



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**



Inclusion Works Strategic Plan

Competitive Integrated Employment in NC

2025-2030

Expanding **Competitive Integrated Employment**

Opportunities for People with I/DD

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Introduction

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is committed to supporting individuals, regardless of disability status, to have the opportunity to work in the community in competitive integrated employment (CIE) if they choose to do so. DHHS values full integration and supports the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to choose their own pathways. Over the past decade, North Carolina has worked to transform services and systems to support people with disabilities as fully included members of their communities. However, North Carolinians with disabilities remain less likely to be employed in the community than their peers without disabilities. The North Carolina Office of State Human Resources reported in 2022 that only 35 percent of working age North Carolinians with disabilities are employed as compared to 76 percent of North Carolinians without disabilities.¹

What is Competitive Integrated Employment?

Competitive integrated employment (CIE)² includes full-time or part-time work, self-employment, and small business ownership for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities who...

- Are paid at least minimum wage, at a rate that is comparable to the rate of pay of others doing similar work
- Work alongside others with and without disabilities in comparable roles
- Get the same benefits and opportunities as other employees doing the same job

All North Carolinians can work in CIE with the right job supports in place.

North Carolina's Commitment to CIE

Inclusion Works is a North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Initiative to promote Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD).

INCLUSION WORKS



¹ <https://oshr.nc.gov/state-employee-resources/equal-employment-opportunity/resources/employment-first>

² U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Disability Employment Policy’s Definition of Competitive Integrated Employment: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie>

Founded in 2023³, Inclusion Works is a collaboration between the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMHDDSUS), the Division of Health Benefits (DHB), and the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD) – which is the general vocational rehabilitation agency for the state.

Inclusion Works is a collaborative effort to focus on providing work opportunities for people with I/DD that offer:

- Integrated work alongside coworkers with and without disabilities
- Opportunities to earn a living wage that is always at/above minimum wage and comparable to those doing similar work
- Opportunities to work in a variety of career fields based on interests, abilities and availability

Inclusion Works recognizes that there are no “disability jobs”. Every person with a disability has the right to pursue any job, and Inclusion Works is there to support them in doing so.

CIE is critical to achieving equal opportunity, full participation, and economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities. CIE allows individuals to work in the community alongside other employees without disabilities. It also allows individuals to earn at least minimum wage and receive the same workplace benefits and opportunities as other employees doing the same job. Businesses also benefit when hiring from the diverse, overlooked talent pool of workers with disabilities. Research demonstrates that disability-inclusive companies outperform their peers and report higher profits, increased innovation, and improved productivity.

DHHS has updated the Inclusion Works Strategic Plan in partnership with self-advocates, families, providers, and additional stakeholders. DHHS will continue to enhance employment services and supports for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, including Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), by aligning them with evidence-based and promising practices to promote informed choice and more opportunities for CIE.

Please note, all strategies and interventions listed in this Strategic Plan are subject to funding availability. Funding includes state and federal funding sources.

³ NCDHHS began programmatic activities as part of CIE Initiative in 2021. The work for this Program was framed as “Inclusion Works” in 2023.

Goals

Inclusion Works identified 5 Goals to address as priority areas in this Strategic Plan:

Our Goals
Informed Choice: Provide people with I/DD the opportunity to pursue competitive integrated employment if that is their choice
Quality I/DD Services: Expand and improve service options for people with I/DD to help reach employment goals
Community Outreach: Increase proactive communication and engagement with all community partners to provide accessible information about CIE options and resources
Workforce Development: Develop the North Carolina workforce for Employment Service Professionals to increase staff capabilities and enhance service delivery
Employer Connection: Promote an increase in employment opportunities through building employer capacity

Mission

Inclusion Works is committed to **expanding supported employment services** and to **improving and increasing CIE** for people with I/DD in North Carolina by:

- Ensuring that people with disabilities have more choices and options
- Supporting providers to update the tools and processes they use to help individuals with employment
- Partnering with community services (like Adult Developmental Vocational Programs/ In Lieu of Services) to support people with I/DD and contribute to a meaningful week

Vision

Inclusion Works empowers people with I/DD to thrive in integrated workplaces of their choice through access to supporting services, ensuring fair pay, and fostering inclusivity.

Inclusion Works aligns with the five principles established in the DMHDDSUS Strategic Plan. These five principles were identified through conversations with community partners and these important concepts underly all the work across DMHDDSUS. DHB and EIPD share support for these five guiding principles and join together to create an enterprise-wide vision for Inclusion Works.

The principles help drive us toward a vision of communities where all individuals are supported to live healthier and happier lives. Employment is a critical piece of this vision to improve the overall quality of life for people with disabilities.

