EMPLOYMENT FIRST
ACT OF 2018

INTERAGENCY PRIORITIES
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

JANUARY 2022
UPDATE & PROGRESS

Annual Report

Table of Contents

Employment First Overview

Employment First – Act 36 Background

Pennsylvania recognizes the value that diverse and inclusive workplaces bring to our economy by contributing different perspectives and representing the state's diverse population. In addition, all Pennsylvanians deserve to have the opportunity to pursue work that meets basic living needs and which may also contribute to a sense of self-worth, social interaction, and inclusion.

In 2016, in alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Governor Wolf issued an Executive Order establishing Employment First policy in Pennsylvania to support people with disabilities in pursuing, securing, and maintaining competitive, integrated employment (CIE). Two years later, the Employment First Act, Act 36 of 2018 (Act 36), permanently established the policy that CIE is the first consideration and preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term services and supports for individuals with a disability.

Act 36 created the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities and the Employment First Oversight Commission to ensure implementation of this policy through strong interagency collaboration and stakeholder engagement. The Act required the Governor's Office to submit an initial three-year plan to the General Assembly, outlining recommendations and strategies to implement the Act and ensure individuals with disabilities have opportunities to achieve economic independence through CIE. The Act also requires the Governor's Office and the Commission to submit annual reports.

Values

Several core values are embedded throughout state agencies' Employment First implementation:

Person-centered: Each person is a unique individual with their own interests, strengths, and abilities with the power to take an active role in the planning process, services, and opportunities that are most meaningful to them. This is represented in each agency's individualized and person-centered planning.

Holistic: Individuals are part of their families and communities, so services are provided with recognition that an individual's circumstances must be considered and that barriers may need to be addressed for effective service delivery and attainment of desired outcomes.

Equitable: Services are delivered with a focus on equity for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and disability, so that everyone has access to opportunities.

Collaborative: Partnership and meaningful stakeholder engagement are at the forefront of service delivery by agencies in state, federal, and local government. The Employment First policy is informed by insight and feedback from advocates who are experts in the field, providers who work directly with customers each day, and the individuals who are directly receiving services.

Data-informed: Data is collected and used to help monitor progress on achieving outcomes, identify areas of success and opportunity, and inform decision making in policy and programming. Data is available to the public to ensure transparency and active collaboration in advancing goals.

Impact of COVID-19

The first year of the pandemic introduced challenges to employment for all populations as businesses and communities faced an unprecedented crisis. Many businesses closed, leaving tens of thousands of people unemployed with limited job opportunities. Many service provider organizations needed to develop new methods of service delivery for participants typically reliant on in-person interactions. Many people, particularly those with underlying health conditions, were unable or hesitant to pursue services or employment due to fear of contracting the virus.

Moving into the second year of the pandemic in 2021, equipped with more information, vaccines, and mitigation strategies, there was progress in businesses reopening, people returning to jobs, and the implementation of new service delivery strategies. However, workforce changes continued to be observed, and shifts in workforce trends are still evolving. Among these, labor force participation rates have decreased for various reasons, one of which is people reassessing their job quality and career pathways. In addition, moving to a more digitally-driven society has increased reliance on technology skills needed for workforce participation, requiring considerations for people without adequate access to broadband, devices, and digital skills.

With new variants emerging in the second half of the year and bringing back some of the initial concerns, COVID-19 continues to present challenges to consistent service delivery and accurate evaluation of employment outcomes. Yet, the pandemic is also introducing new opportunities, as businesses are seeking workers and implementing incentives and policies – such as more inclusive hiring practices, telework, and higher wages – to recruit and retain employees. These dynamic influences are important to consider in evaluating Employment First outcomes, reassessing goals, and adapting to future needs.

3-year Plan Progress and Looking Forward

The initial 3-year plan required by Act 36 included a significant number of priority areas and recommendations, with the primary purpose of embedding Employment First CIE policy into daily operations across agencies. Over the past three years, examples of this policy integration include:

- **Leadership structure:** The Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities and the Employment First Oversight Commission each meet on a quarterly basis throughout the year. Staff from multiple agencies engage with the Commission to provide requested data and information, presentations, and dialogue around goals. The Governor's Policy Office and the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs also provide staffing and support to the Commission.
- **Written policy:** Employment First policy language is now found in various agency documents and materials, including official bulletins and relevant contracts.
- **Trainings and materials:** Multiple agencies regularly conduct trainings and presentations and have developed materials to support families and individuals in exploring inclusive education and employment pathways and resources, largely assisted by the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) and various partners such as Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) and Hispanos Unidos para Ninos Excepcionales (HUNE).

4

- **Website information:** Sites such as [We Can Work](#) and [PA Transition Resources](#) have been created to promote CIE and connect individuals, employers, and providers to resources. The [Employment First website](#) includes relevant information, reports, resources, and data.
- **Data tracking:** In addition to several agency-specific reports, the [Employment First data dashboard](#) is now available to track core measures of progress, identify areas of improvement, and establish benchmarks for accountability.
- **Agency agreements:** Several Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) have formalized partnerships between agencies to increase interagency coordination, data collection, case sharing, funding opportunities, and more seamless engagement for people receiving services.

