

EMPLOYMENT FIRST ACT OF 2018

INTERAGENCY PRIORITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

AUGUST 2019



Initial Interagency Priorities and Recommendations for Employment First Act Implementation

Act 36 of 2018, the Employment First Act, requires the Office of the Governor to submit an initial three-year plan to the General Assembly, outlining specific policies and strategies commonwealth state agencies will adopt to implement the Employment First Act and ensure individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to achieve economic independence through competitive integrated employment.

The Office of the Governor, in collaboration with the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities, developed this initial three-year plan, which outlines the commonwealth's policy recommendations to implement the Employment First Act and identifies the lead state entity charged with implementing each recommendation. In most cases, the recommendations in this initial plan will be implemented through inter-agency partnerships and in collaboration with Employment First stakeholders.

Act 36 of 2018 also requires the Office of the Governor to submit an annual report to the General Assembly every year by January 30. The first annual report, due January 2020, will build on this initial three-year plan to include specific, measurable performance indicators and the implementation status of each policy recommendation. These indicators will be informed by the feedback and priorities of the Employment First Oversight Commission, and the measurable goals and objectives the commission will publish in its first annual report by Oct. 1, 2019.

The Wolf Administration looks forward to engaging the Employment First Oversight Commission and other stakeholders to further develop this comprehensive plan to advance Employment First across the commonwealth and improve employment outcomes for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

I. Priority: Review, identify, and change policy and practice to align with the letter and the spirit of the Employment First Act of 2018.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>1. Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement. Pennsylvania’s Employment First efforts have been shaped by the perspectives, expertise, and input of diverse stakeholders, and meaningful stakeholder engagement should continue to inform implementation efforts. Agencies at the state and local levels will actively seek feedback and ideas from partners representing a variety of sectors and backgrounds, and will prioritize the inclusion of individuals with disabilities within these discussions.</p> <p>The Governor’s Office will have collected input from the Employment First Oversight Commission regarding the development of this initial three-year implementation plan by June 2019.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs
<p>2. Cross-Agency Collaboration and Coordination. Individuals with disabilities in Pennsylvania often receive services and supports from a variety of agencies, service providers, and organizations. To ensure these efforts are effective and efficient, coordination of these cross-agency efforts is vital. As part of Employment First efforts, state agencies will continue to meet regularly and identify opportunities to improve the structure of collaboration at the state level, including memorandums of understanding, interagency workgroups, and program/policy guidance.</p> <p>The Governor’s Cabinet for People with Disabilities will identify other governmental entities (such as task forces, workgroups, boards, commissions, etc.) that should be regularly engaged to support Employment First implementation by November 2019.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Office of Policy and Planning • Governor’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs
<p>3. Data and Reporting. Agencies are tasked with using data more effectively to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.</p> <p>Agencies will use data to identify areas for improvement, establish benchmarks for accountability, and measure progress.</p> <p>In consultation with the Employment First Oversight Commission, state agencies will identify current data collection on education, training, and employment of people with disabilities in Pennsylvania, including opportunities to establish interagency data sharing agreements that better identify short- and long-term outcomes and areas for improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Office of Policy and Planning • Governor’s Office of Performance through Excellence (OPE)

