

Employment First (Act 36 of 2018)
Interagency Priorities and
Recommendations – Updates and
Progress
Annual Report

Office of the Governor

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GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

The foundation of our economy is our workforce — our people — and I firmly believe all Pennsylvanians deserve the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed. Pennsylvanians deserve the chance to pursue employment that is both rewarding and dignified. For too long, too many Pennsylvanians with disabilities have been excluded from the workforce, denied accessibility accommodations, or were limited to working in isolating jobs that paid subminimum wage. The Employment First Act — Act 36 of 2018 — tasked the Commonwealth with promoting the economic independence of individuals with disabilities, and ensuring they have the resources and information to be successful.

Currently, Pennsylvania faces a workforce crisis in every county and every industry across the Commonwealth. To overcome this crisis and build an economy that lifts everyone up, we must support all workers in our efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable workforce. Our First Lady Lori Shapiro and I understand the importance of this fight for equitable access and meaningful employment. The First Lady has taken a personal interest in this work, visiting the Hiram G. Andrews Center in Johnstown earlier this year to promote barrier-free education and job-readiness programs to people of all backgrounds and ability levels, as well as joining a group of high school students with disabilities at the Humane PA animal shelter to shadow them during a Department of Labor & Industry summer job program that matches students with local job opportunities. I'm proud of her work and the work of Commonwealth employees across Pennsylvania to ensure everyone has access to a stable, fulfilling job and career.

My Administration is dedicated to making good on the promise laid out in the Employment First Act and advancing real freedom for all Pennsylvanians. The employment of the disability community benefits both employers and individuals with disabilities statewide. I urge our Commonwealth businesses, educational institutions, community leaders, and fellow citizens to join us in building a community that is welcoming for all.

Sincerely,

Governor Josh Shapiro

Employment First at a Glance

Employment First Policy – Act 36 Background

All individuals should have the opportunity to pursue and participate in employment that leads to a positive sense of self and family-sustaining wages. Pennsylvania is committed to supporting jobseekers in finding pathways to work in environments that are safe, inclusive, and that also provide competitive income. This includes a commitment to supporting employers in enhancing their inclusive hiring and retention practices so that the diverse workforce can experience all the benefits that work brings. By equipping workplaces with the tools to accommodate the varying needs of workers, a vibrant economy is maintained, as more Pennsylvanians are connected to meaningful work.

In 2016, in alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Governor Wolf issued an Executive Order establishing Employment First policy in Pennsylvania to support people with disabilities in pursuing, securing, and maintaining competitive, integrated employment (CIE). Two years later, the Employment First Act, [Act 36 of 2018 \(Act 36\)](#), permanently established the policy -- making CIE the first consideration and preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term services and supports for individuals with a disability. The Shapiro Administration is committed to upholding the values and goals laid out in Act 36 to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with a disability.

Act 36 created the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities and the Employment First Oversight Commission to ensure the implementation of this policy through strong interagency collaboration and stakeholder engagement. The Act required the Governor's Office to submit an initial [three-year plan](#) to the General Assembly, outlining recommendations and strategies to implement the Act and ensure individuals with disabilities have opportunities to achieve economic independence through CIE. The Act also requires the Governor's Office and the Commission to submit annual reports.

Values

Several core values continue to be embedded throughout state agencies' Employment First implementation:

Person-centered: Each person is a unique individual with their own interests, strengths, and abilities with the power to take an active role in the planning process, services, and opportunities that are most meaningful to them. This is represented in each agency's individualized and person-centered planning.

Holistic: Individuals are part of their families and communities, so services are provided with recognition that an individual's circumstances must be considered and that barriers may need to be addressed for effective service delivery and attainment of desired outcomes.

Equitable: Services are delivered with a focus on equity for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and disability, so that everyone has access to opportunities.

Collaborative: Partnership and meaningful stakeholder engagement are at the forefront of service delivery by agencies in state, federal, and local government. The Employment First policy is informed by insight and feedback from advocates who are experts in the field, providers who work directly with customers each day, and the individuals who are directly receiving services.

Data-informed: Data is collected and used to help monitor progress on achieving outcomes, identify areas of success and opportunity, and inform decision making in policy and programming. Data is available to the public to ensure transparency and active collaboration in advancing goals.

3-year Plan Progress

The initial 3-year plan required by Act 36 included a significant number of priority areas and recommendations, with the primary purpose of embedding Employment First CIE policy into daily operations across agencies. Last year's January 2023 annual report highlighted various ways in which policy integration advanced since Employment First was initiated, such as:

- Creating offices embedded in departments focused specifically on accessibility;
- The expansion of internship programs for college students with disabilities run through Commonwealth agencies;
- The disbursement of multi-million-dollar grants to help connect individuals to CIE;
- Inclusion of Employment First in written policy documents, trainings, and materials across various agencies;
- Availability of public facing information and data through various reports and websites:
 - [Employment First website](#)
 - [Employment First data dashboard](#)
 - [We Can Work](#)
 - [PA Transition Resources](#)

This January 2024 annual report serves as the first update under the Shapiro Administration. Main changes to the report include the addition of 2023 data and key highlights.

2023 Key Highlights

State agencies continued to provide robust services while also seeking opportunities for innovation throughout 2023. Highlights for 2023 include:

Rapid Engagement of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is required by the Rehabilitation Act to determine a customer's eligibility within 60 days of application for services and to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) within 90 days of the eligibility determination (although there is a waiver process for situations beyond control).

Rapid engagement of Vocational Rehabilitation services continues to be a national theme, and OVR has reinforced this initiative and goal agency-wide over the past two years and will continue to do so through guidance, training, and expectations. OVR continues to look for system and procedural enhancements to improve timely delivery of services to our customers as we know that the sooner a customer can engage in services the more likely they are to continue to engage and have a successful outcome.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

OVR is required to conduct Customer Satisfaction Surveys. This is conducted through an electronic survey process and review of the summary information routinely to inform policy and program development. OVR also offers public comment for its State Plan and for any policy changes that are being made, to ensure the voices of the communities served are heard, acknowledged, and represented. OVR also has the PA

Vocational Rehabilitation State Board and the PA Rehabilitation Council, who each hold four public meetings annually where customers or other stakeholders are given opportunity to provide input related to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services within Pennsylvania.

