

The Value of Competitive Integrated Employment for People with Disabilities & the Value Delivered by Individual Supported Employment Service Providers

Individualized competitive integrated employment (ICIE) creates clear value for people with disabilities, employers, and public funders of supported employment services. Research shows that ICIE is linked to better economic stability, health, quality of life, independence, and community inclusion for people with disabilities, while also helping employers meet workforce needs. For public funders, ICIE represents a high-value investment because effective employment services can improve outcomes, reduce long-term reliance on paid supports, and lessen the broader personal and public costs of unemployment.

When people with disabilities work in individualized competitive integrated employment (ICIE), multiple benefits result for the individuals employed, their employers and the public funders of the individual supported employment (ISE) services that keep them successfully employed.

A 2022 systematic review of 17 peer-reviewed studies found ICIE to be strongly correlated with **better economic, psychological and physical health** outcomes for the person with a disability. This same study also found links to **improved quality of life, self-determination, autonomy, independence and reduced support needs**.¹ The value of ICIE for people with disabilities is sometimes illustrated through the lens of social determinants of health.² Known to contribute more to a person's positive health and mental health status than medical care, social determinants of health include employment, safe housing, good food, transportation and social connections. When people with disabilities work, they have:

- **Greater economic stability from earned income,**
- **Improved housing, food and social options due to higher level of income,**
- **More community connections and relationships, less isolation**

¹ Taylor, Avellone, Brooke, Wehman, Inge, Schall, and Iwanaga, "The Impact of Competitive Integrated Employment on Economic, Psychological, and Physical Health Outcomes for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* 35, no. 4 (2022): 963–982, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12974>

² The conditions in the environment...that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks." (Healthy People 2030, US Department of Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion)

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- **Better quality of life as a result of what’s noted above and having a greater sense of purpose.**

Conversely, people who are unemployed “*report feelings of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, demoralization, worry, and physical pain. Unemployed individuals tend to suffer more from stress-related illnesses such as high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, heart disease, and arthritis.*” (Healthy People 2030, US Department of Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion³).

Indeed, ICIE is uniquely advantageous for people with disabilities. A study published in 2022, which examined the impact of work conditions and settings on quality of life for people with disabilities, including ICIE, sheltered facility employment and unemployment, found that **people in ICIE had better quality of life outcomes than those who were unemployed or working in sheltered facilities.**⁴

People with disabilities who aren’t expected, encouraged and supported to work often must rely on public benefits that are not enough to meet basic needs. In 2026, the maximum federal SSI payment for one person is \$994 per month, and the average SSDI benefit for a disabled worker is about \$1,630 per month. When cost of living is combined with the added costs of disability, these limited benefits leave many people in deep poverty.

ICIE brings the opportunity for more income and a myriad of higher quality of life outcomes for workers with disabilities while simultaneously providing employers with a previously untapped workforce to help fulfill their talent needs in the face of shortages impacting many states and industries.

All of the advantages for employed individuals with disabilities also **bring value to public funders** of disability services. **Value in this context is higher quality and increased cost-effectiveness from services such as ISE services.** Higher quality results from ISE services because of the many outcomes previously discussed that result when people with disabilities are enabled to work in ICIE. Increased cost-effectiveness from ISE services results from the use of best practices for job match, training, application of enabling technology and facilitation of workplace inclusion. These best practices lead to a successful reduction in paid ISE services as an individual with a disability’s tenure in ICIE increases. The savings from this “fading” combined with reduced health and mental

³ <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>

⁴ Randall and Jamison, “Association Between Employment Status and Quality of Life for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities,” *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* 36, no. 1 (2023): 158–168, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.13053>

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health costs, and avoidance of the need to purchase non-work service alternatives, together create the increased cost-effectiveness for funders of ISE services.

There is a need to reduce the negative impacts and costs of unemployment, and to assist more people with disabilities to experience the well-documented benefits of ICIE.

Expectations and encouragement of people with disabilities to obtain and maintain ICIE, combined with effective and readily available employment services supporting ICIE, are critical for improving the health and quality of life of working-aged Michiganders with disabilities.

To put these strategies in motion, there is also a need for public funders of disability services including ISE to realize the value delivered by employment service providers that facilitate and support ICIE using best practices. Four ways for ISE service providers to demonstrate and increase the value they deliver to their funders are discussed below.

Using Data to Demonstrate the Value Delivered by ISE Providers

To strengthen support for public funder investment in ICIE for people with disabilities, providers of ISE services must be able to clearly demonstrate the **value** they deliver to funders. This requires going beyond a commitment to encouraging and supporting people with disabilities to work in ICIE. In other words, recognizing the difference between “having good values” and “delivering good value.” In this context, the word “*values*” refers to the principles that guide the work of ISE, while the word “*value*” refers to the *return on investment* of ISE services, or more specifically, the combination of service quality and cost-effectiveness.

Funders want to know which ISE service providers can deliver the highest quality outcomes for what they pay to all ISE providers. They seek to identify which ISE service providers can deliver *both quality and efficiency, not just one without the other*. Tracking and being able to share data demonstrating quality and efficiency is especially important in contract and payment negotiations. ISE service providers are in a better negotiating position when they can show that by using best practices, they can deliver higher quality services for the same or lower cost than other providers.