<p>An interagency data sharing memorandum of understanding will be executed with all agencies by August 2020 and will serve as a basis for enhanced data analysis and reporting.</p>	
<p>3.a. Labor Participation and Unemployment. Labor & Industry should mainstream the collection and publication of labor participation rates and unemployment rates for Pennsylvanians with a disability in commonwealth press releases and reports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Center for Workforce Information and Analysis
<p>3.b. Early Childhood. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning should continue to collect and publish the number of children receiving early intervention services in segregated environments and non-segregated environments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Child Development and Early Learning • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education
<p>3.c. Human Services. The Department of Human Services should continue to collect and publish data on all program participants enrolled in any program that provides home and community-based services and:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have employment as a goal in their service plan, Are receiving employment services, and/or Are employed. The Department of Human Services will determine other important data that should be published, such as hours worked, nature of work, full-time or part-time status, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Offices of Long-Term Living, Developmental Programs, and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
<p>3.d. Work-Based Learning and Paid Work Experience. The Departments of Education and Labor & Industry should continue to collect and publish data on work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities, as required under Act 26 of 2016 (Work Experience for High School Students with Disabilities Act). Both departments should also continue to analyze and publish information related to how many students with a disability leave secondary education with at least one paid work experience and should work collaboratively with stakeholders to identify any other metrics that may be relevant for improving pathways to competitive integrated employment for young people as they transition out of the K-12 education system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>3.e. Vocational Rehabilitation. The Department of Labor & Industry should collect and publish data on the number of individuals referred to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the number determined eligible, and the number for whom competitive integrated jobs were secured or maintained. If possible, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation should show the number of these individuals who were, at the time of referral, being compensated at subminimum wage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<p>3.f. Business Assistance. The Department of Labor & Industry should collect and publish data on the number of private-sector businesses that request and receive assistance from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation with the hiring or retention of a worker with a disability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
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II. Priority: Raise expectations of employment goals for children with a disability at an early age. Work with parents, families, and publicly funded programs to continue shifting expectations towards this goal.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>4. Promote Integrated Settings. Serving children and youth in a segregated setting early in life may instill within them and their parents that living and working in typical community-integrated settings is not an outcome they should expect as an adult.</p> <p>The Office of Child Development and Early Learning will continue to promote and encourage the provision of early intervention services for children ages 3-5 in integrated settings. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning will continue to build provider capacity to increase the number of children, compared to baseline, receiving Early Intervention services in integrated environments and reduce the number of children receiving Early Intervention services in restrictive settings/special education classes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Child Development and Early Learning • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education
<p>5. Parent and Family Engagement Training. Young adults with significant disabilities whose parents “definitely expected” them to obtain post-school work when their children are in high school are more than five times as likely to have paid, community-based employment within two years after exiting school¹. The Departments of Education, Labor & Industry and Human Services should continue collaborating to develop and provide training opportunities for parents of children with significant disabilities no later than high school for the purpose of promoting an expectation that their child will work as an adult.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs
<p>6. Change Requirements for Vendors Serving Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs. The Department of Health will require vendors serving children with special health care needs and their families to promote the expectation that children with disabilities will work as an adult.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Health’s Bureau of Family Health

¹ Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012

<p>This language will be phased into new grant agreements serving children and youth with special health care needs within the Bureau of Family Health. Vendors will be required to assist clients in identifying and linking to job readiness and employment services and supports when employment is a goal of the client.</p>	
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III. Priority: Prepare young people with a disability to become working adults with a disability.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>7. Promoting a Vision and Culture of Employment First in Pennsylvania’s Education System. The Department of Education should continue to work with partners to provide leadership and support that promotes a vision and culture throughout the K-12 education system that emphasizes the role of education is to help students with a disability transition into a job, not just transition out of school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education
<p>8. Effective Use of Transition Funding. The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, should implement a pilot project with select school districts to identify a statistically significant number of students with varying degrees of disabilities (i.e., severe cognitive disabilities and/or students with physical disabilities) and examine Individualized Education Program (IEP) expenditures for those students that can be used to develop and distribute recommendations for school districts outlining how to most effectively educate students with a disability to achieve competitive integrated employment outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>9. Paid Work Experience. One of the best predictors of whether students with a disability will work as adults is if they get at least one paid work experience before they leave high school. PDE should develop and promote policies to encourage local educational agencies to increase paid work experiences for students with a disability before leaving high school. As indicated in Executive Order 2016- 03, this is something that should be measured to determine whether progress is being made when implementing Employment First.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>10. Self-Advocacy. To increase students’ confidence, independence, and self-advocacy skills, which can translate into greater chances of success in employment, the Department of Education should promote strategies to materially increase the number of students who lead their own IEP meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education

