



EMPLOYMENT FIRST ARIZONA

Real Jobs. Real Wages

What is Employment First?

Employment First means that competitive, integrated employment should be the first and preferred choice available for individuals with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly funded systems. It starts with the presumption that a person with a disability can work. For too long people with disabilities have had to demonstrate their “readiness” for employment. Everyone has the right to work.

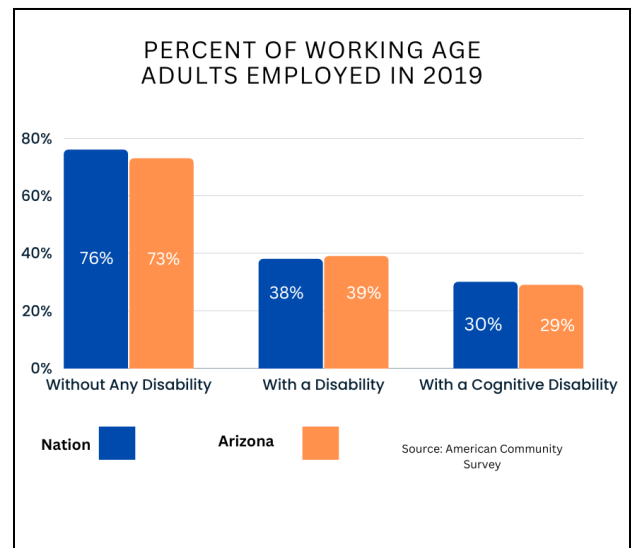
What is Competitive, Integrated Employment?

Work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis for which an individual is:

- Compensated at or above minimum wage and comparable to the rate paid to employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience;
- Receiving the same level of benefits provided to other employees without disabilities in similar positions;
- At a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities; and
- Presented opportunities for advancement similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.

Why is Employment First Important?

People with disabilities want to work¹, yet of working age Arizonans receiving services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) **only 21% are participating in competitive, integrated employment**. In fact, only **16% of DDD resources were spent on integrated employment services** in 2018, while the remainder is spent on facility-based non-work services.¹ Arizona believes in the dignity of work. With reasonable assistance, accommodations, and encouragement, many more people with disabilities can work successfully in the community.²



¹ https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/10_20_21-APSE-14c-Update-REV.pdf

² https://www.statedata.info/sites/statedata.info/files/files/bluebook_2022_complete_F.pdf

Advocates recognize that Employment First represents a generational shift in expectations. Additional resources may be needed to pilot new models and support providers through this transition while they continue to serve existing clients. Part of this transition period must also encompass the development of new competencies, training, certifications, and ultimately new rate structures.

How Many Other States Have Implemented Employment First?

About 40 states have some type of effort focused on Employment First. At least 21 of these states have an official state policy declaring that employment in the community is the first and preferred option for people with disabilities.³ Recent examples include:

- In 2022 Utah adopted [Senate Joint Resolution 15](#) recognizing Employment First.
- In 2022 Kentucky passed [SB104](#) stating that “It is the policy of the Commonwealth of Kentucky that competitive integrated employment shall be considered the first and primary option for persons with disabilities of working age who desire to become employed.”

What Is the Potential Economic Impact of Implementing Employment First?

According to an Arizona study conducted by the Institute for Community Inclusion,⁴ increasing Arizona’s labor force participation rate for people with disabilities by only 6 percentage points over a ten-year period, could result in:

- An increase of between \$281.04 million and \$818.82 million in gross domestic product (GDP) each year. Over a ten-year period, this could result in up to \$8.19 billion added to Arizona’s economy and 20,420 jobs being added to Arizona’s economy.
- In the short term, Arizona could expect the money it collects in taxes to increase by \$14.25 to \$41.53 million each year.³

Arizona has a dynamic and growing economy. Arizonans with disabilities want to be part of it. There has never been a better time to match opportunities with enthusiasm and ability. The time is now to make real jobs and real wages available to this community.

The time is now for Employment First.

For more information visit:

[AZ Employment First website](#)
[Arizona APSE Chapter website](#)

³ <https://apse.org/legislative-advocacy/employment-first/>

⁴ Winsor, Jeanne, PhD, Landa, Cada, PhD, Perumal, Andrew, PhD, Butterworth, John, PhD, The Power of Disability Employment: The Impact to Arizona’s Economy, Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, October 2019.