

# Improving Employment Outcomes for Individuals With High Support Needs

*Working documents contain information collected in response to state requests. They are intended to share work in progress but may not be a comprehensive analysis or compilation.*

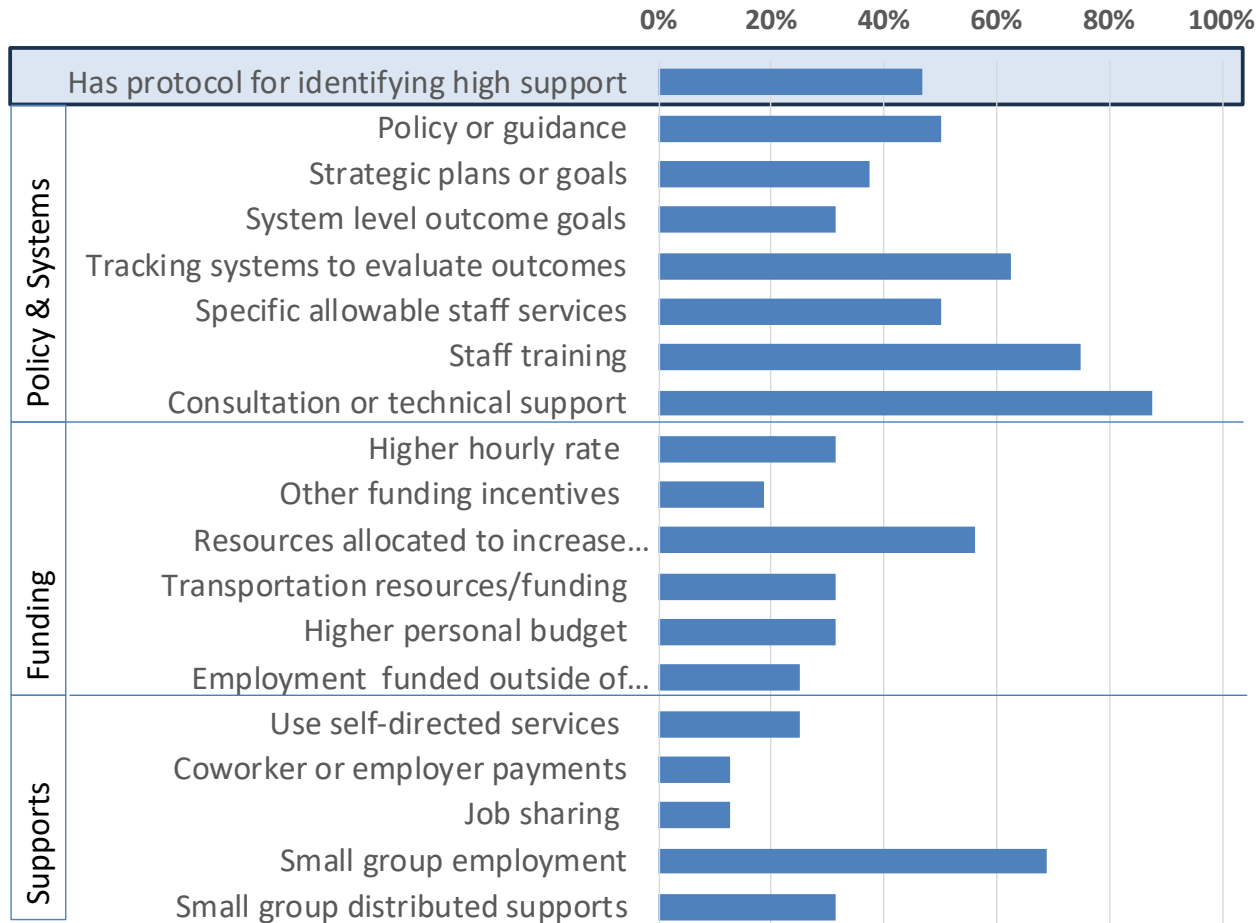
## What did the states request?