Employment Services Recovery Payments

In 2023, 95 providers of Supported Employment, Benefits Counseling, or Small Group Employment services were determined eligible to receive \$5 million in payments for serving more people in Fiscal Year 2022-2023 than they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Fiscal Year 2019-2020.

Sharing of Employment Race Data

In April of 2023, the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) developed and disseminated county level employment reports that include data on competitive integrated employment, employment services, and employment goals evaluated by race to each county or county joiner. ODP asked each county or county joiner to review the data, evaluate whether any significant disparities exist between races, determine if a reason for the disparities can be identified, and strategies to address systemic issues should be adopted.

Benefits Counseling Waiver Amendment

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) approved an amendment to the benefits counseling requirements in the Community HealthChoices (CHC) 1915(c) waiver effective April 1, 2023. The amendment removed OVR referral requirements for this service. The Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) requested the waiver amendment to ensure participants are able to access benefits counseling in a more timely manner.

Pay-for-Performance in CHC

The 2024 CHC agreement includes pay-for-performance incentives for CHC Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). The agreement provision requires CHC-MCOs to reach a supported employment 2.5% benchmark for CIE based on each MCO's ratio of home and community-based services (HCBS) population age group 21-64.

Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (CMHSBG) Funding

Montgomery County Community College utilized CMHSBG funding to support Wellness Center services at their Pottstown campus. One hundred percent of the students who frequented the Wellness Center the most were retained from the fall to spring and saw increases in their GPAs. Continued enrollment and higher GPAs will help students attain employment.

Requirements for Vendors Serving Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

The Department of Health will require vendors serving children and youth with special health care needs and their families to promote the expectation that children with disabilities will work as an adult. 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.

Employment First Policy Priorities

The policy priorities section focuses on a set of core areas from the 3-year plan to identify progress and areas of opportunity. The areas of focus in this report look at key efforts over this past year, as well as priority areas informed by feedback from the Governor’s Cabinet and the Employment First Oversight Commission.

Early Childhood – Setting the Stage

Engaging parents and families

A first step in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is setting expectations, providing information, and changing the culture so that families and individuals know that future education and employment pathways are available. Agencies that engage with families and children at a young age have taken steps to enhance parent and family trainings and materials establishing this approach.

- The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) provides trainings on inclusion and Early Intervention (EI) services and has developed models on best practices. Since 2018, the number of families participating in or planning EI training has more than doubled.
 - 2021-22: 161 families participated in EI training; 272 families were involved in planning.
 - 2022-23: 1,092 families participated in EI training; 201 families were involved in designing or implementing a training.
- ODP and OCDEL continuously integrate the [Charting the LifeCourse](#) principles into service delivery systems by providing access to resources and trainings. ODP collaborates with the PA Family Network (PAFN), which includes Family Advisors across the state, and Self Advocates United as part of the Supporting Families Initiative to support this work.
- Through each District Office. The Early Reach Program envisions a future where early transition intervention becomes a cornerstone of success for students with disabilities. Through collaborative partnerships with students, parents, and the community OVR embraces diversity and pioneers the development of innovative, inclusive programs for students with disabilities.

Increasing early intervention services in integrated settings

Early Intervention ensures that children birth to five with developmental delays or other established factors that put them at risk of substantial delay have the best chance for healthy development by offering a range of developmental and social-emotional services. Services can be provided in the home, in a community-based setting, or at a specialized facility.

This priority focuses on providing services in the home or community, where the child is actively engaged with others and is considered in an integrated setting. OCDEL publishes data in the annual State Interagency Coordinating Council report and to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs.

- 2021-22: approximately 59,106 children participated in the Preschool EI program.
- 2022-23: approximately 59,106 children participated in the Preschool EI program.

Table 1 - Early Intervention Measures Percentages 2019-2023

Early Intervention Measures	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23
Percent of infants and toddlers (birth to 3) receiving EI services in home and community settings	99.86%	99.92%	99.96%	99.6%
Percent of preschool children (ages 3-5) that have access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and receive the majority of their services in ECE	60.98%	55.87%	56.99%	62.19%
Percent of preschool children that receive the majority of their services in the home	8.83%	12.35%	11.38%	8.71%
Percent of preschool children that receive their services in a specialized classroom	30.19%	31.78%	31.63%	29.10%

School Age – Preparing for Transition

Note: Additional transition activity data, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), is documented in [quarterly reports](#) required by the Work Experiences for High School Students with Disabilities Act ([Act 26 of 2016](#)).

Establishing postsecondary plans for pathways to employment

The PDE Bureau of Special Education (BSE) works collaboratively with educators, schools, OVR, ODP, and other stakeholders to ensure students have access to quality and meaningful education, supports, services, and opportunities. Secondary Transition Coordinators at all 29 Intermediate Units (IUs) are trained to educate and support schools implement career readiness indicators with students with disabilities. As of SY 2022-23, approximately 288,814, special education students attended school districts; 20,522 special education students attended brick-and-mortar charter schools; and 15,298 special education students attended cyber charter schools. PDE has a robust training plan for secondary transition that includes resources for students, families, and educators, such as:

- The [Secondary Transition website](#) for students and parents;
- [Transition Tidbits](#), a free monthly subscription regarding transition opportunities;
- Annual professional development for educators focused on the state Academic Standards for Career Education and Work, career readiness indicators, and PA Employment First;

- The Pennsylvania Secondary Transition Community of Practice 2023-2026 State Plan focusing on increasing the youth engagement footprint across the state and increasing the number of students with disabilities as Career and Technical Education Completers; and
- Train the Trainer for Secondary Transition IU Training & Consulting Specialists for Transition Discoveries and grants for LEAs to implement Transition Discoveries locally. In 2022, 32 LEAs were involved in the Transition Discoveries Grant.

