



# Employment First (E1st): A Family Perspective

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## Employment First Is...

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

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

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

### Integrated Community Employment

is **work** performed by a person with a disability who:

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

## Everyone Benefits!

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





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

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

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

## Pursuing Integrated Employment

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

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

- ⇒ [www.ivrs.iowa.gov/cesframeset.html](http://www.ivrs.iowa.gov/cesframeset.html) Success stories of community-based employment across the state.
- ⇒ [www.jobhonor.org/iowa-overview](http://www.jobhonor.org/iowa-overview) Inspiring stories of meaningful employment from the Iowa Job Honor Awards.
- ⇒ [www.idaction.org/videos](http://www.idaction.org/videos) See videos of people with disabilities living and working in their communities.
- ⇒ [www.iowawins.org](http://www.iowawins.org) Stories of employees & employers with disabilities.
- ⇒ [www.apse.org/resources/videos-stories](http://www.apse.org/resources/videos-stories) The Association of Persons Supporting Employment First (APSE) has a collection of video stories.

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

## Iowans with Disabilities at Work

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



## Supports Available for Integrated Employment

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

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

**Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB)** helps educate, train and empower blind or low vision individuals, including providing integrated employment services. See [www.blind.iowa.gov](http://www.blind.iowa.gov) for more information.

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

**Mental Health and Disability Services (MHDS)** There are regional services and funding for eligible people who may be on waiting lists or not Medicaid eligible. Find out more at [www.dhs.iowa.gov/mhds/disability-services/employment](http://www.dhs.iowa.gov/mhds/disability-services/employment).

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

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



**WorkingTogether**  
so all can work



*"I love working in my greenhouse!"*  
**Marissa from Strawhat Farms.**

Read Marissa's story in "Thinking Outside the Employment Box" on page 2.



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

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

## Answers to FAQs

Here are answers to frequently asked questions about Employment First.

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

***A:*** Yes! IVRS, Iowa WORKS, and MHDS Regions serve eligible Iowans with disabilities. IDB serves people with low vision and who are blind.

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

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

***Q: Will pre-vocational services still be provided?***

***A: Yes!*** They will just look different, be provided in different places and be more individualized.

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

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

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

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

### Confused by Acronyms?

Read the definitions of some acronyms related to employment

**CBCM**—Community Based Case Manager

**CCO**—Consumer Choices Option

**CMS**—Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

**CRP**—Community Resource Provider

**IDB**—Iowa Department for the Blind

**IME**—Iowa Medicaid Enterprise

**IPE**—Individualized Plan for Employment

**ISP**—Individualized Service Plan

**MCO**—Managed Care Organization

**PASS**—Plan to Achieve Self-Support

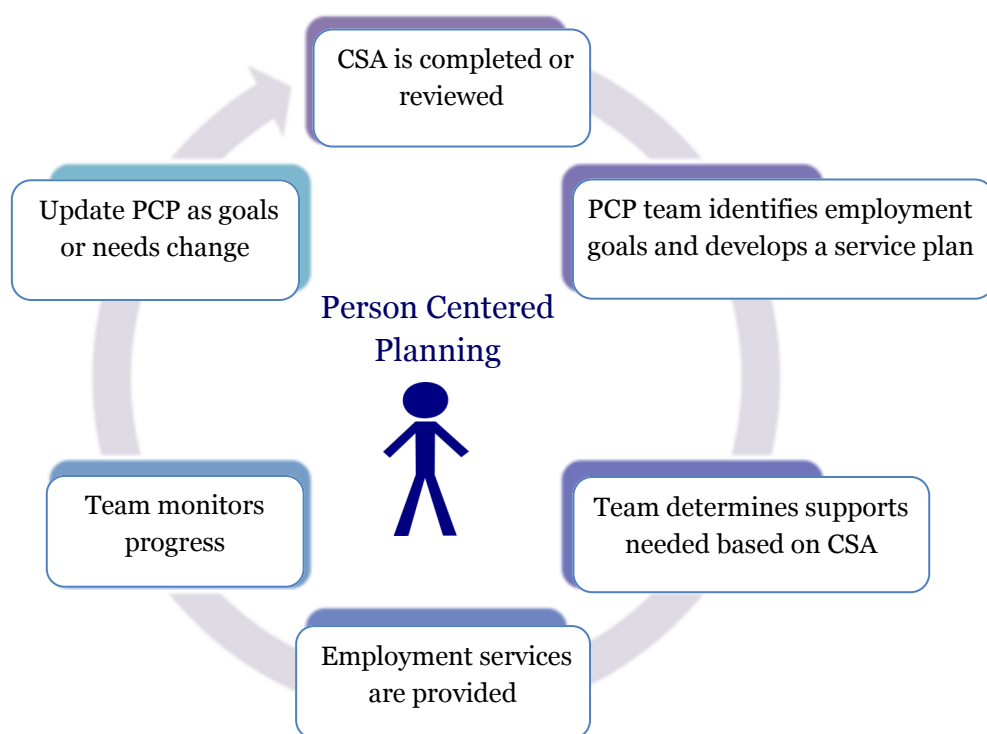


Detailed information about the Medicaid State Plan is available at [www.dhs.iowa.gov/ime/about/stateplan](http://www.dhs.iowa.gov/ime/about/stateplan).

## Employment Service Planning

Sources of employment services for people with disabilities are **Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS)** and **Medicaid Home—Community Based Services (HCBS)**. HCBS has the ID and BI waivers and the Habilitation Program that can offer support in the area of employment for those who qualify. **Iowa Department of the Blind (IDB)** provides employment services for Iowans who are blind.

Once a person is determined eligible, the cycle of HCBS Waivers and Habilitation service planning is similar to the planning process of IEP teams: evaluate, plan, implement and regularly review the plan to be sure it meets the person's needs. Medicaid services are designed to meet individual needs. They include **1) core standardized assessment (CSA)** and **2) person-centered planning (PCP)**. This picture shows the **Person Centered Service Planning** process.



## Important Definitions

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

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

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

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





## E1st Myths — CORRECTED!

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

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

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

**Myth:** Supports in the workplace are too costly.

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

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

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

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This publication has been developed by ASK Resource Center, based on the Iowa Employment First Guidebook created by staff from the Center for Disabilities Development, Iowa Department Human Services, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Department of Human Rights, Iowa Association of People Supporting Employment first, and the Iowa Department for the Blind. View the entire Iowa Employment First Guidebook online at [https://uihc.org/ucedd/sites/uihc.org.ucedd/files/iowa\\_employment\\_first\\_guidebook.pdf](https://uihc.org/ucedd/sites/uihc.org.ucedd/files/iowa_employment_first_guidebook.pdf)