<p>11. Professional Training. The Department of Education should continue to implement and increase participation in specialized training for special education teachers and transition coordinators to improve competitive integrated employment outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education
<p>12. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Participation. The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, should continue to identify and reduce barriers that exist for vocational rehabilitation counselors to increase the frequency and consistency of participation in students’ IEP meetings by vocational rehabilitation counselors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>13. Decrease Reliance on Sheltered Employment. The Department of Education and partner agencies should exhibit leadership to train school personnel and families of students with a disability about the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which prohibits local educational agencies from contracting with entities whose work is compensated at subminimum wage. Personnel should also be trained on the impact the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ 2014 home and community-based services rule which prohibits adult waiver funding from being used to pay for services that tend to isolate and segregate people with a disability from the community of people without disabilities. Public education funding should promote educational programming that leads to competitive integrated employment and reduces the use of, and reliance on, segregated educational programming. The Department of Education should monitor progress in moving away from non-integrated, segregated educational services and programming in IEPs of students with disabilities toward goals and strategies that promote (1) paid work experiences while a student is still in school and (2) transition to post-secondary competitive integrated employment.</p> <p>The Department of Education may monitor progress by conducting a survey of a sample of special education teachers to understand the progress being made. Periodic findings and annual progress reports should be submitted to the Governor’s Office for review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs
<p>14. Increase Pre-Employment Skill Development. When students are prepared with skills and competencies that increase the likelihood of success on the job or success in postsecondary education programs that lead to a job, they are more likely to succeed in competitive integrated employment as an adult. The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, should ensure that transition plans in IEPs exist by age 14 and that they include meaningful pre-employment services, such as self-advocacy skills, public transportation and travel skills, assistive technology assessments and training, organizational skills, personal presentation and hygiene competencies, and note-taking skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<p>15. Discovery and Customized Employment. Discovery is a process that identifies the unique contributions offered by people who, due to the impact of their disabilities, might not compete for jobs as well as others. Customized employment is the process of matching the abilities of an individual with the needs of a business, instead of following the traditional method of hiring people and expecting them to perform job tasks predetermined in a standard job description. Instead, customized employment enables a worker to emphasize their abilities and interests, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will succeed, while at the same time enabling the business to increase productivity by having the work completed effectively. The Department of Education should promote knowledge and awareness of discovery and customized employment services for IEP team members, including parents, special education professionals, and transition coordinators, to utilize in the development and implementation of IEPs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>16. Expand Summer Initiatives. Over the last decade, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation’s Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services has worked with a growing team of partners, including the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, Salus University, and Penn State University, in providing high school students and recent graduates with a sample of university life, including a packed curriculum of orientation and mobility, vocational preparation, post-secondary preparation activities, independent daily living activities, assistive technology skill development, adapted recreational activities, and exposure to the overall college campus experience. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education should build on the development of their Junior Summer Academy by expanding access to the weeklong learning experience for more students ages 8-13, preparing students to succeed and thrive as an adult in the workplace.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

IV. Priority: Transition students from secondary education to adult life. Given the significant investment of public resources preparing young people with a disability to be productive adults, all state agencies must be committed to employment outcomes, innovation, and seamlessness when students with a disability transition from school to work.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>17. Community-Integrated Programming. For students eligible to stay in school from age 18 through age 21 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and state law, the Department of Education should continue to partner with other agencies and stakeholders to adopt policies and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education

<p>promote practices emphasizing educational programming that is based in the community, and prepares the student to work and function in a community setting.</p>	
<p>18. Case Information Sharing. State agencies should continue to work collaboratively to enable and promote the ability of individual student/adult case information to be accessible by, and shared between, local educational agencies, county mental health and developmental service agencies, and district Office of Vocational Rehabilitation offices. Appropriate confidentiality protections must be considered.</p> <p>State agencies should review data and outcomes from a pilot conducted in Allegheny County to promote consistent data collection and sharing that created a local agreement template for use by school districts, district Office of Vocational Rehabilitation offices, and the county mental health/intellectual disability (MH/ID) offices to encourage adoption in other areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Office of Performance Through Excellence • Governor’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education
<p>19. Career and Technical Education Programs. Career and technical education programs, including those provided through career and technical centers, are valuable resources for students with disabilities. As part of Pennsylvania’s State Plan requirements under the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), the Department of Education and partner agencies, including Labor & Industry and the PA Workforce Development Board, should explore opportunities to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, both within academic and technical programs as well as in postsecondary endeavors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Policy Office • Department of Education’s Bureaus of Career and Technical Education and Special Education • PA State Board of Education • Department of Labor & Industry • PA Workforce Development Board
<p>20. Supports Coordination and Waiver Access for Graduating Students. The Department of Human Services should continue its efforts to make supports coordination available to all transition age students with an intellectual disability and/or autism, and make waiver capacity available to students with an intellectual disability and/or autism upon graduation to ensure there is a seamless transition from school to adult life, avoiding gaps in service that could disrupt a student’s job.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education
<p>21. Comprehensive Transition Programs. In recent years, states – including Pennsylvania – have worked to increase the availability of Comprehensive Transition Programs, one- or two-year college-based certificate and credential programs for young adults with intellectual or other developmental disabilities who are not otherwise able to meet eligibility criteria to enroll in a traditional postsecondary degree program. The commonwealth should continue to work to strengthen access to Comprehensive Transition Programs for adults with an intellectual disability and/or autism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education and Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs
<p>21.a. Expanding Access to Comprehensive Transition Programs. The Department of Education and partners, including the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education

