

**Title**

Importance of Implementing Employment First in Arizona

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# Arizona APSE Chapter

## Association of People Supporting Employment First

*Mission: To expand inclusive employment opportunities for all people with disabilities through education, advocacy and legislative action.*



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### **Introduction**

Arizona has a population of over 7 million people, and an estimated 17% of the population has a disability. However, the employment rate for people with disabilities in Arizona is significantly lower than the rate for people without disabilities. The implementation of Employment First policies can address this issue and increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Employment First is a policy that promotes integrated and competitive employment for people with disabilities as the first and preferred option. This policy requires states to prioritize employment over non-employment services for individuals with disabilities, and it has been widely adopted across the United States. However, not all states have implemented Employment First policies into legislation. This white paper will explore why the state of Arizona must adopt Employment First policies and legislation to increase employment for people with disabilities, with the most recent data and cited sources.

### **Arizona APSE's Role in Employment First**

Arizona APSE is a state chapter of the national organization known as Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), which is dedicated to promoting and advancing inclusive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In Arizona, the organization plays a critical role in advocating for Employment First policies and promoting best practices in employment services for individuals with disabilities. Arizona APSE has been a strong advocate for Employment First policies and strives to work closely with state agencies and policymakers to develop and promote these policies.

Arizona APSE has been actively involved in promoting the adoption of Employment First policies in the state. The organization has provided testimony in support of Employment First legislation and has collaborated with other disability advocacy organizations to raise awareness of the need for Employment First policies.

Arizona APSE also provides training and technical assistance to employment service providers and employers to promote the use of evidence-based practices in employment services for individuals with disabilities. The organization hosts an annual meeting and offers training and networking opportunities throughout the year to promote best practices and encourage collaboration between service providers, employers, and individuals with disabilities.

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Overall, Arizona APSE plays a critical role in promoting and advancing Employment First policies in the state, and its advocacy and training efforts are crucial to the successful implementation of these policies.

#### **Background of Employment First in Arizona**

Arizona has made progress in implementing Employment First policies in recent years. In 2014, the Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) explored to prioritize employment as the first option for individuals with disabilities seeking vocational rehabilitation services. Additionally, in 2016, the Arizona Governor's Council on Spinal and Head Injuries issued a report that recommended the adoption of Employment First policies in the state.

In 2019, the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC), contracted with Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston to create *The Power of Disability Employment: The Impact to Arizona's Economy*. The study found that increasing the number of workers with disabilities will positively impact Arizona's economy, and that employment infrastructure for Arizonans with disabilities is consistently improving, but must be brought to scale.

Furthermore, the ADDPC issued a report in November 2021, outlining the next steps to make Employment First a priority in the state. Where it states, "It's time for stakeholders to move to the next level that implements a robust and comprehensive Employment First policy with legislation and funding that mandates sustainable employment outcomes for people with disabilities."

Despite these efforts, Arizona has yet to pass legislation that officially adopts Employment First policies. The state is currently one of only nine states in the United States that has not passed legislation officially adopting Employment First policies. The adoption of Employment First policies in Arizona is crucial to increasing employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities in the state. The establishment of Employment First policies can provide a clear framework for state agencies, disability advocacy organizations, and individuals with disabilities to work towards the goal of increasing integrated, competitive employment for individuals with disabilities in Arizona.

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### **Reasons to Implement Employment First in Arizona**

1. **Increased Employment Outcomes:** The Employment First policy has been shown to increase employment outcomes for people with disabilities. According to a report by the National Conference of State Legislatures, states that have implemented Employment First policies have seen an increase in the number of individuals with disabilities who are employed in integrated, competitive jobs. In addition, a study by the Institute for Community Inclusion found that states with Employment First policies have higher rates of competitive employment for people with disabilities than states without these policies.
2. **Cost Savings:** Employment First policies can also result in cost savings for the state. According to a report by the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, states with Employment First policies have seen a reduction in the use of non-employment services, such as day programs and sheltered workshops. This reduction in non-employment services has resulted in cost savings for the state.
3. **Compliance with Federal Law:** The implementation of Employment First policies is also required by federal law. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which was signed into law in 2014, requires states to implement Employment First policies. Failure to comply with this federal law could result in the loss of federal funding.
4. **Improved Quality of Life:** Integrated and competitive employment has been shown to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. According to a study by the Institute for Community Inclusion, individuals with disabilities who are employed in integrated, competitive jobs have higher levels of self-esteem, better social networks, and a greater sense of purpose than those who are not employed or who are employed in non-integrated settings.
5. **Community Inclusion:** Employment First policies also promote community inclusion for people with disabilities. When individuals with disabilities are employed in integrated, competitive jobs, they have more opportunities to interact with non-disabled individuals and to be included in community life. This inclusion can lead to increased social capital and a greater sense of belonging in the community.

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### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there are compelling reasons why the state of Arizona must implement Employment First into legislation. This policy can increase employment outcomes for people with disabilities, result in cost savings for the state, ensure compliance with federal law, improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, and promote community inclusion. By adopting Employment First policies, the state of Arizona can create a more inclusive and equitable society for all its citizens.

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