The initial 3-year plan also included extensive programming recommendations that were relevant in 2018-19. These programming recommendations and associated progress can be found in the plan and subsequent annual reports on the Employment First website. Going forward, with recognition of Employment First policy now being embedded into many regular operations, as well as the impact of the pandemic and evolving changes in the labor market, the Cabinet is focusing on a more targeted set of core areas and measures for continued progress. <u>During the next year, the Cabinet's focus will be reviewing progress since 2018, along with the Commission's priorities, to revise program outcome goals and an updated set of recommendations for 2022-23 and beyond.</u>

2021 Key Highlights

The Wolf Administration continues to make substantial progress across agencies and partners to further develop and implement the comprehensive plan to advance Employment First across the commonwealth and improve employment outcomes for Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Despite the challenges associated with the pandemic, 2021 also saw the continuation of innovative service delivery and several important accomplishments. Highlights include:

- **Creation of the Employment First Data Dashboard:** Several agencies represented on the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities compiled data pertaining to Employment First initiatives for inclusion on a public-facing [Employment First Data Dashboard](#) to show progress over time. The measures are an initial set of core data elements selected to track participation in services and employment outcomes, many of which correspond to the focus areas in this report. The two data pages also are found on the PA Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) [Employment First website.](#)

- **New formalized partnership between agencies for transition activities:** In 2020, the PA Department of Education (PDE) and L&I Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) established an MOU to formally collaborate on improving vocational and career preparation for all Pennsylvania students with disabilities to participate in work-based learning, part time jobs, and career planning to pursue CIE after graduating from high school. During 2020-21, the agencies trained stakeholders on the content and mission of the MOU. In 2021-22 they will develop a funds-sharing agreement to hire positions to implement the MOU locally and focus on shared positions. During 2022-23, the PA Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of

Developmental Programs (ODP) will join the collaborative to ensure all agencies are supporting CIE of students with disabilities at the local level.

- **Launch of Postsecondary Transition website for individuals with disabilities:** Located at pasecondarytransition.com, PDE and OVR collaborated to create, fund, and maintain a new online resource with information related to employment for people with disabilities, including information for high school students.

- **New customized employment position:** The PA Office of Administration (OA) and OVR are piloting the application of customized employment concepts within state government. Customized employment is a process for achieving CIE through the development of a job position that is personalized to meet the needs of both the employee and the employer. Several positions were identified to create a customized role tailored to maximize the skills and talents of the employee. As of January 24, 2022, The Department of Revenue hired an individual through the customized employment process to perform tax processing work in a permanent, full-time position.

The following policy priorities section is reformatted from previous reports to focus on a set of core areas to identify progress and areas of opportunity. The areas of focus in this report look at key efforts over this past year, as well as priority areas informed by feedback from the Governor's Cabinet and the Employment First Oversight Commission. The Cabinet looks forward to continuing this work in 2022.

Employment First Policy Priorities

Early Childhood – Setting the Stage

Engaging parents and families

A first step in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is setting expectations, providing information, and changing the culture so that families and individuals know that future education and employment pathways are available. Agencies that engage with families and children at a young age have taken steps to enhance parent and family trainings and materials establishing this approach.

- The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) provides trainings on inclusion and Early Intervention (EI) services and has developed models on best practices. Since 2018, the number of families participating in or planning EI training has more than doubled. In 2020-21, 93 families participated in EI training and 376 families were involved in the planning of EI training.

- ODP and OCDEL continuously integrate the Charting the LifeCourse principles into service delivery systems by providing access to resources and trainings. ODP collaborates with the PA Family Network (PAFN), which includes Family Advisors across the state, and Self Advocates United as part of the Supporting Families Initiative to support this work.

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) established language in grant agreements that promotes pathways to employment for children and youth with special care needs.

- OVR provides regular outreach to parents and families through Early Reach Coordinators and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

Increasing early intervention services in integrated settings

EI ensures that children birth to age five with developmental delays or other established factors that put them at risk of substantial delay have the best chance for healthy development by offering a range of developmental and social-emotional services. Services can be provided in the home, in a community-based setting, or at a specialized facility.

This priority focuses on providing services in the home or community, where the child is actively engaged with others through an integrated setting. OCDEL publishes data in the annual State Interagency Coordinating Council report and to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs. According to OCDEL, approximately 57,500 children participated in the Preschool EI program during school year 2020-21.

Early Intervention Measures	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21
Percent of infants and toddlers (birth to age-3) receiving EI services in home and community settings	99.92%	99.86%	99.92%
Percent of preschool children (ages 3-5) that have access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and receive the majority of their services in ECE	64.32%	60.98%	55.87%
Percent of preschool children that receive the majority of their services in the home	5.63%	8.83%	12.35%
Percent of preschool children that receive their services in a specialized classroom	30.05%	30.19%	31.78%

School Age – Preparing for Transition

Note: Additional transition activity data, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), is documented in quarterly reports required by the Work Experiences for High School Students with Disabilities Act (Act 26 of 2016).

Establishing postsecondary plans for pathways to employment

The PDE Bureau of Special Education (BSE) works collaboratively with educators, schools, OVR, ODP, and other stakeholders to ensure students have access to quality and meaningful education, supports, services, and opportunities. Secondary Transition Coordinators at all 29 Intermediate Units (IUs) are trained to educate and support schools with implementing career readiness indicators with students with disabilities. During SY 2020-21, approximately 308,000 special education students attended school districts; 21,000 special education students attended brick-and-mortar charter schools; and 13,000 special education students attended cyber charter schools. PDE has a robust training plan for secondary transition that includes resources for students, families, and educators, such as:

- The SecondaryTransition.org website for students and parents;
- Transition Tidbits, a free monthly subscription regarding transition opportunities;
- Annual professional development for educators focused on the state Academic Standards for Career Education and Work, career readiness indicators, and PA Employment First;
- The Community of Practice 2021-22 state plan emphasizing person-driven planning (PDP) by creating a webinar series on PDP and supportive family, professional and youth toolkits;
- Train the Trainer for Secondary Transition IU Training & Consulting Specialists for Transition Discoveries and grants for local education agencies (LEAs) to implement Transition Discoveries locally.

