



Position Paper on Employment for Persons with Disabilities

What is the issue?

Persons with disabilities, in DC and elsewhere, have lower rates of employment and earn significantly lower wages compared to their counterparts without disabilities. In DC in 2020, the employment rate of people without disabilities was 75.5%, while the employment rate of people with disabilities was 30.1%.¹ Only 9% of people receiving services from the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) of DC's Department on Disability Services report having a paid job, which is substantially lower than the national rate of 18% of people receiving developmental disability services with a paid job.² DC has the 6th largest gap of all U.S. States in median annual earnings between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. In DC, people with disabilities have an average income of \$11,244 less than people without disabilities.³ Although DC agencies supporting people with disabilities in employment decline to work with subminimum wage employers, people with disabilities are still disadvantaged compared to their counterparts without disabilities. They are behind people with disabilities in other states in employment and earnings.

The National Core Indicators show that of people with developmental disabilities without a job, 64% said they wanted a paid job, and 6% said they weren't sure if they did or did not want a paid job. Employment needs for people with disabilities in DC are still high.⁴

A significant barrier people with disabilities face when trying to find employment is a lack of prospective employers hiring people with disabilities. At the June 2022 Project ACTION! meeting, advocates with disabilities, and family members of people with disabilities identified

¹ Citation: Paul, S., Rafal, M., & Houtenville, A. (2021). Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2021 (Table 3.1-3.9). Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability. Note: Authors' calculations using the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample with Experimental Weights, 2020, which is subject to sampling variation.

² National Core Indicators (NCI) for DC from National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) and the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) for 2019-2020. <https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/states/DC/report/2017-18/>.

³ 2021 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium from the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Statistics and Demographics, A NIDILRR-Funded Center. https://disabilitycompendium.org/sites/default/files/user-uploads/Events/2022ReleaseYear/2021_Annual_Disability_Statistics_Compendium_WEB.pdf.

⁴ National Core Indicators (NCI) for DC from National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) and the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) for 2019-2020. <https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/states/DC/report/2017-18/>.

additional barriers to finding work, some due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included changing and less reliable transportation, inaccessible and complicated application processes, particularly online applications, discriminatory pre-employment testing, fear of an inaccessible and unaccommodating workplace, and challenging system navigation with insufficient support.

Why is this issue important to the DC Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC)?

The unique barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities limit their ability to obtain and maintain employment, income, and the independence and self-determination that come with them. Increasing employment of people with disabilities in DC requires breaking down these barriers and exploring more opportunities for customized employment, which incorporates individualized accommodations and flexibilities, and creates a more welcoming work environment.⁵

According to people with disabilities surveyed by the DC Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), job training and continuous job coaching were respectively the second and third most essential RSA services to successfully obtain and retain employment, but only 20% of respondents claimed that job skills training was readily available and only 24% found job coaching readily available.⁶ If implemented well, expanding DDA eligibility could lead to more long-term employment supports, such as supported employment that is not time-limited, for people with disabilities who have not historically been eligible for DDA services.

October 2022 is the tenth anniversary of DC's designation as an "Employment First" state. Employment First is centered around the premise that ALL people, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of fully integrated employment and community life. Over the past 10 years, there have been some accomplishments in the development and expansion of several programs to address the needs of people with disabilities in DC. The Direct Support Professional (DSP) Academy was created in 2019 to provide vocational skills training to both adults and youth with disabilities while also getting more people into high-demand DSP jobs. The Aspiring Professionals internship program worked to place people with disabilities in DC government positions. Other programs, such as JumpStart, the Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, and the Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Grant, target employment for youth in transition. Additionally, programs and events such as Guided Group Discovery, People Planning Together Training, and the Annual Latinx Conference on Disabilities developed further outreach and peer-to-peer support opportunities for seeking employment.

⁵ https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/58803_DOL_PolicyBrief_%233.pdf

⁶ Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) from DC DDS RSA, 2020.

<https://dds.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dds/publication/attachments/2020%20Comprehensive%20Statewide%20Needs%20Assessment%20FINAL%20Report-%20optimized%20%28002%29.pdf>.

What is the DDC's position and what is the change we would like to see?

The DDC believes strongly that people with disabilities should have equitable employment opportunities. Employment is one of the central goals in the DDC's 2022-26 Five Year State Plan, and in October 2022, the DDC will sponsor an Employment First Summit to examine the accomplishments of the past ten years and identify new measures to integrate people with developmental and other disabilities more substantially into the DC workforce. The DDC aims for the Employment First Summit to be an opportunity for agencies and community partners to recommit to Employment First and establish SMARTIE (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic/Relevant, Time Bound, Inclusive, and Equitable) goals for making Employment First a reality in DC by 2032.

There must be much greater progress toward making the DC government itself a more receptive employer of people with disabilities, as well as in eradicating discrimination and improving communication and collaboration with businesses and organizations on the value of hiring persons with developmental and other disabilities.

The DC government should take several concrete steps to increase the employment of people with disabilities in the District. These steps should include:

- Creating a preferential hiring program for people with disabilities in all DC government agencies.
- Expanding access to long-term employment supports when needed, such as ongoing job coaching through RSA and DDA.
- Promoting supported and customized employment in the District government and the private sector.
- Eradicating discrimination in hiring and employment against people with disabilities.
- Increasing access to individualized information regarding the effects of employment income on benefits.
- Ensuring employment does not threaten other long-term care benefits, such as Medicaid.

Further, all agencies and community organizations focused on disability issues should hire people with disabilities on their staff and contribute to the advancement of customized employment opportunities. Every person and organization in DC can contribute to Employment First to increase and maintain fully integrated employment of all persons with disabilities across DC.

Glossary

CSNA: Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, an evaluation of the employment needs of people with disabilities conducted by RSA

DDA: Developmental Disabilities Administration, part of the Department on Disability Services

DDC: Developmental Disabilities Council, responsible for identifying the most pressing needs of people with developmental disabilities and advancing public policy and systems change that help them gain more control over their lives.

Employment First: A policy supporting the “philosophy that all people, regardless of disability, prefer and are capable of individual, integrated employment according to each person’s interests, preference, and informed choices.”

NCI: National Core Indicators, “the standard measures used across states to assess the outcomes of services provided to individuals and families.”

RSA/DCRSA: Rehabilitation Services Administration, part of the Department on Disability Services focusing on “vocational rehabilitation,” or employment needs of PWD

SMARTIE Goal – An acronym that represents a best practice in goal setting. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic/Relevant, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable.