

## Where Do We Go From Here?



***Next Steps to Make Employment  
a Priority in Arizona***

**November 2021**

# NON O T C D D O R T N

This brief explores options to help create new energy and support to make employment a priority in Arizona. It reviews a grassroots initiative to improve employment outcomes and builds on those efforts by making recommendations.

Although employment is one of the primary building blocks leading to inclusion, better income, good health, and freedom, it remains an elusive goal for many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who wish to work. Equal access to employment for people with disabilities has not improved since the passage of the American with Disabilities Act almost thirty-one years ago. In 2019, the employment-to-population ratio, i.e., the percent of the population that is employed, for people with disabilities was 38.9 percent. In contrast, the employment-to-population ratio of people without disabilities was 78.6 percent, slightly more than double that of people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

In Arizona, only 22 percent of people in the Division of Developmental Disabilities system are in integrated employment. Arizona is lagging severely behind states that have successfully implemented comprehensive employment initiatives. The 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates for Arizona report 173,613 people with disabilities are employed, 24,215 are unemployed, however, 251,181 are not in the labor force, and not seeking work.

The median earnings for people with disabilities are \$25,702 for males, and \$21,387 for females. In comparison, people with no disabilities report higher earnings; males \$37,858, and females \$30,202.

A 2019 study prepared by the Institute for Community Inclusion found that if 2,302 to 6,367 more people with disabilities in Arizona became employed each year for ten years, there will be:



Spencer Nickell  
Spencer's Place

- An increase of between \$281.04 million and \$818.82 million in gross domestic product each year. Over a ten-year period, this would result in up to \$8.19 billion added to Arizona's economy.
- Between 703 and 2,042 new jobs created each year in the state. Over a ten-year period, this would result in up to 20,420 new jobs in Arizona.
- In the short term, the state could expect the money it collects in taxes to increase by \$14.25 to \$41.53 million each year.

The figures above were based on increasing Arizona's labor force participation rate for people with disabilities by six percentage points, from 42.3 percent to 48.6 percent, over a ten-year period, and the unemployment rate for people with disabilities stays the same at 12.7 percent and 10.3 percent respectively.<sup>2</sup>

## BACKGROUND

There exists a growing national movement that is trying to affect change in the disability community in important fundamental ways. Most crucial in this effort, is changing the expectations many people have about the capacity of individuals to meaningfully contribute to the workforce and the community. Employment First is a national initiative that addresses this concern. It promotes competitive employment in an integrated setting at a minimum wage or higher. It means regular jobs like everyone else in society; in typical work settings, working side-by-side with people without disabilities, earning regular wages and benefits, and being part of the economic mainstream of our society.

Governor Doug Ducey and Arizona stakeholders have endorsed this initiative and are sharing a common vision to change and enhance expectations around employment. Stakeholders are advocating for progressive change in the support infrastructure, which will enable people with disabilities to pursue employment opportunities and achieve economic independence.

*Employment should be an expected outcome for youth and adults with disabilities. People with disabilities have the right to equitable pay, inclusive jobs, and opportunities for advancement in the workplace. These are the principles of Employment First in Arizona.*

Vanessa Zuber, Director of Employment Services, UCP of Southern Arizona & APSE Board Member

## Figure 1 Timeline of Employment First in Arizona



Brian Marshall smiles during a break from work at La Grande Orange Grocery & Pizzeria

*Arizona's Employment First effort is having a positive impact on our jobseekers, while busting the longstanding myth that people with developmental disabilities do not desire, or cannot obtain, meaningful employment. STARS is gaining a reputation as an agency that improves the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities by making their dream of inclusive employment a reality.*

David Henderson, President & CEO, STARS

In 2013, the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) convened twenty-four stakeholders to facilitate an Employment First discussion.

2014 - An Employment First Core Team comprised of advocates, family members, service providers, educators, state agencies, the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), was created to help guide the planning process.

2015 - ADDPC provided funding to develop an Arizona Employment First Strategic Plan.

2015 - Vocational Rehabilitation and the Sonoran UCEDD began to jointly fund an Employment First Manager to coordinate and implement Arizona's Employment First Strategic Plan.

2017 - Governor Doug Ducey issued an Executive Order establishing Arizona as an Employment First state.

2017 - With the assistance of ADDPC, an Arizona Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Chapter was formed. The Chapter is associated with APSE National and its mission is to expand inclusive employment opportunities for all people who have disabilities through education, advocacy, and legislative action.

2019 - Core Team focused on updating the Arizona Employment First Strategic Plan and reported on collective progress and leadership agencies.

2020 - ADDPC funded development of an Arizona Employment First website and employment videos to serve as a critically needed resources to help increase public awareness and provide support for competitive integrated employment.

# APPROACH

As a grassroots effort, Arizona’s Employment First initiative has made considerable progress since 2013. Core Team members continue to meet and remain dedicated to the principles of employment and systems change.