<p>other postsecondary institutions, should work together to promote Comprehensive Transition Programs and other innovative programs that expand access to rigorous coursework by helping K-12 and postsecondary education institutions collaborate and expand access based on successful models.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education • Other postsecondary partners including the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, PA Commission for Community Colleges, and state-related universities.
<p>21.b. Provide Financial Assistance for Students in Comprehensive Transition Programs. As part of its goal to expand access to rigorous coursework for all students, the Department of Education should encourage the use of available state and federal (Title IV, Part A) funding to cover tuition of students ages 18-21 participating in a Comprehensive Transition Program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education
<p>21.c. Identify and Address Barriers. The Department of Human Services and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation should continue to solicit input from Comprehensive Transition Programs, waiver participants, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation customers, and other stakeholders to identify potential barriers facing participants who want to attend and benefit from Comprehensive Transition Programs, and make changes to remove those barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>22. Expanding Innovative Programs Connecting Young People with Disabilities to Workforce Opportunities. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation should continue to sustain, improve, and increase access to programs that connect students with disabilities with meaningful workforce opportunities, including Project Search, Early Reach, and Jobs For All.</p> <p>A. Project Search is an innovative cross-agency program that enables high school seniors with significant disabilities to spend their final school year in non-paid training, gaining real-world experiences in hospitals and other non-profit organizations while rotating through various job experiences with a participating employer. Most graduates secure competitive integrated employment following graduation.</p> <p>B. Early Reach is an initiative spearheaded by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation that targets information and outreach to individual students with disabilities and their families to ensure they are aware of vocational rehabilitation services as early as possible, know when the student</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<p>will be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, and learn how they can take advantage of educational programming while still in secondary education to prepare the student for competitive integrated employment.</p> <p>C. Jobs For All is a wage reimbursement initiative to offset an employer’s costs of hiring a young person with a disability and providing on-the-job training. This serves as an incentive to the employer to hire young people with a disability and increases the likelihood of retention.</p>	
<p>23. Cross-system Training and Professional Development. Multiple state agencies provide critical services to individuals with disabilities across Pennsylvania. The web of program and funding rules is often complex and complicated. Given the importance of interagency coordination and collaboration to the success of an individual with a disability being supported to securing or keeping a job, it is important that professionals within each system know and understand the other systems. The Departments of Education, Labor & Industry, and Human Services should continue to conduct regionalized, in-person trainings for supports coordinators, local special education professionals, and vocational rehabilitation counselors so they can learn together how their respective systems work and services that can support competitive integrated employment outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education

V. Priority: Assist adults with a disability in getting and keeping a competitive integrated job.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>24. Embrace the Future, and Do Not Discount Family Fears. Implementation of state and federal laws moving away from segregated settings and towards integrated settings should respect the fact that many families whose adult sons and daughters have relied on certain services for decades may harbor doubts and fears about what the future may hold – such concerns must not be discounted. The departments should communicate frequently to all stakeholders, emphasizing the possibilities, answering questions, and allaying concerns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry
<p>24.a. Provide Clear Guidance to Local Educational Agencies on Expectations. The Department of Education should continue to implement Section 511 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act by providing clear guidance and technical assistance to local educational agencies regarding the prohibition on contracting with entities whose work is compensated at subminimum wage, among other expectations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education