One of the most effective ways ISE service providers can demonstrate value is by collecting and using data to show the *quality and efficiency* of their ISE services. **Outcome measures** help ISE providers track the results of services, such as number and diversity of employers hiring, supported employee hours worked, wages, uninterrupted work history, successful reduction in paid support (i.e., fading), and reduction in avoidable, non-preventative health and mental health costs. **Process measures** help ISE providers track how efficiently and effectively ISE services are delivered by

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focusing on staff practices including timeliness and efficiency in using best and evidence-based service delivery strategies.

ISE providers should also regularly analyze their data to understand why certain trends are occurring. This type of analysis can reveal successful strategies to replicate, weaknesses to address, and opportunities for continuous quality improvement. Regularly sharing results with funders helps demonstrate transparency, accountability, and a commitment to high performance and cost-effectiveness. The same information can also be used with employers, individuals, and families to build confidence in the provider’s ability to effectively support employment outcomes.

Key Outcome Data Points	Key Process Data Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Job alignment w/job goal ▪ Placements across industries, beyond food service, janitorial, and other relatively low wage jobs, and total number of employers ▪ Successful placement rate ▪ Trending over time average hours/week, average hourly wages, and benefits offered/taken ▪ Retention rates, satisfaction rates (supported employees & employers) ▪ Career advancement outcomes ▪ Re-employment rate and timeframe after job loss/resignation ▪ Job Development/Placement – hours (& length of time) person needs to work (based on pay and work schedule) to offset cost of JD/JP with their earnings ▪ Job Coaching – cost per hour worked by supported employee; cost per dollar earned by the supported employee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timely service starts – length of time between referral date and first date of service ▪ Timely service end – number of services delivered within appropriate timeframe (without need for extension caused by staff/agency) ▪ Job Development/Placement – average time to accepted job offer ▪ Re-employment after job loss/resignation – average time to accepted job offer ▪ Job Development/Placement for specific job seeker – number of new/existing employer contacts, type/quality of employer contacts, frequency and timeliness of follow-up with employers, number of meetings/interviews with potential employers ▪ Job Coaching – written fading plan being used, written task analysis and teaching plan being used, consistency of coach, coaching hours over time represented as % of supported employee hours worked, % reduction in coaching hours achieved quarterly, use of assistive technology/aids (number and type), use of natural supports (at and outside of work)

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Delivering Value to Funders through Adoption of Best Practice ISE Strategies Across Services

As stated earlier, value is a combination of quality and cost-effectiveness, which is achieved by the effective and efficient use of best practices. Value is not delivered through efficient service delivery without high quality, or through high quality service delivery without efficiency. By using best practices for job match, training, applying enabling technology and facilitation of workplace inclusion, quality and cost-effectiveness are both possible, with the presence of both indicated by a successful reduction in paid ISE services that occurs as an individual with a disability's tenure in ICIE increases. The savings from this “fading”, reduced health and mental health costs, and avoidance of the need to purchase non-work service alternatives, along with the benefits to the person with a disability together create the value for funders of ISE services.

Given the clear economic, health, and quality-of-life benefits of ICIE for people with disabilities and the value that is possible to deliver to funders through the provision of best practice ISE services, providers of ISE can deliver even more value to funders by using ISE as the lens through which they design and deliver similar services such as Skill Building Assistance, Group Supported Employment and Community Living Supports (CLS). In Michigan's 1915(j) State Plan Amendment, these three services are already defined in ways that support this approach, with a consistent emphasis on skill acquisition, person-centered supports, and the expectation of fading paid service over time as independence **and interdependence with unpaid sources of support** are built. When service delivery strategies for Skill-Building and Group Supported Employment are aligned with those used in ISE, Skill Building can enable people to successfully **acquire** employment-related skills, explore ICIE options, and take meaningful steps toward ICIE within reasonable timeframes. When service delivery strategies for CLS are aligned with those used in ISE, CLS can enable people to successfully **acquire** self-advocacy skills, mobility skills, and soft skills while participating in the community in ways that have the added benefit of exposing people to ICIE and encouraging them to pursue ICIE to enjoy the benefits that come with this. For service providers, this approach means focusing on demonstrating the value of Skill-Building, Group Supported Employment and CLS by using ISE best practices and showing the results in measurable skill acquisition, ability to fade paid staffing over time and the effectiveness of these services in encouraging and supporting people to pursue and successfully obtain ICIE.

Tracking Progress Toward ICIE

Implementing a program-level tracker across Skill Building, Group Supported Employment and CLS services helps providers see and facilitate clearer pathways to ICIE for those served, and

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demonstrate to funders the progress individuals are making over time. By using an “Employment Path” tracker for example, action steps for staff to move each individual along the path can be more easily identified and incorporated into service delivery. The tracker also makes each person’s movement toward ICIE visible over time for use in person-centered planning and in demonstrating key outcomes of your services to funders.

