent dealing with service authorizations.
- ▶ A lack of interagency engagement between schools and disability agencies with a lack of continuity between the school systems and adult services. In some cases, a lack of engagement of DDD and/or DVRS within the transition process was noted, while in others, agencies were engaged but there was lack of responsiveness and effective coordination.

### Recommendation: Interagency coordination

1. Conduct an inventory of existing agreements (MOUs) to determine whether all necessary agreements are in place and up to date. (For example, the publicly available [DVRS, CBVI, DDD MOU](#) is from 2008.)
2. Review the language of existing interagency agreements to ensure there is clarity regarding issues of eligibility determination, data sharing, referral processes, coordinating/braiding service delivery, coordinating/braiding funding, specific agency responsibilities, communication between systems, etc. (See [Promoting Competitive Integrated Employment through MOU's and Other Inter-agency/-departmental Agreements](#) from the LEAD Center for details regarding best practices in interagency agreements.)
3. Ensure that interagency agreements are widely available, and that staff across public agencies, service providers, and educational agencies are aware of and understand how to implement and support interagency agreements.
4. Develop guidance to the field on how services should be identified, sequenced, and braided across systems to meet desired employment outcomes, enabling people to move smoothly through the employment process, including a process map to detail agency and staff roles and responsibilities when referrals are made to other systems and when individuals move between systems. (See example from Alaska: [A Guide for the Proper Definition and Sequencing of DVR and SDS Employment Services for SDS I/DD Waiver Recipients](#).)
5. Develop interagency groups at state/local levels to strengthen partnerships, identify and address interagency issues at a systems and individual level, and address common goals. Within this effort, consider development of local interagency transition teams in which school districts, support coordinators, service providers, local DVRS and CBVI offices, and other stakeholders meet regularly to build relationships and share updates, information, and resources. See [resources from Massachusetts on interagency teams](#) to assist with this process.

## Interagency Collaboration Issue 2: Complexity of System and Challenges in Accessing by Individuals and Families

Consistently, individuals and families expressed frustration with the difficulty of navigating New Jersey's complex and siloed service system.

- ▶ Many family members and disability professionals expressed that the full array of employment services and supports are only accessed by individuals who have a knowledgeable and persistent family member to advocate and guide the person through the system.
- ▶ Services are difficult to understand and navigate, inconsistent, and lacking in responsiveness, with a feeling by individuals and families of being left on their own to navigate the system and access services. For example, many families are uncertain about the partnership between DDD and DVRS and how to navigate both agencies in order to find and maintain integrated employment.
- ▶ One participant shared during an interview:

*The leaders believe poor employment outcomes are a result of employers not hiring and transportation issues, but really it is the system is too complicated and burdensome for family, individuals, and providers. The flow chart to understand working between systems and how and when to access systems is extremely cumbersome.*

### Recommendation: System complexity from individual and family perspective

1. There is the need for development of a culture in individual agencies, and as a collective whole, that focuses on clarity and simplification of processes from the perspective of individuals and families, as well as basic customer service and responsiveness. The **customer-centered design** approach embraced by many workforce development systems should be considered as a framework for this.
2. As noted elsewhere in this report, greater availability of user-friendly materials for individuals and families would be helpful in accessing and navigating the service system. While such guides can be helpful, they are only truly effective when dealing with systems and agencies that are knowledgeable, working collaboratively, and responsive to individual needs.
3. Addressing the interagency issues discussed previously is core to the issue of system complexity.

## High-Performing States Element: Policy and Goals

### Policy and Goals Issue 1: Lack of Self-Determination and Informed Choice Regarding Employment

It is critical that individuals have the necessary information, knowledge, and experiences to make truly informed decisions about working, and this occur within an atmosphere that facilitates self-determination and informed choice, including addressing any questions or concerns individuals have regarding employment. Highly integrated within New Jersey's policy and practice documents is this concept of "informed choice." However, based on feedback from stakeholders, the actual practice of informed choice is at times problematic:

- ▶ There is too often reliance simply on an individual's verbal response regarding their interest (or lack thereof) in community employment, when individuals have limited experience on which to base that decision, and sometimes limited experience in making decisions for themselves.
- ▶ There is a practice by individuals with I/DD of often deferring choice making to others (e.g., family members, guardians, caregivers, professional staff) whether intentionally by those involved or not. During a key stakeholder interview, a parent commented:

*It feels like those who do [work in a sheltered workshop] have been steered in that direction, haven't been informed of other options, and/or don't have the time or knowledge to put in the work to get competitive, integrated, employment.*

- ▶ As noted, DDD's *Pathway to Employment* process, intended to encourage pursuit of employment in the context of informed choice, is not always well facilitated by service coordinators.
- ▶ Despite having an Employment First policy, there is too often a neutrality from staff regarding whether or not an individual should pursue employment, combined with a presumption that if an individual or family expresses lack of interest in integrated employment, that there is little that can or should be done.

### **Recommendation: Ensure informed choice**

1. Develop a clear and consistent definition of informed choice, to be used by public agencies (DDD, DVRS, CBVI), educators, and service providers.
2. Develop implementation guidelines regarding practices that support informed choice.
3. Integrate training on informed choice into staff development, including support coordinators, service provider staff, VR counselors, educators, and others.
4. Develop user-friendly materials for individuals with I/DD on what informed choice is in terms of employment, and provide training on informed choice and employment led in part by self-advocates.
5. Develop user-friendly materials for families on supporting their family member regarding informed choice.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration's [Criterion for an Integrated Employment Location in the Definition of "Competitive Integrated Employment" and Participant Choice](#) contains extensive guidelines regarding informed choice. The ICI publication, [Employment and Employment Supports: A Guide to Ensuring Informed Choice for Individuals with Disabilities](#), provides a variety of best practice strategies and resources that can be helpful.

### **Policy and Goals Issue 2: Need for Increased Family Support**

Given the prominent roles of families in the lives of individuals with I/DD, support for families is critically important to advancing employment. Key themes that emerged regarding family support issues include:

- ▶ As noted, frustration by family members in navigating the service system to get necessary employment services and supports, for both transitioning students and adults.
- ▶ Concerns about their family member working in the community, viewing their family member as not having the skills to succeed in integrated employment, or issues regarding safety in the community and possible mistreatment. Another concern is viewing community employment as less predictable and stable than a sheltered workshop or day program.
- ▶ Concerns over the impact of working on the family member's public benefits.

### **Recommendation: Enhance family support**

Recommendations for addressing these concerns are weaved throughout this report. Additional recommendations include:

1. Sharing of success stories and peer-to-peer efforts among families, focused on families who are hesitant regarding having their family member pursue employment.
2. Enhancement of service coordinators and service provider staff skills in how to engage family members who have concerns about employment, in part by encouraging "one step at a time" exploratory approaches.
3. The [Charting the LifeCourse](#) framework is an excellent tool to help families plan for services and supports across the lifespan. New Jersey is a member of the national [Community of Practice for Supporting Families of Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#); the Charting the LifeCourse framework and tools are a key part of this. The agencies, groups, and programs involved in this effort should continue to explore ways to integrate Charting the LifeCourse into services and programs.

### Policy and Goals Issue 3: DDD Support Coordination Issues

Support coordination is a major linchpin in terms of individuals becoming successfully employed. DDD support coordinators facilitate development of the Individualized Support Plan, coordination of services with service providers and funding agencies (DDD, DVRS, etc.), and other services. The development of the individual's **Pathway to Employment** is required annually by DDD as part of the completion of the *Person Centered Planning Tool*. The *Pathway to Employment* is intended to ensure that employment is addressed in the service planning process within an Employment First framework. Information from the *Pathway to Employment* is incorporated into the **Individualized Support Plan**, which must contain at least one goal related to employment.

While on paper, the *Pathway to Employment* is one of the better examples nationally of this type of process, feedback from stakeholders indicates that it is often poorly implemented. Stakeholders noted that support coordinators are too often not well skilled in facilitating the *Pathway to Employment* discussion, and do not facilitate a process that ensures employment is fully explored for individuals.

Additional feedback was received regarding challenges of support coordination, including:

- ▶ Inconsistency in the quality of support coordinators.
- ▶ High turnover in support coordinators, resulting in a lack of relationship with individuals and families, and understanding of their needs.
- ▶ Support coordinators who lack understanding of best practices in employment services and supports, and who are not aligned with the values of Employment First (e.g., presumption of employability).
- ▶ Support coordinators lacking skills to deal with the challenges of moving individuals along the employment pathway who have families who are unwilling to consider employment for their family member.

### Recommendation: Improve support coordination

1. DDD has a strong structure in place in terms of *Pathway to Employment* and a range of quality assurance tools to support the Individualized Support Plan employment requirements. Clearly, however, these tools are not having the intended impact. DDD should undertake a review of this structure and determine why it is not resulting in intended accountability and outcomes.
2. Provide support coordination staff specific guidance and training on aligning their roles with Employment First, and how to encourage and support individuals to take action and access services that lead to community employment. The SELN publication ***Guidance for Conversations: Identifying and Designing Pathways towards Rewarding Employment*** is recommended. The publication helps staff to assess a person's interest in and progress toward employment, and ensure they are moving along the employment path to the maximum extent possible.
3. Case management staff have a key role in supporting informed choice. As noted in more detail in the discussion of informed choice and self-determination, support coordinators should be among those who receive training on effective facilitation of informed choice.
4. Many of the issues of support coordination go beyond employment, and it is recommended DDD undertake a review of the current support coordination structure and take steps to address general quality and stability issues. According to one respondent of the stakeholder survey:

*As support coordinators we often find that individuals and families do not agree with employment for the person. They often fear losing benefits and/or do not think they or their loved ones need to be challenged by the obligations of employment. As support coordinators we are not in a position to change people's minds. Often these views are deeply embedded in the thinking. More work needs to be done to address educating people about the impact to SSI and Medicaid when people work before opinions start to change. You cannot expect that simply putting an entry in the Individualized Support Plan that work outcomes will change. I have frequently recommended that someone do*

*a survey of the New Jersey Comprehensive Assessment Tool (NJCAT) responses on the question about whether the person completing the survey thinks the person will work. A high percentage of people who are closest to individuals with I/DD do not believe it is possible. Since they are the ones who will need to support the idea and use ongoing encouragement when someone does work, this will undermine all efforts. I've reviewed over 500 NJCATs in my career as a support coordination supervisor and support coordinator. The data is staring us in the face, but no one looks at it.*

#### **Policy and Goals Issue 4: Access to DVRS Services**

There have been a number of positive efforts by DVRS in support of Employment First, and many of the individuals with I/DD who receive DVRS employment services experience a successful outcome. At the same time, data indicate that a low number of individuals with I/DD are able to access necessary VR services. Extensive feedback was received regarding challenges experienced by individuals, families, and service providers in dealing with DVRS. These include:

- ▶ A high level of inconsistency from office to office in terms of eligibility determination, access to services, and level of customer service.
- ▶ A perception that too often DVRS staff view individuals with I/DD as not work ready or employable.
- ▶ Individuals being determined ineligible in a way that is not consistent with federal WIOA requirements – e.g., that individuals on Social Security disability benefits [SSI and Social Security Disability Insurance or SSDI] are presumed eligible; abiding by the requirement for “clear and convincing evidence” (the highest standard in civil law) when determining that an individual’s disability is too severe to benefit from VR services.
- ▶ Denial of services by DVRS that forces individuals to use their DDD individual budgets for essentially the same career planning, prevocational training, and supported employment services, resulting in an insufficient budget for work supports. As one parent noted, “DVRS is not on the same page, and all supports for employment drain the individual’s (Medicaid waiver) budget.”

Trial work experiences, used to determine whether an individual can benefit from VR services, do not demonstrate the potential capabilities of an individual in terms of employment. An employment provider commented that few providers are qualified to contract to deliver trial work experience, that there are few assessment community employer sites, and trial work experience does not take into account a person’s interests or are personalized to match a person’s job goal. This provider gave an example that one company only has a contract with the office supply retailer Staples for trial work experiences.

One self-advocate with I/DD shared his experience with DVRS. He said despite “making it clear that he wanted to make the real-life choice to go for employment” his counselor referred him to a psychological evaluation to make sure he was employable. After his evaluation he said his DVRS counselor did not “even understand” and “didn’t care” and was about to put him in an “inappropriate placement” that did not match his abilities. His service provider helped him advocate for a more appropriate job goal and found him a job that fit his skills. Many parent advocates commented that DVRS counselors were reluctant at best to work with people with I/DD and would mostly deem people “not ready” for services. Some parents view DVRS as under-skilled when working with people with I/DD. As one parent said:

*For our son we were told that he was not a candidate for employment although we are not sure exactly why as this was not explored with us. We are thinking that it would be great to think in an innovative fashion to try and help figure out if he could be employed in some fashion.*

### **Recommendation: Improve access to DVRS services**

1. Examine current policies and practices regarding determination of eligibility, and ensure they are fully and consistently implemented within the requirements of WIOA, and maximize opportunities for individuals with I/DD to access VR services.
2. Expand the diversity of trial work sites used to determine whether individuals can benefit from VR services, so that sites are available that allow individuals with I/DD to demonstrate their specific strengths and capabilities, and view employment in the community positively.
3. As recommended by the DVRS *Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment*: (a) provide training for DVRS counselors about individuals with the most significant disabilities with specific employment needs and techniques to address those needs; and (b) provide training about DDD as an agency and services it provides its consumers, and how to work collaboratively with DDD on meeting individual employment needs (NJDOL, 2020a, p. 25).