For students eligible to stay in school from age 18 through age 21 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state law, PDE partners with agencies and stakeholders to adopt policies and promote practices emphasizing educational programming based in the community and prepares students to work and function in a community setting. Nearly 5,500 students in this age range remain in school each year. For the 2020-2021 school year, Act 66 of 2021 allowed 21-year-old students eligible under IDEA to remain in school for an additional school year. Of the potential 1,800 students, about 600 students returned for an additional year.

- **Middle school support:** PA's six-year initiative *Middle School Success: The Path to Graduation (*P2G) program provides professional development for schools and helps regional teams identify middle school students with emotional behavioral disorder who may be off-track for graduation. Local leadership teams use attendance, behavior, and course performance data to identify and implement academic and behavioral Evidence Based Practices aligned to the SSIP Coherent Improvement Strategies (i.e., Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Family Engagement, etc.).

- **Educator professional development:** Training and technical assistance provided to schools emphasize the importance of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) being grounded in practices that provide community opportunities, work-based opportunities, and independent living, with the least amount of supports necessary for success. Nearly 150 LEAs engaged in this professional development and have improved practices over the past year.

- **Collaborative IEP development:** OVR staff attendance at IEP meetings help support a comprehensive transition plan and connection to resources for student work experiences and future employment pathways. As of December 2021, an estimated 151,000 students with IEPs between the ages of 14 and 21 are eligible for transition and Pre-ETS. While OVR cannot attend every IEP meeting, staff attend whenever possible.

Total Number of IEP Meetings Attended by OVR staff	SFY 2020-21 Q3	SFY 2020-21 Q4	SFY 2021-22 Q1	SFY 2021-22 Q2
	2,257	1,526	1,127	2,687*

*This is an 80% increase from the prior year (*SFY 2020-21 Q2: 1,492*)

Connecting to transition activities for future education & employment

BSE and OVR work together to support students' participation in work activities and to track work-based learning and paid work experiences. WIOA places significant emphasis on the provision of these services to students and requires that OVR set aside at least 15% of its federal funds to provide Pre-ETS to all eligible or potentially eligible students. In addition, ODP ensures that 100% of individuals with intellectual disability/autism age 21 and graduating have the opportunity to access waiver services which include employment support. Schools are required to make students aware of available services

when they exit and are encouraged to connect students to services long before graduation. To support the monitoring of transition activity progress, beginning in July 2021, PDE added several specific Employment First focused questions to their data collection:

Questions Added to PDE data collection	First year of revised data (2020-2021)
Does the student have a transition plan as part of the IEP?	114,383 students had a Transition Plan
Does the student have an outcome goal of competitive integrated employment?	78,674 student had an outcome goal of competitive integrated employment
Did the student participate in a competitive integrated paid work experience?	9,387 students participated in a competitive integrated paid work experience
Did the student participate in individual job coaching services funded by the school in a paid work experience?	9,810 students participated in individual job coaching services funded by the school in a paid work experience
Upon exiting high school, was the student employed in a competitive integrated setting?	Upon exiting high school, 13,814 students were employed in a competitive integrated setting

- **Competitive Integrated Employment Grants:** CIE grants improve CIE outcomes for youth with disabilities by providing virtual and in-person work experiences, such as job shadowing, internship/practicum, cooperative education programs, apprenticeship, community-based work programs, and service learning (unpaid), with job coaching as appropriate, for youth with disabilities with preference for students at-risk of dropping out and/or youth who have difficulty obtaining employment, independently. Funding can be used to establish sites that can serve as models for community-based competitive employment for youth with disabilities and support partnerships between OVR, County/Community-Based Behavioral Health, the Office of Intellectual Disabilities, Centers for Independent Living, and other disability-specific support.

- **Pre-Employment Transition Services Participation**: OVR took several steps to increase Pre-ETS during COVID, including virtual programming; introducing a new Youth Ambassador program to hire students to work as self-advocates in their communities; making it easier to access Supported Employment services as a student; and, introducing an initiative to develop work experiences with colleges and universities. This year, OVR created two Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Specialist positions to develop partnerships with employers who will provide work-based opportunities to students with disabilities.

Pre-ETS Related Services	SFY 20-21 Q3	SFY 20-21 Q4	SFY 21-22 Q1	SFY 21-22 Q2
Counseling on Postsecondary Training Opportunities	884	988	472	643
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	950	801	668	999
Job Exploration Counseling	1245	1,215	616	1,148
Work Based Learning	500	737	911	636
Workplace Readiness Training	2013	1,673	594	1,389
Total Number of Unique Students Receiving Services	**4,095**	**4,005**	**2,393**	**3,447**

- **Summer programming**: Over the last decade, OVR in partnership with PDE has partnered with various entities to develop and offer summer programming opportunities, such as the Junior Summer Academy. The MY Work program, launched in Pittsburgh in 2019, allows students with disabilities to participate in a paid work experience with a local municipality during the summer. This initiative is now being implemented statewide. OVR also developed a summer program called Summer Postsecondary Experience that connects students to colleges and universities.

Specialized Pre-ETS Opportunities	SFY 20-21	SFY 21-22
Promoting Academic Success	54	38
MY Work Initiative Orientation	0	151
Professional Connection Experience (PCE) Week 1	0	26
DHH Summer Academy	0	11

Increasing workforce participation and training upon graduation

Participating in comprehensive IEP planning and transition services ideally leads to CIE or enrollment in postsecondary education and training upon graduation. Below are several measures related to this outcome. Additional information may be found in the Act 26 reports and Data Dashboard.

