

# Toward Competitive Employment for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: What progress have we made and where do we need to go?

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## ■ **A QUICK LOOK:**

Recent research has shown that supported employment interventions for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) has a significant impact on employment and sustainability for people with IDD. However, even with evidence showing this effectiveness, national rates of integrated employment of people with IDD are below one-third of the working-age population. With the passing of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), advancements and progress have been made. But what more can be done in regards to policies and future research? How can competitive and integrated employment for people with IDD be boosted higher? This article explores those questions.

## ■ **KEY FINDINGS:**

The article discusses four pathways to competitive and integrated employment (CIE) for people with IDD:

1. supported employment (SE),
2. customized employment (CE),
3. internships and
4. higher education.

Here are some of their findings:

- Implementation of supported employment, which is competitive employment in an integrated setting with ongoing support services for individuals with the most severe disabilities, includes four phases:
  - Get to know the job seeker
  - Job development and matching
  - Training and support
  - Job retention services
- When using supported employment, remember:
  - Use SE for people who have the most significant disabilities
  - Employment specialists should be well-trained
  - Have a balanced job seeker/business interest focus
  - Avoid poor job matches
  - Factor in the funding required to keep a person in a certain job
- Customized employment is an important part of SE and includes discovery, development, job training and support.
- Internships and hands on experience is a vital part of future success and should be supported prior to exiting high school.

## ■ **PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:**

- Transition-aged youth with IDD have the lowest rates of post-secondary enrollment of any disability group. Schools, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, community rehabilitation providers, and colleges/universities need to collaborate to create new ways to better integrate students with IDD.
- Stronger community rehabilitation programs will be needed with staff that have community employment experience with people with IDD, understand that people with IDD are employable and the importance of employment for all, provide long term supports, and be experts at working with employers.
- The following is needed to better promote the importance of CIE for people with IDD:
  - Providing training for employment specialists
  - Federally fund research that focuses on the issue of CIE
  - Have better school and community relationships
  - Provide transition and employment knowledge to family members
  - Provide more inclusive social skills instruction through more integration
  - Prior to graduation, create a seamless transition to paid employment

## ■ **MORE ABOUT THIS ARTICLE:**

- 20-25 percent of the country's persons with IDD are working competitively; that percentage is above 50 percent in states including Vermont, Connecticut, Michigan, Oregon, Nebraska, Idaho, and Nevada.
- Supported employment was first defined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was replaced by the WIOA in 2014.
- Vocational rehabilitation funding can be used to provide customized employment, but few state agencies are able to do so.

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## ■ **QUESTIONS? FEEDBACK?** Do you have questions or feedback about putting this research into practice? We're waiting to hear from you! **Send us your questions or feedback:** <https://idd.vcurrtc.org/>

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