The “Employment Path Tracker” should capture whether a person in CLS is interested in ICIE. (Current policy expects that anyone in Skill-Building or Group Supported Employment is already interested in using those services to help achieve ICIE.) Other things to be tracked should include Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) status and progress, job status, job satisfaction and desire for career advancement. As noted previously, specific action steps and strategies needed to move the person forward on the Employment Path should be woven into each person’s service plan.

All provider staff must recognize the quality of employment conversations matters. Employment discussions should go beyond asking, “Do you want to work?” or “Do you want to work in the community?” Skill-Building and Group Supported Employment should always be introduced and reinforced as training services, not long-term employment options. Effective conversations to facilitate informed choice around employment are framed as open-ended conversations about the person’s interests, strengths, experiences, knowledge, goals for life – not just career - and untapped potential. Staff should encourage high aspirations for employment. Activities in Skill Building, Group Supported Employment and CLS can be intentionally designed to give people opportunities to explore a range of employment possibilities to build their own positive vision and preferences about ICIE.

An agency’s Employment Path Tracker should be updated and reviewed every month or two by Skill Building, Group Supported Employment, CLS, and ISE program managers for coordinated planning and accountability that ensures the expectation of reasonable and continued progress on the Employment Path not overlooked or delayed. This level of coordination can prevent people from remaining in Skill Building or Group Supported Employment services, without at least part-time transition to ICIE, for long periods of time, which ensures alignment with current MDHHS policy expectations captured in the service definitions for these services. By documenting movement toward and transition to ICIE - including increased interest, acquisition of employment-related skills, increased referrals to MRS, and transitions into ISE services - providers can show funders their services are producing measurable outcomes and delivering value through purposeful and efficient progress on the expected outcomes of these services.

Employment Path Tracker Examples:

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- https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18ulbX3Q7DrNXvTjP38YMXH5Eh6OBs8TH/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=100743014037152975055&rtpof=true&sd=true
- https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ei1TXMOMO1JBN0sAl0S2mVKlthTpZCSK/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=100743014037152975055&rtpof=true&sd=true

Cross-Training Staff to Strengthen Pathways to CIE

Cross-training Skill Building, Group Supported Employment and CLS staff to be ISE job coaches can further strengthen service quality and ISE service capacity, which will reduce ISE service gaps while facilitating career advancement opportunities for these staff. To be effective, training should include attention to best practices for ISE, including teaching strategies using task analysis, systematic instruction, enabling technology and other effective and evidence-based methods for fading so staff can support people in learning tasks in ways that build competence and independence over time. This will also ensure your agency's delivery of Skill-Building, Group Supported Employment and CLS services utilizes these ISE best practices to maximize positive outcomes for individuals served and value for funders.

When Skill Building, Group Supported Employment and CLS staff are also trained to provide ISE job coaching support, agencies build a more skilled, multi-dimensional and flexible workforce while also ensuring skill acquisition and fading outcomes can occur in all services. **This also helps providers address their workforce shortages, as existing staff that fade can have that time reassigned to people waiting for staff availability.** In addition, many providers struggle to expand their Supported Employment programs because they do not have enough trained job coaches, which can lead to waitlists. The cross-training strategy particularly enables providers to respond more effectively as demand for ICIE and ISE services grow. Job coaching can also give Skill Building Group Supported Employment and CLS staff firsthand experience to what ISE looks like, which can encourage them to take opportunities to provide more ISE.

Conclusion and Reflection

ICIE is a critical health and quality of life outcome for people with disabilities. ISE services delivered using evidence-based and best practices are essential for supporting individuals with mental health, intellectual and developmental disabilities to find and keep ICIE. ISE services lead to increased value for public funders by delivering higher quality and cost-effectiveness. The ISE approach to delivering supports can also be a model to ensure Skill-Building, Group Supported Employment and CLS can deliver similar quality and cost-effectiveness, while also assisting providers to address their workforce shortages and need to offer career advancement opportunities to staff. Service providers play a critical role in making all this possible by using the

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strategies outlined in this brief in addition to adopting a commitment to the benefits of ICIE for those they serve, employers and public funders. The providers that stand out to people with disabilities and public funders will be those that not only embrace Employment First values but also show measurable results through effective service delivery. As you review your current practices, consider the following:

- Are your Skill Building, CLS, and Group Supported Employment services intentionally aligned to support clear pathways to ICIE with ISE services?
- Do staff engage in meaningful employment conversations that build high expectations and help people develop a positive vision about employment?
- Do you have a system for tracking each person's movement toward ICIE that is updated and reviewed regularly across programs?
- Are people making timely, measurable progress toward ICIE, or are they remaining in preparatory services too long without clear movement forward?
- Do staff have the skills, training and mentoring/support needed to deliver high-quality employment supports, including best-practice job development, task analysis, systematic instruction, integration of enabling technology and strategies for fading?
- Are you cross-training staff in ways that strengthen flexibility, reduce service gaps, support growth in Supported Employment and provide staff with career advancement opportunities?
- Are you using outcome and process data to show both the quality and efficiency of your services?
- Can you clearly communicate the value of your CIE-related services to funders, employers, individuals, and families, recognizing that value for funders is defined differently than value for individuals, families and employers?

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