

**Competitive Integrated Employment: Valuing All Perspectives
Information Session Questions and Answers
November 7, 2022**

Questions and Answers: *(Thanks to Disability Rights North Carolina, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Division of Health Benefits and Division of MH/IDD/SUD Services for assisting with the responses)*

Do people have their SSI adjusted down when they get these jobs that pay better so the overall outcome doesn't add to their overall wealth? How has that been handled? Is one of the goals for people with IDD to be able to have more money from their hard efforts?

Response: Yes, SSI payments do decrease as income is earned, yet total household income increases with the combination of work and income. In 2022, individuals can earn up to \$1,767 each month and still maintain SSI eligibility. This is referred to as the Break-Even point. Earnings above this amount result in the loss of the SSI payment, but Medicaid is retained in North Carolina if earnings remain below \$40,301. Please be sure to contact a benefits counselor to discuss your specific situation. https://www.servicesource.org/north-carolina-benefits-counseling-services/#pp-toc_heading-anchor-7

Will the services individuals have in place (that have helped them be successful) be jeopardized as a result of the increased income they will receive? If not, what supports are in place to ensure that this will not happen?

Response: Every person's financial situation is different and therefore the impact to any benefits they receive and the salary they earn will vary. NC DVRS has Benefits Counselors available that are well-trained and knowledgeable to assist anyone considering competitive integrated employment in reviewing their benefits, employment salaries and overall impact. When individuals decide to work, there are state and federal supports called "work incentives" that will allow a person to work and continue to receive benefits for a set amount of time before benefits are impacted. Generally, when individuals work, this increases total household income with the combination of earnings and benefits, so people may find they are better off financially when they work. . Please be sure to contact a benefits counselor to discuss your specific situation.

How do people apply? Web address?

Response: Anyone can apply for VR Services. They can contact their local office to directly apply. Please visit this website for contact information for the office near you. <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/vocational-rehabilitation-services/vocational-rehabilitation-local-offices>

For general inquiries: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/vocational-rehabilitation-services/vocational-rehabilitation-information-request>

How does one get informed of the new advisory committee Kathie Trotter spoke of? SWTCIE

Response: At this time, the DVRS agency is working closely with our federal grant administrators to set up the cooperative agreements and other initial requirements to get

started. However, we hope in early 2023 to begin soliciting members for the SWTCIE Advisory and will share widely that process at that time.

According to Oregon's Data in February of this year, the individuals that were employed in competitive employment were nearly 50% in small group employment. Is that a work group of individuals with IDD?

Response: It's correct that in Oregon they offer both individual and small group supported employment to people with I/DD. Small group employment permits up to 8 individuals to train at a time, though most groups are really 5 or less. The individuals in small group supported employment had to meet four criteria: (1) they had to be paid at least the state minimum wage (which in Oregon is 12/hr), (2) they had to be an employee of, and paid by, a competitive business, (3) they had to have a goal of working in competitive integrated employment, and (4) the time spent in small group supported employment was limited to 6 months (with the possibility of one 6 month extension).

Have any individuals chosen to work full time when given access to competitive integrated employment?

Response: Yes. Individuals may choose to work full and part-time when given access to competitive integrated employment. Benefits counseling is available to assist someone to better understand potential impact to benefits depending on work earnings.

NC DVRS assists over 30,000 persons with various disabilities annually with services and supports as they strive to obtain and maintain competitive integrated employment. At the conclusion of the 2021-2022 state fiscal year, DVRS had placed 3,499 persons with disabilities in competitive integrated employment. These numbers do include those with various disabilities and vary greatly in the area of the state and the complexity of barriers presented. The overall CIE effort is structured to offer additional supports to those that have multiple complex barriers who may have a much more difficult time obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

Will there be customized employment for individuals with a significant disability? If so, how are you planning for this?

Response: NC DVRS currently supports individuals with significant and most significant disabilities in employment opportunities that meet their interests and strengths and will often partner with an employer to restructure or reassign non-essential job tasks to meet the needs of their employee. This is accomplished through NC DVR's supported employment services. However, NC DVR does anticipate some training in the area of customized employment which utilizes a slightly different approach to understanding strengths and interests of a job candidate and how to best align with employers for success.

What about increasing the pay and benefits for job coaches?

Response: Job coaching staff are not directly hired by the state. However, they are hired by community service providers that may contract with the state or other state supported entities. The state is reviewing ways that rates paid to these service providers might be increased in hopes of providing better wages to these vital staff. We hope that this will give the providers what they need to make the pay for these staff more competitive and stabilize these positions enabling them to provide more consistent support to those pursuing CIE. North Carolina's trade associations and provider networks report that they are advocating for increased wages for all direct support professions including job coaches.

How can we ensure choice for all?

Response: To promote choice, efforts must be focused with the individual to learn about the variety of options available to them, and this effort must match with how the person can best become more informed about their choices. People learn best by seeing and spending time in different settings. The influential supporting people in the life of the individual must be involved as well so that all can be more informed. Choices will often change over time as people become more informed, thus, revisiting choices and preferences is a key to respect of ongoing choice.

Yes, we cannot lose sight of the spectrum of developmental disabilities and needs.

Throwing all into one bucket is not the answer. How will you address this?

What about customized employment for individuals with a significant disability?

Response: The unique circumstances of each individual should be considered in the journey of choice and supports to promote ongoing goal attainment. The array of options continues to expand with the commitment of supporting people to attain their desired outcome.

Also, cognitive disabilities are different from physical disabilities, but some people have BOTH. Where are you in the planning for this?

Response: The unique circumstance of each individual should be considered in the journey of choice and supports to promote ongoing goal attainment. The array of options continues to expand with the commitment of supporting people to attain their desired outcome.

