

Employment First “101”

Aging & Disability
Services Division
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Background of employing people with disabilities

ADA

Olmstead

Community
employment

Unemployment of people with disabilities,
Iowans with disabilities

Why work? The importance of work for
wellbeing

Community Inclusion, How people with
disabilities can help businesses

Iowa's system of employment supports

Overview

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA is a federal civil rights law enacted by Congress in 1990 that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities, including employment.

The ADA guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as anyone to enjoy **employment** opportunities, purchase goods and services and participate in state and local government programs.

The Olmstead Decision

Olmstead v. L.C. and E.W. is a federal lawsuit decided by the US Supreme Court on June 22, 1999.

The decision interpreted part of the ADA and became a landmark civil rights decision for Americans with disabilities.

The ADA and the Olmstead Supreme Court decision are about making changes so all persons with disabilities have opportunities for full community integration and inclusion.

What US DOL says about Employment First

- E1st is a national systems-change framework grounded in the belief that even people with the most significant disabilities should have the opportunity to be fully employed and participate in community life.
- In E1st, publicly-funded systems work to align policies, regulations, and reimbursement structures to promote community integrated employment or competitive integrated employment (CIE) as the FIRST option for employment services for people with significant disabilities.
- Many states have formal E1st policies or legislation. Iowa has made E1st proclamations and is currently working on more formal, permanent actions to embed E1st in our regulations.

Iowa's Employment Vision

“Employment in the general workforce is the first priority and the expected and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age Iowans with disabilities.”

What is “Community Employment?”

We believe that everyone, even people with significant disabilities, can and should have the opportunity to be fully employed in their community and take part in community life.

Individual job

Paid by employer

Normal job setting

Integrated with
regular workforce

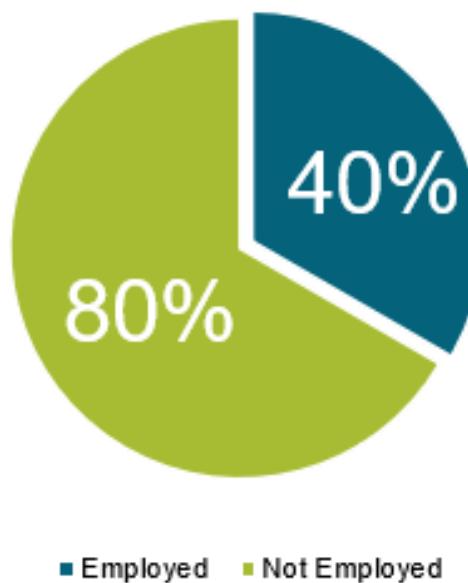
Natural supports
(+ provider if
needed)

Employment Inequities

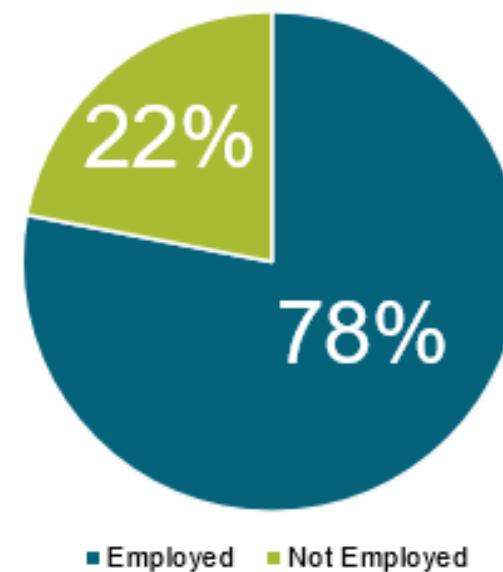
40% of people with disabilities ages 16-64 are working or looking for work