### **Policy and Practice Issue 5: Strengthening Transition to Improve Employment Outcomes**

Preparing young people for successful employment as adults is critically important not only for individual youth and their families, but also for changing the overall culture for employment of individuals with I/DD.

- ▶ Services for transition vary heavily between school districts across New Jersey. Some schools, particularly those in wealthy, suburban districts, represent “pockets of excellence,” offering robust transition services, including work experience and transition coordinators that help guide students and families through this life stage and preparing them for successful employment as adults. However, many schools – particularly those serving a large number of low-income students – lack the resources to provide transition coordination supports and to implement best practices supporting youth to achieve integrated employment.
- ▶ As previously noted, a lack of interagency engagement between schools and disability agencies is a major issue.
- ▶ Many families were disheartened by their family member’s transition experience, with parents feeling it is entirely up to them to guide their family member through the complex service systems on their own. As one parent noted, “Most of the parents I know who have employed kids had to do it themselves.” Families pointed to cumbersome systems to navigate, conflicting information, lack of statewide/top-down transition service standardization, the need to start employment services when the individual is younger, and the time and resources needed to successfully transition from school to adult services as root causes to poor transition experiences and outcomes.
- ▶ These findings were reinforced by a recent family survey on transition and access to adult services conducted by the New Jersey Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities program at the Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities. This survey found that the majority of families “are overwhelmed and do not have the time the transition process requires. Even if they understand the information, they still need help navigating the complex and complicated systems.” The study found that “the real issue for families is the complexity of the system, the number of agencies and people and the fact that none of them are coordinated or talk to one another” (Colacello & Kratchman, 2021).

### **Recommendation: Improve transition employment outcomes**

1. Create clear, statewide policy guidance on Employment First and transition.
2. Review current NJDOE policies/guidance on transition, and consider how these can be enhanced to strengthen employment experiences and outcomes. Massachusetts has a number of [policies on transition](#) that might serve as examples.
3. Enhance current training and supports on Employment First policies and practices for districts, especially for schools that have not been involved with regional transition trainings and collaborations in the past.



4. Given that work experience while in school has been shown to be one of the most important factors in employment success as an adult (Haber et al., 2016), districts should be encouraged to adopt best practices in work-based learning. The Employment First Massachusetts publication, *Work-Based Learning for Students with High Support Needs*, can serve as a resource.
5. Update transition and employment resources on the NJDOE website. Ohio is an [excellent example of transition resources online](#).
6. Develop user-friendly, plain language materials for students and families on supports, services, and resources relevant to finding and keeping employment while in school and after graduation, and ensure they are culturally relevant for diverse populations.
7. As noted under *Interagency Collaboration*, facilitate the creation of local interagency transition teams.
8. Consider the development of a program similar to the [Transition Specialist Endorsement](#) in Massachusetts. The endorsement provides recognition of a particular set of professional skills and knowledge related to providing transition services.
9. Utilize the county college-based adults centers for transition for individuals with disabilities, newly established by the state legislature under [S-4211/A-6228](#) to support successful transition to employment, aligned with Employment First.

### **Policy and Goals Issue 6: Pre-Employment Transition Services**

Pre-ETS, authorized by WIOA and funded by VR (DVRS and CBVI), have become an increasingly important service to prepare transition students for competitive, integrated employment. Services available include: (1) job exploration counseling, (2) work-based learning experiences, (3) counseling on postsecondary education opportunities, (4) workplace readiness training, and (5) instruction in self-advocacy.

One self-advocate described his high school transition services, which included work experiences through DVRS Pre-ETS, as helping him “tremendously.” However, many others felt the quality and availability of Pre-ETS was inconsistent. Parents shared that Pre-ETS could be “hit or miss” and that “Pre-ETS services need a knowledgeable parent advocate to initiate; it is not automatic.” Also, agencies have experienced staffing challenges with Pre-ETS, and some rural parts of the state are not served by a single Pre-ETS provider.

### **Recommendation: Improve Pre-ETS for students with I/DD**

1. Examine the current participation levels of individuals with I/DD and whether this aligns with the WIOA requirements that Pre-ETS be available to all students in need of these services.
2. Examine current methods for students with I/DD accessing Pre-ETS, and make necessary changes for improving more consistent access.
3. Review current program offerings by Pre-ETS providers to ensure they are fully inclusive of the needs of students with I/DD.
4. Address issues regarding lack of availability of Pre-ETS on a statewide basis, including rural areas.

### **Policy and Goals Issue 7: Extended Employment and Subminimum Wage**

In the course of developing this report, extensive comments were received regarding extended employment (sheltered work). The extended employment programs pay individuals based on their productivity rate, under a special wage certificate – often referred to as a 14(c) certificate – allowing them to be paid less than New Jersey’s minimum wage of \$12 per hour. During FY 2019–20, there were approximately 2,840 individuals in extended employment (NJDOE, 2020a).

It is clear that extended employment as an option continues to have major support from families, service providers, DVRS, and political leaders. However, many stakeholders feel the level of support for extended employment is at odds with the state’s vision for Employment First.

- ▶ Extended employment does not align with the state's definition of Employment First (prioritizing employment in the general workforce).
- ▶ Continuing to devote a significant and increasing level of resources to extended employment is at odds with prioritizing resources for competitive employment.
- ▶ In terms of creating a culture that focuses on competitive employment as the preferred option, it is problematic to continue to present extended employment as one of the readily available and viable options for individuals with I/DD, rather than as an alternative that should be pursued only when all other options have been fully explored.

While there is strong support for extended employment in New Jersey, this is not the case in all other states or at the federal level, which is likely to affect extended employment in New Jersey over the long term.

- ▶ At the federal level, efforts to completely phase out subminimum wage continue to gain momentum, and there is also proposed federal legislation intended to encourage states to phase out the use of sheltered work.
- ▶ The U.S. Department of Justice is increasing its enforcement efforts to limit the use of public funds in support of segregated settings such as extended employment.
- ▶ Numerous states have discontinued the use of subminimum wage and sheltered employment, as part of efforts to ensure policy and resources are focused on supporting individuals in integrated employment.

DVRS Actions: DVRS has made recent changes to encourage individuals transitioning out of extended employment into competitive integrated employment. All extended employment providers must provide competitive integrated employment services, and have a goal of annually placing 10% of individuals in extended employment into competitive integrated employment (NJDOL, 2018). In addition, the extended employment hybrid program allows individuals to spend part of their week in competitive integrated employment (minimum of one day per week for 2.5 hours) and also in extended employment (NJDOL, 2016).

In addition to these DVRS actions, there are a multitude of federal and state requirements in terms of regular reviews of individuals earning subminimum wage and/or working in extended employment (sheltered work), with similar requirements for both.

- ▶ Under the federal WIOA and New Jersey Administrative Code, all individuals currently either in subminimum wage employment or extended employment must have at least an annual review (and in some cases a semi-annual review) that includes employment counseling to explore possible transition to integrated employment.
- ▶ In addition, under Section 511 of WIOA, individuals age 24 and under must take a series of steps to give full consideration of competitive integrated employment, before entering subminimum wage employment.

In alignment with Employment First, it is important that every effort be made to reduce the number of youth entering subminimum wage employment, and ensure that as many individuals as possible are transitioning from extended employment and subminimum wage employment into integrated employment. Feedback received in preparation of this report indicated that this is not always the case, reinforcing findings from the *Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment* (NJDOL, 2020a, p. 33).

- ▶ Family support/fear of vulnerability may conflict with workshop consumers'/employees' choice to explore work.
- ▶ Workshop staff may not agree with consumers' and employees' interest and ability to pursue interest in employment.
- ▶ Workshop employees are often confused about next steps following counseling under WIOA Section 511, the referral process, procedures, DVRS counselor involvement, and the workshop involvement.

### **Recommendation: Extend employment and subminimum wage**

1. The *Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment* recommended the development of “best practices, standardized protocol and training to conduct 511 counseling.” (NJDOL, 2020a, p. 16). The current procedures and tools used for annual reviews of those in subminimum wage employment as well as extended employment should be reviewed and enhanced to ensure they are clear and aligned with the intent of federal and state requirements, providing full opportunities for exploration of integrated employment and use of best practices for informed choice. Ohio has [procedures and tools specific to Section 511](#) that may be useful as examples.
2. Provide training to all DVRS staff involved in the review processes, as well as all extended employment providers and other special wage certificate holders employing individuals with I/DD, to ensure they are using standard protocols and best practices, and the appropriate roles of each party.
3. Create user-friendly materials for individuals with I/DD to help them understand the annual review processes, and their role and rights within these processes, including informed choice, right to explore competitive integrated employment, and access to self-advocacy and self-determination resources under Section 511. Create similar materials for family members and guardians.
4. The requirements for Section 511 require involvement of multiple agencies and entities, including DVRS, CBVI, NJDOE, Local Educational Agencies, and disability service providers. There is also a critical role for DDD within these review processes for both subminimum wage and extended employment, given that many individuals who are subjected to the review processes may need to use DDD for employment services and supports. It is recommended that comprehensive interagency agreements and strategies be developed that clearly outline the overall procedures for reviews of individuals in subminimum wage and extended employment, the specific responsibilities of the state agencies, and the entities they support (service providers, schools, etc.). This should include a joint issuance from the agencies.
5. Create an annual publicly available report regarding extended employment and subminimum wage employment, that tracks individuals in extended employment, subminimum wage employment, and efforts to transition them to integrated employment.

### **Policy and Goals Issue 8: Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) Administrative and Communication Issues with Funders**

Adults with I/DD primarily receive employment assistance via service providers (CRPs) funded by DDD and DVRS and in some cases CBVI. Service providers may also be involved in supporting transition through contracts with schools. Service providers noted extensive issues regarding administrative burdens and communication with funding agencies.

- ▶ Negotiation by CRPs with DDD and support coordinators regarding services that an individual needs takes up significant time and resources and detracts from achieving employment goals for individuals. As one survey respondent noted, “When completing the Individualized Support Plan, DDD has regularly denied services that can lead to full, integrated employment. DDD uses formulaic definitions instead of checking the individual’s needs and the services that will uniquely assist them.”
- ▶ Extensive administrative time is spent by providers dealing with the complexities of billing issues. One provider noted the state Medicaid agency is difficult to deal with, and that they often go “round and round” regarding what’s billable.
- ▶ There is a lack of flexibility in funding to provide supported/customized employment services for people with the most significant disabilities. One survey respondent stated, “Although there are specific (DDD) staff people responsible for managing employment services, they are not successful in achieving many goals. Hands-on approaches are needed, not just bureaucratic endeavors.”

### **Recommendation: Revise current administrative requirements for service providers**

1. In concert with revising funding structures for employment and day services (noted below), DDD and New Jersey's Medicaid Authority should conduct a thorough review and revision of administrative requirements for providers. Such an effort should be inclusive of service providers, New Jersey Association of Community Providers (NJACP), and DVRS.
2. In revising administrative requirements, emphasis should be placed on:
  - ▶ Clear standards for service authorization.
  - ▶ Limiting ambiguity and need for ongoing negotiation by service providers.
  - ▶ Timely responsiveness to requests.
  - ▶ Recognition of the significant resources that service providers are spending on administrative issues, and reducing the administrative burden so that staff time can focus on the employment needs of individuals.
3. The state should make full use of its membership in the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities to receive guidance and technical assistance on how to reduce the administrative burden on the provider community and ensure quality services.

## **High-Performing States Element: Capacity Development – Training and Technical Assistance (TA)**

### **Capacity Development – Training and TA Issue 1: Service Provider Capacity**

While there are some high-quality service providers, the 2020 DVRS *Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment* stated there are “an insufficient number of CRPs (Community Rehabilitation Providers) and supported employment providers with a range in quality, and understanding scope of vocational rehabilitation services” (NJDOL, 2020a, p. 32). The need to strengthen the network of employment service providers to ensure consistency, alignment with best practices, and overall adoption of an Employment First philosophy was reinforced via stakeholder feedback and review of data. Some of these issues are reflective of individual service providers' operational issues; however, DDD and VR create the context and structure within which CRPs operate, and collaboration, support, and consistency by DDD, DVRS, and CBVI is critical to enhancing CRP capacity.