Our Principles⁴

	<p>Lived Experience. We value lived experience by listening to and advocating for individuals and families, championing the expertise of peers, promoting natural and community supports, and creating opportunities for meaningful partnerships.</p> <p>We know our partners have diverse perspectives, backgrounds, histories, and identities that can help inform everything we do at the Division. We will center and learn from our partners' experiences to improve our work.</p>
	<p>Equity. We create policies that help everyone get what they need to live healthy lives in their communities, with a particular focus on improving access to services for historically marginalized populations.</p> <p>Equity means ensuring, through fair and just treatment, that all North Carolinians can achieve optimal health outcomes. In alignment with the 2024-2026 DHHS Strategic Plan, we will work with partners to overcome equity barriers for historically marginalized populations. We will monitor key metrics indicating the success and reach of our services across all population groups, and we will ensure that we and our partners are accountable for overcoming known, persistent health inequities.</p>
	<p>Inclusivity. We commit to ensuring that everyone who uses our systems feels welcomed, and our policies support the health and well-being of all North Carolinians, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, national origin, socioeconomic status, religion, ability, culture, and experience.</p> <p>We commit to ensuring that no individual feels unsupported by our services and supports by taking steps to improve service accessibility for consumers and reduce burdens for providers.</p>
	<p>Quality. We promote the provision of high-quality, evidence-based services and supports that leverage the expertise and best practices of our clinical partners.</p> <p>A quality-informed approach means leveraging data to perform oversight and promoting services and supports that lead to better outcomes. It includes regulating Plans and providers to ensure people receive services quickly and in compliance with all rules and requirements followed. The Division will also share the data we collect so our partners can hold us accountable every step of the way.</p>
	<p>Trauma Informed. We recognize the reality of trauma and promote a culture of kindness, understanding, and respect for every person.</p> <p>Trauma has a real, measurable effect on the way we interact with the world around us. We commit to making sure our systems, services, and supports are reactive to life experience, and we aim to resist re-traumatization.</p>

⁴ [NC DMH/DD/SUS 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.](#)

Terms & Definitions

The following additional terms are used throughout this Strategic Plan

- **Adult Developmental Vocational Program (ADVP)** is a licensure status for facilities and services to provide organized developmental activities for adults with developmental disabilities to help prepare them to live and work as independently as possible.
- **Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD)** is a division within the NC Department of Health and Human Services that helps people with disabilities in NC achieve their goals for competitive integrated employment and greater independence.
- **In Lieu of Services (ILOS)** are services and/or settings not covered under the Medicaid State Plan but that are medically appropriate, cost-effective alternatives to covered services that are provided under Medicaid Managed Care.
- **Individual Service Plan (ISP)** is a version of a Person-Centered Plan (PCP). See *Person-Centered Plan* definition below.
- **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)** is a plan developed with the eligible VR program participant and their EIPD VR Counselor. It is developed with a specific career goal and lists services to be provided to reach that goal.
- **Informed Choice/ Informed Decision Making** is the principle that everyone, regardless of disability status, can make choices if given the opportunity and support.
- **Intellectual and Developmental Disability (I/DD)**, as defined by the NC Department of Health and Human Services, is a lifelong disability that begins at birth or during childhood and affects an individual's daily living and functioning with the need for assistance with activities of daily living. Developmental disabilities can be caused by a mental impairment, a physical impairment, or a combination of both mental and physical.
- **Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCO)** are responsible for managing and overseeing public mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance use services at the community level. NCDHHS contracts with the LME/MCOs to provide state-funded services to people across North Carolina, making them a key partner. LME/MCOs are the same organizations as Tailored Plans. Because Tailored Plans are the same organizations as LME/MCOs, this Strategic Plan will use LME/MCO throughout.

- **Non-CIE Work Setting** is an organization or environment that employs people with disabilities separate from people without disabilities and may pay individuals less than minimum wage.
- **Person-Centered Plan (PCP)** is a plan developed by the individual with I/DD, and the people who will provide the supports and services to help the individual with I/DD meet their goals. The PCP includes an assessment of interests and skills, an action plan, and an intervention plan. ISPs are a type of PCPs.
- **Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)** are EIPD-sponsored services for students with disabilities, mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), to help them explore CIE careers and post-secondary training, develop workplace skills, and self-advocacy skills, gain confidence in their abilities. A student with a disability does not have to be an EIPD client to receive Pre-ETS services.
- **Project Spark** is a program created by EIPD to help people with I/DD move from jobs that pay less than minimum wage into competitive integrated employment. There are currently three Provider agencies delivering the Project Spark: Wake Enterprises, Chatham Trades and TCI Works. Project Spark is funded through a 5-year Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration that is set to conclude Fall 2027 if not refunded.
- **Providers** are organizations or agencies that offer employment-related services to individuals, which may include ADVP/ILOS services, Supported Employment, and wraparound services that contribute to an individual's meaningful day
- **Tailored Plans** are managed care organizations that ensure individuals across North Carolina receive necessary healthcare services, including mental health, developmental disability, or substance use disorder treatment services. There are four regional LME/MCOs in North Carolina, each ensuring services are provided for a set of counties throughout the state.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services** are a diverse program of services delivered by EIPD to assist people with disabilities with achieving their goals of competitive integrated employment
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)** - The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law by President Obama on July 22, 2014, to help job seekers – including people with disabilities – access the services they need to succeed in employment and match employers with skilled workers.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The Inclusion Works Strategic Plan focuses on the most salient issues surrounding employment for North Carolina adults with I/DD, their caregivers, and service providers. This plan was built with input from our community partners. The Inclusion Works Employment Advisory Committee meets monthly and has helped refine the Strategic Plan to reflect the perspectives and desires of the I/DD Employment Community. A comprehensive [Landscape Assessment](#) was conducted by Work Together NC to identify focus areas and service-related gaps in North Carolina for people with I/DD. This analysis was incorporated into the Strategic Plan, which outlines the vision for improving CIE opportunities and outcomes in North Carolina.

