

"Employment First" Helps Everyone: **Behavioral Health Providers**

In the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) 2011-2014 Plan, "Leading Change: A Plan for SAMHSA's Roles and Actions," under Strategic Initiative #4: "Recovery Support," they list the following key facts:

- Of the more than 6 million people served by State mental health authorities across the Nation, only 21 percent are employed. Despite this exceptionally low rate, **only 2.1 percent of people served received evidence-based supported employment services.**
- Supported employment programs that help people with the most serious mental illnesses **place more than 50 percent of their clients into paid employment.**
- A recent 10-year study suggests that **supported employment initiatives for people who are high users of mental health services can reduce their need for such services,** saving public funding over time.

Additionally, under Goal 4.3 of the plan, the purpose is to "Increase gainful employment and educational opportunities, while decreasing legal and policy barriers, for individuals in recovery with mental and substance abuse disorders."

What Employment First and Employment Are Not

- *Employment First* does **NOT** mean "employment only." *Employment First* does **NOT** mean "forced employment."
- *Employment First* does **NOT** limit individual choices but rather increases personal choices, expands opportunities and enhances self-determination through greater access to the workforce, jobs, earned income and community.
- *Employment* is **NOT** a program, employment **IS** an outcome. *Employment* is the result of effective supports and services offered naturally on the job and complemented by external supports and services including those publicly funded.

Desired Outcomes

- Measurable increases in employment of Alaskans with disabilities, particularly those with significant disabilities, within the general workforce earning minimum wage or higher with benefits.
- Employers universally value individuals with disabilities as an integral part of their workforce, and include people with disabilities within general recruitment and hiring efforts as standard practice.
- Greater opportunities exist for citizens with disabilities to pursue self-employment and the development of microenterprises.
- Measurable decreases in expenditures on non-work programs for Alaskans with disabilities of working age.
- A decision not to consider employment in the community for an individual is re-evaluated on a regular basis; the reasons and rationale for this decision are fully documented and addressed in service provision.

It is important to note that Employment First and HB211 does not require behavioral health providers to provide employment services. It does however, require the Department of Health and Human Services to report on progress toward steps taken to ensure that gainful employment within the general workforce is a priority within the Department and providers that receive funding from the Department. How this is done can vary from providing direct employment services to aligning with partners such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or the Employment Security Division (job centers) to ensure those they serve have access to services leading to gainful employment within the general workforce.

Crosswalk for HB 211: The Employment First Bill

Section 1: Amends section 14.03.078

- The Department of Education is required to submit an annual progress report on transition services performance indicators to the Alaska Mental Health Trust (this data already acquired).

Section 2: Amends 14.03.120

- The Department of Education must make the primary objective of "transition services" helping a child with disabilities become gainfully employed in an integrated setting.

Section 3: Amends 23.15

- Department of Labor and Workforce Development shall make gainful employment in the general workforce the priority of vocational training, rehabilitation, or placement and submit an annual progress report to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.
- Gainful employment is:
 - Full time or part time
 - At or above minimum wage
- General workforce refers to integrated employment in the community.

Section 4: Amends 39.28.040

- When the Department of Administration administers the requirements of the affirmative action plan, the primary goal of vocational training, voc rehabilitation or employment placement of an individual with disabilities should be gainful employment in the general workforce.
- Gainful employment is:
 - Full time or part time
 - At or above minimum wage
- General workforce refers to integrated employment in the community.

Section 5: Amends 47.80.135

- The Department of Health and Social Services should make the goal of vocational training, voc rehabilitation or employment placement of an individual gainful employment in the general workforce and submit an annual progress report to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.
- Gainful employment is:
 - Full time or part time
 - At or above minimum wage
- General workforce refers to integrated employment in the community.