Several member states expressed interest in improving employment outcomes for individuals with high support needs. The SELN implemented a survey of state members in December 2023 to collect information on state strategies designed to strengthen employment options. For the purpose of the survey, we identified people with high support needs as individuals who have not typically had access to or been successful in competitive integrated employment (CIE).

The guiding question was “What policies or strategies do you have in place to encourage CIE for people with high support needs?” Questions addressed policy and systems change, funding and resource allocation, and models of support other than individual supported employment. This document summarizes state responses and major themes reported.

## Quantitative Summary

Fifteen states responded to the survey, and 47% of the states reported that their state had a structure or protocol for identifying individuals with high support needs. States were more likely to report strategies that addressed policy and systems, and least likely to report strategies that used models other than supports for competitive integrated employment.



## Summary of Narrative Responses

### Defining high support needs

*States reported using a diverse array of measures to identify individuals with high support needs but did not typically use these measures when reporting employment outcomes.*

Measures reported included:

- » Level of Need (LON) Score
- » Health Risk Screening Tool and the Determination of Need-Revised (DON-R). (yearly)
- » Supports Intensity Scale
- » Acuity Assessment (state)
- » Inventory for Client and Agency Planning (ICAP)
- » High: Requires support in the community at all times to maintain health and safety. Experiences significant barriers to employment or community participation.

### Policy and systems change

*Most state responses address a global emphasis on employment as a priority for every individual but do not specifically address individuals with high support needs.*

- » Language or guidance related to employment first emphasizes employment as a priority for everyone
  - Georgia employment first legislation states, “The General Assembly finds and declares that competitive integrated employment, including self-employment, in the general workforce is the first and preferred option in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of the level of disability.”
- » Language in policy that “anyone can work”
  - Example: Oregon “Anyone can work with the right supports”
- » Person-centered planning requires employment be addressed in every plan
  - Examples include the use of the LifeCourse Framework and employment discussion guides.
  - In some states the plan must document an individual’s decision to not explore employment.
  - **Ohio rules governing employment first** require that “Each individual of working age and each individual approaching completion of a program or service under Chapter 3323 of the Revised Code will participate in a person-centered planning process ... to identify the individual’s unique strengths, interests, abilities, preferences, resources, and desired outcomes as they relate to competitive integrated employment.”

*Targeted service definition that provides a higher level of services and supports.*

- » New York: Intensive supported employment services (SEMP) offer intensive supports and an option for short-term wage payment during job exploration for people who have higher support needs as an alternative to VR services (Employment Training Program or ETP).

*Some states reported allowing for more hours of support for individuals in CIE compared to other day activities, a higher budget allocation, or do not count employment support expenditures against the budget cap. These policies apply to all individuals who engage in employment.*

*Examples include:*

- » Oregon allows 40 hours/week for job coaching compared to 25 hours/week for other services.
- » Hawaii does not count spending on Discovery and Career Planning or Individual Employment Support against an individual’s personal budget.



***Some states identified exception protocols or funding strategies that support individuals with higher job-related support needs.***

- » Oklahoma. If an individual needs additional supports which are not readily available, the individual may qualify for supplemental supports or enhanced rates

***Some states identified access to additional services as part of an individual's employment plan including nursing, behavior support, and personal care assistance.***

## Goals

***Most states do not have strategic goals that specifically target employment for individuals with high support needs. States did cite goals to strengthen employment participation and outcomes across service participants.***

- » One state cited current efforts to build a rate structure that would incentivize employment for individuals with more complex needs.
- » One state cited a strategic effort to increase the number of providers that offer a full array of day and employment services as a way to more seamlessly address personal goals and support needs.
- » One state mentioned policy that addresses placement goals for individuals in sheltered work settings.