78% of people ages 16-64 without disabilities are working or seeking work

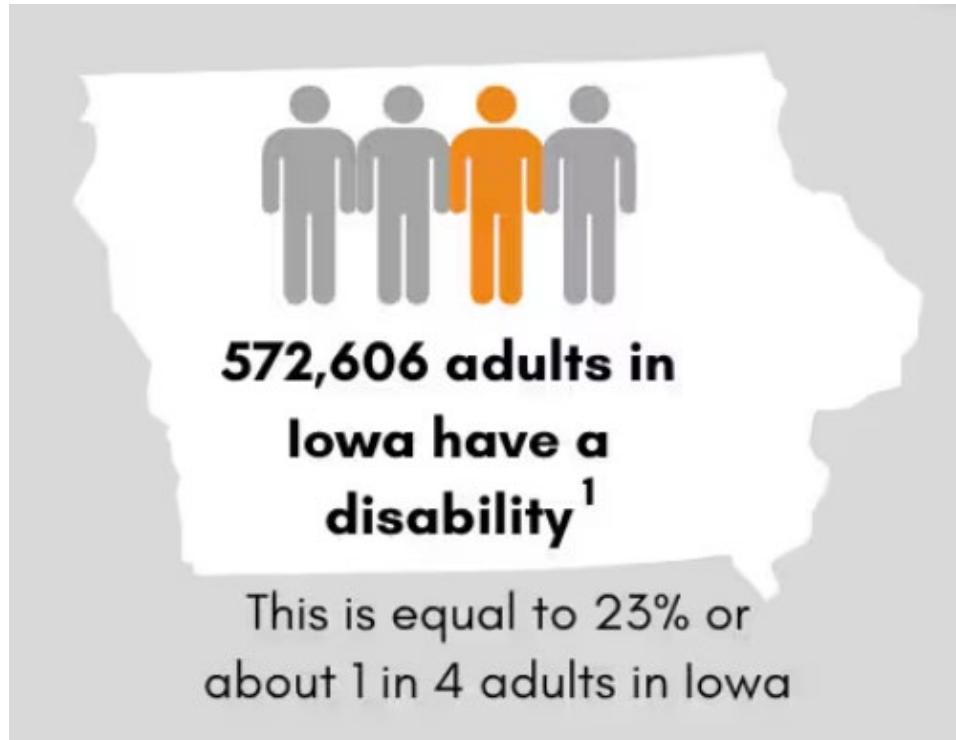
Americans with disabilities



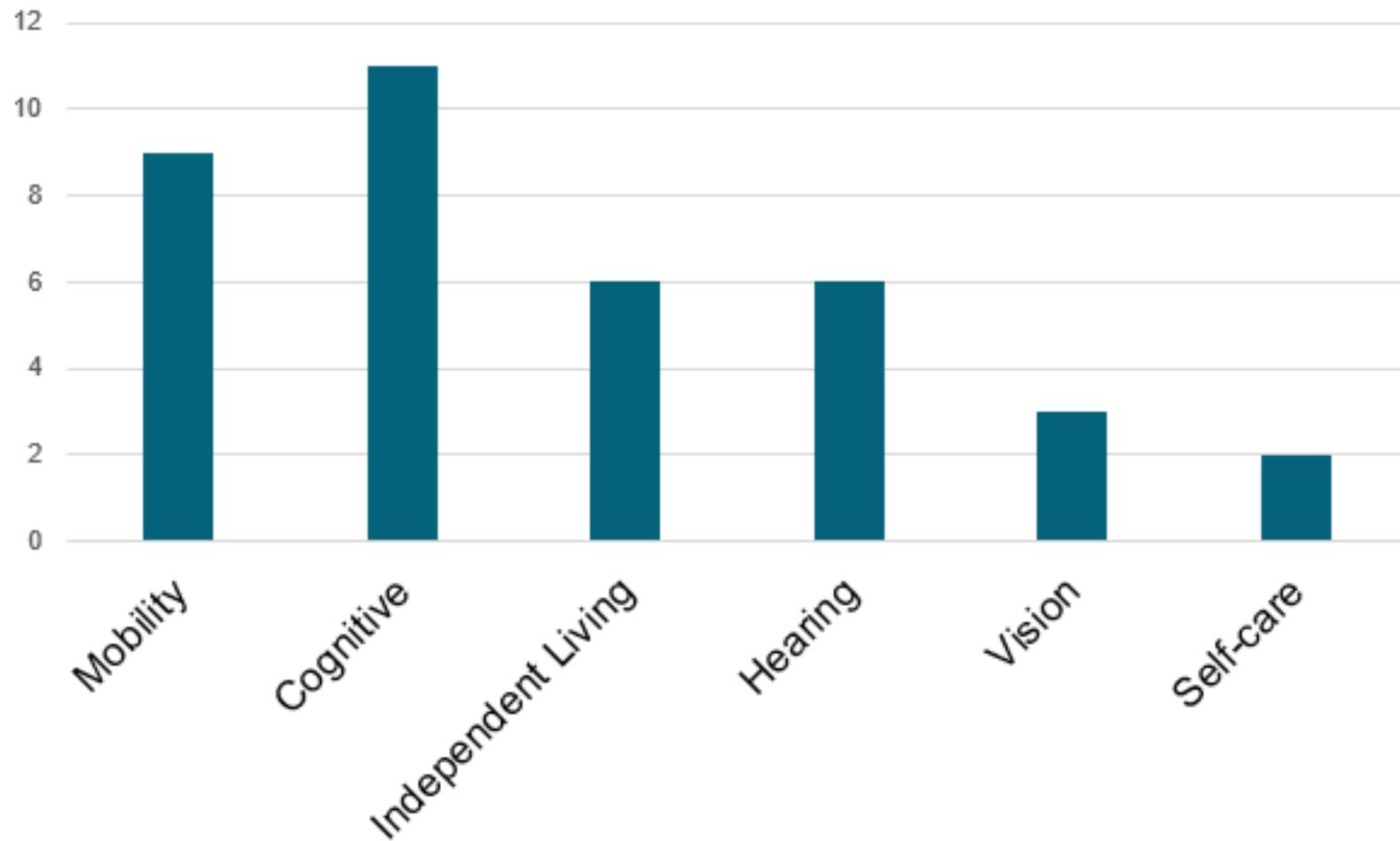
All Americans



Iowans with Disabilities



Percentage of Iowans with select disability types



For Most People, **Employment** is a Part of **Recovery**



70% of people with behavioral health illnesses want to work but only 15% are employed



Work is the best treatment for serious mental illness (i.e., people with depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia) --Luciano, Bond, & Drake, 2011

Change the question to change the culture...

from “Do you want to work?” to “What work do you want to do?”