For students eligible to stay in school from age 18 through age 21 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state law, PDE partners with agencies and stakeholders to adopt policies and promote practices emphasizing educational programming based in the community and prepares students to work and function in a community setting. In response to the pandemic, Act 66 of 2021 and Act 55 of 2022 allowed 21-year-old students eligible under IDEA to remain in school for one additional school year. Approximately 600 eligible students remained enrolled for the 2021-22 year, and another 400 students elected to remain enrolled for 2022-23. As of September 2023, a child eligible under IDEA who attains the age of 21 years may remain enrolled in their resident district and receive an offer of a Free and Appropriate Public Education until their 22nd birthday.

- **Middle school support:** PA's six-year initiative *Middle School Success: The Path to Graduation* (P2G) program provides professional development for schools and helps regional teams identify middle school students with emotional behavioral disorder who may be off-track for graduation. Local leadership teams use attendance, behavior, and course performance data to identify and implement academic and behavioral Evidence Based Practices aligned to the SSIP Coherent Improvement Strategies (i.e., Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Family Engagement, etc.).
- **Educator professional development:** Training and technical assistance provided to schools emphasize the importance of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) being grounded in practices that provide community opportunities, work-based opportunities, and independent living, with the least amount of supports necessary for success. In 2022, the Pennsylvania Department of Education expanded and established multiple new programs for educators.
 - Nearly 150 LEAs engaged in professional development and improved practices in 2021. In 2022, an additional 186 LEAs participated in the program.
 - The Department of Education added The Role of the School Psychologist in Secondary Transition, and close to 250 school psychologists participated in the training.
 - In 2022, 32 LEAs were involved in the Transition Discoveries Grant.
 - In 2022, 20 LEAs requested Customized Technical Assistance related to Transition Programming.
 - Since the creation of Nuts and Bolts of Job Coaching in January 2022, close to 600 LEA staff have taken the course.
- **Collaborative IEP development:** OVR staff attendance at IEP meetings help support a comprehensive transition plan and connection to resources for student work experiences and future employment pathways. Public data from PDE for the 2021-2022 school year indicates an estimated 159,850 students with IEPs between the ages of 14 and 21 are eligible for transition

and Pre-ETS. While OVR cannot attend every IEP meeting, staff attend whenever possible.

Table 2 - Total Number of IEP Meetings Attended by OVR Staff

Year	SFY Q3	SFY Q4	SFY Q1	SFY Q2
2021	2,257	1,526	1,127	2,687
2022	2,396	1,206	1,001	2,624
2023	2,504	1,470	N/A	N/A

Connecting to transition activities for future education & employment

BSE and OVR work together to support students’ participation in work activities and to track work-based learning and paid work experiences. WIOA places significant emphasis on the provision of these services to students and requires that OVR set aside at least 15% of its federal funds to provide Pre-ETS to all eligible or potentially eligible students. In addition, ODP ensures that 100% of individuals with intellectual disability/autism age 21 and graduating can access waiver services which include employment support. Schools are required to make students aware of available services when they exit and are encouraged to connect students to services long before graduation.

Table 3 - 2021-2022 Data Points for Student Employment Transitions

Data Points	2021-2022*
Number of students who have a transition plan as part of the IEP	123,483
Number of students who have an outcome goal of competitive integrated employment	89,885
Number of students participating in a competitive integrated paid work experience	8,974
Number of students participating in individual job coaching services funded by the school in a paid work experience	7,598
Number of students who, upon exiting high school, were employed in a competitive integrated setting	14,775

**2022-23 data unavailable due to year lag in OSEP approval process.*

- Competitive Integrated Employment Grants:** OVR was awarded a grant from the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Pathways to Partnerships in collaboration with federally funded Centers for Independent Living (CILs), ODP, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and PDE/ Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) for a total amount of \$9.9M. This is a 5-year grant that will run from October 2023-September 2028. These grant funds will allow OVR

to provide opportunities to further develop partnerships between the PDE, BSE, OVR, ODP, and federally funded CILs. These funds will be used to develop training opportunities for professionals, implement Transition Discoveries across partnerships, and develop work-based learning opportunities for students.

Progress developing OVR's Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Grant, InVEST (Integrated Vocational Engagement & Support Team) Project has continued successfully. The goal of this \$13.9M model demonstration grant is to assist individuals who are engaged in, or may be considering, subminimum wage (SMW) employment to move into competitive integrated employment (CIE). The InVEST project is focused on: engaging individuals with disabilities and their families, creating an integrated resource team to identify and deliver necessary supports and services to support CIE, and supporting the needs of businesses and workers with disabilities.

- **Pre-Employment Transition Services Participation:** Approximately 53% of current OVR customers are under the age of 25. To better serve these customers and provide effective services to students with disabilities in PA, the OVR Transition Division has implemented Pre-ETS and transition services training across all agency bureaus. This has ensured consistent and up-to-date understanding of what services can be offered and the various signature programs that OVR currently offers such as, MY Work, the Professional Connections Experience (PCE) and Professional Connections Foundation (PCF), Post-Secondary Experience (PSE) and Youth Ambassador (YA) programs, School to Work transition and CTI/HGAC program eligibility and referral.

OVR has focused on developing and implementing Pre-ETS programs for PA Academic, Career & Technical Training (PACTT) affiliates and students, and increasing partnerships and relationships with consultants, agency staff and stakeholders. OVR continues to strengthen these partnerships and expand the understanding of OVR's continuum of Pre-ETS Services. Additionally, OVR hosts Pre-ETS provider office hours, to give formal training and technical support to providers on requested topics.