Our Goals
Informed Choice: Provide people with I/DD the opportunity to pursue competitive integrated employment if that is their choice
Quality I/DD Services: Expand and improve service options for people with I/DD to help reach employment goals
Community Outreach: Increase proactive communication and engagement with all community partners to provide accessible information about CIE options and resources
Workforce Development: Develop the North Carolina workforce for Employment Service Professionals to increase staff capabilities and enhance service delivery
Employer Connection: Promote an increase in employment opportunities through building employer capacity

The Inclusion Works Strategic Plan is organized by outlining the Goals, Objectives, and Strategies that DHHS will employ to increase Competitive Integrated Employment for people with I/DD.

- The Goals are broad statements focusing on the desired outcome.
- The Objectives are the detailed steps needed to achieve the Goal.
- The Strategies describe the actions DHHS will take to accomplish the Objective.

There are metric tables under each goal that specify the desired outcome for that goal. An up arrow “↑” indicates that this item is expected increase and a down arrow “↓” indicates that this item is expected to decrease. The NC Department of Health and Human Services will collect data on the progress of each of these goals. More information on data and reporting can be found in the [Appendix: Data Collection and Reporting](#).

GOAL 1 – PROVIDE PEOPLE WITH I/DD THE OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT IF THAT IS THEIR CHOICE

Objective 1: An Informed Choice Process will be followed to empower people with I/DD to make decisions based on a complete understanding of employment options.

- ❖ **Strategy 1.1:** Develop a process for individuals to make an Informed Choice about their employment options. This process will be person-centered with a focus on engaging the individual in an approach that matches their style of learning to lead to a complete understanding of employment options. This must occur at a pace that matches the individual's learning style. People trusted by the individual should be part of the person-centered approach along with service provider and case management team members.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.2:** Work with identified individuals to complete Employment Assessments and co-create Career Development Plans when consent is provided to do so.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.3:** For individuals interested in competitive integrated employment, offer additional skills assessments and observation opportunities. Through this process, individuals can explore different job opportunities to inform and reach their desired employment outcomes.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.4:** Periodically revisit individuals and conduct re-assessments as needed to confirm informed choice regarding employment

Measuring Progress

We will track progress towards this Goal with the following metrics:

Metric	Desired Outcome
Number of individuals who have completed the new Employment Assessment process	↑
Number of individuals with a Preliminary Career Development Plan following the Employment Assessment Process	↑
Number of people with I/DD referred to EIPD VR Services as a recommendation of their Preliminary Career Development Plan	↑

GOAL 2 – EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICE OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH I/DD TO HELP THEM REACH THEIR EMPLOYMENT GOALS

Objective 1: Increase participation in Supported Employment Services

- ❖ **Strategy 1.1:** Increase participation in Medicaid-funded SE Services for Medicaid-eligible individuals
- ❖ **Strategy 1.2:** Increase participation in State-Funded SE services for individuals who are not eligible for Medicaid options.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.3** – Support individuals working in CIE to maintain and advance their career with long-term vocational supports (LTVS).

Objective 2: Increase the number of people with I/DD participating in EIPD Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services

- ❖ **Strategy 2.1:** Individuals in non-CIE employment who make an informed decision to pursue CIE following the new Employment Assessment process will be referred to EIPD as part of their Career Development Plans.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.2:** Increase monitoring and support for students with I/DD through the provision of Pre-ETS services, Internships and Project Search.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.3:** Provide increased support for people with I/DD seeking CIE through the Project Spark grant program at select Provider agencies.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.4:** Broaden post-secondary education opportunities by partnering with colleges and universities to offer employment-related supports for students with I/DD
- ❖ **Strategy 2.5:** Help to educate Tailored Care Managers and other professionals on the process of achieving CIE through EIPD.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.6:** Provide additional supports for people with I/DD who are considering CIE with CIE Outreach Case Managers (OCM) who can support them to apply and engage in VR services through an IPE, connect them with certified Benefits Counselors, and provide other resources to obtain ongoing support for CIE.

Objective 3: Assist people with I/DD with effective transportation planning to help overcome this persistent barrier to CIE.

- ❖ **Strategy 3.1:** Evaluate state policy options to develop and expand transportation services. Determine feasibility of coverage for pick-up and drop-off services and explore alternative solutions including rideshare services and local community transportation options.
- ❖ **Strategy 3.2:** As appropriate, support individuals to explore the possibility of independent travel to work and to navigate the NCDMV and public transportation systems.