### **Recommendation: Enhance CRP training**

A comprehensive series of required and optional trainings on employment for service provider staff are offered by the [Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities](#), with additional training available from The [Arc of New Jersey](#). To enhance existing provider training, the following are recommended:

1. Ensure that training is aligned with the national standards of the [Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators](#), which are based on the APSE [Universal Employment Competencies](#).
2. Review training to ensure it includes discussion of the Employment First philosophy and policies, and how they are integrated within service delivery.
3. Providers indicated that they are limited in participation in optional trainings due to staffing issues and the need to generate sufficient billable hours. DDD and DVRS should consider how to address this issue to improve access to training.

### **Recommendation: Increase technical assistance**

A major focus of many states in terms of Employment First has been the provision of TA to service providers. DDD and DVRS should expand TA to service providers to support restructuring of resources and developing policies and practices to increase individual employment outcomes and the overall implementation of Employment First.

### **Recommendation: Enhance standards and credentialing for employment staff**

1. To address uneven adoption of model practices across the state, DDD and DVRS should review their current standards for direct service employment staff, to ensure they are consistent, and align with the [Universal Employment Competencies](#) established by APSE.
2. The state may also wish to consider policies, similar to other states, that encourage employment staff to obtain the [Certified Employment Support Professional](#) credential, as has been advocated by the Developmental Disabilities Advocacy Network.

### **Recommendation: Address staff shortages**

The inability of CRPs to attract and retain staff is at the core of many of the issues regarding quality and consistency of employment services. States are utilizing a wide variety of strategies to address the general direct support professional shortage, including those available from [the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota](#). Beyond these general strategies, consideration should be given to the following specific to employment services:

1. Greater use of technology to support individuals remotely, enhancing the ability for self-management on the job, and more efficient use of staff time.
2. Consideration of models that require less direct service staff time. An example is the [Partners with Business](#) effort in Wisconsin, where businesses are paid for providing for supports. [Data from this pilot](#) are encouraging in terms of employment outcomes and costs.
3. Working with service providers to maximize efficiency in terms of use of staff and other resources through strategies such as process analysis (e.g., Lean Management), and use of technology by staff, with such efforts supported by rate and reimbursement mechanisms.
4. Utilize the *Direct Support Professional Career Development Program*, newly established by the state legislature under [S-4102/A-6230](#) to in part address the need for highly skilled employment support professionals.

### **Recommendation: Expand scope of employment opportunities**

Providers too often focus on narrow/"traditional" aspects of the labor market (retail, food service, janitorial), rather than the full range of potential jobs. To expand the diversity of jobs, CRPs should:

1. Leverage the strong interest in employment of people with disabilities by business groups, led by NJBIA.
2. Use [labor market information](#) to understand the diversity of the local labor market.
3. Incorporate tracking of diversity of employers and positions as part of service monitoring.

### **Recommendation: Expand availability of customized employment**

Customized employment is an intensive individualized approach for employment services and supports that consists of a comprehensive discovery process and employer negotiation, and has been found to be successful for individuals with more significant needs. The *Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment* noted there are only two DVRS vendors providing customized employment services (NJDOL, 2020a, p. 33). Efforts should be made to expand the availability of customized employment services, with DVRS and DDD working together to ensure consistency in approaches.

### **Capacity Development – Training and TA Issue 2: Need for a Comprehensive Communication Strategy**

Consistent messaging is critically important for the success of Employment First in New Jersey. [Ohio](#) and [Colorado](#) are excellent examples of Employment First efforts that have dedicated extensive resources to development of materials and communication.

### **Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive communication strategy**

1. Create clear standards for communication on Employment First that ensure consistency of definitions and terms, and consistent messaging and sharing of information by DDD, DVRS, CBVI, NJDOE, SETC, etc.
2. Create a comprehensive website dedicated to Employment First in New Jersey that includes a wide variety of resources for individuals with I/DD, families, and professionals; success stories of employment of youth and adults with I/DD; links to policy documents, service manuals, etc.
3. Support the creation of user-friendly materials and guides (print and visual) for individuals and families. Materials available from [Disability Rights New Jersey](#) can serve as a basis of this. [Disability Hub MN](#) is a great example of a comprehensive effort in this regard.
4. Conduct ongoing outreach to individuals, families, advocates, and stakeholders, to educate them about the state's efforts regarding Employment First.
5. Ensure that materials are available in a variety of languages, and are reflective of diverse communities.

### **High-Performing States Element: Financing**

#### **Financing Issue: Funding Structure and Reimbursement Rates**

Funding encompasses a range of issues:

- ▶ Is overall funding dedicated to integrated employment sufficient?
- ▶ Are there ways of shifting funding to increase the level of support for integrated employment?
- ▶ Does the funding structure provide sufficient reimbursement to service providers to provide quality employment services?
- ▶ Does the funding structure provide sufficient flexibility incentives for quality employment outcomes?

The scope of this project did not allow for a thorough review of all of these issues. However, the following specific items were identified.

- ▶ For FY 2019, DDD reported that funding for day and employment services was \$283 million. Of this total, only \$7 million (2.5%) went to integrated employment services. (National Survey of State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Agencies' Employment and Day Services, [StateData.Info, 2021a](#)).
- ▶ State funding of sheltered work has increased from \$35 million in FY 2016 to \$69 million in FY 2022. (This is based on a review of annual state budgets, and combining various line items for extended employment/sheltered work.) In FY 2018, the rate for each extended employment slot was increased by \$2,000, with the following additional services to be provided: pre-placement, job coaching, and skills training (NJDOL, 2018)
- ▶ At first glance, New Jersey's payment rates for employment services are not egregiously low. However, providers indicated that they do not reflect the actual costs. They often operate employment services at a loss, and the low rates make it difficult to attract and retain quality staff. Service providers stated that the extensive time spent on administrative and billing issues adds significantly to costs.
- ▶ DDD's individual budget approach creates challenges. While DDD employment service rates have steadily increased, individual annual budgets have not. Therefore, providers hit the budget limit before an adequate amount of services can be provided, especially for those who need longer-term and more intensive supports. (The amount of funding per person for day and employment services is \$14,000 to \$63,000 per year depending on the individual's tier of care.)

### **Recommendation: Revise funding structures for employment and day services**

1. Follow the lead of other states such as Iowa and Tennessee and establish and implement a statewide plan to rebalance funding resources toward integrated employment (Iowa Department of Human Services, 2017; TennCare, n.d.). This would include DDD conducting an analysis of its day and employment services funding, and developing a strategy to increase the amount and percentage of funding for integrated employment over time, as well as looking at other funding sources to ensure they are prioritizing integrated employment.
2. Merely increasing rates by a specific percentage based upon historical payment rates will not be sufficient to support a high-quality and financially stable employment provider network. Research demonstrates that payment rates should be carefully studied within the context of factors such as the real-world cost of hiring high-quality staff, efforts to increase staff qualifications, the level of support needed by job seekers, and non-billable activities (Winsor, Lyons, Butterworth, & Kennedy-Lizotte, 2017). It is recommended that DDD leadership, in conjunction with DVRS, NJACP, and service providers, develop a plan to revise employment and day services rates. Part of this should also include addressing the issue of individual budget limits. The [SELN Funding Framework](#) can serve as a guide in these efforts.

## **High-Performing States Element: Outcome Data**

### **Outcome Data Issue: Availability/Transparency of Data**

Employment data are critically important for accountability, tracking of progress, and identifying areas for improvement. New Jersey collects various data on employment of individuals with I/DD, but it is not readily available and easy-to-understand in a way that allows for policymakers, agency personnel, individuals with I/DD, family members, and other stakeholders to determine the current status of employment of individuals with I/DD and ongoing progress made toward fulfilling the vision of Employment First.

As with many states, the challenges of data collection and reporting in New Jersey are the siloed nature of data by systems, the difficulties in sharing data by systems and across agencies (due to privacy concerns and limitations of information technology), and variations in data collection requirements at the federal and state levels. In addition, data collection is always a balance between the ideal data set vs. the costs and ability to obtain the necessary data elements. Appendix A contains links to a number of examples of other states' data systems.

### **Recommendation: Data collection**

1. Identify the data currently available across systems regarding employment of individuals with I/DD.
2. Identify the data gaps regarding employment of individuals with I/DD, and how these gaps can be addressed.
3. Create mechanisms for ongoing monitoring of key data elements.
4. Develop a publicly available data "report card" that can be used to track progress and is regularly updated.

### **Recommendation: Employment data elements to be collected and reported for persons with I/DD**

1. Core data elements: Number of individuals in individual integrated employment, group employment, extended employment, and average hours/wages.
2. Demographic data: Gender, age, race, ethnicity, and geographic distribution.
3. Additional employment variables for consideration: Benefits, average length of employment, and occupations/industry distribution.

### **Recommendation: Agency data**

1. DDD: Number and percentage of individuals in integrated employment services, overall and by geographic distribution.
2. DVRS/CBVI: Number and percentage of individuals with I/DD served and outcomes; number and percentage of individuals with I/DD receiving Pre-ETS.
3. NJDOE: Transition outcomes by setting, including individual integrated employment, group employment, extended employment, etc.
4. DDD/VR Interagency Data: Number of individuals served by DDD referred to VR, with an open VR case, and closed into employment by VR.
5. Funding levels for integrated employment and other day/employment services.

### **Recommendation: Secondary data analysis**

Analysis of secondary data sets is a valuable performance measurement tool, allowing New Jersey to annually measure its progress supporting individuals with I/DD against other states. Secondary data sets can provide data by similar state agency and general employment trend data. For individuals with I/DD, much of this secondary data analysis can be found at [www.statedata.info](http://www.statedata.info).

## **High-Performing States Element: Service Innovation**

### **Service Innovation Issue 1: Addressing Public Benefits Preservation**

Provider staff, support coordinators, families, and individuals all identified concerns about loss of public benefits (Social Security, Medicaid, etc.) as a key reason many people with I/DD do not seek integrated employment. Professionals voiced a need for families and individuals to receive better education about how benefits are affected by work, and families and individuals shared that it is not easy to access personalized information about their benefits. While quality benefits assistance is available from [the New Jersey Work Incentive Network Support \(NJWINS\)](#) and [DVRS](#), it is at a level that is insufficient to meet current needs. New Jersey has also invested in the Disability Benefits 101 online tool ([DB 101](#)), but it has not been highly used. The extremely low use of Social Security work incentives is also an indicator of a need for a more robust benefits counseling infrastructure.

### **Recommendation: Provide greater access to accurate benefits information and assistance**

1. In order for individuals and families to have ready access to benefits counseling, consider a tiered approach such as other states are utilizing (e.g., Missouri). The concept of a tiered approach is availability of increasing intensity of benefits counseling depending on need, with all staff interacting with individuals and families having at least a core minimum knowledge that allows them to provide benefits guidance, with Work Incentive Planning and Assistance services from NJWINS at the top of the tier.
2. To support the building of such an infrastructure:
  - ▶ Create counseling as a separate service under the DDD HCBS waiver, that allows providers to bill for the service.
  - ▶ Fund training for community work incentives coordinators that will provide staffing for expanded benefits counseling, including staff based within CRPs.
  - ▶ Ensure support coordinators are well trained regarding effective guidance on benefits.
  - ▶ Ensure benefits counseling is available in ways that are reflective and responsive to the needs of diverse communities, including having a cadre of individuals providing benefits assistance who are viewed as trusted resources within those communities.



### **Recommendation: Create a “pro-employment” approach to benefits counseling**

Aligned with Employment First, use a consistent pro-employment message regarding benefits that acknowledges concerns over benefits but makes it clear that public benefits are not an insurmountable barrier to employment. A publication from the State Employment Leadership Network, *Changing the Culture and Message about Benefits: A Comprehensive Approach for Promoting Employment*, provides a series of strategies regarding changing the messaging and culture around benefits that may be helpful.

### **Service Innovation Issue 2: Addressing Transportation Challenges**

Lack of access to reliable transportation came up consistently across stakeholder groups as a barrier to employment. Addressing transportation is a complex issue, requiring multi-tier approaches, within a context that views transportation for employment as a solvable problem.