Table 4 - 2022 Pre-ETS Related Services

2022 Pre-ETS Related Services	SFY 22-23 Q3 (Jan-Mar)	SFY 22-23 Q4 (Apr-Jun)	SFY 23-24 Q1 (Jul-Sep)	SFY 23-24 Q2 (Oct-Dec)
Counseling on Postsecondary Training Opportunities	832	800	939	1,306
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	685	444	1,200	1,678
Job Exploration Counseling	1,218	988	1,169	2,189
Work Based Learning	566	687	1,656	1,412
Workplace Readiness Training	1,670	1,251	1,150	2,638
Total Number of Unique Students Receiving Services	3,636	3,075	4,250	6,220

Table 5 - 2023 Pre-ETS Related Services

2023 Pre-ETS Related Services	SFY 23-24 Q3 (Jan-Mar)	SFY 23-24 Q4 (Apr-Jun)	SFY 24-25 Q1 (Jul-Sep)	SFY 24-25 Q2 (Oct-Dec)
Counseling on Postsecondary Training Opportunities	1,703	1,670	N/A	N/A
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	1,388	1,218	N/A	N/A
Job Exploration Counseling	3,017	2,700	N/A	N/A
Work Based Learning	1,665	2,430	N/A	N/A
Workplace Readiness Training	3,636	3,033	N/A	N/A
Total Number of Unique Students Receiving Services	7,883	7,530	N/A	N/A

**Please Note: A single student could have received multiple services, and, if so, the services could have been received in different quarters or spanned multiple quarters. Therefore, the total number of students who received

services during a quarter might not be equal to the total of the number of students who received each of the services that quarter. Also, the number of students receiving services during the year may not be equal to the sum of the numbers who received in each quarter.**

Summer programming: OVR continues to engage and serve students throughout summer to expand employment opportunity, build skill development, and foster real-life experiences for youth with disabilities.

- **Expansion of Summer Internship Program**

In summer 2023, 23 interns participated in the State Employment Summer Internship Program. In 2024, OVR in collaboration with the Office of Administration (OA) plans to expand the 10-week State Employment Summer Internship Program beyond Harrisburg, Johnstown, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia to include additional locations across the Commonwealth. The program will begin June 6 and end August 8, 2024.

- **MY Work**

MY Work (MY = Municipalities + Youth) is an OVR-funded summer jobs program where OVR partners with local municipalities/non-profits and Community Resource Providers (CRPs) to create summer jobs that help connect students with disabilities to employment within their local communities. Throughout summer 2023, 851 students participated in a paid work experience with 162 municipalities across 47 counties.

OVR is working to expand MY Work student enrollment, partnerships with CRPs and existing partnership with the Outdoor Corps. It is OVR's goal to continue fostering these paid work experiences and have a MY Work site in each of PA's 67 counties in 2024.

- **Summer Pre-ETS Programming**

Professional Connections Experience (PCE) is a 60-hour program consisting of a combination of group instruction on workplace readiness and job exploration and experience to the world of work through job shadows, informational/mock interviews, in-person workplace tours, and assistance in obtaining prerequisite work documents such as photo ID, work permits and financial documentation.

- **2024 Summer Academies**

The Bureau of Blind and Visual Services (BBVS) Summer Academy Program is designed to provide high-school aged students with visual impairments an opportunity to develop their knowledge, experiences, and awareness as it relates to their future academic and employment goals. Students participate in a week-long program on a college campus where they receive assessments, information and educational experiences in various curriculum areas related to independent living, travel skills, vocational development, and assistive technology. BBVS is actively planning this year's Summer Academy to be held in June 2024 for students going into 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade.

The Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH) Summer Academy is a ten-day program held at Penn State's (PSU) University Park Campus, preparing student entry into post-secondary education leading to competitive integrated employment. This program is offered by OVR, ODHH, in partnership with the Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education's PaTTAN and the Pennsylvania State University (PSU).

Increasing workforce participation and training upon graduation

Participating in comprehensive IEP planning and transition services ideally leads to CIE or enrollment in postsecondary education and training upon graduation. Below are several measures related to this outcome. Additional information may be found in the [Act 26 reports](#) and [Data Dashboard](#).

Table 6 - Act 26: Job Referrals Made to Employers by OVR on behalf of students (2022)

2022	SFY 21-22 Q3 (Jan – Mar)	SFY 21-22 Q4 (Apr – Jun)	SFY 22-23 Q1 (Jul – Sep)	SFY 22-23 Q2 (Oct – Dec)
Total Number of Job Referrals	682	623	1,420	993

Table 7 - Act 26: Job Referrals Made to Employers by OVR on behalf of students (2023)

2023	SFY 22-23 Q3 (Jan – Mar)	SFY 22-23 Q4 (Apr – Jun)	SFY 23-24 Q1 (Jul – Sep)	SFY 23-24 Q2 (Oct – Dec)
Total Number of Job Referrals	1,270	1,412	Not Yet Published	Not Yet Published

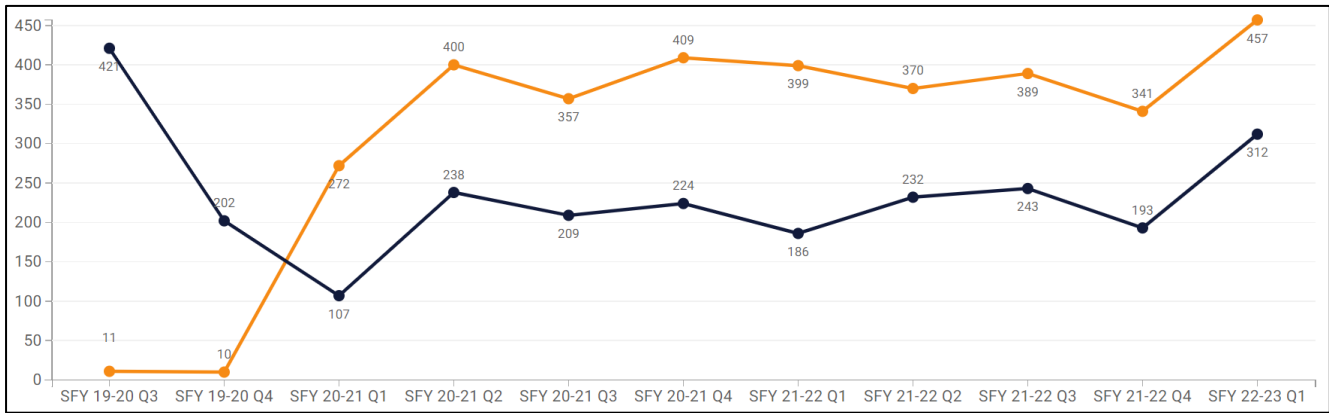
Table 8 - Act 26: Students with Disabilities who entered CIE within 3 months of Graduation