<p>24.b. Enhancing Supports for Individuals Receiving Services in Sheltered Workshops to Pursue Competitive Integrated Employment. The Department of Labor & Industry should continue to implement Section 511 with creativity and innovation to support individuals receiving services in sheltered workshops who want to pursue competitive integrated employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>24.c. Enhancing Trainings and Supports for Individuals and Families. The Department of Human Services should continue to implement the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' home and community-based services rule by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Providing training and support for families to use Life Course tools, which encourages developing a vision that includes employment; Identifying services that do not support or lead to competitive integrated employment and working to adopt changes to waiver service definitions; Placing limits on the amount of time an individual can receive a service in a vocational program or other large-group employment activity; and Offering training and/or assisting providers to transform their service models from segregated ones to those supported by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' home and community-based services rule. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services
<p>25. Benefits Counseling. People with a disability whose lives are dependent on access to medical care and long-term supports and services often fear getting a job and earning wages because earning too much can result in the loss of eligibility for publicly funded services and benefits. There are programs and work incentives that enable a person to earn an income while remaining eligible for life-sustaining services, but few people with a disability are aware of them. The Department of Human Services should continue to make its home and community-based services program participants aware of free benefits counseling available through the Social Security Administration's Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program and should also develop benefits counseling services within its waivers to cover the cost of benefits counseling when free Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program assistance is not readily available. The service should be performed by qualified professionals who hold a Certified Worker Incentive Counseling credential accepted by the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services' Offices of Developmental Programs and Long-Term Living • Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>26. Discovery and Customized Employment. As discussed in an earlier recommendation, discovery and customized employment are innovative models of service and are particularly effective for individuals with significant disabilities. The Department of Human Services should fund the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services

<p>development of more provider capacity in Pennsylvania for these emerging services and should ensure that they are available to program participants of home and community-based services programs.</p>	
<p>27. State Center Residents. Pennsylvania operates four public Intermediate Care Facilities for People with Intellectual Disabilities (also known as state centers). About 750 Pennsylvanians reside in these state centers and roughly two-thirds are working age. State center resources may be used to support individuals who want to hold competitive integrated jobs in the community outside the state center. The Department of Human Services should continue to make it a priority to increase the number of state center residents who hold competitive integrated jobs in the community. Specifically, it should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff in discovery, customized employment, and other supported employment competencies; • Engage the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to make connections between center residents and vocational rehabilitation counselors for career assessment, job development, post-secondary training opportunities, and job coaching services; • Innovate when it comes to finding and developing jobs in the community; • Commit to making reliable transportation to and from a job available for individuals who get and keep jobs in the community; and • Engage non-public employment service providers, if necessary, to achieve the desired outcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>28. Provider Qualifications. The Department of Human Services’ Offices of Long Term Living and Developmental Programs require staff who provide employment services to waiver participants to obtain either the ACRE Basic or Professional Certificate of Achievement, or the Certified Employment Support Professional certification. The Department of Human Services and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation will continue recruitment efforts for new providers and provide information to staff regarding testing and certification opportunities, including offering providers an online ACRE training course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Offices of Long Term Living and Developmental Programs • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>29. Supports Coordination. Supports coordinators are the professionals who work directly with participants of publicly funded home and community-based services programs to discuss their needs and goals, and to identify services and supports necessary to meet their needs and achieve their goals. Supports coordinators are foundational to implementing Employment First. The Department of Human Services should provide guidance and continue to invest in sustained training to supports coordinators to ensure that employment is the first consideration and preferred outcome of individualized service planning. This should include tools and discussion guides for supports coordinators to use when discussing employment with program participants. The Office of Long Term Living should focus on</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Offices of Long Term Living and Developmental Programs • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<p>working with managed care organizations ahead of the January 2020 Community HealthChoices implementation date to utilize supports coordinators and employment support services.</p>	
<p>30. Community HealthChoices. In addition to home and community-based services waivers and state-funded programs, many Pennsylvanians with a disability are receiving or will receive necessary long-term supports through the new managed care program called Community HealthChoices. The Department of Human Services should prioritize competitive integrated employment as an outcome within Community HealthChoices by including necessary service definitions and data collection requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Long Term Living
<p>31. Maximize Federal Funds for Employment. The federal Rehabilitation Services Administration makes available to state vocational rehabilitation agencies funding at a 78.7 percent to 21.3 percent federal-to-state ratio. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation should continue to submit requests for reallocations to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, maximizing any state match available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Governor’s Budget Office • State Workforce Development Board
<p>32. Interagency Funding Memorandum of Understanding. To promote interagency collaboration and program innovation, and to ensure sufficient staff capacity exists, the Departments of Labor & Industry and Human Services should sustain the interagency funding memorandum of understanding signed in 2015 which annually directs state funds from the Office of Developmental Programs to the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund for the purpose of matching those funds with additional federal vocational rehabilitation funds. The purpose of the new funding is to meet the vocational rehabilitation needs of people with an intellectual disability and/or autism and promote program innovation and service expansion. New vocational rehabilitation staff specializing in intellectual disabilities and/or autism should be authorized, hired, and trained immediately to eliminate backlogs in eligibility determinations and employment service authorizations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Developmental Programs • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>33. Enhance Collaboration and Coordination with Pennsylvania’s Workforce Development System to Improve Access and Outcomes. Many people with a disability simply need assistance securing and retaining employment like their peers without disabilities. The Department of Labor & Industry should direct and train the agencies connected to the workforce development system and the vocational rehabilitation system to promote improved collaboration between the two systems. People with a disability who visit their local PA CareerLink® site should be served by that site if possible. PA CareerLink® staff should not automatically refer all people with a disability to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. In addition, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation staff, in collaboration with local Centers for Independent Living, Assistive Technology Resource Centers, and the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, should continue to participate regularly in on-site reviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Development • PA Workforce Development Board