***Several states identified planning efforts or goals to strengthen outcomes for people with high support needs.***

- » New York: Reported a strategic plan to identify gaps, resources, and training that relate to both employment and day services for individuals with high support needs.
- » Oregon: Is adding a metric for regular review that addresses outcome data by individuals assigned level of support need. Oregon is also reviewing rates to inform incentivizing supports for people with high support needs.
- » Washington: Targets transition students with high support needs who exit school with a job or obtain a job with in the first year after graduation or work 10hrs/week or more

## Role of data

***States mentioned the importance of existing data systems as part of their overall strategy to improve employment outcomes.***

- » Respondents emphasized the importance of outcome data and reporting in monitoring employment outcomes across the individuals who receive services, but in most cases did not cite specific goals related to persons with high support needs.
- » Some states identify the need to expand data sharing with other systems to support quality management.
- » States mentioned the need to monitor increases in employment for individuals with complex needs, phase out of sheltered work, and increasing capacity for customized employment as areas of focus.
- » Washington: Reported a goal to increase the average hours per week worked at least minimum wage for high acuity clients by 50% over the project, while maintaining the current growth rate of high acuity clients working at least minimum wage
- » New York is using pay for reporting to strengthen access to outcome data from providers participating in supported employment
- » Oregon reported adding a metric for regular review and reporting on the number of people working in CIE by assessed/assigned level of support need.

- » Missouri reported using “pay for reporting” to capture metrics on services and outcomes that support outcome reporting including acuity variances.

### ***Use of ARPA funds***

- » States reported that ARPA supported employment pilots targeted individuals with more complex support needs such as high support needs, transportation, assistive technology, personal care needs.

## **Funding**

***States report efforts to increase rates for employment and other community-based services, and increasing the number of hours of support an individual is eligible for to ensure rate increases don't reduce hours of support. Overall state's emphasis is on ensuring that employment rates are higher than other rates and support quality services.***

- » Oregon: Oregon funds individual based on the number of hours they work to incentivize fading. The rate for people with fewer needs decreases as the person transitions from initial to maintenance support, however, the rates for people with higher needs remain the same as they go through these stages.
- » Oregon provides up to 40 hours of job coaching per week as opposed to a limit of 25 hours per week for other employment and day service activity services.
- » Oregon policy supports continued funding for employment services from either ODDS or VR when individuals are engaged in residential services from Stabilization and Crisis Unit services, usually considered to be a 24 hour service.
- » Oklahoma has a mechanism for requesting enhanced rates or additional supports.
- » One state reports authorizing a higher number of support hours for individuals with high support needs.

***Some states report use of quality-based incentive payments for CIE job entry, access to benefits, and longevity. These are in general provided regardless of an individual's level of support need. Incentive payments do not apply to individual's annual budgets.***

- » Washington reports prioritizing transition students with high support needs who exit school with a job or obtain a job within the first year after graduation or work 10hrs/week or more. Providers receive an outcome payment for jobs obtained and if the job is 10hrs/week or more.

***States mentioned that individuals with higher support needs can have higher personal budgets that allow more resources to be used for employment.***

- » Oregon allows ODDS funding for attendant care to be used while an individual receives VR services.
- » Missouri has piloted intersecting ABA and employment services in order to develop/establish future training.

***Some states report using the ability to make payments directly to coworkers or employers to support employment***

- » In one state the option for coworker payments was included in the waiver but discontinued because of low utilization.

***States report continued use of small group employment models, but in some cases, states are limiting the size of groups. For example, one state limits the size of groups to one staff with 4 employees. Other states continue to allow group sizes up to 8 but offer rates so support ratios as low as 1:2.***

## Capacity building

***Staff training investments emphasize training for employment support professionals and establishing minimum qualifications intended to create a base level of knowledge. Some states have employment specialists that can support individual plans and teams.***

- » Several states reported contractual relationships with training providers or internal training resources.
- » Two states reported training opportunities that focused on individuals with high support needs.
  - Ohio developed and implemented training specific to employment, community membership and people with higher support needs. They have supported a workgroup called Policy to Practice made up of stakeholders focused on improving supports for people with complex needs
- » Some states reported the availability of consultation to support individual's job search and supports including Washington (contracts with 2 TA providers who support high acuity individuals), Ohio (Regional Support Teams that consult and provide TA), and Oregon (Regional employment specialists), and Indiana (a contracted provider). Arizona maintains a team of 7 Employment Specialists that can support teams with high support individuals.
- » Texas maintains a dedicated mailbox for questions related to employment

***Some states reported funding to support program development or innovation at the provider level.***

- » Ohio: Supports “Innovating Inclusive Supports” grants with a goal of “...addressing systemic gaps, improving access to adult day and employment services, and the continuum of supports for people with the most significant communication, sensory, behavior, and/or medical support needs.”
- » Minnesota maintains a program of innovation grants.