Year	SFY Q3 (Jan – Mar)	SFY Q4 (Apr – Jun)	SFY Q1 (Jul – Sep)	SFY Q2 (Oct – Dec)
2021	357	409	272	400
2022	389	341	399	370
2023	501	495	457	427

Table 9 - Act 26: Students with Disabilities who entered CIE while OVR customers

Year	SFY Q3 (Jan – Mar)	SFY Q4 (Apr – Jun)	SFY Q1 (Jul – Sep)	SFY Q2 (Oct – Dec)
2021	209	224	107	238
2022	243	193	186	232
2023	422	557	312	346

Figure 1 - [High School Students with Disabilities Who Enter Competitive Integrated Employment within 3 Months of Graduation](#)



- **Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs):** CTPs are 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. OVR provides financial aid for CTPs in accordance with the College Policy; ODP covers Education Support services to assist with tuition costs when other resources are not available. In 2015, Millersville University, one of the universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, received federal funding to collaborate with PSU Harrisburg and Mercyhurst University and others to build the PA Inclusive Higher Education Consortium to serve young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- **Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC):** The mission of the HGAC is to offer nationally recognized, accredited postsecondary education, preemployment transition, and support services to customers as they determine and pursue individualized goals of employment and independence. Programs and services are available to the public and to individuals with or without disabilities. This past year, HGAC served 1,963 people per year with evaluations, disability supports, and a variety of other services, and approximately 99 students graduated from the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) located at HGAC.

 - Employment Rates: 63-79%, average annual range for 2018-22 (all CIE)
 - Hourly Starting Wage: \$11.86-\$16.06, average annual range for 2018-22
 - Employer Satisfaction Rates: 81-95%, average annual range for 2018-22

Working Age Adults – Participating in CIE

Connecting people to individualized employment services

Several state agencies coordinate and fund services for working age adults to support CIE goals.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR): OVR provides vocational rehabilitation services to help people with disabilities prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. Counselors are available to conduct interviews, assist customers in developing vocational goals, and organize a variety of services. An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is developed which establishes vocational objectives, services, providers, and responsibilities. Services include but are not limited to counseling and guidance, diagnostic services, assessments, information and referral, job development and placement, and personal services such as readers or sign language interpreters which come at no cost to the individual.

Table 10 - OVR by the Numbers

Measure	PY 2018-19	PY 2019-20	PY 2020-21	PY 2021-22	PY 2022-23
Individuals Engaged with OVR	69,421	54,549	45,535	53,721	65,296
New Applicants	19,904	12,060	9,693	13,762	17,619
Individuals Placed in Employment	7,485	6,953	4,773	5,374	5,654
Average Hourly Wage	\$13.84	\$14.11	\$14.61	\$15.34	\$17.24

Office of Developmental Programs (ODP): ODP serves individuals with an intellectual disability or autism. ODP provides services that support an individual to obtain and maintain employment, in accordance with the [Everyday Lives](#) framework, which includes employment considerations. Each individual enrolled with ODP has an Individual Support Plan (ISP) developed using person-centered planning. Employment goals include specific activities such as exploring CIE, updating hours of employment, changing jobs, or career advancement. These services are funded by Medicaid, which is required to be a last-dollar payer source. If comparable services are available through other means, they must be provided first. Several measures have indicated an increase since 2018.

Table 11 - ODP Employment Services Measures

Measure	CY 2021 Q1	CY 2021 Q2	CY 2021 Q3	CY 2021 Q4	CY 2022 Q1	CY 2022 Q2	CY 2022 Q3	CY 2022 Q4	CY 2023 Q1	CY 2023 Q2	CY 2023 Q3
Number of people ages 18-64 enrolled with ODP with an Employment Goal on their ISP	13,787	13,878	13,669	13,736	13,788	13,902	13,850	13,688	13,748	13,901	13,782
Number of people ages 18-64 enrolled with ODP with CIE	6,745	7,057	7,537	7,720	7,361*	7,635*	7,678*	7,841	7,934	8,082	8,107

*The number of people ages 18-64 enrolled with ODP with CIE reported in previous years has been corrected.

Table 12 - Number of People Enrolled with ODP Reporting Self-Employment

Year	Number of People Enrolled with ODP Reporting Self-Employment
2019	333
2020	209
2021	350
2022	402
2023	466

*Data compiled from ad hoc request.

Table 13 - Authorized Benefits Counseling Services in ODP

Year	Authorized Benefits Counseling Services in ODP
FY 2020	163
FY 2021	272
FY 2022	365
FY 2023	432

*Data compiled from ad hoc request.

Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL): OLTL’s Community HealthChoices (CHC) Waiver Program serves older Pennsylvanians, individuals with a physical disability, and some other disability types. CHC provides services that support an individual to obtain and maintain CIE. Each individual has a Person-Centered Service Plan (PCSP) directed by the participant. CHC offers participants access to five specific employment services: Benefits Counseling, Career Assessments, Job Finding, Job Coaching, and

Employment Skills Development Services. Services are currently coordinated through three CHC Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). These services are funded by Medicaid, which is required to be a last-dollar payer source. If comparable services are available through other means, they must typically be provided first.

Success Stories Shared by the CHC Managed Care Organizations:

A CHC participant discussed a possible job at SAM's Club with her Service Coordinator (SC) and wanted to give it a chance but was afraid of losing services or not having her needs met through her CHC waiver. With encouragement and support of the SC, the participant applied and got the job while remaining eligible for CHC. The participant has been successfully employed now for close to 2 years!