Objective 4: Maintain a comprehensive system of support with wraparound services for people with I/DD, including ADVP/ILOS, HCBS, and residential services

- ❖ **Strategy 4.1:** Explore service models for meaningful day opportunities in the community that include locally developed programs and nationally recognized models meeting Home and Community-Based Services standards set forth by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).
- ❖ **Strategy 4.2:** Support Tailored Care Management model to include Community Navigator services. Promote Tailored Care Management extender roles that establish partnerships with community organizations to support greater community participation.
- ❖ **Strategy 4.3:** Provide training and professional development for Care Managers and Employment Service Providers to utilize community mapping as a tool to identify and build partnerships with an array of community organizations and resources.

Measuring Progress

We will track progress towards this Goal with the following metrics:

Metric	Desired Outcome
Number of individuals receiving I/DD Supported Employment services in NC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-Funded Supported Employment • Medicaid Supported Employment • EIPD Supported Employment 	↑
Number of individuals receiving Long-Term Vocational Supports while employed in CIE	↑
Number of individuals with an open and active EIPD case	↑
Number of individuals starting a job in CIE following EIPD VR services	↑
Number of participants in Pre-ETS annually ⁵	↑
Number of participants in Project Spark	↑

⁵ Note: Pre-ETS serves students with disabilities (inclusive of I/DD) and these students with disabilities may participate in Pre-ETS without applying for or being determined eligible for VR services. For Pre-ETS, a student with a disability is defined as an individual with a disability in a secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized education program who is aged 14-21 years and is (1) eligible for and receiving special education or related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or (2) is a student who is an individual with a disability for the purposes of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (34 CFR §361.5(c)(51)).

GOAL 3 – INCREASE PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH ALL COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION ABOUT CIE OPTIONS AND RESOURCES

Objective 1: Communicate and promote information about Inclusion Works across multiple media platforms and languages to reach targeted audiences

- ❖ **Strategy 1.1:** Update the NCDHHS Inclusion Works website to continue to make it a helpful source of information, with links to resources and guides to help educate and support individuals seeking CIE.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.2:** Develop mixed-media, plain language materials for specific audiences in the I/DD community to promote the benefits of CIE and ways to get connected to support. Highlight disability-led employment success stories with the community.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.3:** Implement and promote Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) website. DB101 is a plain-language resource for people with I/DD or their care providers to access information on NC Benefits and Work Incentives information.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.4:** Include a language access strategy to ensure all oral and written communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate for diverse audiences served by Inclusion Works. Ensure information is available across multiple media platforms and meets accessibility standards.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.5:** Make available educational materials and training guides to employers in North Carolina on accessible hiring practices and reasonable accommodations.

Objective 2: Engage with community stakeholders to inform policies and programs related to I/DD Employment

- ❖ **Strategy 2.1:** Form Inclusion Works Advisory Committee to offer guidance around the implementation of the Inclusion Works Strategic Plan.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.2:** Provide multiple and ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback through meetings, public webinars, family support groups, and conferences attended by Inclusion Works resources.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.3:** Engage with local business partners through networking events hosted by North Carolina Chamber of Commerce and local Employment Service Providers to build connections and meet workforce needs with people with I/DD.



Measuring Progress

We will track progress towards this Goal with the following metrics:

Metric	Desired Outcome
Number of stakeholders attending Inclusion Works Advisory Committee meetings	↑
Number of users visiting Inclusion Works website (web traffic)	↑
Number of quarterly stakeholder events open to the public hosted by Inclusion Works	↑

GOAL 4 – DEVELOP THE NORTH CAROLINA WORKFORCE FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROFESSIONALS TO INCREASE STAFF CAPABILITIES AND ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY

Objective 1: Build a workforce with well-trained, competent professionals to educate and prepare people with I/DD to achieve CIE

- ❖ **Strategy 1.1:** Provide training events and tools for Employment Service Providers and Care Managers in designed to add to their knowledge, skills, and abilities to deliver quality employment services.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.2:** Provide Technical Assistance and support to Provider agencies adopting new processes for Employment Services Delivery.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.3:** Create a CIE Learning Collaborative that includes programmatic staff, executive leadership, and direct support professionals at Provider Agencies. Provider Agencies in the CIE Learning Collaborative will serve as peer mentor sites for other Providers who are interested in transforming their current models of employment services.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.4:** Increase the number of employment professionals with professional certifications by funding training courses from accredited organizations.

Objective 2: Support Providers and LME/MCOs to operationalize and implement best practices for CIE through Innovation Programs and other funding opportunities

- ❖ **Strategy 2.1:** Launch the Inclusion Works Provider Innovation Program to support North Carolina Provider agencies in transforming their business and service delivery models to increase CIE.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.2:** Implement a CIE Incentive Program to reward Providers who provide services that lead to CIE for people with I/DD.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.3:** Support capacity building at LME/MCOs by adding CIE Coordinator positions that will work with people with I/DD and their families to provide linkages to services that enable individuals to explore and achieve CIE.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.4:** Project Spark will support Providers at select pilot locations to provide comprehensive support for members to achieve CIE.
- Strategy 2.5:** Provide funding for capacity building at Provider agencies through grant opportunities such as the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Provider Incentives.

