
TCDD 2013 Public Policy Recommendation

EMPLOYMENT FIRST

Recommendation

The State of Texas should adopt the position that employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome of publicly funded services for all working age Texans with disabilities, regardless of disability.

- Employment First policies should be clear that competitive employment is not *required* of individuals with developmental disabilities in order to secure and maintain necessary health care and supports.
- Employment First policies should also include clear provisions that ensure students with disabilities understand and explore all postsecondary options, receive training specific to people with disabilities in their preferred line of work, and have access to resources to help people with disabilities understand the effect of earned income on their public benefits should they choose integrated employment.

Benefits of Employment First

Employment First initiatives hold individuals with disabilities to the same employment standards, responsibilities, and sets of expectations as any working-age adult. Employment First is a declaration of both philosophy and policy stating that competitive employment is the first and preferred outcome of services for people with developmental disabilities.

The Texas Legislature has created opportunities for Texas to be attractive to business, drawn, in part, by a workforce educated by our world-class university system. TCDD's goal is to ensure that those businesses also find an educated, prepared workforce that includes Texans with developmental disabilities. TCDD recommends a strategy that will ultimately reduce per-capita cost for services by assisting Texans with disabilities in preparing for, finding, and maintaining positions in the workforce. Access to "real jobs with real wages" is essential if citizens with disabilities are to avoid lives of poverty, dependence, and isolation.

It is recognized that full implementation of this policy will be a long-term process, requiring a general raising of expectations over time, by individuals (receiving publicly funded services), their families, agency and service provider staff concerning the ability of individuals to succeed in individual, integrated employment.

Problem Employment First Policy Addresses

While the majority of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities want to have a job in the community, they are unable to achieve the independence that comes with work. The current low participation rate of citizens with disabilities in the workforce is unacceptable. National Core Indicators survey data shows that 74 percent of individuals with developmental disabilities do not have a community job and 47 percent of those without a job would like one.

We know that people with disabilities are steered into non-integrated settings instead of receiving community-based employment. These segregated day activity programs and sheltered workshop environments pay sub-minimum wage and fail to cultivate a person's potential. The advances in education and community living are not fully leveraged or realized when so few people with developmental and other disabilities actually work in the community.

Working for independence, productivity and community inclusion.

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