### **Recommendation: Improve transportation for employment**

1. Make knowledge of transportation and addressing transportation part of the core competencies for employment staff, and integrate identification of transportation options within staff training.
2. Create a curriculum for students and adults with I/DD on identifying transportation options and self-managing their transportation to their maximum ability.
3. Create a statewide taskforce on transportation issues (as proposed by the state legislature) that brings together disability agencies, other human service agencies, and transportation officials to identify strategies for enhancing transportation options. Encourage the creation of similar structures at regional and local levels to create connections between the disability community, others with transportation needs, and local transportation providers and experts.
4. Create mobility manager positions who work with individuals, families, and service providers on identifying transportation options.
5. Become familiar with and utilize transportation resources that are available at a national level, and examples of how transportation barriers have been addressed in other states. [Community Transportation Association of America](#) has a multitude of projects and resources that can assist.
6. Examine the current provisions regarding transportation in the DDD HCBS waivers, and determine if they are being utilized effectively, and if modifications could be made to better support transportation for employment.
7. Align transportation efforts with overall efforts in New Jersey for greener/more environmentally friendly transportation and reduction in congestion.
8. Since 2020, there have been at least eight bills introduced in the state legislature regarding transportation for people with disabilities, with [P.L. 2020, Chapter 114](#), a bill to improve paratransit services, and [A-5336wGR/S-344](#), a bill that requires DHS to establish payment programs for transportation from private-sector and government transportation services, have both been enacted. Efforts should be made on passing additional legislation that will increase transportation options.
9. In 2018, The Arc of New Jersey, in partnership with the Rutgers Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation, produced a report *In their Own Words: Recommendations on Transportation Inspired by Interviews with Persons with Developmental Disabilities in New Jersey*. It is recommended that this report be reviewed for additional strategies regarding transportation.

### **Service Innovation Issue 3: Meeting the Needs of Diverse Communities**

New Jersey is an extremely diverse state in terms of race and ethnicity. However, stakeholder feedback indicated employment services and supports are often not reflective of the needs of the diverse population of the state, not always readily available and accessible to these populations, and that there are cultural issues within these communities that are barriers to employment and services. These issues include:

- ▶ People in minority communities too often dismiss employment as an option, and in some minority cultures, parents cannot move beyond keeping their children safe.
- ▶ While fears over the impact of employment on public benefits are often a barrier, this can be particularly an issue for those in minority communities because of their significantly higher poverty rates (New Jersey Future, 2020), where families are living on the economic edge and any loss of benefits could adversely affect the family.
- ▶ There is a distrust of government and public systems in some cultures, resulting in an unwillingness to use available services.
- ▶ Language barriers are an issue, with a lack of interpreters for meetings and services to clarify purpose of services and connection to employment process.
- ▶ There is a need for more service providers based in diverse communities with services reflective of the community's needs. However, New Jersey's overly complicated employment system makes development of new service providers to increase provider capacity in underserved areas difficult.

### **Recommendation: Increase capacity to meet needs of diverse communities**

The unique needs and persistent systemic oppressions against diverse communities necessitates a targeted look at the issues facing these communities and potential solutions. Systemic racism cannot be addressed by the disability service system alone, and all stakeholders involved in social systems must be a part of the overall effort to end systemic injustice. However, within the context of employment services and supports, the following are recommendations:

1. State agencies and other key stakeholders should consider creating a subcommittee to address issues of employment services and supports in diverse communities to examine and address disparities in employment services and supports.
2. Identify and track data that will reveal inequities faced by diverse communities.
3. Develop and implement training for agency and provider staff to increase understanding of unserved and underserved populations in their service areas.
4. Conduct targeted outreach to diverse communities and seek connections with local community groups that offer resources or serve as gathering places for those communities (e.g., community centers, faith communities). Growing these connections can be particularly important when the underserved community has a deep-seated distrust of the social service system and to better understand their needs. As one advocate shared, "I wonder what some people who want to access employment services and would want to get help, but have a culture of distrust of the system – I wonder if they would even see [the service system] as an option."
5. Members from diverse communities shared that attempts to offer services geared toward underrepresented diverse groups have faltered as programs have tried to bring their services to a scale that is sustainable. State agencies and community partners should make a focused investment through seed money and infrastructure for the creation of services that meet the needs of these communities.
6. A survey respondent noted the lack of voices reflective of the state's diversity of race at the leadership table guiding policies and practices. A focused and deliberate effort is needed to ensure that leadership discussions are fully reflective of the state's diversity.

#### **Service Innovation Issue 4: Meeting Needs of Rural Communities**

Another underserved population in need of targeted solutions are rural communities. Perhaps in part because New Jersey is largely urban and suburban, the unique needs and challenges of these communities are often overlooked. In these rural areas, there are often limited employment options, a lack of employment services and supports, and a lack of transportation.

#### **Recommendation: Improve employment services in rural areas**

1. Examine and map service provider capacity in rural areas to clearly identify regions lacking certain employment services or with limited options.
2. Develop a plan for how DDD and DVRS can support providers to offer services in rural areas. Include in these efforts training or resources for service providers and schools in rural areas on finding and engaging employers in these communities.
3. State agencies, service providers, and schools should consider ways to partner with existing resources in rural communities, such as libraries and community centers, to connect people to transportation and work opportunities. One example of creative partnerships is found in rural Nassau County, Florida. The Nassau County School District was limited in the VR-funded community work experiences and job retention supports it could offer students due to the lack of long-term employment service providers in its community. As a solution, Nassau County became the first school district in the state eligible for VR vendor designation in 2016.

#### **Service Innovation Issue 5: Increase Use of General Workforce Development System**

There is limited use of the general workforce development system (One-Stop Career Centers, youth services, etc.) by individuals with I/DD. The resources available via this system can serve as a complement to existing services, and staff from SETC expressed openness to partnering with DDD.

#### **Recommendation: Enhance role of workforce development system**

1. DDD, DVRS, and NJDOL should work together to build a partnership focused on how individuals with I/DD can best access general workforce development services, and be supported in doing so by service providers. Examples of outcomes from this effort can include:
  - ▶ Guidance to the local workforce development boards and One-Stop Career Centers on meeting the needs of individuals with I/DD in an inclusive way.
  - ▶ Materials and training for service providers and individuals with I/DD on how to utilize the general workforce development system.
  - ▶ Participation by DDD and I/DD service provider staff and individuals with I/DD on state and local workforce development board committees, youth councils, etc.
2. One of the requirements under WIOA is an annual assessment of accessibility at One-Stop Career Centers. The current policies and procedures for these assessments should be reviewed to ensure they are inclusive of the needs of individuals with I/DD. Self-advocates with I/DD can play an important role in such efforts.

#### **Service Innovation Issue 6: Increase Use of Technology for Employment Supports**

The past several years have seen greater use of technology (universal technology and assistive technology) for supporting individuals in employment and other activities, and delivery of services. Greater use of technology allows for services to be provided more efficiently (e.g., less cost and fewer staff hours) and effectively (greater independence, less need for on-site staff and greater integration).

### **Recommendation: Increase use of technology in provision of employment services and supports**

1. Approach maximizing technology from three perspectives: (a) use of technology (apps, etc.) to increase self-management by employees with I/DD on the job site, (b) use of technology for remote staff support, and (c) use of technology to enhance staff efficiency, including minimizing need for staff in-person "office time".
2. Examine Technology First and similar efforts under way in other states ([Ohio](#), [Missouri](#), [Massachusetts](#)), and consider a similar effort for New Jersey.
3. Encourage the passage of the bill to establish the Taskforce on Supportive Technology for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities ([A860/S181](#)), which will help ensure a systematic approach to such efforts in terms of employment and other areas.
4. Integrate consideration of and training on use of technology into Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Support Plan, Individualized Plan for Employment, and other planning processes.
5. Engage state resources on technology in these efforts, including [the Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center](#).

### **Service Innovation Issue 7: Expanding Work Skills and Career Pathways**

Like many individuals who have difficulty being successfully employed, a core issue for individuals with I/DD is a lack of in-demand work skills. Given the critical need to expand the skill set of individuals with I/DD to respond to the demands of today's workplaces, New Jersey should consider the following, as part of the commitment by [SETC](#) regarding career pathways for individuals with I/DD (SETC, 2016c)

### **Recommendation: Increase work skills of individuals with I/DD**

1. Postsecondary Education: Analyze postsecondary education programs to ensure they are as available and inclusive of individuals with I/DD as possible and result in necessary skill building. New Jersey has several [programs specifically for individuals with I/DD](#).
2. Career and Technical Education: Support individuals with I/DD to enroll in career and technical education programs while in high school or during their post-high school years to develop in-demand technical skills and possibly earn industry-based credentials. Examples of such efforts nationally include: [Hire Me South Carolina](#), and [Project TOPS, Florida](#). Texas has also recently undertaken a [study of occupational skills training for individuals with I/DD](#).
3. Apprenticeships: (a) Support the inclusion of individuals with I/DD in apprenticeships programs, in line with proposed legislation in New Jersey ([A3803/S688](#)) that would require pre-apprenticeships and school-to-apprenticeship linkage programs to include training and services that help maximize program participation by individuals with disabilities. (b) Examine potential opportunities for individuals with I/DD under the peer-to-peer apprenticeship mentoring program for women, minorities, and persons with disabilities, established in 2020 under [P.L. 2020, Chapter 58](#). (c) Review recent legislative actions in [California](#) that included the addition of the director of rehabilitation and the executive director of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities to California's Interagency Advisory Committee on Apprenticeships, and created a subcommittee focused on apprenticeships for the disability community. New Jersey may wish to consider similar strategies.
4. Pilot Programs: Consider creation of pilot programs to demonstrate greater inclusion of individuals with I/DD in career pathway programs (career and technical education, apprenticeships, etc.).

### **Service Innovation Issue 8: Public Sector Hiring**

Given the major role of the public sector in the labor market, it is important to focus efforts on increasing employment of individuals with I/DD in part on government employment. In May 2021, legislation ([P.L. 2021, Chapter 84](#)) was signed into law, establishing a Task Force to Promote the Employment by State Agencies of People with Disabilities. This task force will focus on both state and local government employment, and is inclusive of various entities representing individuals with I/DD.

#### **Recommendation: Increase public employment**

1. Utilize the newly established taskforce as a catalyst for increasing public employment.
2. Leverage opportunities for individuals with I/DD, under legislation signed into law in January 2022 ([A-5294/S-3418](#)) that fast tracks the hiring and advancement process for persons with significant disabilities, and establishes the State as a Model Employer program ([A-5296/S-3426](#)).
3. Develop service provider capacity on public hiring through development of staff knowledge on government employment processes, and time dedicated to building relationships and negotiating with government entities that result in hiring.
4. Develop pilot projects on public hiring of individuals with I/DD.
5. Review information from the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) on other state initiatives on public employment.
6. Focus public employment efforts in part on federal employment, using the [Schedule A hiring authority](#) for individuals with I/DD, and employment at the county and municipal levels ([King County, Washington](#) is one of the best examples).

### **Service Innovation Issue 9: Use Federal Grants as a Catalyst**

The federal government regularly awards various capacity-building discretionary grants to improve employment of individuals with disabilities. Many states have used such grants as an important component of advancing Employment First efforts.

#### **Recommendation: Federal grants**

1. It has been anecdotally observed that over the past several years, New Jersey was rarely the recipient of federal systems change and demonstration grants. Whether this is due to not applying for this funding, or applying and not being awarded funding, is unclear. However, it is recommended that New Jersey be more aggressive in pursuing such funds, which can serve in part as a catalyst for further interagency collaboration.
2. Examine findings from recent federal systems change grants to inform advancing Employment First in New Jersey. Examples included the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities' [Partnerships for Employment](#), and USDOL's [Office of Disability Employment Policy's](#) efforts to advance competitive integrated employment.

## Section 5: Advocacy Plan and Implementation

---

This report has laid out a comprehensive set of issues and recommendations regarding increasing employment of individuals with I/DD in New Jersey. The task ahead can seem overwhelming and there are no simple quick fixes. However, every effort must be made to avoid this being another case of simply “admiring the problem.” Given the lack of progress regarding integrated employment, accepting the status quo because the problem seems too difficult, or presuming that “we’re doing the best we can” is unacceptable: unacceptable for individuals with I/DD, for their families, and for the state of New Jersey as a whole. Realizing the vision of Employment First will require a commitment by the full range of stakeholders to work together, measure progress, hold themselves mutually accountable, and diligently make changes over time.

A core theme of the High-Performing States Framework is that systems change to improve employment for individuals with I/DD requires addressing a series of inter-related components. In terms of setting priorities, it is important to focus on:

- ▶ An array of items that affect various components of the High-Performing States Framework.
- ▶ A mix of items that are readily achievable and impactful (e.g., development of materials and products), and others that will take sustained effort over time (e.g., changes in policies).

A suggested first step in translating this report into action is implementing the recommendation to create an Employment First commission that provides leadership and coordination of efforts to increase employment of persons with I/DD, while enabling various stakeholders to work together on common goals. From there, using the High-Performing States Framework as a guide, this report suggests the following areas of initial action:

1. Begin to address the full array of interagency issues with a focus on building cross-agency relationships through collaborative activities, resulting in trusting partnerships built over time.
2. Strengthen data collection, reporting, and transparency.
3. Institute consistency in terms of self-determination and informed choice regarding employment.
4. Address support coordination issues.
5. Review and address DVRS eligibility determination issues and expand the diversity of trial work sites.
6. Address the range of issues regarding authorization of services and braiding and blending of services.
7. Fully engage self-advocates and families on Employment First, including the creation of user-friendly information and materials that enable individuals and families to navigate the system.
8. Diversify sites for community assessments and employment through greater and more diverse business engagement.
9. Build a stronger network for benefits planning.
10. Update resources on transition on the NJDOE website, in part to assist under-resourced schools.
11. Take initial steps to address needs of underserved communities and populations.
12. Begin rollout of communications strategy.

While it is recommended that the 12 items listed above be addressed most immediately after the formation of the Employment First commission, over the long term all recommendations in this report should be addressed in some form. It is recognized that leadership may feel other recommendations in this report take precedence, as more critical and/or more readily achievable. However, what’s most important is to maintain a broad and ongoing focus on a multitude of items that advance employment of individuals with I/DD, that address various aspects of the High-Performing States Framework, and that create sustained change over time. To put it simply, there is not one solution, there are lots of solutions.

## Next Steps

It is recommended that this report be used as the basis for a “call to action” regarding Employment First. Suggested steps include:

1. Widely circulating this report among policymakers, legislators, public agencies, service providers, advocacy organizations, individuals with I/DD, and their families.
2. Creation of short summary documents regarding the report's findings.
3. Holding a series of community forums to share and discuss the report's findings. In developing such forums consideration should be given to:
  - ▶ Provision of information regarding the report's findings that is highly accessible for individuals with I/DD.
  - ▶ Ensuring participation by individuals from diverse and traditionally underserved communities.
4. Engaging in discussions with other states that have been on a similar journey to learn from their experiences.

## Creating a Culture of Change

As efforts move forward to take the recommendations of this report and translate them into action, it is important that this effort be conducted within an atmosphere that will promote change. Doing so requires recognizing and acting on the following:

1. Like all states, there is room for significant improvement in integrated employment for individuals with I/DD in New Jersey.
2. That all entities and stakeholders need to make changes and improvements themselves, in order for the state to address the employment needs of individuals with I/DD as a collective whole.
3. That all entities and stakeholders have a role in the problems and challenges that exist, and in creating solutions.
4. That to be successful, efforts to advance Employment First must be done in an atmosphere of collegiality, mutual respect, encouragement of diversity of views, and emphasis on building strong partnerships over the long term.
5. There are no simple or easy solutions. Realizing the promise of Employment First is a long-term process that addresses a wide range of policy and practice issues.
6. That individuals with I/DD and their families must be fully engaged in advancing Employment First.
7. That aligned with Employment First, there is a sincere belief by all involved that with the right assistance and supports, individuals with I/DD can be successfully employed.

## Section 6: Overview of New Jersey Service System

---

The system of employment and day services and supports for individuals with I/DD in New Jersey consists of a network of public agencies, private service providers, and educational agencies. This section provides an overview and background information on the major public agencies and programs involved in supporting employment for individuals with I/DD.

### Public Agencies

#### Division of Developmental Disabilities

DDD in New Jersey's DHS is the state's I/DD agency, providing a broad range of services, including residential, family supports, and day and employment services. DDD has nine Community Service office locations throughout the state that oversee and coordinate services, with non-institutional services provided primarily by a network of service providers.

Medicaid is a primary funder of DDD services. To receive services from DDD, individuals must be at least 21 years old, be Medicaid eligible, and have a developmental disability. Individuals must enroll in one of two Medicaid waiver programs: the Supports Program or Community Care Program. Services are funded via individual budgets, with these budgets determined based on the individual's tier of care. The tier also determines the reimbursement rate for the individual's service provider. The amount of funding per person for day and employment services is \$14,000 to \$63,000 per year depending on the individual's tier of care. Additional funding for individual-supported employment can be requested when the individual budget does not sustain the level of support needed for the individual to find or keep a competitive job in the general workforce.

Services are available based on funding; there is no entitlement to DDD services. There is currently a waiting list of approximately 4,000 individuals for the Community Care Program and no waiting list for the Supports Program. Additional details on DDD eligibility and services can be found in DDD's [Supports Program and Community Care Program Policies and Procedures: A Quick Guide for Families](#).

DDD support coordination (case management) is provided by independent, community-based support coordination agencies, chosen by the individual and their family. The support coordinator assists the individual in developing goals through a [Person-centered Planning Tool](#) (that includes employment-related outcomes), develops the Individualized Support Plan, coordinates services (including working with other agencies and programs), and monitors progress.

DDD employment services are provided via the parameters of definitions in the state's HCBS waiver plans (Supports Program and Community Care Program). These services include:

- ▶ **Prevocational Training:** Learning and work experiences that help an individual learn about jobs that they may be interested in, and learn skills to become more employable. Such services are limited to 30 hours per week, and generally can be provided for a maximum of two years.
- ▶ **Career Planning:** Employment planning to help an individual get and keep a job. Services are limited to 80 hours per year.
- ▶ **Supported Employment – Individual:** Assists an individual to get and/or keep a job in the general workforce at or above minimum wage. Services are limited to 30 hours per week.
- ▶ **Supported Employment – Small Group:** Training activities in business, industry, and community settings for a group of two to eight individuals. Services are limited to 30 hours per week.



Detailed descriptions of these services are contained in the program manuals for each of the HCBS waivers. Along with direct employment services, additional supports that may assist with employment are also available via other waiver services, including assistive technology, goods and services, and transportation, among others. In addition to employment services, non-employment day program services are also available from DDD: community-based supports, community inclusion services, individual supports, and day habilitation.

In 2013, the Office of Inspector General at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that DDD's claims for federal Medicaid reimbursement for supported employment under the Community Care Waiver did not comply with federal and state requirements (Jarmon, 2013). As a result, the state was required to refund millions of dollars to the federal government and revamp its funding systems for supported employment services.

In 2015, the Supports Program waiver was created, in addition to the existing Community Care Program. DDD also began moving from a contracted services model to a fee-for-service model for all services, which has now been largely implemented. This shift to a fee-for-service model was a major change and has been a significant adjustment for service providers. As part of this change, providers began billing New Jersey Medicaid for waiver services, rather than billing DDD.

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

DVRS is the general VR program for the state, and is part of NJDOL. The mission of DVRS "is to enable eligible individuals with disabilities to achieve an employment outcome consistent with their strengths, priorities, needs, abilities, and capabilities."

DVRS is funded through a combination of federal and state funds. The federal funds are authorized under WIOA. Per WIOA, the purpose of the state VR program is:

*to assess, plan, develop, and provide vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities, consistent with their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice so that they may prepare for and engage in competitive integrated employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).*

Per WIOA, a successful employment outcome for VR is "competitive integrated employment," which is defined as full-time or part-time work at minimum wage or higher, with wages and benefits similar to those without disabilities performing the same work, and fully integrated with co-workers without disabilities.

For state VR program services authorized under WIOA, the federal government covers 78.7% of the cost, with the state required to come up with the remaining 21.3% in order to utilize those funds. In FY 2021, New Jersey's federal allocation of these funds for DVRS was \$50.7 million. New Jersey has generally drawn down its full allotment of federal funds.

Eligibility for VR services is based on the following requirements:

- ▶ the individual has a physical or mental impairment that results in a substantial impediment to employment, and
- ▶ a determination has been made by a VR counselor that the individual requires VR services.

Individuals receiving benefits from Social Security as a result of their disability (SSDI or SSI) are presumed eligible for services.

All individuals must intend to achieve an employment outcome (competitive integrated employment as defined by WIOA), and completion of an application for VR services is sufficient to indicate this intent. While VR programs may determine that an individual is unable to benefit from VR services in terms of an employment outcome because of the severity of the individual's disability, such a determination must be made through "trial work experiences" (supported employment, on-the-job training, and other experiences using a realistic integrated work setting). Such a designation must be made using "clear and convincing evidence," which is the highest standard in civil law.

DVRS provides a variety of employment-related services, including: career counseling, job placement and supported employment services, out-of-school youth employment services, benefits counseling services, work-related accommodations and assistive technology, training, Project SEARCH, and Pre-ETS. While a determination of eligibility is required for most DVRS services, Pre-ETS services are available to students who are “potentially eligible,” and an eligibility determination is not required. Further details regarding DVRS services can be found at the [DVRS website](#). DVRS services are provided via the network of 21 DVRS offices throughout New Jersey, and via contracts with approximately [90 provider organizations](#).

### **Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

While in most cases, eligible individuals with I/DD will receive services from DVRS, VR services for individuals who are blind and visually impaired are provided by CBVI, which is part of DHS. As with DVRS, these services are authorized by WIOA, and funded through a combination of federal and state dollars. In FY 2021, federal funding for state VR services for CBVI was \$12.7 million. This report primarily focuses on DVRS as that is the primary VR agency that works with individuals with I/DD.

### **General Workforce Development System**

As with all states, New Jersey has a public employment system authorized by WIOA that is intended to serve all individuals needing employment assistance. This system is overseen by NJDOL, and administered at the local level by 18 [local workforce development boards](#). A primary mechanism for accessing these services is via the state’s 28 [One-Stop Career Centers](#). A variety of employment and training services are available via the general workforce development system, many of which are self-directed. Youth services are administered by the local workforce development boards, and are available to in-school and out-of-school youth. Youth with disabilities are highly eligible for these services. Although not a primary provider of services to individuals with I/DD, the general workforce development system is a potential service option. DVRS is a required partner in the state and local workforce development system.

### **Coordination Between DDD and VR**

Coordination between DDD and VR (DVRS and CBVI) is important for a multitude of reasons, including coordination of services for individuals served by both agencies, and sequencing of funding.

WIOA requires a cooperative agreement between VR and the state I/DD agency, regarding VR services, including extended (long-term post placement) services for individuals served under the state’s HCBS waivers. The [current VR-DDD MOU](#) that is publicly available is from 2008, although the 2016 WIOA state plan indicates a five-year agreement was signed in July 2015. There is a more recent updated MOU that has been developed, but has not yet been signed and made publicly available.

In terms of sequencing of funding, per DDD:

*Employment services (Career Planning, Prevocational Training, Supported Employment) must initially be accessed through DVRS or CBVI. If employment services are not available through DVRS or CBVI, or if employment services through DVRS or CBVI have been exhausted, DDD funding will be made available (DHS, 2020).*

In cases where the individual is receiving funding from both VR and DDD, services may be provided by the same service provider if they are a vendor for both agencies.

For individuals needing post-placement follow-up services (e.g., job coaching and ongoing check-ins), VR can fund these services only for a limited time through its combined federal-state funding authorized under WIOA. However, the state funds VR for Long-Term Follow Along Services for extended supported employment services for individuals needing ongoing supports after they have completed supported employment services available via federal-state funding. In addition, when VR funding for follow-up services ends, DDD can provide funding for long-term follow along on an ongoing basis as needed.

DDD guidelines for DVRS referral are available at: <https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/projects/documents/DVRSReferralGuidelines.pdf>

## Transition from School to Adult Life

Students with I/DD who have an IEP plan are entitled to services from their local educational agency until the end of the school year they turn 21, or leave school. This entitlement includes transition services and supports focused on exploring employment and careers and gaining work experience while still in school, which are written into the student's IEP plan. Delivery of these services are locally controlled by each of the state's 686 school districts. NJDOE provides supports and guidance for transition services. These transition services are often provided directly by the school, but may also be provided by an external service provider through a contract with the school, particularly for students ages 18 to 21.

Students can also receive transition-related services from VR (DVRS or CBVI) that complement the services and supports from their school. These include:

1. **Pre-ETS**, which are available to all students ages 14 to 21 who are "potentially eligible" for VR services (which likely includes all students with I/DD) and can benefit from Pre-ETS. These services include: (a) job exploration counseling, (b) work-based learning experiences, (c) counseling on postsecondary education opportunities, (d) workplace readiness training, and (e) instruction in self-advocacy. Pre-ETS are provided primarily by a network of service providers that have contracts with DVRS or CBVI.
2. **Transition services**, which are individualized and include a broad range of potential services to assist students and youth with their employment needs. Unlike Pre-ETS, students must be determined eligible for VR services. DVRS cases for transition services are opened two years prior to the student leaving school.

As part of the transition services available, DVRS funds **Project SEARCH**, an internship that takes place entirely at the workplace during the student's last year of high school. A DVRS counselor is assigned to each secondary school in New Jersey. There is a transition coordinator in the central office, and a lead transition counselor in each local office. DVRS, CBVI, and DOE have an **interagency agreement** regarding coordination of transition from school to competitive integrated employment.

