

10-9-15

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator

Re: Employment First: Expectations of employment providers

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

[Like Us](#) on Facebook!

Oregon is fortunate to have a well-established network of providers, funded through ODDS, delivering employment-related services. Many of these providers have rich histories in their local communities of delivering services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Now, the Employment First initiative and new federal regulations require important changes in the services delivered by provider organizations. The basic reasons for this evolution were addressed in [last week's message](#). This week's message will outline the two primary expectations for employment providers.

The first expectation is that employment services must support people to enter the general workforce and achieve individual, integrated employment. This is consistent with the Employment First policy that all people, regardless of disability, can work in the community with the right supports and job match. The expectation is to help people with I/DD get jobs in their communities. Meeting this goal can be accomplished in many ways, including:

- Giving people enough information and experiences to make an informed decision about pursuing integrated employment;
- Helping people learn some of the basic skills related to working in an integrated employment setting; and
- Directly helping people obtain, succeed, or advance in an individual community job.

For some providers, these expectations around integrated community jobs are consistent with their current vision, mission, structure and organizational capacity. For others, these are big changes and create challenges and concerns for organizational leaders and users of those services.

The second major expectation is that all services, regardless whether they are employment-related or not, must be provided in an integrated setting. Definitions of an integrated setting are contained in both [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA) and [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#) (CMS) new Home and Community Based Services regulations. The definition of an integrated setting generally includes (but is not limited to):

- Interaction with others (co-workers or customers) who do not have a disability, not including paid service personnel;
- A work location typically found in one's community and not one specifically designed or established for individuals with disabilities;
- A setting that does not have "institution-like features,"; and
- A setting that is part of and supports access to the broader community.

While these definitions may need additional clarity and discussion among stakeholders before operations can be fully restructured and considered compliant, it is clear that in the near future, services must be delivered in integrated settings. The final date for Oregon providers to comply with the CMS regulations that services are provided in integrated settings is September 1, 2018. Based on CMS rule, Medicaid funding will no longer be available for non-compliant settings after March 17, 2019.

Many provider organizations will need to make changes to keep pace with these expectations. That is why we will continue to support activities such as the Provider Transformation project, as well as trainings to help staff with the skills needed to provide integrated services. This is why we will also continue to clarify service options for those people who may not be ready at this time to pursue individual integrated jobs in their communities.

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon. If you have comments or other questions, please email them to employment.first@state.or.us.

~ Mike