Are you going to keep the sheltered services, and keep the lower than minimum wage certificates?

Response: Subminimum wage rules are governed by the Fair Labor Standards Act. ADVP settings will be a choice offered through the LME/MCO.

How does the state view a Microenterprise as self-employment as a viable option for CIE? Is there funding for providers to offer startup funds? Training for staff to support a small business appropriately?

Response: Supported self-employment is a viable option for individuals. The supports, training and funding to establish self-employment will vary depending on the funding source and client need.

Hi! I'm an Occupational Therapist and own a small business providing supports for those aging in place (Companions and OT). However, one of my goals is to hire Direct Support Professionals to help support people with I/DD (supported employment, home/community-based supports). I was told that Trillium is a closed network at this time. Can you please advise me as to how to pursue becoming a provider of these services? Thank you!

Response: The definition of Closed Provider Network (also referred to as Network, Closed Network, Provider Network, and PIHP Closed Provider Network): The group of providers that have contracted with PIHP to furnish covered mental health, intellectual or developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services to Enrollees, as set forth at N.C.G.S. § 108D-1(2). LME/MCOs have a closed network for mental health, intellectual-developmental disability, substance use disorder services. In this context, closed means that the LME/MCO can control the network. It is also important to note that Trillium would not have a closed network for OT as that is a service they will begin to oversee in the Tailored Plan world.

Is the focus of the effort only on people in current segregated workshops or will efforts be improved to assist individuals with disabilities who are currently unemployed, underemployed but want to work and have a career path?

Response: This effort is focused on assisting individuals with disabilities who currently unemployed and underemployed and are looking for choice of employment.

Did your systems change efforts begin with the Executive Order, a lawsuit, or some other endeavor? How did you navigate the development of the MOU?

Response: The Department received a demand letter from DRNC and CPR; however, efforts were already underway to expand choices and the associated supports.

Should the state not have these services and funding secured before moving forward? There are many individuals that will not choose employment and they need to know what services they will get prior to closing the door to workshops/ADVP.

Response: There are many individuals that will not choose employment and they need to know what services they will get prior to closing the door to workshops/ADVP. NC DHHS is working to operationalize the 1915 (i) array of services which includes Community Living and Support and Supported Employment. These 1915(i) services will be available in 2023 to assist members with competitive integrated employment and meaningful day activities.

When NC looks at Clinical Coverage Policy 8P for considering service definitions under the Innovations Waiver, will you consider looking at Georgia's Comprehensive and New Option home and community-based waivers for individuals with IDD? The service Community Supports focus on supports to individuals to assist with community integration for connection of natural supports and building leisure/recreational interests. The Community Supports services can be group or individual services.

Response: Thank you for this suggestion. We will look into these options.

Why are people with IDD sequestered to be in their own counties?

Transportation is the issue and innovation waiver will not cover transportation if their program or job is out of their counties. Response: The Day Supports definition in the NC Innovations Waiver does cover transportation. Furthermore, NC Innovations Community Networking and Supported Employment can cover transportation if the beneficiary does not need paid support at the integrated activity or job.

Are schools considered State Agencies?

Response: Schools are a part of local governmental structures.

What exactly does "expand other meaningful day options" mean? Slide 13.

Response: Expanding other meaningful day options means having service options to support people in their home and community. An example of this is the development of the 1915(i) Community Living and Support Definition that is designed to flexibly support people in their home and community.

Comments and Recommendations:

- Please cross train Division of Services for Blind and Vision Impaired on how to understand Supported Employment in the context of people with IDD. This is not improving and it is a serious barrier to people with both disabilities.
- The increase in income is great however with the increase in income means that services are cut and benefits are cut. So the services that are in place to help them be successful are lost.
- We need more experts for 'work incentives and benefits counseling'. We need to find a better way to support individuals understand the facts instead of being fearful of losing benefits. The process is too complicated.

Response: Agreed, more experts are needed for work incentives and benefits counseling. There are about 110 individuals in NC that offer this service. The level of experience and training varies from person to person. Locating and accessing NC Benefits Counselors can be difficult, but NC DVRS benefits counselors do have information on how to access these individuals. The process of understanding how all this works is extremely complicated because individual's benefit situations are different. Certified, experienced benefits counselors, as well as local Social Security Administration staff can assist to better understand the process.

- NC CARES! LiNC-IT is great as well. Thanks for the support.
- I agree with the speaker about engaging business in these discussions. Unfortunately, rarely in these webinars is business representation. Usually policy makers, lawyers and social workers
- We have not been happy with OE which is the organization that provides job coaching for our daughter. We need more options.

Response: The best recommendation is to meet with OE staff to further explore the issues to identify options to adjust the approach to services. Depending on what may be available to you, speaking with your vocational counselor or LME/MCO is also an option.

- There are many who would choose work but one size does not fit for everyone. I have never thought that my sister was taken advantage of making below min wage. She was paid based on her production.

Response: Subminimum wage rules are governed by the Fair Labor Standards Act.

- My son would be a potentially superb candidate for Discovery for Customized Employment provided by well trained, competent and certified staff so a profile could be developed based on his strengths, preferences, competencies and interests and a job developed that meets his needs and that of the employer. Then Informed Choice would be documented, including if he then chose to say no. The example of the woman who worked at McDonalds reflects poorly trained staff and support, etc. Not her fault. We must stop "blaming the person with a disability as a victim." This is the real culture change needed to change the systems.
- There are some individuals working in supported employment making more per hour than direct support professionals.
- Thank all of you for all the great information, let's just please to make sure we don't leave anyone out of these important decisions we are making.