

## The importance of work for individuals with intellectual/ developmental disabilities

### Calls to action

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) should have the opportunity to work in their community.

- Reforms to Medicaid and balancing the federal budget should not fall disproportionately on the backs of individuals with I/DD.
- Federal programs, including Medicaid, need to be configured to make this possible and encourage opportunities for work for individuals with I/DD.
- Continue to support the Workforce Incentive Opportunity Act, which helps keep individuals with I/DD employed.

Work gives individuals a sense of purpose and self-worth. For many, it defines who we are and is a source of justifiable pride. Work helps improve individual and family finances, and it helps us connect socially. All individuals, regardless of disability, deserve the opportunity to be full members of their community where they can live, learn, work and play through all stages of life.

Recent legislation and regulation governing Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), and settlement agreements between states and the U.S. Department of Justice are clarifying federal intent and paving the way to support opportunities for individuals with disabilities to have meaningful jobs in their communities. With an increasing emphasis on integrated employment and an Employment First philosophy, the nation is poised for transformation that could put Americans with disabilities on a path out of poverty and toward self-sufficiency.<sup>1</sup>

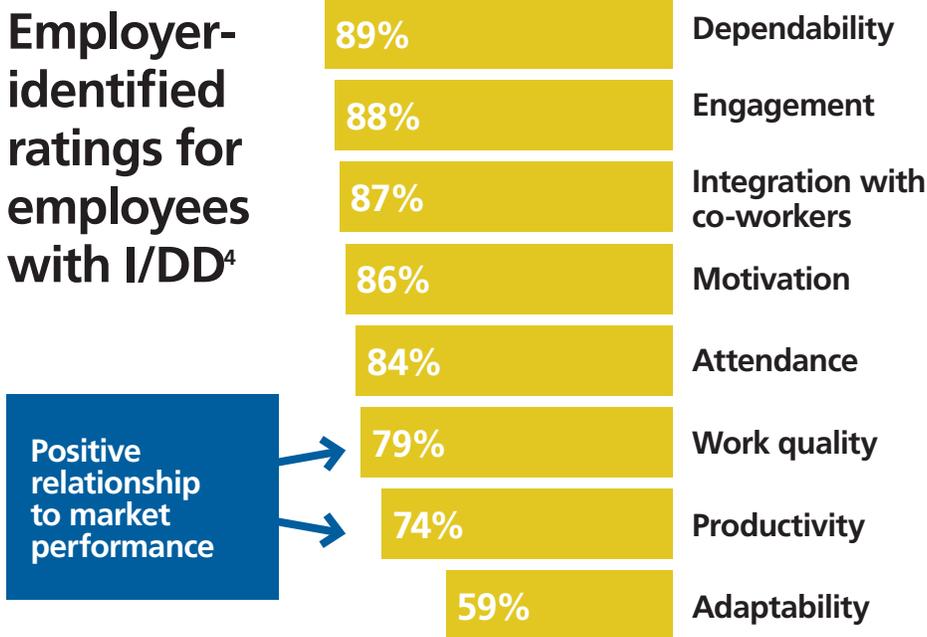
Individuals with I/DD need to be supported to make informed choices about their work and career options and have the resources to seek, obtain and be successful in community employment. They may need varying degrees of support to reach personal goals and increase satisfaction with their lives. These goals often include being employed in the community alongside individuals without disabilities and earning competitive wages.

Yet there is a significant gap in the employment rate for working-age adults depending on whether they have a disability: 71.4% of adults without disabilities are employed, while only 32.5% of adults with disabilities are employed. For individuals with I/DD, the gap is even wider: only 14.7% of adults with I/DD are employed.<sup>2</sup>

Low societal expectations of individuals with I/DD fosters job discrimination. Lack of other services like transportation or accommodations and assistive technology can also hinder success. Other challenges for individuals with I/DD include a lack of work experience prior to leaving school. They may need long-term supports that aren't available, and have difficulty navigating the service delivery system. Requirements related to employment include:

- Opportunities for post-secondary education, including college and vocational training, to gain knowledge and skills to allow people to get better jobs
- Ongoing planning to promote job advancement and career development
- Fair and reasonable wages and benefits
- Opportunities for self-employment and business ownership
- Ability to explore new career directions over time
- Opportunities to work and increase earnings and build assets without losing eligibility for needed public benefits

Family caregivers report that 20% of individuals with I/DD have no source of paid income. They report low levels of employment (85% of individuals with I/DD did not have a job), decreases in employment services and unmet needs in the areas of job support. For individuals who had jobs, family caregivers reported that the individual liked what they did (82%), were satisfied with their work hours (78%), were satisfied with their wages (69%), and earned at least minimum wages (57%).<sup>3</sup> In addition, employers often value individuals with I/DD for their job performance.



Individuals with I/DD must have training and information on how to access supports needed to find and keep jobs. Ancillary services like transportation and accommodations like assistive technology should be available to individuals and support agencies. Additional public policy changes should encourage employers to hire individuals with I/DD, such as a tax credit per I/DD individual who stays on the job for a defined period of time.

Using support strategies such as supported employment and customized employment, there are individual competitive integrated employment options for nearly everyone with I/DD. In addition to competitive, integrated employment with no formal paid supports, other options include supported and customized employment (competitive, integrated employment with formal paid supports), customized employment, social enterprise or self-employment, and volunteer work.

A significant amount of evidence indicates that integrated employment options improve consumer employment outcomes by moving an I/DD individual's daily focus away from formal, paid supports and toward an integrated, self-sustaining life alongside individuals without disabilities.

SOURCES

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2. National Core Indicators. Adult Consumer Survey, 2015–2016 Final Report; 2017. [nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/2015-16\\_ACS\\_Report\\_Part\\_I\\_0623.pdf](http://nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/2015-16_ACS_Report_Part_I_0623.pdf).
3. Anderson LL, Larson SA, Wuorio A. 2010 FINDS National Survey Technical Report Part 1: Family Caregiver Survey. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Research and Training Center on Community Living; 2011.
4. Institute for Corporate Productivity, [i4cp.com](http://i4cp.com).

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