When people work, they experience:



Work Outcomes:

Something to do, build a Career, use their talents



Quality of Life Outcomes:

Self esteem, community integration, make friends, contribute to their community, symptom control, fewer hospitalizations

What People Say...

”When you’re working, you’re part of the real world. You feel connected. Having a job gives me stability. I have something to look forward to every day.”

“The employment counselor helped me understand why Tony paces. Pacing is OK in the security business.”
--Security business owner

“I worried that if my daughter got a job, she would feel stressed. But just the opposite happened. She’s doing much better than before.”



Health and
Human Services



E1st: The Bottom Line

**The Right Thing
to Do:**

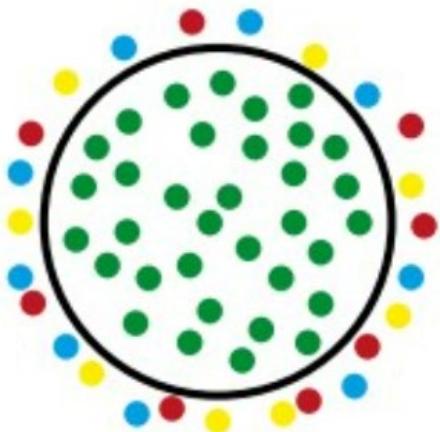
- People with disabilities have demonstrated ability and are an untapped resource.

**The Smart Thing
for Communities
to Support:**

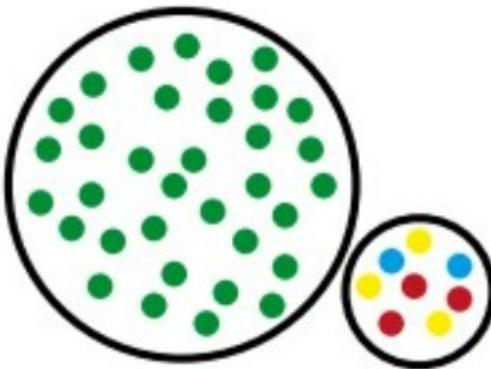
- When people with disabilities work and live more independently, they rely less on government, they contribute to the local economy, they use less healthcare, and are more involved in their communities.

**Makes Good
Business Sense:**

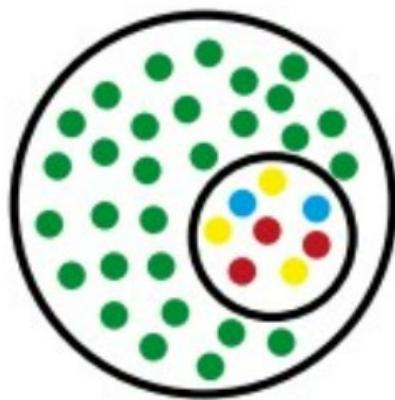
- People with disabilities are an asset for business. Business models across the U.S. have proven results (KwikStar, Walgreens, Lowes, Home Depot, BankAmerica, other big companies + countless small businesses)



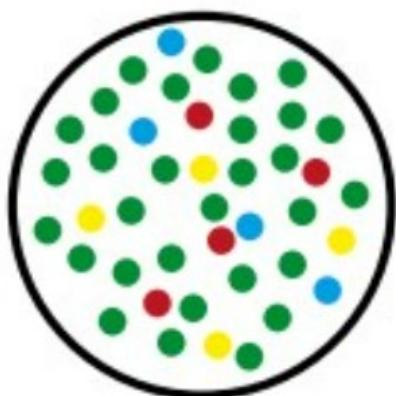
Exclusion



Segregation



Integration



Inclusion

Five Reasons to Create Inclusion in the Workplace



Happier
Employees



Growing
Culture



New
Knowledge



Increased
Production



Greater
Diversity



**Iowa
Success with
Individual
Placement
and Support
(IPS)**

A Sampling of Success Stories

Booklet of 18 people who used HCBS & VR services to start and run their own successful businesses,

[https://cdd.center.uiowa.edu/sites/cdd.center.
uiowa.edu/files/2025-
12/thinking_outside_employment_box.pdf](https://cdd.center.uiowa.edu/sites/cdd.center.uiowa.edu/files/2025-12/thinking_outside_employment_box.pdf)

Iowa Job Honor Awards

<https://www.jobhonor.org/media-iowa>

My favorite is 2016 “Owner Revolution”

Iowa Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG)
video: Wage Earners, “Marianne”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_94Ulnr
5XU&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_94Ulnr5XU&feature=youtu.be)

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Resources

E1st for Iowans with Disabilities

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Kyra Hawley Preston, Aging & Disability kyra.Hawley@hhs.iowa.gov

Benefits Planning for People with Disabilities

Disability Rights Iowa, contact@driowa.org Toll Free: 800-779-2502

Angela Young, VocRehab Angela.Young@iowa.gov

Individual Placement and Support

University of Iowa Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health,
www.iowacebh.org

Customized Employment aka Customized Discovery

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Contact Info

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Thank You!