



PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

STATUS

In New Jersey, the funding sources for supported employment for consumers are the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Division of Mental Health Services (DMHS). Approximately one-quarter of the funding for these programs comes from the federal government. Funding sources for supported employment to help consumers from welfare to work are the Division of Family Development and DMHS. Approximately 60% of their funding comes from the federal government. There has been no significant increase in funding for Supported Employment, both initial training and long-term supports, over the last few years. The same funding problem is likely to occur next year.

Why Do Mental Health Advocates Care About This Issue?

Working provides a sense of purpose and a source of dignity.

Most persons, including those with severe mental illnesses, report that they want to work.

The first-onset of mental illness is often early in life, and once on disability programs, length of stay among consumers tends to be long. Early intervention increases the chances of preventing long-term, severe work-disability.

Unemployment and underemployment are issues that affect consumers. Many consumers do not have the same opportunity to contribute and achieve their potential because of barriers they face when trying to obtain competitive employment.

Accelerated entry into competitive work, integrated services that address needs across life areas and ongoing supports are central to successful employment for many consumers. Supported Employment (SE) has been shown to be the most effective service in achieving competitive employment outcomes.

How Does This Issue Affect Consumers in New Jersey?

It is estimated that 70% of the 53– 54,000 unemployed consumers in the state want to work. Of the 1851 people with mental illness who are served yearly in supported employment programs that specialize in individuals with mental illness, 600 are new enrollees.

New Jersey's Supported Employment Program provides these services:

- Mental Health Counseling
- Vocational and Skill Assessment
- Job Support and Accommodations
- Interpersonal and Life Skills Training

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- Job Prep and Coaching
 - Internships
 - Job Placement

Flat funding for New Jersey's Supported Employment Program has caused the following problems:

- Eroding full time equivalent. To keep experienced staff, salaries must be increased; as a result there have been cuts in the number of full time staff members.
- Fewer new people entering the SE program. Many consumers need to be placed multiple times, through no fault of their own (Replacement Cost). In order to maintain the growing number of people in SE and to keep people employed, the costs for long-term post employment supports has increased (Extended Support Cost). As a result, one half of the resources now go toward supporting the people already enrolled, limiting the resources available for new consumers.
- High recruitment and training costs for new staff. Because the salary levels are too low to keep experienced job coaches, agencies have to hire staff who have no knowledge of employment services.
- Decline in the quality of service provided to consumers.
- There are no supported employment/employment oriented programs to help a child consumer's transition out of child treatment services and into jobs and careers as adults. The assumption that child consumers will be pushed out and into the adult system rather than pulled forward and normalized into jobs has become a self fulfilling prophesy, 80-90% of adults who are long-term in day treatment programs had some kind of designation or diagnosis in youth.⁽¹⁾ This, despite the growing body of research that early intervention increases the chances of preventing long-term, severe-work disability.

(1) Barriers to Employment Among Persons with Mental Impairments, Donna D. McAlpine, Ph.D. and Lynn Warner, Ph.D. (2002) Disability Research Institute. From website: www.als.uiuc.edu/dri