While DDD cannot begin providing employment services and supports until an individual reaches the age of 21, it encourages individuals between ages 18 to 20 to submit an application for services in order to begin the process of transition to adult services, and works with the individual, family, school district, and other transition partners to ensure a smooth process. DDD has also committed to supplementing the efforts of NJDOE and local school districts through funding of The Arc of New Jersey's **Planning for Adult Life** project, to assist students with I/DD between the ages of 16 and 21 and their families in charting a life course for adulthood, including a focus on employment.

## Public Benefit Systems

Many individuals with I/DD receive benefits from one or both Social Security programs for people with disabilities: SSDI and SSI. Benefits counseling funded by the Social Security Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Program is available from **NJWINS – New Jersey Work Incentive Network Support**. Benefits counseling is also available from **DVRS**. These benefits counseling programs provide guidance to individuals regarding the impact of employment on public benefits when going to work, including their cash benefits from Social Security, as well as medical benefits (Medicaid and Medicaid), housing, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and other public benefit programs. They also provide information on work incentives that can assist individuals in pursuing employment. New Jersey has also invested in **DB 101**, an online tool to assist in managing benefits. The **New Jersey WorkAbility** program allows people with disabilities who are working, and whose income would otherwise make them ineligible for Medicaid, the opportunity to receive full Medicaid coverage.

## Service Providers

Many of the day and employment services for individuals with I/DD are provided by a network of service providers throughout the state, most of which are nonprofit organizations. These service providers (CRPs) vary in size, geographic scope, types of services, and populations served. Some providers focus exclusively on integrated employment, while others provide a full range of day and employment services, as well as residential, family support, and other services. Day and employment services funding for individuals with I/DD primarily comes from DDD and DVRS, and in some cases CBVI; some service providers also have contracts with school districts for services for transition students as well as other sources of funding.

Individuals and their families have a choice over from which provider they receive services. Service providers bill DVRS and CBVI for services provided under contracts with the state's VR agencies, and bill New Jersey Medicaid for services provided under the state's HCBS Medicaid waivers. Service provider staff are required by DDD to complete training provided by the Boggs Center or an alternative training entity on [Employment Specialist Foundations: Basic Knowledge and Skills](#) that includes the following topics:

- ▶ Overview, Assessment/Discovery
- ▶ Job Development
- ▶ Job Coaching
- ▶ Long-Term Follow Along

## Extended Employment/Sheltered Work/Subminimum Wage

Among the service providers in New Jersey is a network of 27 sheltered workshop programs called extended employment programs that are overseen by DVRS. Extended employment is [defined](#) by DVRS as:

*A program designed to provide long term employment by the community rehabilitation program of a client/worker who is presently unable to work in the competitive labor market. An individual is frequently paid less than minimum wage based upon time studies identifying his/her ability.*

According to the DVRS case services manual, the purpose of the extended employment program is to provide "employment and vocational rehabilitation services to those consumers, who by personal choice or by labor market conditions, are not yet ready for placement in integrated, competitive employment." Work activities in extended employment programs occur via contracts with private industry and government agencies to produce goods and provide services. The extended employment programs pay individuals based on their productivity rate, under a special wage certificate, allowing them to be paid less than New Jersey's minimum wage of \$12 per hour. During FY 2019–20, there were approximately 2,840 individuals in extended employment (NJDOL, 2020b).

New Jersey's administration of sheltered workshop is unique among states. In most states, oversight of sheltered workshops is done by the state I/DD agency, and in some cases by the state education agency (e.g., Missouri). However, in 2013, DDD announced it was phasing out funding of sheltered workshops, as part of implementation of Employment First and evolving federal policy (DHS, 2013). As a result, in 2014, oversight and funding of sheltered work (extended employment) was transferred to DVRS. Total state funding of sheltered work has increased from \$35 million in FY 2016 to \$69 million in FY 2022.

Extended employment programs are among the entities that produce goods and provide services for state, county, and municipal governments under the state's [Rehabilitation Facilities Set-Aside Act Rules](#). These rules enable the set-aside of designated commodities and services to be sold by disability programs to state, county, and municipal governments in New Jersey. This work is performed by a network of 41 service providers, 25 of which are extended employment programs. Seventy-five percent of the work hours under the set-aside rules must be done by individuals with disabilities.

Implementation of the Rehabilitation Facilities Set-Aside Rules is overseen by the Commodities and Services Council for the Blind and Other Persons with Severe Disabilities. Among the members of the council are the directors of DVRS, CBVI, and DDD. [ACCSES New Jersey](#) is the designated central nonprofit agency, operating the set-aside program, and supporting its 41 members to obtain business through the set-aside program.

[USDOL \(2021\)](#) data list 33 organizations in New Jersey holding 14(c) special wage certificates, and 2,220 individuals earning subminimum wage. However, [a DVRS response to questions for the FY 2018 state budget](#) stated that "Special Wage Certificates have been issued by the NJ Department of Labor's Division of Wage and Hour Compliance to 168 employers in the State of New Jersey." The reasons for this discrepancy aren't clear. It is also important to note that not every holder of a 14(c) certificate is an extended employment provider.s

## Acknowledgments

---

The authors of this report were David Hoff, Britni Miles, Jean Winsor, Agnes Zalewska, and John Shepard, all of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Danielle Mahoehney of the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota.

Maria Heidkamp and Kathy Krepcio of the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development provided guidance on the development of the report. InBum Chung was the graphic designer. Robb C. Sewell edited the report.

This report was produced by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, on behalf of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities. Support for development of the report was provided by the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Stakeholders that were engaged in interviews and forums in preparation of this report include the Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, New Jersey Association of People Supporting Employment First, the Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, community rehabilitation providers, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, family members, school personnel, and advocacy groups. An online survey, available in both English and Spanish, was completed by 287 individuals with I/DD, family members, and professionals. Thank you to all who took the time to share their perspectives, which were invaluable in preparation of this report.

*This work is funded by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, in part by grant number 2001NJSCDD-02, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.*

## About the Heldrich Center

---

The **Heldrich Center for Workforce Development** at Rutgers University is devoted to transforming the workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. The center provides an independent source of analysis for reform and innovation in policy-making and employs cutting-edge research and evaluation methods to identify best practices in workforce development, education, and employment policy. It is also engaged in significant partnerships with the private sector, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to design effective education and training programs. It is deeply committed to assisting job seekers and workers attain the information, education, and skills training they need to move up the economic ladder.

## About the Institute for Community Inclusion

---

The **Institute for Community Inclusion** (ICI), is based at the University of Massachusetts Boston, in the School for Global Inclusion and Social Development. Through training, technical assistance, research, and direct service activities, ICI supports the rights of children and adults with disabilities to participate in all aspects of society. Much of ICI's efforts focus on inclusive employment.

# Appendix A: Resources on Integrated Employment

---

The following is a selected list of resources that can assist New Jersey in advancing Employment First. These include resources cited in the report text as well as additional resources.

## Employment First Implementation

1. Website: [APSE Resources on Employment First](#)
2. Website: [ODEP – Employment First \(USDOL\)](#)
3. Website: [ODEP – Competitive Integrated Employment \(USDOL\)](#)
4. Publication: [Employment First Resource List](#) (State Employment Leadership Network [SELN])
5. Publication: [High-Performing States Framework](#) (SELN)
6. Publication: [SELN Accomplishments Report](#)
7. Publication: [Iowa Employment First Guidebook](#)
8. Publication: [Ohio's Path to Employment First](#)

## Interagency Collaboration

1. Website: [Ohio Strategic Planning Guide](#) (Ohio Employment First)
2. Publication: [A Guide for the Proper Definition and Sequencing of DVR and SDS Employment Services for SDS I/DD Waiver Recipients](#) (State of Alaska)
3. Publications: High-Performing Employment System Series – case studies of interagency collaboration (ThinkWork)
  - ▶ [Iowa](#)
  - ▶ [Maryland](#)
  - ▶ [Oklahoma](#)
4. Publication: [Multi-System Collaboration: Supporting Individuals from Pre-employment Through Employment and Community Engagement Across the Life Course](#) (ThinkWork)
5. Publication: [Promoting Competitive Integrated Employment through MOU's and Other Inter-agency/-departmental Agreements](#) (LEAD Center)

## Informed Choice and Employment

1. Publication: [The Employment Journey: A Focus on Informed Choice](#) (ThinkWork)
2. Publication: [Criterion for an Integrated Employment Location in the Definition of "Competitive Integrated Employment" and Participant Choice](#) (Rehabilitation Services Administration)
3. Publication: [Employment and Employment Supports: A Guide to Ensuring Informed Choice for Individuals with Disabilities](#) (ICI)

## Support Coordination

1. Website: [SELN Guidance for Conversations](#)
2. Publication: [Guidance for Conversations: Identifying and Designing Pathways towards Rewarding Employment](#) (SELN)
3. Publication: [Support Coordination Strategies that Impact Employment Outcomes and Services for Individuals Served by State Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Agencies](#) (ThinkWork)

## Transition

1. Website: [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Transition Resources and Materials](#)
2. Website: [Ohio Transition Toolkit](#)
3. Website: [Partnerships in Employment](#) (information on first round of ACL PIE projects)
4. Website: [Resources on Effective Interagency Transition Teaming](#) (Massachusetts Employment First)
5. Website: [Transition Specialist Endorsement](#) (Massachusetts)
6. Website: [Transition Tennessee](#)
7. Website: [Wisconsin Transition Improvement Grant](#)
8. Publication: [State Self-Assessment Toolkit for Systems Change in the Transition of Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities from High School](#) (ThinkWork)
9. Publication: [Work-Based Learning for Students with High Support Needs](#) (Massachusetts Employment First)

## Staff Competencies and Development

1. Website: [Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators](#) (ACRE)
2. Website: [Certified Employment Support Professional](#) (APSE)
3. Publication: [APSE Universal Employment Competencies](#)

## Employment Outcomes and Performance Measurement: Examples

1. Website: [Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration Employment Outcome Data System](#)
2. Website: [Ohio Outcome Tracking System for Individuals with I/DD](#)
3. Website: [Washington Developmental Disabilities Administration Outcome Data System](#)

## Capacity Building with Self-Advocates and Families

1. Website: [Disability Hub MN](#) – Minnesota resource site for individuals and families
2. Website: [Massachusetts Raising Expectations for Better Futures](#): training on engaging families in employment (Employment First Massachusetts)
3. Website: [Charting the LifeCourse](#) (UMKC)
4. Publication: [What Matters Most: Research on Elevating Parent Expectations](#) (Partnerships in Employment)
5. Publication: [Writing for Families: Tips to Increase the Impact of Training Materials](#) (ThinkWork)

## Self-Advocacy Resources

1. Website: [Florida ExploreWork Curriculum](#) (Employment First Florida)
2. Publication: [Real Work For Real Pay: A Self-Advocate's Guide to Employment Policy](#) (ASAN & SARTAC)
3. Publication: [Disability Employment Policy 101 Guide](#) (SARTAC)



4. Publication: [A Purpose in Life: Why Employment First Matters to Self-Advocates](#) (SABE & Green Mountain Self-Advocates)
5. Publication: [Employment First Statement](#) (Green Mountain Self-Advocates)

### **Benefits**

1. Publication: [Changing the Culture and Message about Benefits: A Comprehensive Approach for Promoting Employment](#)
2. Publication: [Missouri Tiered Benefits Counseling Concept](#)

### **Transportation**

1. Website: [Community Transportation Association of America](#)
2. Website: [Mobility Ohio](#)
3. Publication: [In their Own Words: Recommendations on Transportation Inspired by Interviews with Persons with Developmental Disabilities in New Jersey](#) (The Arc of New Jersey, Rutgers Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation)
4. Publication: [Meeting the Employment Transportation Needs of People with Disabilities in New Jersey](#) (Voorhees Transportation Center, Rutgers University)

### **Technology**

1. Website: [Massachusetts Technology Forward](#)
2. Website: [Missouri Technology First](#)
3. Website: [Ohio Technology First](#)
4. Website: [Tennessee Enabling Technology Program](#)
5. Publication: [Using Technology for Remote Support, Self-Management, and Employment in the Community](#) (ICI)

### **Occupational Skills Training/Career Pathways for Individuals with I/DD**

1. Website: [Hire Me South Carolina](#)
2. Website: [Project TOPS, Florida](#)
3. Publication: [Texas Study – Occupational Skills Training for Individuals with I/DD](#)

### **Public Sector Hiring**

1. Website: [Federal Employment Schedule A Information](#)
2. Website: [King County Washington Public Employment Initiative](#)
3. Website: [National Conference of State Legislatures Information on Public Employment of People with Disabilities](#)

# Appendix B: New Jersey Stakeholder Online Survey Results

---

An online survey was conducted to gain feedback from stakeholders regarding improving employment outcomes for individuals with I/DD. The survey was administered in English and Spanish, and distributed by NJCDD and other networks. The following is a summary of the survey responses.

