

**North Carolina Transition to Competitive Integrated Employment:
Valuing All Perspectives
Executive Summary**

North Carolina Defines Competitive Integrated Employment as:

- **Employee works either full-time or part-time, including self-employment**
- **Employee is paid at a rate that is not less than the minimum wage**
- **Employee is eligible for the level of benefits provided to other employees**
- **Employee works at a place where the employee can interact with other persons who are not individuals with disabilities to the same extent that all employees interact with these persons**
- **Employee has opportunities for advancement in the organization**

Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) is a national initiative with a set of guiding principles that the federal government is using to encourage inclusive employment for individuals with disabilities. Through federal legislation and policy, the federal government is prompting States to create plans of action that will move the State toward Competitive Integrated Employment principles, policies and processes. Governor Cooper has issued an Executive Order outlining the Employment First initiative. In addition, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has developed a Five-Year Strategic Plan to transition our State to Competitive Integrated Employment. Disability Rights North Carolina has played a key role in prompting North Carolina to align with the federal and national movement to Competitive Integrated Employment. Some communities in North Carolina have been developing innovative models of integrated employment and vocational programming. There are many perspectives on how North Carolina should proceed with this transition, the timing and important considerations.

The i2i Center for Integrative Health was awarded a short-term grant from the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities to interview individuals representing all stakeholders in the Competitive Integrated Employment discussion. Once the interviews were completed, a free information session was held, open to all and presenting an opportunity for participants to hear from stakeholders. The information session also included a “leveling the knowledge” component and a portion around the national perspective and lessons learned from other States to ensure that all participants have the same basic understanding of the intent behind Competitive Integrated Employment.

For more information on this initiative, contact Ann Rodriguez at ann@i2icenter.org.

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Key themes that arose from the interviews:

General Concepts:

- There is a general willingness to move to CIE
- More education is needed for all stakeholders.
- Home and Community-Based Setting rules encourage CIE
- North Carolina should use examples/peer models
- Funding is not sufficient to offer community-based choices that meet the continuum of needs
- North Carolina should focus on a transition plan and implementation that aligns with Medicaid Transformation

Addressing Needs of Individuals with Intellectual-Developmental Disability Diagnoses:

- A top priority should be around offering choice that is meaningful to the individual service-user.
- Flexibility within the framework of CIE in North Carolina is required to fit individual needs.
- Key considerations for making CIE successful include:
 - Access to transportation to employment
 - Address health equity issues around access to services
 - Include provisions that ensure the safety of individuals in employment settings

Workforce and Employer Capacity Issues:

- There is concern that there are not enough employers in some areas of the State
- Benefits counseling must be robust so that individuals can be certain of how hours and wages in employment will impact their benefits
- The State must ensure that employers are trained in integrated programming and employment
- Additional discussion is needed on the future of ADVPs as a part of the service system

This summation paper will be available to all stakeholders as an opportunity to better understand all perspectives on the transition to Competitive Integrated Employment. The paper will also be used to develop a summit in 2023 that will give additional opportunity to hear and learn from other states that have transitioned to Competitive Integrated Employment and North Carolina stakeholders.

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