- ❖ **Strategy 2.6:** Evaluate the current system of Provider reimbursement rates for employment services to incentivize long-term CIE outcomes. Explore options to modify funding model to support additional training and services informed by best practices.

Measuring Progress

We will track progress towards this Goal with the following metrics:

Metric	Desired Outcome
Number of NC Employment Provider staff completing Wise Online Academy Courses	↑
Number of CIE Incentive Program payments made to providers	↑
Number of NC Employment Provider staff acquiring Work Incentive Practitioner Certifications for Benefits Counseling	↑
Number of NC Employment Providers completing Inclusion Works Provider Innovation Program	↑

GOAL 5 – PROMOTE INCREASED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH BUILDING EMPLOYER CAPACITY

Objective 1: Provide employers with training, resources, and connections to other inclusive employers

- ❖ **Strategy 1.1:** Provide EIPD Windmills training to private businesses and public organizations across the state
- ❖ **Strategy 1.2:** Partner with the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce, NC Works, EIPD, and local organizations to identify CIE employers with inclusive hiring principles and practices.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.5:** Develop additional employer resources on the benefits of hiring qualified workers with disabilities such as: access to a skilled talent pool, improved company culture, tax incentives, and enhanced public image, while also contributing to a more inclusive and diverse workplace.
- ❖ **Strategy 1.6:** Develop partnerships with professional Human Resources organizations to provide information and disseminate resources related to CIE

Objective 2: Establish events to support connection among employers, service providers, and adults with I/DD

- ❖ **Strategy 2.1:** Host job networking events across the state to connect people with I/DD and potential employers.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.2:** Work with employers to inform them about paid internship opportunities to match their job needs with future workers with disabilities.
- ❖ **Strategy 2.4:** Launch a career training program to prepare I/DD Peer Mentors to be qualified to enter employment in human service occupations.

Measuring Progress

We will track progress towards this Goal with the following metrics:

Metric	Desired Outcome
Number of EIPD Windmill Trainings administered annually to businesses in NC	↑
Number of paid internships provided for people with disabilities	↑
Number of CIE employers that hired people with disabilities	↑

Appendix

Goal 1 – Informed Choice

Informed Choice

Informed choice is based on the principle that everyone, regardless of disability status, can make choices if given the opportunity and support to do so. People are presumed competent to make decisions for themselves. Informed choice means that people make their own decisions based on complete and accurate information. It occurs when a person, with or without reasonable accommodations, understands all the options available to them, including the benefits and risks of their decisions. Additional components of informed choice, specifically related to VR services, are defined within [34 CFR 361.52-Informed Choice](#). Informed choice is part of an ongoing process of engaging people in person-centered conversations about their goals. The process of informed choice doesn't have an end and doesn't just occur one time.

Informed choice is central to NCDHHS's plan to expand CIE opportunities for people with I/DD. Individuals, families, caregivers and guardians will be engaged regularly in conversations about employment goals and options. Information on all available options will be provided in a way that is easily understood and will include benefits, risks, and steps to move forward, if desired. Informed choice will include an opportunity to visit and observe people working in CIE and to talk with them about their experience. Choices are respected and individuals will not be forced to do something that they don't want to do.

Providers and direct support professionals play an important role in informed choice. They help ensure that the individual, family, care giver and/or guardian understand the breadth of options available, the benefits and risks of their choices, and the next steps needed to achieve their goals. Providers play an important role to help people connect with community resources that support accomplishing their goals.

Informed choice does not always result in a decision to pursue CIE. DHHS respects the informed choice of individuals who choose not to pursue CIE. DHHS will ensure that the informed choice process includes other options that are available to the individual. Other options include meaningful day activities such as volunteering, participating in day programs, and social opportunities.

Employment Assessment

People with I/DD approaching or of working age already will have the opportunity to take part in career development planning if they choose to do so. Part of this planning includes participating in Employment Assessments. All individuals working in non-CIE jobs in NC

will be provided an Employment Assessment at their provider location. The Employment Assessments are individualized assessments designed to identify the strengths of the individual with I/DD and their interest in pursuing CIE. The assessment includes questions about the individual's employment interests, their specific needs for employment, their previous employment history, and their current employment status. Families, caregivers, and guardians will also have the opportunity to participate in an employment assessment to share their perspectives about the employment-related strengths and needs of the individual with I/DD.

During 2024-2026, Work Together NC will conduct the Employment Assessments. In the long term, the Employment Assessment will be provided by the professional who typically helps the individual with their Person-Centered Plan (PCP) or Individual Service Plan (ISP) PCP or ISP. This professional will be either the service provider for people with I/DD receiving a State-funded service or the LME/MCO Care Coordinator for people with I/DD receiving a Medicaid-funded service. If the provider is unable to complete the Employment Assessment and the individual does not have Medicaid, a referral will be made to EIPD to apply for VR services.