These efforts are admirable but are they sustainable? If Arizona wants to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities, it must transition from grassroots to something more structured and accountable. Arizona must examine what other states are doing and use the performance of those states to set realistic goals for increasing employment of Arizonans with disabilities.



## APPROACH AND RESULTS

During the Fall of 2020 an intern and staff member with the ADDPC conducted informal interviews based on recommendations from the Sonoran UCEDD with Employment First representatives in Colorado, Kansas, South Dakota, Washington, Wisconsin, and the Institute for Community Inclusion. The states were selected based upon having the highest employment outcomes, legislatively established centralized focus, DD Council leadership, and involvement with people with disabilities. The Institute for Community Inclusion is recognized as a national leader and policy expert in Employment First. The interview consisted of fourteen questions centered on program development, employment outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations. See Exhibit A for list of questions.

## Colorado

Cross-disability Employment First bill was enacted in June 2016 followed by additional legislation in 2018 requiring implementation of recommendations of the Colorado Employment Advisory Partnership. The recommendations focused on clear and consistent data collection among agencies; training for supported employment professionals; appropriate use of the Discovery process as an assessment for persons with disabilities; and training and outreach for employers, educators, case managers, and persons with disabilities and their families. An Office of Employment First was created within the UCEDD. In addition to creation of a new office, a nationally recognized supported employment training certificate is required for all vendors and professionals that provide employment services.

## Kansas

Legislation enacted in 2011 established a statewide policy of Employment First for all people with disabilities. In addition, the Kansas Department of Education developed an Employment First policy specific to transition. Although Employment First legislation was passed, no funding was provided. Therefore, there is limited coordination among agencies, which makes it difficult to obtain data. No real employment outcomes have been reported.

## South Dakota

Governor Dennis Daugaard's Employment First initiative was inspired by his involvement with the National Governor's Association when he assisted former Governor Markell of Delaware with holding forums to explore strategies to increase employment of people with disabilities. This led to the creation of an often-referenced policy brief [\*A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities / Blueprint for Governors\*](#). Governor Daugaard's Employment Works Initiative was launched in 2013 to help guide Employment First efforts. In addition, the South Dakota Employment Works Task Force was created with broad stakeholder support. These stakeholders identified five recommendations: finding and supporting businesses to employ people with disabilities; connecting businesses to employees with disabilities; eliminating disincentives to employment; developing flexible systems and promoting promising practices; and educating the public, providers, employers, and people with disabilities.

## Washington

Washington has been a pioneer and leader practicing principles of Employment First for more than forty years and has been recognized nationally for their progressive efforts. The Washington DDD adopted its *Working Age Adult Policy* in 2004 and updated in 2012. The policy identifies employment supports as the primary method of furnishing state-financed day services to adult participants and emphasizes community employment as the primary service option.<sup>3</sup> Legislation was passed in 2012 to support employment as the first choice for adults of working age. It also incorporated the right to transition to a community access program (activities that promote individualized skill development, independent living, and community integration) after nine months in an employment service. Individuals may receive only one service option at a time.

Initial implementation of the policy resulted in movement of individuals from community access (non-work) supports to community employment. In March 2004, 1,817 individuals were in community access supports, and in 2007, the number decreased to 321. During that same period, the number of people in individualized employment increased from 2,992 to 3,410, and the number of individuals on the “path to employment” grew from 840 to 2,650.<sup>4</sup> Between 2007 and 2009, the number of DDD clients in integrated employment increased by 54 percent, representing an additional 2,555 clients and a total of 7,277 clients in integrated employment.

## Wisconsin

Legislation enacted in March 2018 established a cross-disability Employment First Policy and specific requirements for state agencies in terms of implementation. It called for all publicly funded programs that provide services and supports to prioritize competitive integrated employment. It also required agencies to collaborate and report on development of a plan that includes employment targets and explain how targets will be achieved; the number of working age persons with disabilities who received publicly funded services through each department; the number of people who are in competitive integrated employment; the percentage change from the previous period, average number of hours worked, and wages earned; and identified barriers and how they are being mitigated. Legislation also requires a statement or analysis detailing the specific impact the collaboration has had on each department’s progress, outcomes, and achievements in increasing participation in competitive integrated employment.

The legislation did not create an office and did not provide funding. Despite the unfunded mandate, employment rates have increased. Wisconsin's APSE chapter has been instrumental in promoting competitive integrated employment among providers with their positive, consistent messaging.

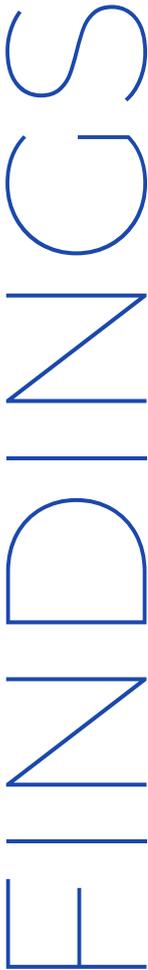
Thirty-nine states have an official Employment First policy based on legislation, policy directive, etc. Twenty-one states have passed legislation stating that integrated employment is preferred over other service options. Eighteen states have a policy directive, executive order, or similar official policy statement, but not legislation. Seven states have both legislation and a non-legislative policy directive.