<p>of accessibility for PA CareerLink® sites. On-site visits should take place no less frequently than every three years.</p>	
<p>34. Meeting the Needs of Individuals with a Serious Mental Illness. Individuals with a serious mental illness have many strengths, talents, and abilities that may be overlooked, including the desire to be employed in a competitive integrated job. Many individuals with a serious mental illness are capable of working competitively in the community if the right job, work environment, and needed supports are available. Resources that help individuals find and keep jobs that capitalize on individual strengths and skills while accommodating needs with support services should be the goal for this population.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>34.a. Increasing Service Capacity through Interagency Coordination. The Department of Human Services’ Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation have a memorandum of understanding for the purpose of increasing funding for increased service capacity to develop and support employment opportunities for individuals with serious mental illness. State funding from the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services was directed to the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund to draw down additional federal vocational rehabilitation funds at a 78.7 percent (federal) to 21.3 percent (state) ratio. The memorandum of understanding will remain in place until the funds are expended. The Offices of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and Vocational Rehabilitation should continue to collaborate regarding funding priorities moving forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>34.b. Evidence-based Supported Employment Services. The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services should continue to focus on data collection and analysis to identify entities providing supported employment to increase the use of evidence-based supported employment services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>34.c. Tracking and Improving Employment Outcomes for Individuals in the Behavioral Health System. The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services should continue to collect and analyze data on individuals in the behavioral health system who are in competitive integrated jobs for the purpose of identifying and implementing future program and policy improvements. The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation should also determine whether a memorandum of understanding would be beneficial for this purpose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services’ Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<p>34.d. Update Licensing Regulations. The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services should continue to work to amend licensing regulations so that the needs of youth and young adults ages 14-17 can be met by psychiatric rehabilitation services (currently limited to age 18 and older).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services' Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
<p>35. Self-Employment. Starting and running one's own business is empowering. Publicly funded programs should assist people with a disability pursue business ownership. The Department of Labor & Industry should continue implementation of its small business policy to support vocational rehabilitation customers who want to be a small business owner and review innovative small business trainings and share information with customers. The Department of Human Services should ensure that service definitions in its home and community-based services programs include self-employment support. In addition, the Department of General Services' Bureau of Diversity, Inclusion, and Small Business Opportunities should continue its efforts to make business owners with a disability and vocational rehabilitation counselors aware that businesses owned by persons with a disability may now be eligible for the Small Diverse Business program. The business must meet "small business" eligibility requirements and must be certified by the U.S. Business Leadership Network as a disability-owned business or service-disabled-veteran-owned business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry • Department of Human Services • Department of General Services • Department of Community and Economic Development

VI. Priority: Transportation. For individuals to succeed on the job, they need reliable transportation to get to and from work, on time, every time.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>36. Establish Baseline Information to Drive Employment-Related Transportation Needs. Transportation is frequently cited as a top barrier to employment. Defining the transportation barrier, identifying areas of need, and cataloging current resources available will help inform transportation strategies across agencies. The following items will be created:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. A concrete list of transportation issues that are faced by people with disabilities to further define what the "transportation barrier" is, informed by focus groups of individuals with a disability and developed in collaboration with other key stakeholders. B. Data that will demonstrate the geographical areas that are most in need of transportation options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Transportation

<p>C. A list of current transportation resources available. D. A list of high-volume employment centers by county/region.</p>	
<p>37. Identify and Test Innovation Transportation Strategies. Transportation is cited as a barrier for people with a disability in both urban and rural areas across Pennsylvania and requires innovative solutions. Historically, implementation of transportation initiatives has proven challenging due to the diverse nature of the state and the significant costs often associated with transportation. The commonwealth should utilize thoughtfully designed pilot programs to allow innovative strategies to be tested for feasibility and replicability, including but not limited to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Volunteer networks; B. Identifying available vans throughout the state that could be used for transportation initiatives related to employment; and C. Researching current promising and innovative practices across the state. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Transportation
<p>38. Maximize and Publicize Existing Resources. While new and innovative transportation solutions are still needed, there are various state and local transportation options that can be utilized. The Department of Transportation, in collaboration with other state agencies, should develop a communication strategy to publicize programs that make efficient use of, and maximize, existing ride resources and any new resources that are developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Encourage and increase awareness of carpooling and vanpooling opportunities for people with a disability; B. Pursue funding for programs such as FindMyRidePA so people with a disability have ready access to information on transit options available to them, including online reservation and tracking; C. Promote PACommute; D. Use PennDOT’s interactive map of public transportation services and programs; E. Utilize social media and online resources; F. Encourage transit agencies to act as mobility managers; G. Determine if transit agencies can advertise accessible transportation services at Department of Motor Vehicles centers statewide; and H. Encourage transit agencies to share best practices as part of the marketing committees of PA Public Transit Association. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Transportation
<p>39. Use Technology to Support and Improve Use of Transportation Options. As technology advances, new methods of improving transportation’s efficiency and flexibility emerge. State agencies’ efforts to expand access to broadband may provide individuals with a disability an</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<p>alternative to commuting. To leverage new technology to meet demands, state agencies will explore and provide implementation updates to the Governor’s Cabinet for People with Disabilities and the Employment First Oversight Commission on the following strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Fully deploy statewide paratransit scheduling software to improve customer service, including customer notification of vehicle arrival time the day before and 30 minutes before, customer ability to schedule online, and customer ability to track vehicle location online. B. Investigate innovative payment technologies to allow public transportation customers more flexibility in how they pay for service, including copayments. C. Expand and enhance broadband services throughout the commonwealth to allow individuals with a disability the option to work remotely. D. Work with the private sector and universities exploring driverless vehicles in Pennsylvania to ensure that individuals with a disability can participate in pilot studies, if interested. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Transportation
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VII. Priority: Lead by example by reducing barriers to Commonwealth employment and improving state contracts.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>40. Pennsylvania will lead by example in reducing barriers to competitive integrated employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State agencies shall make an effort to employ individuals with a disability in no less than 7 percent of the overall state work force. • State agencies shall review on a biannual basis, the adequacy of hiring, placement, and advancement practices with respect to individuals with a disability. • The Office of Administration shall develop a framework for individuals to self-report a disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of General Services • Office of Administration