## Transportation

***States reported expanding transportation options to include ride sharing and other free choice transportation options.***

- » Some states are developing or expanding non-medical transportation services to support CIE
- » Engaging with state and regional transportation initiatives and task forces was mentioned.
- » Connecticut includes ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft in waiver transportation services.
- » Georgia included “free-choice” transportation dollars in an ARPA pilot to support creative solutions, especially in rural areas.

## Self-direction

***While some states reported increasing use of self-directed service options, these options were not targeted at supporting employment or for individuals with high support needs.***

- » States identified the need to address qualifications and credentialing when an individual self-directs employment support.

## Appendix

### Detailed summary of responses

|   | yes        | no        | no response        | Percent "yes"        |
|---|------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Does your state have a structure or protocol for identifying individuals with high support needs?   | 7          | 8         | 0                  | 47%                  |
| <b>Policy and Systems Change</b>  | <b>yes</b> | <b>no</b> | <b>no response</b> | <b>Percent "yes"</b> |
| Policy or guidance  | 8          | 7         | 1                  | 50%                  |
| Strategic plans or goals  | 6          | 8         | 2                  | 38%                  |
| System level outcome goals  | 5          | 9         | 2                  | 31%                  |
| Tracking systems to evaluate outcomes   | 10         | 5         | 1                  | 63%                  |
| Specific allowable staff services   | 8          | 6         | 2                  | 50%                  |
| Staff training  | 12         | 3         | 1                  | 75%                  |
| Consultation or technical support   | 14         | 1         | 1                  | 88%                  |
| Policy and systems change: Other  | 3          | 1         | 12                 | 19%                  |
| <b>Funding and Targeted Resources</b>   | <b>yes</b> | <b>no</b> | <b>no response</b> | <b>Percent "yes"</b> |
| Higher hourly rate for supporting persons with high support needs   | 5          | 10        | 1                  | 31%                  |
| Other funding incentives like benchmark payments (please specify type of payment and criteria)  | 3          | 12        | 1                  | 19%                  |
| Resources allocated to increase provider agency capacity (e.g. grants or financial support outside of fee for service, consultation to employment specialists, clinical supports, braided funding...) | 9          | 6         | 1                  | 56%                  |
| Transportation resources/funding (e.g. supports beyond typical, creative alternatives)  | 5          | 10        | 1                  | 31%                  |
| Higher personal budget  | 5          | 10        | 1                  | 31%                  |
| Employment supports are funded separately from (outside of) the personal budget cap   | 4          | 11        | 1                  | 25%                  |
| Use self-directed services to support individuals with high support needs (please comment on why this structure is more effective)  | 4          | 11        | 1                  | 25%                  |
| Funding and Targeted Resources: Other   | 0          | 2         | 14                 | 0%                   |
| <b>Models of support (not ind CIE)</b>  | <b>yes</b> | <b>no</b> | <b>no response</b> | <b>Percent "yes"</b> |
| Coworker or employer payments   | 2          | 13        | 1                  | 13%                  |
| Job sharing (workers with and worker without disability)  | 2          | 13        | 1                  | 13%                  |
| Small group employment (1:2, 1:3)   | 11         | 4         | 1                  | 69%                  |
| Small group distributed supports (list ratio limitations)   | 5          | 10        | 1                  | 31%                  |
| Models of support other than individual CIE: Other  | 0          | 1         | 15                 | 0%                   |



## State Employment Leadership Network

The SELN is a place for states to connect, collaborate, and create cross-community support regarding pressing employment-related issues at state and federal levels for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The SELN was launched in 2006 as a joint program of the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

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