Act 26: Job Referrals Made to Employers by OVR on behalf of students					
SFY 20-21 Q1	SFY 20-21 Q2	SFY 20-21 Q3	SFY 20-21 Q4	SFY 21-22 Q1	SFY 21-22 Q2
546	641	833	926	1,074	594

Act 26: Students with Disabilities who entered CIE within 3 months of Graduation (by SFY Quarters)							
2019-20 Q3	2019-20 Q4	2020-21 Q1	2020-21 Q2	2020-21 Q3	2020-21 Q4	2021-22 Q1*	2021-22 Q2*
11	10	272	400	357	409	399*	370*

Act 26: Students with Disabilities who entered CIE while OVR customers (by SFY Quarters)							
2019-20 Q3	2019-20 Q4	2020-21 Q1	2020-21 Q2	2020-21 Q3	2020-21 Q4	2021-22 Q1*	2021-22 Q2*
421	202	107	238	209	224	186*	232*

* New data not included on graph below
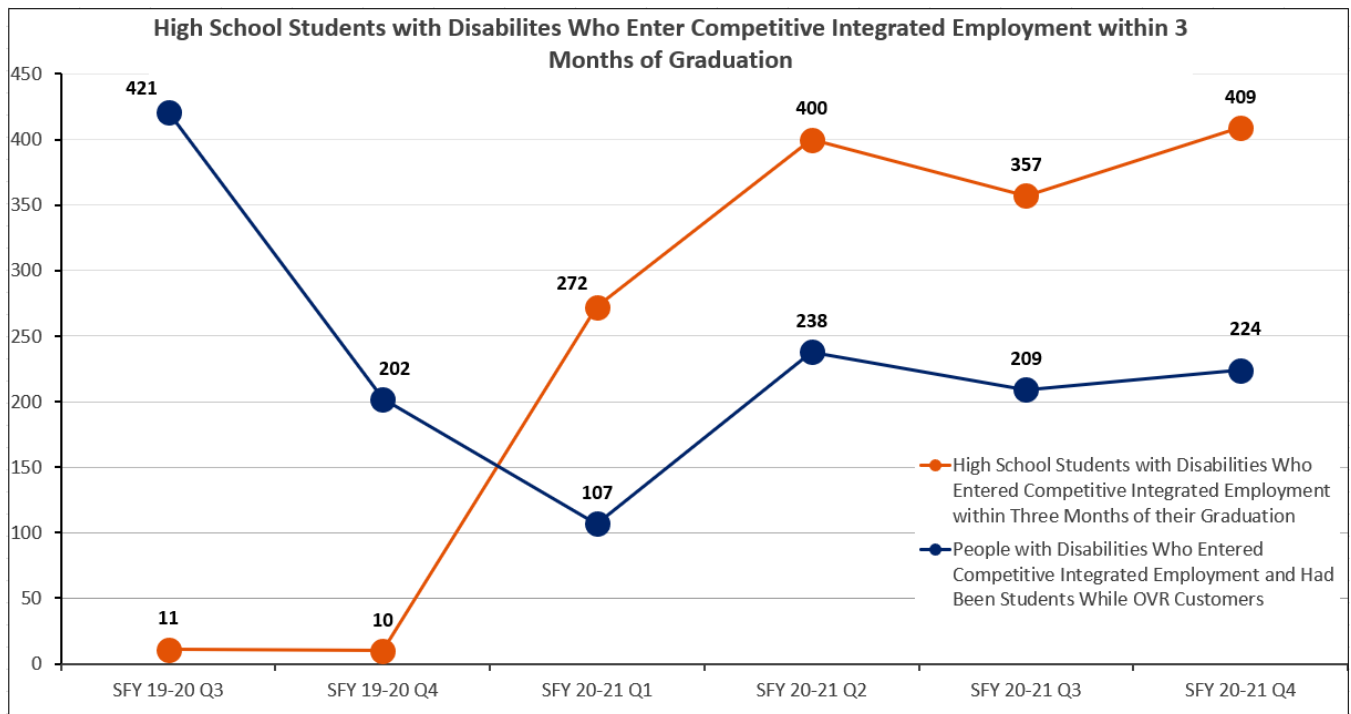
- **Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs):** CTPs are one- or two-year college-based certificate and credential programs for young adults with intellectual or other developmental disabilities who are not otherwise able to meet eligibility criteria to enroll in a traditional postsecondary degree program. OVR provides financial aid for CTPs; ODP covers Education Support services to assist with tuition costs when other resources are not available. In 2015,

Millersville University, one of the universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education received federal funding to collaborate with PSU Harrisburg and Mercyhurst University and others to build the PA Inclusive Higher Education Consortium to serve young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Additional information is needed to understand current participation and progress of CTP enrollment and completion, in addition to other postsecondary enrollment measures.

- **Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC):** The mission of the HGAC is to offer quality postsecondary education, preemployment transition, and support services to customers as they determine and pursue individualized goals of employment and independence. Programs and services are available to the public and to individuals with or without disabilities. On average the HGAC serves 1,400 people per year and 900 during reduced COVID-safe operations.

  - Employment Rates: 69-84%, average annual range for 2016-21 (all CIE)
  - Hourly Starting Wage: $10.52-$15.49, average annual range for 2016-21
  - Employer Satisfaction Rates: 83-95%, average annual range for 2017-21

Working Age Adults – Participating in CIE

Connecting people to individualized employment services

Several state agencies coordinate and fund services for working age adults to support CIE goals.

- **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR):** OVR provides vocational rehabilitation services to help people with disabilities prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. Counselors are available to conduct interviews, assist customers in developing vocational goals, and organize a variety of services. An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is developed which establishes vocational objectives, services, providers, and responsibilities. Services include but are not limited to: counseling and guidance, diagnostic services, assessments, information and referral, job development and placement, and personal services such as readers or sign language interpreters which come at no cost to the individual.

