

Background

Every person should have the opportunity to receive a fair and livable wage and work in their communities. Most people with disabilities who are of working age remain unemployed or underemployed. Persons with disabilities should be employed in the community and earn competitive wages, known as competitive integrated employment (CIE). “Employment First” policies are an important strategy to increase opportunities for CIE as the preferred outcome. Persons with disabilities should be supported in making informed choices about their work and careers and have access to resources to seek, obtain, and be successful in CIE.

Research

[ThinkWork.org](https://thinkwork.org) is a policy and systems research center at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and member of AUCD’s national Network. Since 1988, the project has described trends in day and employment services and outcomes for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). ThinkWork includes data from state IDD agencies, the Rehabilitation Services Administration-911 database, the American Community Survey, the Social Security Administration, National Core Indicators Project, and the U.S. Department of Labor. Researchers, policymakers, and the public can select what type of analysis they want to conduct through chart generation tools.

Recent findings include:

- American Community Survey data shows that people with a cognitive disability are more likely to be poor and less likely to work than their same aged peers without disabilities. In 2022, people with no disability were employed at 76.7 percent, compared to 37.9 percent for people with a cognitive disability. Additionally, 10.3 percent of people with no disability were living under the poverty line compared to 28.1 percent of people with a cognitive disability.
- Data from the National Core Indicators Project from 2022-2023 found that 83 percent of people who receive services from their state IDD agency are not working. Of those not working, 43 percent want a job but only 37 percent of people who want to work have a plan to get a job.

During the 119th Congress, AUCD will work to:

- Support the reauthorization and implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) toward maximizing employment in CIE and improving transition outcomes from school to college and a career for persons with disabilities.
- Build infrastructure and improve coordination and communication between private sector employers and the disability workforce.

During the 119th Congress, AUCD will work to:

- Provide incentives to states for stronger partnerships between disability and transportation systems and build competency on transportation within the disability service system and disability service providers, given that transportation is identified as a core barrier to employment.
- Provide and expand training and technical assistance to organizations that provide employment services (i.e. vocational rehabilitation (VR) organizations) to expand and improve their capacity to support people to succeed in CIE.
- Phase out the use of subminimum wage, in part by supporting organizations to transition from the use of subminimum wage and segregated settings to CIE by putting in place comprehensive transition services and appropriate safeguards.
- Strengthen and conduct oversight of the U.S. Department of Labor's monitoring of 14(c) waiver holders' compliance under the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- Strengthen transition from school to adult life by:
 - Requiring schools to coordinate with VR agencies in the implementation of WIOA provisions and in the transition of individualized education program requirements.
 - Ensuring greater accessibility and availability of work experiences, internships, and apprenticeship programs for students transitioning from school to employment.
- Reform the Social Security disability system (specifically Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income) to remove the disincentives to employment, increased wages, and building of assets.
- Increase funding of VR agencies to a level that ensures sufficient funding to meet the needs of all persons with disabilities who need employment assistance.
- Increase access to identification of technology—including assistive technology—so that people who need it can be employed in CIE.