Career Development Plan

The results of the employment assessment will be used to develop a Preliminary Career Development Plan, which will become part of the individual's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) or PCP. Preliminary Career Development Plans include:

- Areas of Work Interest
- Recommended Next Steps to pursue employment
 - Applying for VR services with EIPD
 - Connecting to LME/MCO
 - Defining support needed and any barriers to employment
 - Completing focused assessments and job exposure opportunities

The Preliminary Career Development Plans are individualized based on the outcome of the Employment Assessments. Based on the Preliminary Career Development Plans, services and supports will be initiated. It is recommended that all individuals who are interested in CIE apply for VR services through EIPD. Individuals might best connect with EIPD through their EIPD Outreach Case Manager. It is also important to ensure the individuals are connected through their LME/MCO to identify long-term service providers for employment supports.

If individuals are not interested in CIE, the Preliminary Career Development plan will

capture the reasons for declining.

Goal 2 – Quality I/DD Services

Employment Services

Employment services are available for people with I/DD to provide supports necessary to find and maintain a job in CIE. The two primary services that serve this purpose are VR services from EIPD and Supported Employment Services.

EIPD VR Services

EIPD VR Services are available to anyone with a disability that wants to pursue competitive integrated employment. A person with a disability can apply for services directly at their local EIPD office.

For those presently working in non-CIE employment, they will be provided, upon consent, an Employment Assessment and Preliminary Career Development Plan through Work Together NC. They can then be referred to an EIPD Outreach Case Manager to help answer questions and provide additional support as they apply for VR services and develop their IPE.

Once VR services are initiated, individuals will receive a set of personalized services to help them reach their employment goal. This could include benefits counseling, career counseling and training, supported internships, job exposure opportunities, job placement, job coaching and more. EIPD will work with the individual to find the right services or supports based on their strengths, needs, and interests. Once employed in a CIE job, EIPD will provide any necessary supports and training. EIPD will monitor for a minimum of 90 days of employment for success and address any issues that may arise.

While individuals are working with EIPD, their care managers/care coordinators will also be identifying service providers for Long-Term Supported Employment Services and supports, if needed. Long-Term Supported Employment can be offered in individual or group settings, and there are different options available based on Medicaid eligibility.

Supported Employment Services

Supported Employment (SE) services help individuals achieve and maintain CIE. This service provides vocational evaluation, job development, intensive training, job placement, and ongoing support.

If it is an individual's first time preparing to look for a job, they will open a case with EIPD and receive a program of services that includes EIPD funded Supported Employment services. However, if individuals have already received services from EIPD and have an active relationship with a Supported Employment Provider, then services are available to provide the right supports for any employment scenario:

- Currently not working and searching for a job
- Switching jobs
- Developing on-the-job skills
- Needing individualized support to maintain job

There are different service options available to individuals depending on Medicaid Eligibility status:

Service Name	Eligibility Requirements
Medicaid-funded SE (1915(i) SE)	Medicaid recipients who complete 1915(i) assessment
State-funded SE	Non-Medicaid recipients with I/DD diagnosis, SNAP/SIS/TBI/EIPD assessment, and at least 1 functional impairment
Innovations Waiver SE	Medicaid recipients and Innovations Waiver beneficiaries

Supported Employment services are delivered by Providers through your LME/MCO. To learn more about how to apply for these services, reach out to your LME/MCO or Tailored Care Manager (for eligible Medicaid beneficiaries).

Benefits Counseling

Work incentives are special rules that allow people receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to work without losing their monthly cash and medical benefits.

North Carolina's Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program helps people with disabilities make informed decisions about work, benefits, and the use of work incentives to achieve their employment goals. WIPA services are provided at no cost for eligible SSDI/SSI beneficiaries. The benefits counselors can provide:

- Information about available benefits
- Referrals to government programs and community resources

- Counseling about the impact of paid employment on your benefits and financial independence
- Planning assistance to help you establish and achieve your goals for employment

Goal 3 – Community Outreach

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will continuously inform stakeholders about available services and resources. Stakeholders will have multiple opportunities to provide feedback through advisory board members, monthly state webinars, and digital communications on the [Inclusion Works website](#).

EIPD CIE Outreach Case Managers are available to provide information and support to people with disabilities who need it to move successfully through the process from non-CIE settings to applying for and beginning services with the VR program. They can also provide helpful information on community resources, help make connections with benefits counselors, peer mentors, etc.

Goal 4 – Workforce Development

Training and Professional Development

In 2024-2026, Wise will provide introductory and advanced training/mentorship to provider staff and leaders (course descriptions below)

Description of Customized Employment Courses

- **Introductory Training (WOA 100).** The Wise Online Academy (WOA) 100 is a 40-hour online course focusing on Customized Employment. The training curriculum has been approved by the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) Customized Employment Certification online training series, which provides employment professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to deliver quality, customized, competitive, integrated employment services to people with I/DD
- **Advanced Supported Employment Training Cohort:** Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) Certification at the Professional Level (*pending*). The Wise Online Academy (WOA) 200 is an ideal course for program management staff or senior employment professionals. ACRE is currently reviewing the curriculum for this course.
- **Customized Employment Practicum, Mentoring, and Fidelity** Graduates of the WOA 100 course will be enrolled in a 6-month practical experience with Wise Training and TA Directors. The TA will include, at a minimum, participation in a cohort of peers who will receive coaching and support that will assist them with a

customizable action planning tool, using the strategies learned in the WOA 100 series to follow the process from Discovery to Job Placement for specifically identified individuals on their caseload.