OVR by the Numbers 2021				
Measure	**PY 2017-18**	**PY 2018-19**	**PY 2019-20**	**PY 2020-21**
Individuals Engaged with OVR	72,334	69,421	54,549	45,535
New Applicants	21,065	19,904	12,060	9,693
Individiuals Placed in Employment	7,885	7,485	6,953	4,773
Average Hourly Wage	$13.28	$13.84	$14.11	$14.61

- **Office of Developmental Programs (ODP):** ODP serves individuals with an intellectual disability or autism. ODP provides services that support an individual to obtain and maintain employment, in accordance with the [Everyday Lives](#) framework, which includes employment considerations. Each individual enrolled with ODP has an individual support plan (ISP) developed using person-centered planning. Employment goals include specific activities such as exploring CIE, updating hours of employment, changing jobs, or career advancement. These services are funded by Medicaid, which is required to be a last-dollar payer source. If comparable services are available through other means, they must be provided first.

ODP Employment Services Measures				
Measure	As of 12/31/2018	As of 12/31/2019	SFY 21-22 Q1*	SFY 21-22 Q2*
Number of people ages 18-64 enrolled with ODP with an Employment Goal on their ISP	13,052	13,505	13,787	13,878
Number of people ages 18-64 enrolled with ODP with CIE	6,470	7,136	6,745	7,057

*data reporting transitioned to a quarterly basis

Number of people enrolled with ODP reporting self-employment	2018	2019	2020	2021
	333	333	209	350

*data compiled from ad hoc request

Authorized Benefits Counseling Services in ODP	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
	100	163	272

*data compiled from ad hoc request

- **Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL):** OLTL's Community HealthChoices Waiver Program serves older Pennsylvanians, individuals with a physical disability, and some other disability types. CHC provides services that support an individual to obtain and maintain CIE. Each individual has a Person-Centered Service Plan (PCSP) directed by the participant. CHC offers participants access to five specific employment services: Benefits Counseling, Career Assessments, Job Finding, Job Coaching, and Employment Skills Development Services. Services are currently coordinated through three CHC Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). These services are funded by Medicaid, which is required to be a last-dollar payer source. If comparable services are available through other means, they must be provided first.

OLTL Employment Services Measures by MCO and Year						
Measures	**AHC/KF**		**PHW**		**UPMC**	
	2020	**2021**	**2020**	**2021**	**2020**	**2021**
HCBS Participants Age 21-64	30,455	32,361	12,420	10,542	14,776	15,786
Goal on PCSP (count)	532	582	209	279	61	213
Goal on PCSP (percent)	1.75%	1.8%	1.68%	2.65%	0.41%	1.35%
Authorization (count)	51	63	11	24	102	118
Authorizations (percent)	0.17%	0.19%	0.09%	0.23%	0.69%	0.75%
Employed (count)	299	330	19	86	73	113
Employed (percent)	0.98%	1.02%	0.15%	0.82%	0.49%	0.72%
Confirmed CIE (count)	241	303	18	84	*	46
Confirmed CIE (percent)	0.79%	0.94%	*	0.80%	*	0.29%

Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY2020 and CY 2021
All percentage calculations are based on "HCBS Participants Age 21-64" as denominator
*indicates data is suppressed due to figure less than 11

Benefits Counseling Services	**Total**
Authorized HCBS – Benefits Counseling	27
Comparable services in Referred to Employment Service – Other	268
Comparable Benefits Counseling Counts Submitted by MCOs	252

Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY 2021

- **Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS):** OMHSAS supports counties in delivering employment services among various other mental health and substance abuse supports. This year, OMHSAS began requiring employment services data to be included in annual county reports, including the number of individuals who have received supported employment services that lead to CIE. The first reports with this new information were provided in July 2021. OMHSAS continues to work with counties to submit the requested data. These services are funded by Medicaid, which is required to be a last-dollar payer source. If comparable services are available through other means, they must be provided first.

County Mental Health Plans can be reviewed for their supported employment on the DHS website.

- **High quality service providers:** Employment services require specialized knowledge. There must be adequate capacity to meet demand for the various services provided through state agencies, and those services must be provided by trained and qualified individuals

Certification Completions	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21
Persons who completed certification in Discovery (ODP/Temple Agreement)	37	14
Persons who completed certification in Customized Employment (ODP/Temple Agreement)	8	20
Persons who completed certification in Systematic Instruction ("Intentional Teaching") (ODP/Temple Agreement)	11	21
Persons who completed certification in College of Employment Services' (CES) ACRE-approved training	561	193

Credentialed Providers	2020	2021
Total number of OLTL credentialed employment service providers	202	207

Enrolled Providers that Offer Benefits Counseling	2019	2020	2021
ODP	7	N/A	46
OLTL	N/A	15	21

Enhancing supports and decreasing reliance on sheltered employment

Employment First policy is focused on supporting individuals with disabilities in attaining employment in workplaces with a diverse workforce and competitive wages and benefits. Some individuals with disabilities are employed in sheltered work environments with subminimum wages. An important objective of Employment First is to continue to implement Section 511 of WIOA (which is intended to limit the payment of subminimum wage to people with disabilities using special wage certificates under Section 14c of the Fair Labor Standards Act) to support individuals receiving services in sheltered work who want to pursue CIE. Using a person-centered approach, OVR provides career counseling sessions to individuals in sheltered workshops on the benefits of CIE and how to use OVR services.