Colorado and Ohio are leading the nation by being the only states to establish an Employment First Office.

Twenty-seven states have policies that are cross-disability, i.e., includes all forms of disability, including but not limited to acquired, congenital, intellectual, brain, neurologic, sensory, mobility, and mental health. Twelve states' policies are focused exclusively on individuals with I/DD.

In addition to the thirty-nine states with Employment First policies, eleven states have Employment First efforts and initiatives underway, but no official Employment First policy has been issued.

These states vary in their level of activity including initial expressions of interest in Employment First with limited follow-up, legislation introduced but not yet passed, formation of task forces, and robust systems change efforts.



## OTHER STATES

New York has a September 2014 Executive Order that mandates the development of an Employment First policy but as of 2021, no official policy has been issued. Nevada has an Executive Order establishing a governor's taskforce on integrated employment. Alabama, Hawaii, and Kentucky have proposed Employment First policy legislation that has not yet been enacted. North Dakota has passed legislation creating a committee on employment of people with disabilities to support Employment First, but it does not specifically prioritize integrated employment over other service options.<sup>5</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS

Interviews and research of state Employment First initiatives identified common themes:

- Employment as the first priority for individuals with disabilities receiving public services
- Clear definition of what Employment First is and what it means
- Concise definition of competitive integrative employment
- Broad representation of stakeholders
- Voices of self-advocates and families, are included
- Consistent data collection among agencies and service providers
- Messaging for service providers about people having jobs, not about closing sheltered workshops or center-based employment
- Employment First is about choice
- Messaging resonates with the public and legislators
- Call for Sub-minimum wage to be eliminated
- Training and professional development for all employment professionals
- Business community, employers, and public officials must be involved
- Lack of dedicated coordination and funding hinders employment outcomes

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 2013 a broad coalition of Arizona stakeholders have been working collaboratively to advance employment as the first priority for individuals receiving public services. A vision and strategic plan have guided efforts to help align agency policies focused on competitive integrated employment. However, the collaboration is not enough to bring about necessary systems change that results in shifting of resources towards integrated employment, a service system that provides consistent and high-quality employment assistance and supports, and measurement and accountability for achieving employment outcomes. It's time for stakeholders to move to the next level that implements a robust and comprehensive Employment First policy with legislation and funding that mandates sustainable employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Arizona Employment First proponents should:

## Employment First Advisory Group

- Build on the existing excellent organizations and collaborative partnership of the Core Team.

## Arizona APSE Chapter

- Enlist Arizona APSE Chapter to champion competitive integrated employment to its members.

## Legislative

- Consider replicating Colorado's efforts to establish legislative support for Employment First.
- Engage a high-level team of policymakers to help draft a legislative action plan.
- Identify key legislative champions.

## Policy and Programming

- Consider using the Wisconsin model for data collection and reporting of employment outcomes.
- Include training and professional development for all employment personnel.
- Be clear on definitions of employment.
- Keep it simple and use plain language.
- Include language that says, "This is the employment policy of Arizona."
- Create opportunities for individuals with disabilities to pursue self-employment and the development of microenterprises.
- Require that professionals who help get a job are highly skilled.
- Ensure adequate funding for quality services and supports is available as needed for long-term employment success.

## Key Stakeholders

- Engage the Governor to position Arizona as a leader in inclusive employment.
- Identify employers that universally value individuals with disabilities as an integral part of their workforce and include people with disabilities within general recruitment and hiring efforts as standard practices.

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## Exhibit A: Interview Questions

### Organizational and Program Development

1. When did your state pass its Employment First legislation and what are the results after?
2. What was the inspiration or driving force that led to enacting Employment First legislation? Who took the lead to organize and coordinate legislation? DD Planning Council? Association of People Supporting Employment First State Chapter? Grassroots stakeholders?
3. What are the pros and cons regarding passing this legislation?
4. What barriers did you run into while planning this legislation? Were there any major players or did issues arise in opposition of the legislation?
5. Is there an actual Employment First Office with staff and where is it located in state government? Division of Developmental Disabilities? Vocational Rehabilitation? Office of the Governor? Department of Commerce?
6. What is the amount of funding that has been requested for this legislation, and how much was approved? Is there funding from other sources?

### Employment Outcomes

7. How many people have successfully gained employment with this initiative?
8. How is the number of people employed tracked as a result of the Employment First legislation?
9. What is different since passing Employment first legislation?
10. How do you measure Employment First legislation success and progress?
11. What is included in the new legislation? State office? Data collection and tracking? Use of Discovery?

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

12. What was the process of enacting Employment First legislation? How do you think this can be applied to Arizona?
13. What are the first steps Arizona needs to take to successfully implement Employment First to benefit its residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities?
14. Now that Employment First is passed, is there anything you and your teams wish you had done differently while planning the bill and implementing legislation?