

Employment First

People with disabilities can perform meaningful work while also receiving fair wages equal to their counterparts without disabilities. Employment First is a framework for systemic change that is centered on the premise that people with disabilities are capable of the same work as those without disabilities.

What is Employment First?

Employment First is a policy that prioritizes competitive and integrated settings for working age people with disabilities as the first and preferred outcome, without removing other options of support that currently exist. Competitive integrated employment is defined as work paid by the employers at minimum wage or greater in a typical work setting where the employee with a disability interacts with coworkers without disabilities. Employment is a fundamental aspect of a person's life and helps promote self-identity, self-confidence, self-determination, and economic self-sufficiency.

Missouri's Current Employment Statistics¹

- 51% of Missourians with disabilities without a job would like one
- In 2016, people who were placed through supported employment had an average annual increase in wages of \$13,156
- As of 2016, only 34% of all working age people with disabilities in Missouri were employed. 25% of people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities were employed.

Employment First in Other States²

- 38 states have Employment First Policies.
- In 2010 Arkansas' Governor signed an executive order to implement Employment First.
- In 2011 Kansas implemented Employment First legislation.
- Illinois enacted Employment First legislation in 2013.
- In 2017 Indiana passed Employment First Legislation.

Recommendations

The Missouri Legislature should support HB 115 to increase competitive and integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Missouri Legislators need to follow the trend towards inclusivity for people with disabilities by prioritizing Employment First and supporting policies that increase competitive integrated employment.

¹ Erickson, W., Lee, C., & von Schrader, S. (2018). 2016 Disability Status Report: Missouri. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability(YTI).

² <https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Employment-first-resource-list-April-2019.pdf#page48>