



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

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LME-MCO Joint Communication Bulletin # J403

Date: November 2, 2021
To: Local Management Entities-Managed Care Organizations (LME-MCOs)
From: Dave Richard, Deputy Secretary for Medicaid, DHB
Chris Egan, Senior Director for Employment and Community Inclusion, DHHS
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Subject: **Expanding opportunities for Competitive Integrated Employment and other meaningful day options for individuals with disabilities**

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is committed to transforming its services and systems to support individuals with disabilities as fully included members of their communities. To achieve this vision, the Department intends to maximize opportunities for individuals with disabilities to explore, seek, and maintain Competitive Integrated Employment and benefit from other meaningful day options.

This initiative builds upon historical efforts by DHHS to expand opportunities for North Carolinians with disabilities to achieve their goals for employment and community inclusion and furthers the Department's mission to improve the health, safety and well-being of all North Carolinians. It aligns closely with the Department's 2021 – 2023 Strategic Plan, its ongoing work to update the state's Olmstead Plan, and the integration mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

North Carolina has been engaged for many years in transforming services and systems to support individuals 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. Analyses of national trends and research on evidence-based practices indicate that supported employment interventions enable inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injury and other disabilities in Competitive Integrated Employment settings. Pursuant to the goal of expanding opportunities for Competitive Integrated Employment, the Department will enhance services and supports that promote informed decision-making and the transition from segregated to integrated community settings. Revisions to the supported employment and meaningful day service array will facilitate transition to Competitive Integrated Employment for those that choose to do so and access to modernized support services and employment resources will provide North Carolinians with disabilities more opportunities to fully participate in the community of their choice.

Prioritizing Competitive Integrated Employment for North Carolinians with disabilities is consistent with the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Final Regulation settings requirements, the integrated setting principles of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision, and other

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federal reports that determined that segregated work settings, as well as subminimum wage jobs, are no longer best practices in serving these individuals. Divisions within DHHS that serve individuals with disabilities collaborate with health professionals, community leaders, and advocacy groups; local, state, and federal partners; other divisions within DHHS; and other stakeholders to provide employment-related services and supports that promote their ability to explore, access, and maintain Competitive Integrated Employment. The Department is committed to advancing these collaborations to support an individual's ability to evaluate options, make informed choices, and understand how to access services and supports that promote training and employment in a competitive, integrated setting.

The Department's commitment to maximize Competitive Integrated Employment and meaningful day options for individuals with disabilities (e.g., Community Living and Supports, Day Supports, Supported Employment) is a comprehensive effort that continues to evolve and improve. The Department will enhance service delivery for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) by taking key steps over the next five years to align employment services with evidence-informed, current best practices. Specifically, the Department will undertake the following:

- Update and align state and Medicaid-funded Supported Employment (SE), Community Living and Supports (CLS), and Day Supports services to incorporate current best practices in the service delivery system for individuals with IDD and TBI. DHHS remains committed to consistent evaluation regarding the services provided to individuals with mental illness as well.
- Engage stakeholders in disability communities to ensure understanding of new services and pathways available to them.
- Conduct informed choice awareness campaign with focus on career pathways and related support services that lead to Competitive Integrated Employment and meaningful day options.
- Offer trainings for providers, families, and advocates regarding changes in service definitions and best practices.
- Develop and promote a comprehensive Transition to Competitive Integrated Employment guide for stakeholders that clearly explains defines the new service array and how to access inclusive educational and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Offer enhanced provider training to help inform and enrich employment service delivery.

Note: In order to bill a Medicaid waiver service, sites must be HCBS-compliant in accordance with the HCBS Final Rule. Therefore, individuals receiving Medicaid supported employment services must be in Competitive Integrated Employment in the community, earning at least minimum wage.

The unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic presented operational challenges for providers and for the individuals and families they serve. The pandemic also affected our economy in ways that impact potential Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities in North Carolina communities. With these factors in mind, the Department is committed to expanding opportunities for Competitive Integrated Employment and other meaningful day options for North Carolinians with disabilities in a transparent and proactive manner, informed by feedback from individuals with disabilities and their families, providers, advocates, and other stakeholders.

Detailed communications regarding the phased rollout of this initiative, including upcoming opportunities for stakeholder input, are forthcoming. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact the Department via email at DMHIDDContact@dhhs.nc.gov or call LaToya Chancey at 984-236-5044.

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