- **Train-the-Trainer Program and Services:** Project organization-designated trainers will build, manage, and use a personalized training site within the Wise Learning Management Center. Each organization will be assigned a Wise professional training staff to provide TA and assist in developing and managing a personalized training site. Each North Carolina organization's site will contain a selection of Wise's content designed to meet the unique training needs of the program. Wise will provide ongoing access to our course training catalog (which currently includes over 300 courses). The organization's staff participant will learn to develop unique state/organization-specific content and be able to monitor staff training progress and store important resource documents. Organizational training sites include:
 - Full Learning Management System administrative functions
 - Team Lead Training and 1:1 technical support
 - Unique link for onboarding new users
 - Ability to assign training content
 - Ability to run course completion reports and upload external training certificates
 - Ability to create training and issue certificates.
 - Customized branding
- **Self-Employment:** A Self Employment Community of Practice, Technical Assistance and Coaching on business development best practices. The Community of Practice will include training to assess interest in starting a business, information on the critical elements of a business plan, coaching on business plan development, considerations for entrepreneurs receiving social security benefits/Medicaid, and technical assistance during business development activities. The cohort will meet monthly and record sessions during the project. Self-Employment SMEs at EIPD will be involved in the Community of Practice.

Provider Innovation Opportunities

Wise will work with the organizations selected in developing Quality Improvement projects. Services will include a comprehensive assessment, strategic plan, organizational action plan, and capacity building plan to increase competitive integrated employment. Plans will include guidance on how to utilize services available within project funding as well as recommendations for additional services and supports in North Carolina and/or nationally.

Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce Plan

North Carolina is currently facing a critical shortage of DSPs, significantly affecting the availability and quality of home and community-based services for people with I/DD. The [DSP Workforce Plan](#) outlines the Department's comprehensive, multi-year strategy to address this shortage and reaffirms our commitment to supporting DSPs and the vital services they provide.

CIE Incentive Program

In 2024, Inclusion Works launched a new CIE Incentive Program. Providers with members working in non-CIE work settings are eligible to receive payments for individuals who find and maintain a job in a competitive, integrated setting. Providers could receive up to \$5,000 for each eligible member who successfully starts a job in a CIE setting and maintains employment for a minimum of 180 days.

As part of ongoing Provider Innovation efforts, Inclusion Works will be making adjustments to the CIE Incentive Program in 2025 to expand impact and reward Providers who are supporting members to reach CIE.

Goal 5 – Employer Connection

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) aims to boost CIE employment opportunities by offering training and resources to employers and fostering connections among inclusive employers. This includes increasing training sessions, partnering with alliances, mentoring, expanding resources, and collaborating with human resources departments. Additionally, DHHS will organize events to connect employers, service providers, and adults with I/DD.

Data Collection and Reporting

NCDHHS will collect data on progress towards expanding CIE opportunities for people with I/DD through the Metrics associated with the five Goals. Data on these metrics will help inform and drive steady progress and identify any adjustments to the Inclusion Works Strategic Plan and/or implementation efforts, including any additional services and supports required to achieve the objectives.

