



Competitive Employment

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Position:

Everyone who identifies work as a goal is employable, with the right opportunities and support. Therefore, people with disabilities have the right to, and should, receive individualized supports and reasonable accommodations to help them prepare for and attain competitive employment: community-based jobs, working alongside people without disabilities, earning at least minimum wage.

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Reasons:

Research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of employment for people with disabilities. For example, a study found that people with disabilities who worked were healthier, reported a higher quality of life, and had lower Medicaid and Medicare costs than those who were unemployed.¹

Nevertheless, a 2019 report by the U.S. Census Bureau found that, when including all workers regardless of occupation, employees with disabilities earned only 66 cents for every dollar earned by employees without disabilities.² In addition, people with disabilities are often afraid to work because they believe that working will cause them to lose their Social Security, Medicaid, and other public benefits.³

Missouri continues to lag behind in competitive employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities. Only 36.1% of Missourians with disabilities were employed in 2018, far lower than the 81.7% employment rate for people without disabilities. Missourians with disabilities were also 5% less likely to be employed than people with disabilities in other states. In addition, almost 6,000 Missourians with disabilities work in sheltered workshops earning less than minimum wage. Finally, in our most recent statewide Comprehensive Review, the majority of respondents said that they had unmet needs regarding employment.⁴

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Recommendations:

- As a state and society, we must acknowledge that competitive employment is a crucial component of community integration. Therefore, we must ensure that people with disabilities have early access to and receive the support they need to obtain well-paid jobs providing meaningful opportunities for community and social engagement and advancement, regardless of whether they live in rural or urban environments.
- Agencies supporting people with disabilities must presume and foster competence and employability including increasing outreach to people in sheltered workshops and other segregated settings as well as people living in rural areas so they can gain the opportunities and supports they need to attain competitive employment.
- Support plans, including Individualize Education Programs and Person Centered Plans, should include goals and objectives for competitive employment and clearly state the employment supports to be provided.
- Schools and partner agencies should focus on helping transition-aged students in special education receive the supports they need to attain competitive employment including career exploration, work experiences, financial and benefits management skills, and a network of supportive individuals and organizations.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, through its Vocational Rehabilitation program, should provide individualized Pre-Employment Transition Services to all transition-aged students with disabilities to help them prepare for and develop the skills they need to gain competitive employment, including job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, post-secondary education counseling, workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and instruction in self-advocacy.⁵
- Agencies supporting people with disabilities should develop collaborative relationships with private businesses and implement strategies that enable competitive employment including coordinated service planning, job exploration, job training, reasonable accommodations, transportation, and internship and work opportunities.
- Missouri state government should take the lead in developing and demonstrating best practices in competitive employment, including consulting with organizations and states, such as Vermont, that have created programs empowering people with disabilities to prepare for and attain competitive employment.
- Agencies supporting people with disabilities should provide information about and access to financial programs such as benefits planning and ABLE accounts that can help people earn and save money without jeopardizing their receipt of public benefits.⁶



References

- ¹ Hall, J. P., Kurth, N. K., & Hunt, S. L. (2013). Employment as a health determinant for working-age, dually-eligible people with disabilities. *Disability and Health Journal*, 6(2), 100-106.
- ² Golden, R. (2020). Why do pay gaps persist for US workers with disabilities? *HR Dive*. Available at: <https://www.hrdive.com/news/why-do-pay-gaps-persist-for-us-workers-with-disabilities/581533/#:~:text=A%202019%20report%20by%20the,earned%20by%20those%20without%20disabilities>
- ³ Morris, Rodriguez, & Blanck. (2016). ABLE accounts: A down payment on freedom. *Inclusion* 4(1), 21-29.
- ⁴ Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council (2021). Comprehensive Review and Analysis, February 28, 2021 (summarizing statistics and statewide survey)
- ⁵ See, 34 C.F.R. § 361.48
- ⁶ See, <https://www.moable.com/>; <http://www.ablenrc.org>

This document was developed in partnership and with support from the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council (PL 106-402) and Jonathan Gerald Martinis, LLC (jgmartinisllc@gmail.com)