## Respondents

**Number of responses:** Two-hundred forty-three (243) individuals responded to at least part of the survey.

**Role of respondents:** Individuals were asked to identify their role within the state and were able to select more than one role; a total of 328 roles were selected. For example, an individual could identify as both service provider personnel and as a family member of someone with a disability.

- ▶ The overwhelming majority of respondents, 48% (N=159), were family members of individuals with disabilities. Nearly 40% (N=131) have a family member age 22 or older and 9% (N=28) have a family member under age 22. Thirty-five individuals with disabilities (11%) also responded to the survey; 8% (N=26) were age 22 or older and 3% (N=9) were under age 22.
- ▶ Individuals who provide direct services to people with disabilities or capacity-building services represented 15% (N=49) of the respondents, including service provider personnel (9%, N=31), support coordinators (2%, N=7), and employment training and technical assistance providers (3%, N=11).
- ▶ The third largest group of respondents, 10% (N=33), represented state agencies or local education staff. Individuals who identified as an educator, school personnel, transition coordinator, or child study team member made up 5% (N=15); DDD personnel, 3% (N=9); workforce development (non-DVRS) personnel, 1% (N=4); DVRS personnel, 0.6% (N=2); NJDOE personnel, 0.6% (N=2); and Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services personnel, .3% (N=1).
- ▶ Individuals who identified as members of advocacy organizations or NJCDD represented 9% (N=31) of respondents: advocacy organization members were 8% (N=25) and NJCDD members were 2% (N=6).
- ▶ Individuals who selected "other" as their role or employer/business entity as their role were 6% (N=21). Almost 5% (N=6) identified as other and 2% identified as employer/business entity (N=5). Examples of the roles individuals who identified as other included an Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator, medical provider, and community college staff.

**Geographic location of respondents:** Two hundred and forty-three (243) individuals responded to the question regarding where they live or work (see Table B-1). One hundred sixty-seven (167) or 69% live or work in a suburban area, 33 (14%) live or work in an urban area, 25 (10%) live or work in a rural area, and 18 (7%) live or work in a statewide capacity.

- ▶ County where respondents live or work. Two hundred and forty-three (243) individuals responded to the question regarding the county where they live or work. The largest number of respondents came from Mercer (12%, N=30), Bergen (9%, N=22), Morris (9%, N=21), Middlesex (7%, N=17), and Camden (7%, N=17) counties.

**Table B-1: Survey Respondents, by County of Employment or Residence**

Atlantic	2.06%	5
Bergen	9.05%	22
Burlington	4.12%	10
Camden	7.00%	17
Cape May	0.41%	1
Cumberland	1.65%	4
Essex	4.94%	12
Gloucester	5.35%	13
Hudson	0.41%	1
Hunterdon	3.70%	9
Mercer	12.35%	30
Middlesex	7.00%	17
Monmouth	6.17%	15
Morris	8.64%	21
Ocean	2.88%	7
Passaic	4.12%	10
Salem	1.65%	4
Somerset	3.70%	9
Sussex	2.47%	6
Union	5.35%	13
Warren	1.65%	4
Statewide	5.35%	13

### Strategic Goals and Operating Policies

Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to state strategic goals and operating policies to impact integrated employment for people with IDD. One hundred and ninety (190) people chose to respond to questions in this section.

**Familiarity and views of Employment First:** The majority of people (64%, N=121) were familiar with Employment First. However, 47% (N=89) did not think there was a clear understanding across stakeholders regarding Employment First. Some respondents expressed significant negativity toward the idea of Employment First. For example, one respondent noted:

*There are many people who are **not** employable and an "employment first" mandate is actually an imposition and hardship. Additionally, there are many who need **constant** (everyday, all day) support – not just for a month or two – in order to be employed, either because employers need to meet insurance requirements or because physical, behavioral, or attention disorders limit the individual's ability to do the job without guidance and protection.*

Such a view speaks to the misperceptions of Employment First as a mandate requiring individuals to pursue employment in the community, when in reality it requires the prioritization of employment while allowing other options to continue.

**Lack of measurable goals is an issue:** Many people (39%, N=75) expressed that in general New Jersey has a goal to expand integrated employment but only 17% (N=32) felt that New Jersey has measurable goals with clear benchmarks toward achieving integrated employment outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities, including those in sheltered workshops and day habilitation services.

**Employment is too often not addressed in service planning:** The lack of specific goals and benchmarks is further reflected in state practices regarding service planning. Only slightly more than half (52%, N=98) felt that employment is addressed in the Individualized Support Plan process, despite requirements to do so. One person noted:

*While people are "required" to have an employment outcome in the Individualized Support Plan, this has proven to be detrimental to actually achieving employment. A workaround has been permitted that more or less allows outcomes for which day habilitation provided by segregated services are permitted to meet this requirement in perpetuity.*

**Lack of focus on employment during transition:** Slightly more than half (53%, N=100) of respondents did not believe that there are clear expectations and support for students with developmental disabilities to transition from school to integrated employment and there was not agreement on whether there are requirements placed on service providers for achieving employment outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities. One respondent summarized the issue:

*There is a lack of continuity between the school systems and adult services. There is a current move to involve support coordinators with students during the 18 to 21 years, which is positive. Transition plans especially in underserved communities need to be strengthened. There is not nearly enough focus on community work experiences.*

## Leadership

Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to state leadership for integrated employment for people with I/DD. One hundred and eighty-three (183) people chose to respond to questions in this section.

**Leadership perceived as not strongly supporting integrated employment:** Less than half of respondents (41%, N=75) expressed that leadership within DDD clearly supports integrated employment as a top priority. When asked if leadership across state government clearly supports integrated employment for individuals with developmental disabilities as a top priority, only 22% (N=40) strongly agreed or agreed with that statement. One respondent shared, "DVR passes the ball to DDD, and DDD to support coordinators. And the individual's budget is not enough for work supports." Another respondent hoped for "new voices and diversity of race and staff with disabilities reflective in leadership at the table guiding policies and practices." Further, only 36% (N=66) strongly agreed or agreed that there are specific staff at the local or regional level who are responsible for managing the development of employment services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities.

**Families not always aligned with Employment First:** One support coordinator noted:

*As support coordinators, we often find that individuals and families do not agree with employment for the person. They often fear losing benefits and/or do not think they or their loved ones need to be challenged by the obligations of employment. As support coordinators, we are not in a position to change people's minds. Often these views are deeply embedded in the thinking.*

**Need for stronger advocacy on Employment First:** Slightly more than half (55%, N= 101) of respondents felt that there was a core group of advocates who are committed to and advocate for employment for individuals with developmental disabilities. However, a need was shared for "...a larger state-level team committed to employment and assisting those providers struggling with it."

## Funding and Contracting Methods

Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to state funding and contracting methods for integrated employment for people with I/DD. One hundred and seventy-three (173) people chose to respond to questions in this section.

**Many see rate structures for employment as problematic:** When asked whether the rate(s) and rate structures paid to service providers encourage integrated employment for individuals with developmental disabilities over other service options, 44% (N=76) strongly disagreed or disagreed and 43% (N=75) were unsure or neutral. A provider shared:

*We currently operate a day habilitation program for young adults with disabilities. While many of our individuals desire to work (either competitively, in a structured environment, or both), there are multiple challenges to making this a reality for them. The funding, revenue, and billing structure of this type of program is currently extremely convoluted and frankly a disincentive to providers who would otherwise be willing to enter this space.*

Additionally, 38% (N=65) strongly disagreed or disagreed that financial incentives are offered to providers to increase integrated employment outcomes. A respondent shared:

*The Division (DDD) has a remarkable additional funding program for supported employment services. However, the stakeholders and community members are unsure in how to implement and use this resource as part of the employment plan should there be a need.*

**Sequencing of funding is unclear:** Only 11% (N=19) shared that there are clear guidelines to facilitate how funding resources are to be sequenced to support individuals receiving employment services from multiple state systems. One individual shared, "As a former support coordinator, I believe there are supposed to be clear guidelines that facilitate how funding resources are to be sequenced to support individuals receiving employment services, but not sure if they actually exist."

**Funding for transition is seen as insufficient and not flexible:** Only 15% (N=26) felt that there is sufficient and flexible funding available to support transition-age youth and young adults with developmental disabilities to transition from school to integrated employment. A parent described their experience:

*Even if the money is there (DVRS transition funding and internship as an example), it is poorly managed and evaluated. My son participated in a transition internship and they offered one post, 30 minutes away. I had to drive there, wait two hours and drive home. The job coaching was intermittent and my son was not ready for that at all, but that was what it was – one size fits all.*

## Training and Technical Assistance

Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to training and technical assistance for integrated employment for people with I/DD. One hundred and seventy-one (171) people chose to respond to questions in this section.

**Service provider and educator technical assistance resources are insufficient:** Few respondents (17%, N=29) strongly agreed or agreed that there are sufficient technical assistance or consultation resources available to provider organizations to assist them in expanding or improving employment outcomes. A similar level of agreement was felt with the statement regarding whether sufficient technical assistance and consultation resources are available to schools and educators to improve employment outcomes for students with developmental disabilities transitioning from school to adult life (15%, N=26).

**Case managers are not viewed as adequately trained regarding employment:** Respondents felt that case managers and staff providing employment services did not have adequate training and technical assistance. When asked whether individuals responsible for service authorization, coordination, and monitoring (such as case managers or support coordinators) receive adequate training on employment supports and outcomes, only 17% (N=29) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. One respondent shared:

*Support coordinators seem to be merely trained in how to apply units to the ISP (Individualized Support Plan)/SDR. They do not have the ability to manage a team of providers, the person, and their guardian (where applicable) to get results that benefit employment initiatives for the person served.*

**Training for direct support staff is viewed as insufficient:** Only 19% (N=32) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "Personnel directly providing employment services and supports (including direct service provider staff, vocational rehabilitation counselors, school staff, etc.), have sufficient training."

One respondent commented:

*Technical assistance and training for all the professionals listed above needs to be improved and the service model has to be one that lifts up rather than focuses on deficits such as people can truly contribute to their communities but we cannot do this if people are not willing to give us opportunities. Part of the opportunity is teaching service providers and others that we can achieve our goals with proper supports.*

## Interagency Collaboration

Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to interagency collaboration for integrated employment for people with I/DD. One hundred and sixty-seven (167) people chose to respond to questions in this section.

**Interagency collaboration is seen as limited:** Only 22% (N=37) strongly agreed or agreed that informal relationships or collaborations exist at the state and local level among public agencies, service providers, educators, and other stakeholders to support integrated employment for individuals with developmental disabilities. The same low percentage strongly agreed or agreed that formal interagency agreements or collaborations at the state level exist to support integrated employment. One support coordinator shared:

*While there may be formal agreements between agencies, the ground level staff do not understand them or their role. The commitment is not there. As an SC or SCS (support coordinator) I have had many times when I've needed to educate the DVRS staff about how the DDD funding can support someone with employment. Too often I have sat in meetings with the individual I support and a DVRS worker who very pointedly and clearly says, "Our support will eventually fade away and you will be on your own in the workplace. You will then work on your own without support." If I wasn't there to speak up and let people know that ongoing support can be provided through DDD funding, the person would have walked away thinking they were not suited for employment because they would need ongoing support.*

An even lower percentage – 16% (N=27) – felt that there are sufficient cross-agency partnerships (e.g., DDD, DVRS, NJDOE, local districts, etc.) to support effective transition for youth with developmental disabilities. A respondent shared, "Although there is an MOU between DVRS and DDD which is formal, there is a lack of informal relationships when there is a need to work together on specific cases." Only about one in five respondents (21%, N=35) shared that DDD and DVRS work well in partnership for individuals with developmental disabilities to access employment services and supports. One respondent commented, "DOE, DDD, and DVR are completely out of sync, and actually have very poor relationships with each other." A parent shared, "Coordination among agencies, entities is confusing, lacking in common understanding and skill level." A provider commented:

*I tell them there is a program called NJ Workability, but I have never walked through the application process with anyone. There is general lack of coordination between agencies (DOE, DOL, DVRS, DDD) regarding this initiative. If there is a clear coordinated program from a top-down level with benchmarks, technical assistance, supports, etc., I have never seen it. I know we are responsible for promoting and connecting people with I/DD with competitive integrated employment from our own respective processes and organizations, but a **huge** barrier is that there is not an easy way to access information about benefits, and in my opinion, that is the largest barrier to employment.*

## Services and Service Innovation

Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to services and service innovation for integrated employment for people with I/DD. One hundred and fifty-seven (157) people chose to respond to questions in this section.

**Quality employment services are not viewed as readily available:** Less than one in five respondents (17%, N= 27) felt that quality services to assist individuals with developmental disabilities to succeed in integrated employment are readily available. Slightly more – 22%, N=34 – strongly agreed or agreed that DDD and DVRS support and encourage innovation in employment services.