In Spring 2023, A CHC participant expressed interest in employment in a conversation with his SC, but then was deterred due to feeling overwhelmed by the steps of finding employment and the tasks involved. The SC connected with the MCO's Employment & Vocational Specialist and, with the participant's approval, the Employment & Vocational Specialist coordinated a meeting via Zoom with the three of them. During the meeting, the Employment & Vocational Specialist addressed and alleviated his concerns while also discussing the process furthermore with the participant. After this meeting, the participant expressed interest in pursuing employment again and are all working closely to ensure the participant is successful in entering the workforce, with a (remote/telework) job he is excited to have.

A CHC participant wanted to work because he wanted more money, liked working, and missed being a part of the workforce. He was hesitant about pursuing or getting back into the workforce because of his disability. The MCO's employment program provided job links to apply for jobs, information to refresh the participant's resume and get a professional headshot taken, helped create a new email account for the participant, and referred the participant to Pathways to Work. This participant is not employed yet but has been provided with a career assessment to help him figure out his career interests.

Another CHC participant decided that he wanted employment because he "just wanted something to do instead of lying around all day...I just wanted to start being on my own and be more independent. Not so much my parents taking care of everything for me. I just wanted to be more productive." After becoming a CHC participant, he was connected to a job coach, who helped with job searching and connected him to the Ticket to Work program. The participant now works as an independent contractor. The participant now feels like he's more organized, more focused, and feels happier. His advice to other participants is, "Don't be afraid to go through the process and make working work for you."

Table 14 - OLTL Employment Services Measures by MCO and Year (AHC/KF)

Measures	2021	2022	2023^
HCBS Participants Age 21-64	32,361	34,166	36,424
Goal on PCSP (count)	582	374	457
Goal on PCSP (percent)	1.8%	1.09%	1.32%
Authorization (count)	63	29	33
Authorizations (percent)	0.19%	0.08%	0.10%
Employed (count)	330	330	369
Employed (percent)	1.02%	0.97%	1.07%
Confirmed CIE (count)	303	304	341
Confirmed CIE (percent)	0.94%	0.89%	0.99%

All percentage calculations are based on "HCBS Participants Age 21-64" as denominator

Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY2021, 2022, and Jan-June 2023^

*Indicates data is suppressed due to figure less than 11

Table 15 - OLTL Employment Services Measures by MCO and Year (PHW)

Measures	2021	2022	2023^
HCBS Participants Age 21-64	10,542	8,861	9,316
Goal on PCSP (count)	279	81	74
Goal on PCSP (percent)	2.65%	0.91%	0.85%
Authorization (count)	24	*	*
Authorizations (percent)	0.23%	*	*
Employed (count)	86	91	80
Employed (percent)	0.82%	1.03%	0.91%
Confirmed CIE (count)	84	88	77
Confirmed CIE (percent)	0.80%	0.99%	0.88%

All percentage calculations are based on "HCBS Participants Age 21-64" as denominator

Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY2021, 2022, and Jan-June 2023^

*Indicates data is suppressed due to figure less than 11

Table 16 - OLTL Employment Services Measures by MCO and Year (UPMC)

Measures	2021	2022	2023^
HCBS Participants Age 21-64	15,786	16,037	17,725
Goal on PCSP (count)	213	733	923
Goal on PCSP (percent)	1.35%	4.57%	5.53%
Authorization (count)	118	32	26
Authorizations (percent)	0.75%	0.20%	0.16%
Employed (count)	113	283	348
Employed (percent)	0.72%	1.76%	2.09%
Confirmed CIE (count)	46	223	300
Confirmed CIE (percent)	0.29%	1.39%	1.80%

All percentage calculations are based on "HCBS Participants Age 21-64" as denominator

Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY2021, 2022, and Jan-June 2023^

*Indicates data is suppressed due to figure less than 11

Table 17 - Benefits Counseling Services

Benefits Counseling Services	2021	2022	2023 [^]
Authorized HCBS – Benefits Counseling	27	28	10
Comparable services in Referred to Employment Service – Other	268	135	274
Comparable Benefits Counseling Counts Submitted by MCOs	252	969	2,040

Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY 2021, 2022 and Jan-June 2023[^].

Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS): OMHSAS supports counties in delivering employment services among various other mental health and substance abuse supports. As of 2021, OMHSAS began requiring employment services data to be included in annual county reports, including the number of individuals who have received supported employment services that lead to CIE. The first reports with this new information were provided in July 2021. OMHSAS continues to review and monitor the county reports.

These services are funded by the DHS Human Service Block Grant (HSBG), also known as base dollars. Annually, each county mental health office (CMHO) independently determines the ongoing need to use base funding for employment supports to assist individuals with serious mental illness (SMI). Due to various collaborations with agencies such as OVR and Workforce, some CMHOs rely on these vocational partners' financial resources instead of using base dollars to fund employment supports. [County Mental Health Plans can be reviewed for their supported employment on the DHS website.](#)

High quality service providers: Employment services require specialized knowledge. There must be adequate capacity to meet demand for the various services provided through state agencies, and those services must be provided by trained and qualified individuals.

Table 18 - Certification Completions

Certification Completions	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23
Persons who completed certification in Discovery (ODP/Temple Agreement)	37	14	27	7
Persons who completed certification in Customized Employment (ODP/Temple Agreement)	8	20	17	2
Persons who completed certification in Systematic Instruction (“Intentional Teaching”) (ODP/Temple Agreement)	11	21	9	4
Persons who completed certification in College of Employment Services’ (CES) ACRE-approved training	561	193	150	163*

*Represents figure for calendar year 2023, rather than fiscal year.