OVR 511 Report SFY 2021-22 to date	SFY 20-21	SFY 21-22
511 Sessions Conducted	1,056	315
Session Attendees	3,762	1,787
Number of Attendees Interested in OVR Services	128	115
Median Hourly Wage of 511 Customers placed into Competitive Integrated Employment	$7.50	N/A

In addition, ODP and OVR jointly contracted with nationally recognized experts to hold provider transformation leadership "boot camp" sessions that provided training to help providers of facility-based services transform their business model to one that supports CIE. In 2021, ODP and OVR funded another round of training and technical assistance for facility-based providers on business model transformation. Executive leadership from 23 Community Participation Support providers attended a free three-day training that was conducted by three nationally recognized experts. Fifteen providers that attended the training were selected to participate in regional learning collaboratives facilitated by a national expert to assist providers in developing and implementing a plan to take concrete and targeted measures to make the transformation. The regional collaboratives have been meeting regularly in the fall and winter of 2021

## Improving workforce system collaboration and employer engagement

The state WIOA plan outlines the goals and activities for the workforce system so that Pennsylvanians can access a one-stop system of coordinated employment and training services at their local PA CareerLink® office or on the PA CareerLink® website. The plan includes federal core partners (including OVR), state required partners, and local partners. Many people with disabilities who enter the workforce system are receiving services through OVR, while others may not be; the need for OVR services by people with disabilities varies. Efforts should continue to be made within the workforce system to ensure collaboration between partners to advance inclusive environments and services, and co-enrollment in applicable services when appropriate.

- **PA CareerLink® office accessibility**: Over the past years, OVR started conducting accessibility reviews of PA CareerLink® offices. While these were on pause during the pandemic, OVR resumed reviews in the Fall of 2021 and will continue until all sites have been assessed and provided with recommendations to increase accessibility.

- **Training for WIOA partner programs**: The WIOA state plan includes a goal to increase training to all front-line staff on available program offerings to allow for informed internal and external referrals to additional services and facilitate serving the holistic needs of the customer.

- **Employer support and engagement:** During 2021, OVR developed a business design tool and ad-hoc reporting capability to collect and publish data on businesses that receive assistance from OVR. Training for OVR business services staff on this tool will begin in 2022. Goals will be

established once a baseline of data is captured in the Commonwealth Workforce Development System when implementation begins. OVR is in the process of developing a business services strategic plan to strengthen and promote OVR services to businesses and customers. OVR supports local business services staff membership and the participation of local chambers of commerce and Society for Human Resource Management organizations.

- **Workforce system Participation:** The below graphs show the number and percent of participants in several core and partner WIOA programs who self-identify as having a disability. *The full display of the below images can be found on the [data dashboard](#).*

Individuals with a Disability who Receive Services from PA CareerLink® Workforce Programs (Adult, All Workforce Programs, Dislocated Worker, Trade, Wagner-Peyser, Youth)
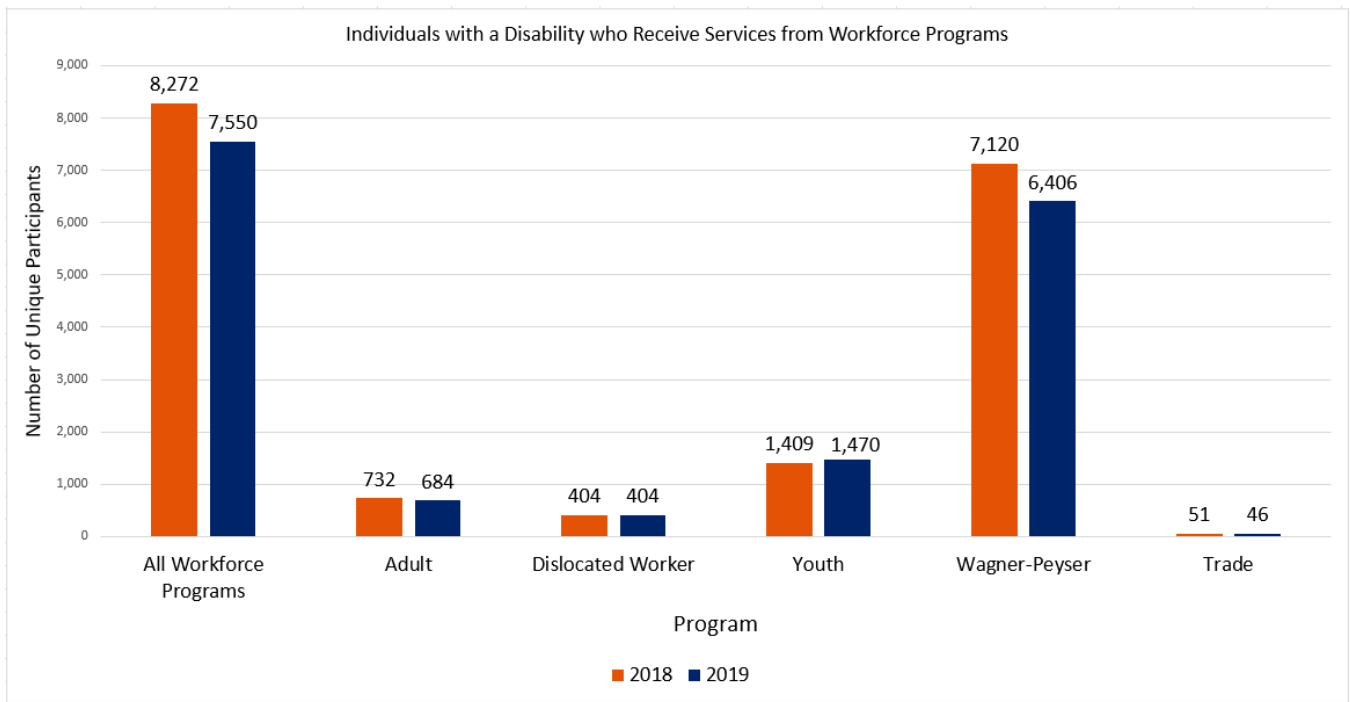
Employment Outcomes of Individuals who Completed PA CareerLink® Workforce Programs (Adult, All Workforce Programs, Dislocated Worker, Trade, Wagner-Peyser, Youth)