**Professional level of belief in employment is perceived as low:** Despite having an Employment First policy, based on a presumption of employability, only 29% of respondents (N=45) expressed that service coordinators, case managers, DDD service provider staff, and educators consistently believe that individuals with developmental disabilities can succeed in integrated employment. Fewer respondents (26%, N=41) felt that the case management and service coordination process supports employment as a primary goal.

**Access to necessary employment supports is a challenge:** Few people –17% (N=26) – shared that if an individual is interested in integrated employment, they are able to access services and supports, regardless of level of disability. One parent shared:

*Our area of South Jersey (Burlington, Camden, Gloucester counties) is lacking in terms of both the quantity and breadth of services available for individuals with disabilities. Whether it's employment-based services, community-based services, or another type of setting, our families consistently have issues accessing appropriate programming for adults with disabilities. There is also a lack of programs with an employment focus for individuals with more severe disabilities, which makes it difficult to offer employment to all individuals with disabilities.*

**Community-based nonwork services are not readily available:** When asked about the availability of sufficient community-based, nonwork services for individuals when they are not working, only a few people (17%, N=26) felt that they were readily available. One respondent shared, "Nonwork services should be more available, i.e., more flexible to accommodate those with only part-time work schedules or work schedules that vary week to week. This is problematic in a system that requires 'pre-authorization' of any service used."

**Information on how to access needed employment supports is not readily available:** Only 15% (N=24) strongly agreed or agreed that information on how to access employment supports and services is readily available and easy to understand. One respondent shared, "I am sure there are some who do all they can to support employment, but the information, resources, opportunities, funding, training, etc. are not aligned with this objective." Another expressed:

*Fee-for-service does provide all the resources an individual would need to be employed, but often families do not want to use the budget for employment as it takes too much of their budget. Support coordinators need to encourage families to use the additional funding resources, however they often do not understand that process so the families in turn don't understand the process. We need to do a better job of providing technical assistance to families and providers in regards to employment services.*

**Individuals are not encouraged to pursue employment:** Even though New Jersey's Employment First policy is intended as prioritizing employment, less than one quarter of people (24%, N=38) think that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families are encouraged to choose integrated employment over other options. One respondent shared, "Information on employment is not readily available to families." Another noted, "Information available online is confusing and limited." Similar percentages of respondents noted that services are provided in a way that supports self-determination and informed choice (23%, N=36), and information on public benefits (Social Security, etc.) is readily available to help individuals make decisions about employment (24%, N=38). One support coordinator expressed, "More work needs to be done to address educating people about impact to SSI and Medicaid when people work before opinions start to change."

**Person-centered planning or community-based discovery are used moderately:** Almost 4 out of 10 respondents (39%, N=62) felt that person-centered career planning or community-based discovery is used to identify an individual's strengths, skills, and support needs for employment. However, one respondent shared:

*The work first page of the NJISP (New Jersey Individualized Service Plan) is language only. It is required to be included in the document. It is just words on the paper to fill a requirement. They can just say "working on mental health issues prior to seeking employment." It means nothing will be done until a miraculous cure.*

A parent also noted, "I hate the phrase (person-centered) because people throw it around and don't understand it."

**Transportation for employment is a major barrier:** Three quarters of respondents (76%, N=119) did not think that adequate transportation is available for those working in the community. One parent shared, "Bergen County is served by permanent private bus routes and therefore has almost no Access Link availability in most residential areas." Another respondent noted:

*Transportation in New Jersey is horrendous for employees. If you have to rely on Access Link, you will be late for work and depending on your location in the state, it is not feasible because it will take two hours or more to get back and forth to work.*

A third respondent said, "Transportation continues to be the biggest barrier to individuals seeking employment. What exists now is unreliable and undependable."

**Access to transition services for employment is problematic:** Regarding transition-age youth, 17% (N=26) shared that students with developmental disabilities are able to access transition services leading to integrated employment. Only 20% (N=30) strongly agreed or agreed that postsecondary options are explored for transition-age students with developmental disabilities. One parent noted, "I don't believe my son is viewed by his school as someone who will work." Another noted, "Case managers at the high school level are overwhelmed with their caseloads. The system is so convoluted that the average parent does not understand it." Another family member shared:

*Parents like me still have to take on a lot of the responsibilities of transition. It's grueling, confusing, and littered with alphabet stew. I leaned on BCSS (Bergen County Special Services School District) CAPE Center and Autism New Jersey's Transition Conferences, and I still don't know half of what would be good to know.*

And still another parent expressed, "Schools do not provide enough information for transition after high school."

**Businesses are perceived as not highly receptive to hiring individuals with I/DD:** Only 20% (N=31) strongly agreed or agreed that businesses and employers are receptive to hiring individuals with developmental disabilities. Throughout the comments sections of the survey, respondents expressed low expectations for businesses to hire people with I/DD. One person shared, "Our population is typically last in first out, there are not a lot of employers who hire and keep people with disabilities more than a year or two."



## Employment Data, Performance Measurement

Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to employment data, performance measurement, quality assurance, and program oversight. One hundred and fifty-seven (157) people chose to respond to questions in this section. However, this section had the fewest comments. All the comments themed around being unaware of any employment data being collected or that if the data are collected that are not widely shared. **Employment data are not readily available: A small percentage of respondents (11%, N=18) shared that employment outcome data are shared with stakeholders.** A slightly larger, though still small, percentage (17%, N=26) strongly agreed or agreed that service provider level employment data are made available to individuals and families to inform decision-making and service selections. Lack of awareness of whether data are available is a major issue. A large percentage (27%, N=43) weren't sure if overall data are available, and similarly 23% (N=36) weren't sure if service provider level employment data are available.

One respondent noted, "There is no data made public (or collected?) that demonstrate success or progress in creating integrated employment opportunities." And one parent shared, "Provider agencies do not give me any information about how my son is doing at his employment unless I beg them for it. DDD should require provider agencies to give parent/guardian periodic progress reports."

## Appendix C: References

---

- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. (2011). *CMCS informational bulletin: Updates to the §1915 (c) waiver instructions and technical guide regarding employment and employment related services*. <http://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/CMCSBulletins/downloads/CIB-9-16-11.pdf>
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. (2014). *Medicaid program; state plan home and community-based services, 5-year period for waivers, provider payment reassignment, and home and community-based setting requirements for community first choice (Section 1915(k) of the Act) and home and community-based services (HCBS) waivers (Section 1915(c) of the Act)*. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2014/01/16/2014-00487/medicaid-program-state-plan-home-and-community-based-services-5-year-period-for-waivers-provider>
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. (2019). *Application for a Section 1915(c) home and community-based waiver: Instructions, technical guide and review criteria*. <https://www.hhs.gov/guidance/document/application-ass1915c-home-and-community-based-waiver-instructions-technical-guide-and>
- Colacello, S., & Kratchman, A. (2021). *Family needs assessment: Easing access to the adult services system*. The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities. <https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/student/documents/SusanColacelloNJLENDPosterFamilyNeedsAssessment.pdfs>
- Haber, M. G., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Rowe, D. A., Bartholomew, A. L., Test, D. W., & Fowler, C. H. (2016). What works, when, for whom, and with whom: A meta-analytic review of predictors of postsecondary success for students with disabilities. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 123–162.
- Hall, A. C., Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzler, D. (2007). Pushing the employment agenda: Case study research of high-performing states in integrated employment. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 45(3), 182–198.
- Hoff, D. (2021). *Employment First resource list, SELN working document – August 2021*. <https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Employment-first-resource-list-August-2021.pdf>
- Iowa Department of Human Services. (2017). *Employment First guidebook: A resource for community based case managers, care managers, service coordinators, and integrated health home care coordinators*. 2nd edition. <https://dhs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/MHDS-Iowa-Employment-1st-Guidebook-2ndEdition-FINAL.pdf?061420190115>
- Jarmon, G. (2013). *Most of New Jersey's claims for Medicaid supported employment services were unallowable*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. <https://oig.hhs.gov/oas/reports/region2/21201009.asp>
- Kiernan, W. E., Hoff, D., Freeze, S., & Mank, D. M. (2011). Employment First: A beginning not an end. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 49(4), 300–304.
- National Core Indicators Project. (2020). *In person survey state report 2018–19, New Jersey report*. National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities and HSRI. [https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NJ\\_IPS\\_state\\_508.pdf](https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NJ_IPS_state_508.pdf)
- New Jersey Business and Industry Association. (2020). *Advancing how employers can help jobseekers with disabilities*. <https://njbja.org/advancing-how-employers-can-support-jobseekers-with-disabilities>
- New Jersey Business and Industry Association. (2021). *Siekerka testifies on improving workplace opportunities for disabled*. <https://njbja.org/siekerka-testifies-on-improving-workplace-opportunities-for-disabled/>

New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities. (2020). *Request for funding proposal, funding opportunity to develop a framework to advance New Jersey's policies and practices in the area of employment and day services for adults with I/DD*.

New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities. (n.d.) *Principles of employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities*. [https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/documents/principles\\_of\\_employment.pdf](https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/documents/principles_of_employment.pdf)

New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities. (2013). *Upcoming changes to DDD's policy on funding of sheltered workshops*. <https://nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/documents/Documents%20for%20Web/ShelteredWorkshopsFactSheet3.18.13.pdf>

New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities. (2020). *Supports program and community care program policies and procedures: A quick guide for families*. <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/community/support>

New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. (2016). *Case services policy manual*. <https://www.nj.gov/labor/wioa/documents/vocrehab/DVRCSPM2016disclaimer.pdf>

New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. (2018). *Extended employment contract changes, frequently asked questions*.

New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. (2020a). *The State of New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the New Jersey State Rehabilitation Council, comprehensive needs assessment (2016–2020)*.

New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. (2020b). *Community rehabilitation programs supported employment and specialized services manual*. <https://www.nj.gov/labor/career-services/assets/PDFs/SE%20Manual%20November%202020%20Final.pdf>

New Jersey Future. (2020). *The geography of poverty and race in New Jersey*. <https://www.njfuture.org/2020/10/14/the-geography-of-poverty-and-race-in-new-jersey/>

New Jersey Office of the Governor. (2012, April 19). *Governor Chris Christie acts to enhance job opportunities for individuals with disabilities in New Jersey* [Press Release]. [https://www.nj.gov/labor/lwdhome/press/2012/20120419\\_employment\\_first.html](https://www.nj.gov/labor/lwdhome/press/2012/20120419_employment_first.html)

New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission. (2016a). *Policy resolution: SETC #2016-06: New Jersey's definition for Employment First*. <https://www.nj.gov/njsetc/policy/resolutions/documents/2016-06%20EF%20Definition.pdf>

New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission. (2016b). *New Jersey combined state plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2016*. <https://www.nj.gov/njsetc/planning/unified/documents/NJ%20Combined%20State%20Plan%20for%20WIOA%202016.pdf>

New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission. (2016c). *Policy resolution: SETC #2016-07: Employment First career pathways framework*. <https://www.nj.gov/njsetc/policy/resolutions/documents/2016-07%20EF%20Career%20Pathways.pdf>

New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission (2020). *New Jersey combined state plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2020*. <https://www.nj.gov/njsetc/planning/unified/documents/NJ%20Combined%20State%20Plan%20for%20WIOA%202020%20Approved%206-22-2020.pdf>

Rogan, P., & Rinne, S. (2011). National call for organizational change from sheltered to integrated employment. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 49(4), 248–260.

StateData.Info. (2021a). *State employment snapshot: New Jersey*. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. <https://www.statedata.info/statepages/New%20Jersey>

StateData.Info. (2021b). *American Community Survey data*. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. <https://www.statedata.info/data>

StateData.Info. (2021c). *New Jersey Social Security data*. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. <https://www.statedata.info/data>

State Employment Leadership Network. (2020). *SELN accomplishments report, 2019*. <https://static.prod01.ue1.pcomm.net/umass/content/Public%20Docs/SELN-annual-report-2019.pdf>

TennCare. (n.d.). *TennCare's culture and system transformation initiative*. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tenncare/documents/LTSSSystemTransformationOnePager.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *34 CFR Parts 361, 363, and 397 – State vocational rehabilitation services program; state supported employment services program; limitations on use of subminimum wage; final rule*.

U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division. (2021). *14(c) Certificate holders*. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>

Winsor, J., Lyons, O., Butterworth, J., & Kennedy-Lizotte, R. (2017). *A systematic approach to revising Florida's integrated employment funding system*. Prepared for Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. Institute for Community Inclusion and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

Winsor, J., Timmons, J., Butterworth, J., Migliore, A., Domin, D., Zalewska, A., & Shepard, J., (2021). *StateData: The national report on employment services and outcomes through 2018*. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. [https://www.statedata.info/sites/statedata.info/files/files/state\\_data\\_2021\\_F%5B3%5D.pdf](https://www.statedata.info/sites/statedata.info/files/files/state_data_2021_F%5B3%5D.pdf)