VIII. Priority: Expand public-private partnerships to improve availability of high-quality supports that improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for Pennsylvanians with a disability.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>41. Local Employment Coalitions. A number of local human service, education, and employment agencies have come together to develop Employment First coalitions. These have proven to be effective at educating professionals across these systems about what other systems have to offer, sharing information and resources, developing positive interagency relationships, enforcing policy, collecting and sharing data, and engaging the business community. However, only a few coalitions exist. The Departments of Human Services, Labor & Industry, and Education should provide financial support to develop and sustain additional employment coalitions across Pennsylvania. State agencies should also assist with a survey of all business engagement and education activities, including identifying gaps in geographic areas of the state, with the goal of aligning initiatives and addressing needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Education • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • PA Workforce Development Board
<p>42. Single Point of Contact Model. Businesses interested in hiring qualified people with a disability to meet their workforce needs can easily become confused and frustrated when it comes to knowing which state or local agency to work with to find talent, get information on accommodations, and identify services to support individuals with a disability. If businesses must work with multiple agencies to find, hire, and support a person with a disability, they may give up or choose not to try in the first place. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation utilizes a “single point of contact” model for businesses to make the process as easy and efficient as possible. The single point of contact model would be the only person the business works with, while assuming the responsibility of working with county human service agencies, employment providers, and the education system to meet the needs of the business. L&I should continue to support and enhance the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation’s single point of contact model and identify ways to improve the number of businesses it assists so more people with a disability can get and keep a job.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<p>43. Business Services. The ability to increase the number of people with a disability employed in a competitive integrated job is directly proportional to the willingness of a business to hire a person with a disability. The Department of Labor & Industry should strengthen and publicize the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation’s Business Services & Outreach Division, making it businesses’ “go-to” source for pre-screened qualified applicants with disabilities to meet staffing needs, information on federal tax incentives to hire people with a disability, information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and accommodations, disability etiquette training, customized employment, and resources to retain staff who may acquire a disability after being employed for some time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Development

<p>44. Provide a Single, Go-To Source of Information for Employment First in Pennsylvania. State agencies should collaborate to develop, maintain, and promote a credible “go-to” source of information on disability employment resources, data, success stories, and professional training resources. Targeted users should be people with a disability, families, advocates, businesses, local education agencies, post-secondary education agencies, and public agencies involved in promoting employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Office • Department of Human Services • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • Department of Education
<p>45. Encourage Businesses to Hire People with a Disability. The Department of Labor & Industry should develop and implement an aggressive outreach strategy to make businesses aware that people with a disability add value to places of business, but that people with disabilities remain a largely untapped labor pool. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation’s Business Services and Outreach Division and single point of contact model should be promoted as a credible, go-to resource for businesses to assist them with identifying talent to meet workforce needs and coordinate disability services and training. The effort should include making connections with local chambers of commerce, manufacturers’ associations, private recruiters, human resources professional associations, etc.</p> <p>The Keystone Economic Development and Workforce Command Center shall convene a roundtable of executives that are leaders in employing individuals with disabilities for their support and advice to encourage more businesses throughout the commonwealth to adopt similar practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor & Industry’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation • PA Workforce Development Board

IX. Priority: Implement, monitor, and provide accountability for the Employment First Act in Pennsylvania.

Recommendation	State Lead(s)
<p>46. Designation of Employment Champions. State agencies will provide the designation of employment champions, consistent with the designation utilized by the Department of Human Services, to providers of service coordination, case management, and authorization services funded through the state Medicaid program, including home and community-based waiver programs, who demonstrate commitment to Employment First and successfully support the placement and continued placement of individuals with a disability in competitive integrated employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Champions shall be provided increased technical assistance to further support employment services. • A complete list of employment champions shall be made available on state agencies' websites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services' Offices of Long Term Living, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and Developmental Programs
<p>47. Certified Peer Specialist Position Description Update. The Department of Human Services' Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services should collaborate with the Governor's Office of Administration to update the Civil Service job description for the Certified Peer Specialist position. An updated definition would allow agencies other than the Department of Human Services to hire civil service Certified Peer Specialists. This change would also require civil service Certified Peer Specialists to obtain and maintain certification through the PA Certification Board.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Services' Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services