Employment Outcomes of Individuals who Completed Workforce Programs
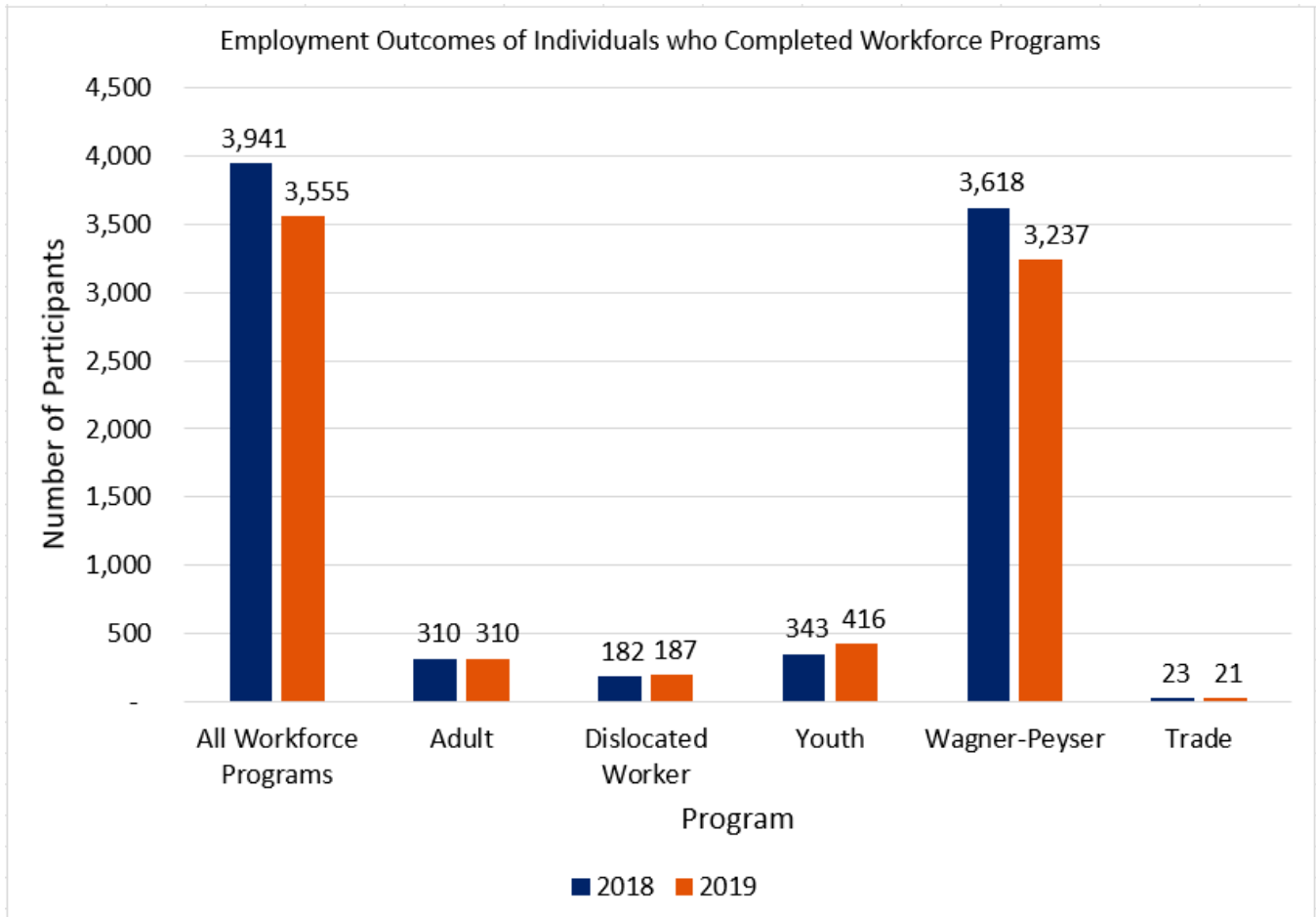
Advancing inclusivity in commonwealth employment

With nearly 70,000 employees, the commonwealth is Pennsylvania's second largest employer. The commonwealth has taken several steps to lead by example and to be an employer of choice through advancing inclusive workplace practices and reducing barriers. The Office of Administration's (OA) Employment First Steering Committee meets throughout the year to assess progress in hiring and retention to increase hiring and support of people with disabilities. Notable efforts in 2021 include:

- **New hiring data collection**: Effective November 2020, job applicants can choose to self-identify as having a disability. This helps inform and assess the effectiveness of commonwealth recruitment efforts for people with a disability. Preliminary data from November 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021 tentatively indicate that 8% of applicants who completed an employment application identified as a person with a disability. OA has also added self-identification to the commonwealth's online onboarding program effective June 2021.

- **Launch of customized employment pilot:** OA and OVR are piloting the application of customized employment concepts within state government. Several positions were identified
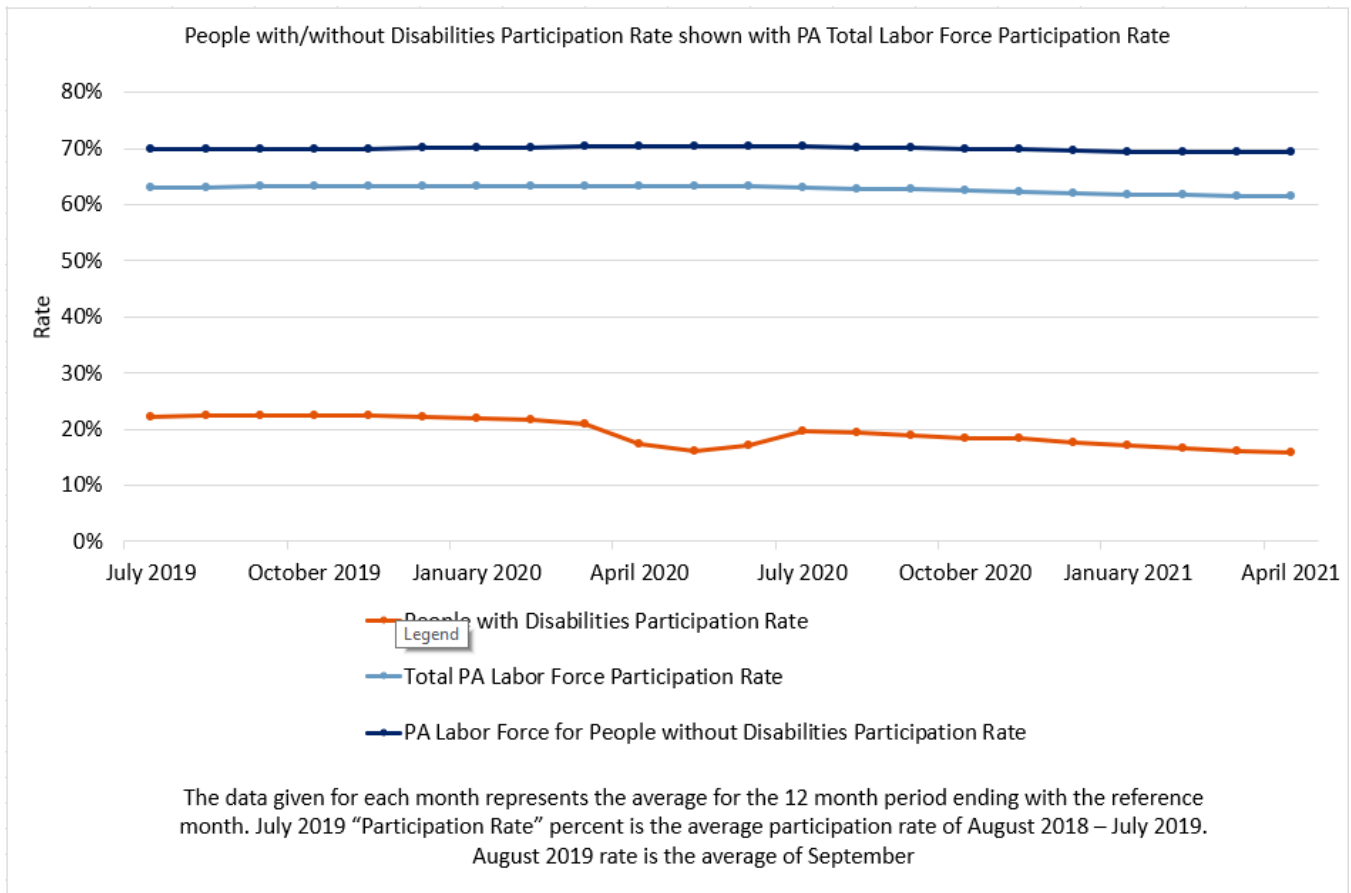
to develop a customized job description. <u>As of January 24, 2022, The Department of Revenue hired an Employment First worker to perform tax processing work in a permanent, full time role</u>.

- **Expansion of internship program**: The successful internship program which started in 2018 and served 18 students was previously on pause but is resuming in 2021-22 with a goal of placing 20-25 interns in Harrisburg. The program is also being piloted in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh with 5-10 placements each. For the first time, remote opportunities are being offered, allowing flexibility for both agencies and participants.

In addition to these efforts, OA hired a Chief Accessibility Officer responsible for ensuring that IT resources, systems, and websites are accessible, as well as a Disability Recruiter who will start in February 2022 and focus on connecting with various organizations and schools to advertise open jobs and recruit job candidates with disabilities. ADA accommodation requests have also been centralized to better ensure compliance with federal law and help commonwealth employees receive the support they need.

Increasing Labor Force Participation rate for people with disabilities

The Labor Force Participation rate includes people who are currently working and those who are actively looking for work. The participation rate for people with disabilities falls significantly below the participation rate for people without disabilities. All Employment First efforts are geared towards increasing the labor force participation rate of people with disabilities through various efforts. This data is Pennsylvania specific and is sourced from the U.S. Census' Current Population Survey (CPS).

People with/without Disabilities Participation Rate shown with PA Total Labor Force Participation Rate

The data given for each month represents the average for the 12 month period ending with the reference month. July 2019 "Participation Rate" percent is the average participation rate of August 2018 – July 2019. August 2019 rate is the average of September

Appendix – Websites and Additional Resources

    I.   **Employment First Policy and Related Plans**
- a. [Act 36 of 2018](#)
- b. [Act 26 of 2016](#)
- c. [Act 36 Three-Year Plan](#)
- d. [WIOA Combined State Plan (2020)](#)

    II.   **Reports and Data Dashboard**
- a. [Employment First Policy Page on the Department of Labor & Industry Website](#)
- b. [Employment First Data Dashboard](#)
- c. [Employment First Data Dashboard – OVR Page](#)
- d. [Act 26 Reports (Transition Activities)](#)

    III.   **Employment and Supportive Services Information**
- a. [We Can Work Page on the Department of Human Services Website](#)
- b. [Secondary Transition Website](#)
- c. [ODP Everyday Lives Framework](#)
- d. [Charting the Lifecourse Framework](#)
- e. [Employment First for Individuals with Disabilities (pa.gov)](#)
- f. [Employment First for Employers](#)
- g. [Employment First for Providers](#)