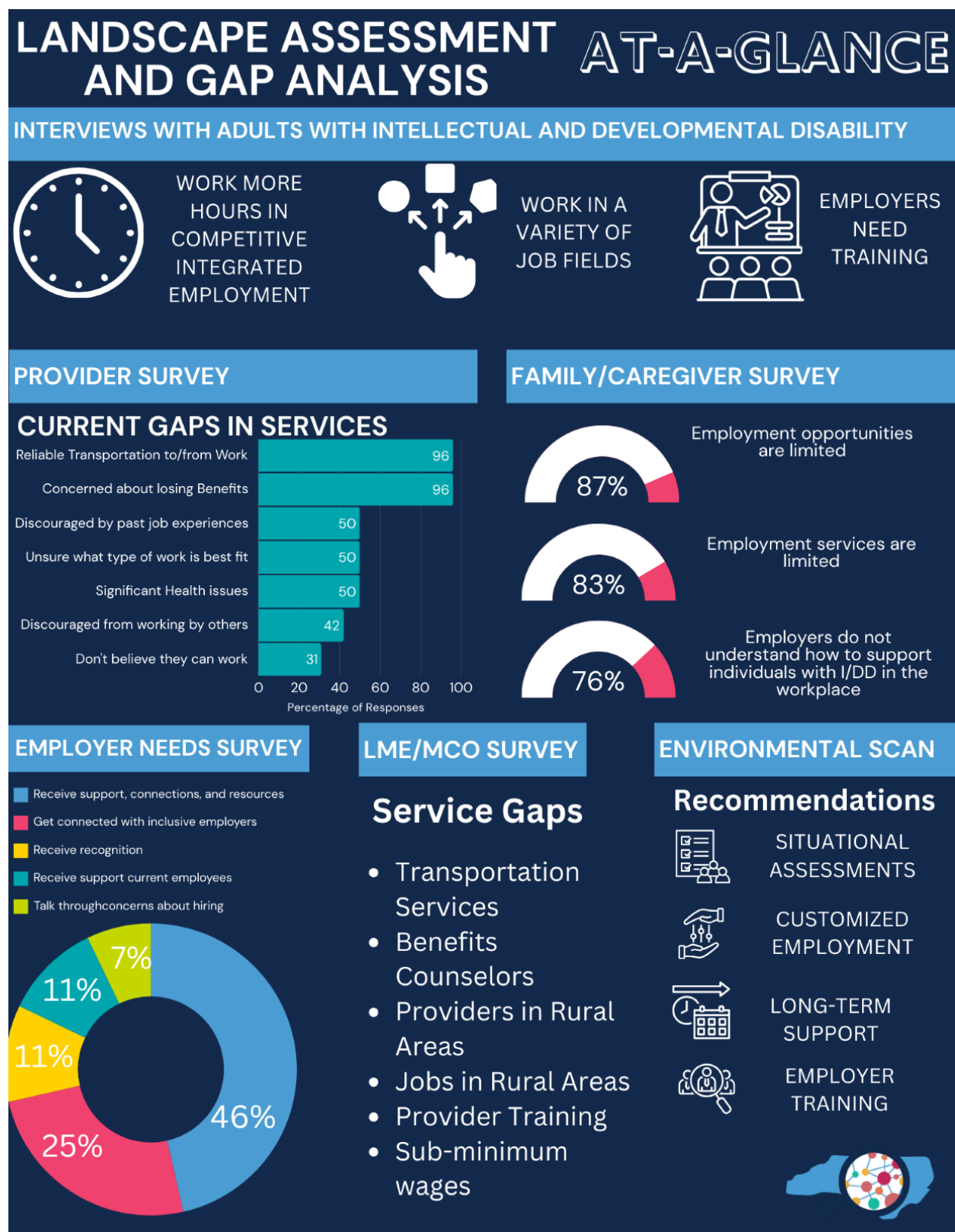
An initial baseline will be created at the time of publication of the report, and data will be updated periodically to track progress. The data will reflect a trend, either increasing or decreasing counts, to reach the desired outcome. Most data will be collected on a quarterly basis, based on existing reporting cycles with LME/MCO's and Providers.

Data will be collected from multiple sources, including but not limited to:

- **Providers and LME/MCOs** – Reports on member employment status and services for individuals receiving ADVP/ILOS services
- **Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities** – VR Services, Project Spark and Pre-ETS data
- **Service Claims Records (EPS)** – I/DD Services delivered in NC
- **Work Together NC** - Employment Assessment and Career Development Planning progress and outcomes
- **Wise** - Training Course and Provider Innovation Program enrollment information

Data is a critical component of the Inclusion Works Strategic Plan and will continue to be used to support people with I/DD to achieve CIE.

Landscape Assessment At-A-Glance



Acknowledgments

The efforts of dedicated individuals and organizations working towards promoting choice for people with I/DD in how they spend their time, including working in an integrated setting for fair pay in their communities. We are grateful to the people with I/DD, family members and caregivers, service providers, LME/MCOs, EIPD, NC DHHS, and community members for their time and effort in participating in the revision of the Inclusion Works Strategic Plan. The perspectives of those who participated provided invaluable knowledge and crucial expertise in guiding the development and revision of the Inclusion Works Strategic Plan to enhance CIE in NC.

Community Collaboration and Partnership

Inclusion Works has collaborated with WorkTogether NC, Wise, and Triangle Disability and Autism Services to implement new practices across the state and expand employment services for people with I/DD. These organizations have made significant contributions to the development of the Inclusion Works Strategic Plan

Work Together North Carolina (WTNC) is a community collaborative of employment at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The mission of WTNC is to improve the quality of life of people with I/DD and their families through (1) making it easier to navigate systems of support in the transition to adulthood and (2) increasing access to meaningful work, continued education, and community engagement. To learn more about Work Together NC, please visit <https://worktogethernc.com>.



UNC TEACCH is accredited by the Council on Quality and Leadership Person-Centered Excellence Accreditation programs. The mission of UNC TEACCH Employment Services is to partner with autistic individuals, their families, employers, and the community to promote meaningful employment that enhances the quality of life. To learn more about the UNC TEACCH Autism program, please visit www.teacch.com.



Triangle Disability and Autism Services supports children and adults with I/DD to achieve their personal goals and dreams in our community through partnership and advocacy. Triangle Disability and Autism Services supports adults with I/DD in Durham, Orange, and Wake counties. To learn more about Triangle Disability and Autism Services, please visit <https://triangledisability.org/>



Wise is a private, not for profit organization dedicated to expanding and sustaining employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Wise mission is to promote equitable employment for people with developmental disabilities through innovation, training, and technical assistance. Wise consults with multiple state agencies on state and provider policy guidance, professional employment services development, and creating peer networks. To learn more about Wise, please visit <https://www.gowise.org/>

