

Title

Promoting Competitive Integrated Employment in Arizona: Challenges and Strategies

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Introduction

Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) is a key goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires that people with disabilities have access to the same employment opportunities as everyone else. The State of Arizona has made significant progress in promoting CIE in recent years, but there is still much work to be done. This white paper will examine the current state of CIE in Arizona, highlight key challenges, and recommend strategies for moving forward.

The Current State of Competitive Integrated Employment in Arizona

The State of Arizona has a significant population of people with disabilities, with an estimated 1 million individuals living with a disability in the state. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is significantly higher than for people without disabilities. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities in Arizona was 9.9% in 2020, compared to an overall unemployment rate of 5.2%.

While Arizona has made significant progress in promoting CIE, much work remains to be done. In 2016, the Arizona Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities created a plan to increase the number of people with disabilities who are employed in integrated, competitive settings. Called "Employment First," it aimed to increase the employment rate for people with disabilities in Arizona to 60% by 2020.

As of Feb 2023, the State of Arizona had made little progress in implementing Employment First placing job seekers in competitive integrated employment. The state had increased the number of people with disabilities who are employed in integrated, competitive settings, and had also increased funding for programs that promote CIE. However, the state has not yet reached its goal of a 60% employment rate for people with disabilities.

Key Challenges

Arizona faces several challenges in promoting competitive integrated employment (CIE) for people with disabilities. Some of the primary challenges are:

1. **Informing and educating employers:** One of the key challenges facing Arizona in its efforts to promote CIE is the lack of job opportunities in integrated, competitive settings. Many employers are not aware of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and are hesitant to do so due to concerns about accommodations and other issues.

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2. Training and educating providers, government program staff, and families/guardians: There is a lack of training and support for people with disabilities who are seeking employment in integrated, competitive settings.
3. Funding and resources allocated to CIE: Another challenge facing Arizona is the lack of funding for programs that promote CIE. While the state has made progress in increasing funding for these programs, more resources are needed to provide job training, support, and other services to people with disabilities. State programs may not have the resources or expertise needed to provide the job training and support necessary to facilitate competitive integrated employment.
4. Implementing and mandating Employment First: Incorporating an Employment First philosophy into government programs like the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) can be a significant challenge. Community based employment or CBE has historically focused on providing services in segregated settings, rather than promoting integrated employment.

Legislation Needed

There are several legislative measures that could be taken to promote CIE in Arizona. One possible measure would be to create tax incentives for employers who hire people with disabilities. This could help to encourage more employers to hire people with disabilities and could help to increase the number of job opportunities in integrated, competitive settings.

Another possible legislative measure would be to provide additional funding for programs that promote CIE. This could include funding for job training and support, as well as funding for programs that help to educate employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities.

There is growing recognition of the importance of Employment First policies, and many states, including Arizona, have made efforts to incorporate Employment First into their DDD and VR programs. By providing training and support to staff, increasing funding for job training and support, and promoting partnerships with employers, government programs like DDD and VR can work to promote integrated, competitive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

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Conclusion

In an article written in Feb 2023 titled, "Employment of People with a Disability Spiked to Record in Hot Labor Market, Applications for Disability Benefits Fell to 20-Year Low," it reports that according to the Social Security Administration, the number of people who *applied* for disability benefits, and the number of people who *received* disability benefits, both dropped to the lowest levels. This is significant because:

1. It indicates that there are more job opportunities for people with disabilities, which is a positive development for their economic well-being and independence.
2. It suggests that employers are increasingly recognizing the value of including people with disabilities in their workforce.
3. The reduction in disability benefit applications may lead to a decrease in the burden on government resources, potentially freeing up funding for other social welfare programs.

These findings are hopeful and show progress is possible when people with disabilities are included in the workforce within their communities at a livable wage.

Competitive Integrated Employment is a key goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act and is essential for ensuring that people with disabilities have access to the same employment opportunities as everyone else. The State of Arizona has made progress in promoting CIE, but there is still much work to be done. By increasing job opportunities, providing job training and support, and increasing funding for programs that promote CIE, Arizona can help to ensure that all individuals, including those with disabilities, have access to meaningful, integrated employment opportunities.

Written by Lorie Sandaine,
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