Table 19 - Enrolled Providers Offering Benefits Counseling (2020-2023)

Enrolled Providers that Offer Benefits Counseling	2020	2021	2022	2023
ODP	N/A	46	50	49
OLTL	15	21	37	41

Table 20 - Credentialed Providers (2020-2023)

Credentialed Providers	2021	2022	2023
Total number of Certified Employment Support Professionals (CESPs)	207	184	158
Total number of OLTL credentialed employment service provider entities	84	92	95

Enhancing supports and decreasing reliance on sheltered employment

Employment First policy is focused on supporting individuals with disabilities in attaining employment in workplaces with a diverse workforce and competitive wages and benefits. Some individuals with disabilities are employed in sheltered work environments with subminimum wages. An important objective of Employment First is to continue to implement Section 11 of WIOA (which is intended to limit the payment of subminimum wage to people with disabilities using special wage certificates under Section 14c of the Fair Labor Standards Act) to support individuals receiving services in sheltered work who want to pursue CIE. Using a person-centered approach, OVR provides career counseling sessions to individuals in sheltered workshops on the benefits of CIE and how to use OVR services.

Table 21 - OVR 511 Report

OVR 511 Report SFY 2021-22 to date	2021	2022	2023 YTD
511 Sessions Conducted	1,089	752	450
Session Attendees	3,326	3,382	2,338
Number of Attendees Interested in OVR Services	236	171	92
Median Hourly Wage of 511 Customers placed into Competitive Integrated Employment	\$9.50	\$11.00	\$10.50

In addition, ODP and OVR jointly contracted with nationally-recognized experts to hold provider transformation leadership “boot camp” sessions that provided training to help providers of facility-based services transform their business model to one that supports CIE.

Improving workforce system collaboration and employer engagement

The [state WIOA plan](#) outlines the goals and activities for the workforce system so that Pennsylvanians can access a one-stop system of coordinated employment and training services at their local PA CareerLink® office or on the PA CareerLink® website. The plan includes federal core partners (including OVR), state required partners, and local partners. Many people with disabilities who enter the workforce system are receiving services through OVR, while others may not be; the need for OVR services by people with disabilities varies. Efforts should continue to be made within the workforce system to ensure collaboration between partners to advance inclusive environments and services, and co-enrollment in applicable services when appropriate.

- **PA CareerLink® office accessibility:** OVR partnered with Workforce Development partners in conducting comprehensive ADA accessibility reviews of all comprehensive CareerLink and smaller affiliate locations across the Commonwealth throughout 2023. Reviews are intended to help identify and resolve programmatic and physical barriers. The Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) will continue conducting official reviews of the Public Workforce System as it relates to ADA accessibility.
- **Training for WIOA partner programs:** The WIOA state plan includes a goal to increase training to all front-line staff on available program offerings to allow for informed internal and external referrals to additional services and facilitate serving the holistic needs of the customer.
- **Employer support and engagement:** The Business Services & Outreach Division (BSOD) strives to provide continuous support to internal staff and external stakeholders, by providing consult to agency persons and promoting the provision of quality services to businesses and the disability community. BSOD also focuses on creating employment, establishing Work Based Learning Experiences, pre-apprenticeships, and other employment opportunities.
- **Workforce system Participation (PYS 2018-2021):** The following tables show the number and percent of participants in several core and partner WIOA programs who self-identify as having a disability.

Table 22 – Number of Participants Who Receive Services from PA CareerLink Workforce Programs with a Disability, 2018-2022

	Number of Participants with a Disability				
	Program Year 2018	Program Year 2019	Program Year 2020	Program Year 2021	Program Year 2022
All Workforce Programs	8,465	7,684	3,904	4,677	5,541
Adult	736	686	541	562	547
Dislocated Worker	404	404	302	243	154
Youth	1,409	1,470	1,367	1,348	1,227
Wagner-Peyser	7,319	6,531	2,812	3,364	4,365
Trade	51	46	40	39	18

Table 23 - Percent of Individuals with a Disability who Receive Services from PA CareerLink Workforce Programs, 2018-2022

	Percent of Participants with a Disability				
	Program Year 2018	Program Year 2019	Program Year 2020	Program Year 2021	Program Year 2022
All Workforce Programs	8.6%	9.3%	11.5%	9.7%	9.1%
Adult	8.1%	9.0%	9.2%	6.9%	5.5%
Dislocated Worker	4.8%	5.6%	4.8%	5.1%	5.1%
Youth	25.7%	30.1%	30.9%	28.1%	26.4%
Wagner-Peyser	8.0%	8.5%	10.1%	8.6%	8.4%
Trade	2.4%	2.8%	3.1%	3.3%	4.0%

Table 24 – Number of Participants with a Disability Employed After Completing PA CareerLink Workforce Program, 2018-2022

	Number of Participants with a Disability Employed after Completing Services				
	Program Year 2018	Program Year 2019	Program Year 2020	Program Year 2021	Program Year 2022
All Workforce Programs	4,014	3,623	2,947	1,519	2,060
Adult	310	310	244	199	214
Dislocated Worker	182	187	163	115	115
Youth	343	416	464	514	550
Wagner-Peyser	3,696	3,311	2,604	1,036	1,549
Trade	24	21	9	8	13

Table 25 – Percent of Participants with a Disability Employed after Completing PA CareerLink Workforce Program, 2018-2022

	Percent of Participants with a Disability Employed after Completing Services				
	Program Year 2018	Program Year 2019	Program Year 2020	Program Year 2021	Program Year 2022
All Workforce Programs	51.1%	54.7%	46.4%	59.0%	57.3%
Adult	66.7%	67.2%	58.2%	62.0%	65.2%
Dislocated Worker	71.9%	77.0%	71.2%	70.6%	70.6%
Youth	58.7%	66.6%	60.4%	70.1%	69.3%
Wagner-Peyser	50.5%	54.0%	45.3%	55.9%	55.1%
Trade	80.0%	65.6%	56.3%	50.0%	61.9%

Advancing inclusivity in Commonwealth employment

With nearly 70,000 employees, the Commonwealth is Pennsylvania's second largest employer. The Commonwealth has taken several steps to lead by example and to be an employer of choice through advancing inclusive workplace practices and reducing barriers. The Office of Administration's (OA) Employment First Steering Committee meets throughout the year to assess progress in hiring and retention to increase hiring and support of people with disabilities. In addition, the Disability Recruiter continues to connect and network with various organizations and schools to advertise open jobs and recruit job candidates with disabilities. Notable efforts in 2023 include:

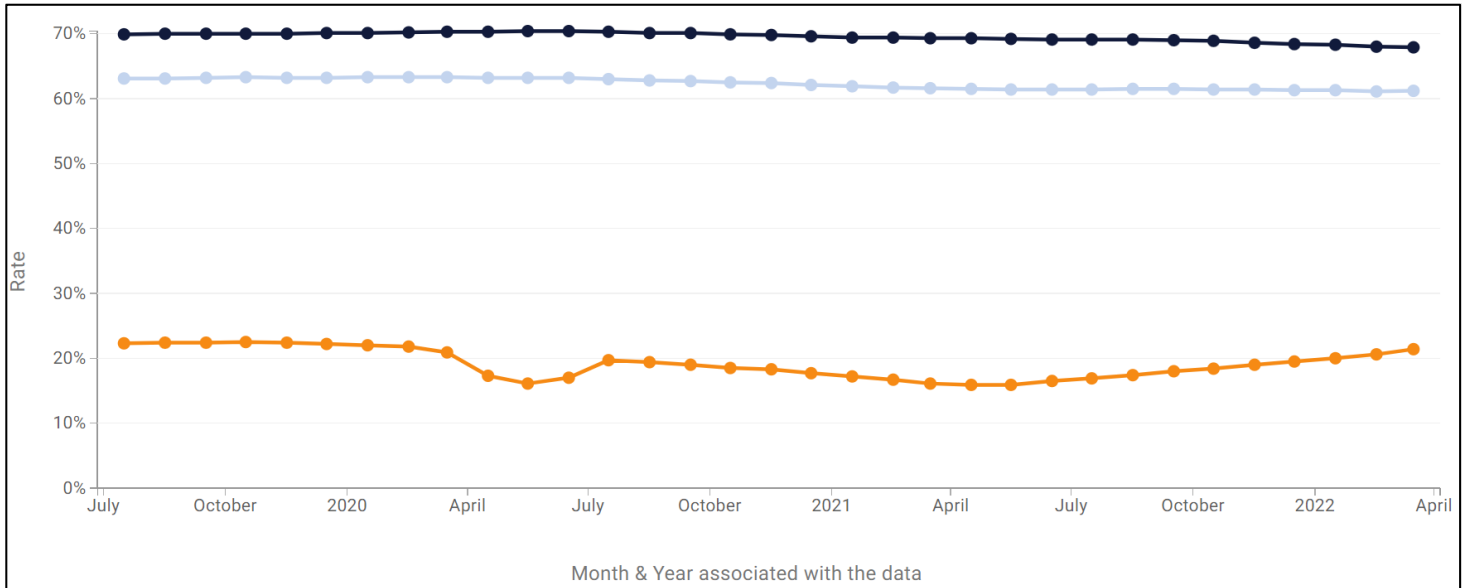
- **Hiring data collection:** Job applicants can choose to self-identify as having a disability. This helps inform and assess the effectiveness of Commonwealth recruitment efforts for people with a disability.
 - Preliminary data from July 2022 to June 2023 indicated that 7.38% of applicants who completed an employment application identified as a person with a disability.
 - During FY 22-23, 6% of hired applicants participating in the survey (including internal and external candidates) voluntarily identified as having a disability.
- **Customized employment pilot:** OA and OVR continue to pilot the application of customized employment concepts within state government. Several positions were identified to develop a customized job description. OVR continues to work with OA on expanding this concept and creating other opportunities within the Commonwealth.
- **Expansion of internship program:** In Summer 2023, 23 interns participated in the State Employment Summer Internship Program. In 2024, OVR, in collaboration with OA, plans to expand the 10-week State Employment Summer Internship Program beyond Harrisburg, Johnstown, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to include additional locations across the Commonwealth. The program will begin June 6 and end August 8, 2024.
- **Accessibility Center for Excellence:** In addition to making assistive technologies and an accessibility testing toolkit available, OA's Accessibility Center for Excellence is adding training on topics like web, mobile, procurement, and document accessibility to the Commonwealth's eLearning platform. Six courses are currently available and the target for the remaining courses is the end of Q1 2024.

Increasing labor force participation rate for people with disabilities

The Labor Force Participation rate includes people who are currently working and those who are actively looking for work. The participation rate for people with disabilities falls significantly below the participation rate for people without disabilities. All Employment First efforts are geared towards increasing the labor force participation rate of people with disabilities through various efforts. These

data are Pennsylvania-specific and are sourced from the U.S. Census' Current Population Survey (CPS). Specific percentages and additional information can be found on the data dashboard.

Figure 2 - People with/without Disabilities Participation Rate shown with PA Total Labor Force Participation Rate 2020-2022



Appendix A – Websites and Additional Resources

I. **Employment First Policy and Related Plans**

- a. [Act 36 of 2018](#)
- b. [Act 26 of 2016](#)
- c. [Act 36 Three-Year Plan](#)
- d. [WIOA Combined State Plan \(2020\)](#)

II. **Reports and Data Dashboard**

- a. [Employment First Policy Page on the Department of Labor & Industry Website](#)
- b. [Employment First Data Dashboard](#)
- c. [Employment First Data Dashboard – OVR Page](#)
- d. [Act 26 Reports \(Transition Activities\)](#)

III. **Employment and Supportive Services Information**

- a. [We Can Work Page on the Department of Human Services Website](#)
- b. [Secondary Transition Website](#)
- c. [Connecting for Employment Video Series and Roadmap](#)
- d. [ODP Everyday Lives Framework](#)
- e. [Charting the Lifecourse Framework](#)
- f. [Employment First for Individuals with Disabilities \(pa.gov\)](#)
- g. [Employment First for Employers](#)
- h. [Employment First for Providers](#)

