

Employment First Cabinet Annual Report

Interagency Priorities and Recommendations (Act 36 of 2018)

January 30, 2025

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Office of Governor Josh Shapiro

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I. Message from Governor Josh Shapiro

January 30, 2025

My Fellow Pennsylvanians:

In Pennsylvania, our greatest asset is our people. Pennsylvanians are the hardest working people in our country – and our ingenuity, grit, and dedication have powered progress for generations.

From day one, my Administration has worked to break down barriers and ensure every Pennsylvanian has the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed. Fundamentally, Employment First is about just that: making sure that every person, who wants to, has the chance to work in a competitive integrated environment, supported and empowered by their employer, their colleagues, and their government.

Today, Pennsylvania's workforce faces many challenges, from a workplace undergoing rapid technological changes to demands from employers for more workers with new and specialized skills. But these challenges present significant opportunities here in the Commonwealth, and my Administration is advancing the cause of Employment First across agencies with innovative workforce development strategies and thoughtful employer engagement. We've continued to connect Pennsylvanians with training opportunities and on-the-job learning opportunities, from the Hiram G. Andrews Center to the first ever Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps crew made up entirely of young people who are deaf or hard of hearing. I am proud of what we as a Commonwealth have achieved so far and what we will accomplish together.

Together with Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis, I am committed to fulfilling the promise at the heart of the Employment First Act to ensure every Pennsylvanian has a seat at the table. Competitive Integrated Employment helps all Pennsylvanians, both employers and workers alike, with or without disability. An inclusive workforce is the cornerstone of a robust economy, and I encourage all businesses, educational and training institutions, community leaders, and citizens to build a Pennsylvania that works for all and welcomes everyone – because when more people are at the table of progress, we all benefit.

Sincerely,



Governor Josh Shapiro

II. Introduction

All Pennsylvanians should have the opportunity to pursue and participate in employment that leads to a positive sense of self and family-sustaining wages. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is committed to supporting jobseekers in securing and sustaining work in safe, inclusive, and good-paying jobs. Of equal importance, the Commonwealth is committed to supporting employers to develop and enhance their inclusive hiring and retention practices so that workers of all abilities and disabilities can earn a fair wage in a good job. By equipping employers with the tools they need to accommodate the diverse needs of all workers, and by connecting more Pennsylvanians to meaningful work, this Commonwealth can build, sustain, and grow a vibrant economy that serves all.

Pennsylvania became an Employment First state when Governor Tom Wolf signed [Executive Order 2016-03](#) on March 10, 2016. This Executive Order made Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) 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. Subsequently, the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities (Cabinet), established by [Act 36 of 2018](#), further defined the role of state government in advancing Employment First principles: to ensure the implementation of this policy through strong interagency collaboration and stakeholder engagement. The Governor's Policy Office is responsible for coordinating the Cabinet, which consists of 17 state agencies and state-related entities.¹

Act 36 of 2018 also established the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC), a body comprised of 16 external appointees, four legislative appointments and twelve gubernatorial appointments, who collectively make recommendations to the Commonwealth on ways to further Employment First values and ensure that people with disabilities are given the opportunity to obtain meaningful employment and life-sustaining wages.

¹ Act 36 requires the participation of 16 state agencies and state-related entities. The Department of Corrections began participating as an ex-officio member, the 17th, in 2024.

Pennsylvania's Employment First Core Values

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, services, and opportunities that are most meaningful to them.

Holistic: Individuals are members of 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 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 center 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 helps monitor progress on achieving outcomes, identify areas of success and opportunity, and inform decision making in policy and programming. Data is publicly available to ensure transparency and collaboration.

Act 36 of 2018 defines Employment First as "The policy of State agencies which provides that Competitive Integrated Employment [CIE] is the first consideration and preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term services and support for individuals with a disability." According to the federal [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA) of 2014, CIE is

"work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis for which an individual is: compensated at or above minimum wage and comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience; receiving the same level of benefits provided to other employees without disabilities in similar positions; at a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities; and

presented opportunities for advancement similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.”²

Under current state and federal law, some employers may seek exemption to minimum wage standards to pay people with disabilities less than the current state minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour. Employers with these exemptions are typically referred to as “sheltered workshops” and must obtain a 14(c) certificate, referencing the section in the Fair Labor Standards Act that governs such subminimum wage arrangements. As of January 1, 2025, there are 40 current 14(c) certificate holders in the Commonwealth. These settings are largely segregated, meaning people with disabilities are separated from their non-disabled peers and paid on a piece rate, or on the basis of volume of work produced. For example, an individual in a sheltered workshop might be paid \$0.01 per silverware packet assembled. Under the Biden Administration, the U.S. Department of Labor proposed a rule ([Employment of Workers with Disabilities Under Section 14\(c\) of the Fair Labor Standards Act](#)) that would phase out 14(c) certificates and thereby gradually eliminate subminimum wages. As of January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration has paused all regulatory action ([Regulatory Freeze Pending Review](#)) by federal agencies indefinitely.

According to the [2020 American Community Survey](#), approximately 14.6 percent of Pennsylvanians have a disability, higher than the national average of 12.9 percent. Additionally, the median salary of Pennsylvanians with a disability is \$27,743, roughly six percent lower than the national average. As of January 1, 2025, there are 2,978 workers who are employed by 14(c) certificate holders in the Commonwealth, a trend that has been declining since the enactment of Act 36 of 2018.

The Shapiro-Davis Administration is committed to upholding the values and goals laid out in Act 36 to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with a disability. As required by the Act, this annual report contains information about progress made since the last report was issued and provides insight into the strategic direction of the Commonwealth as advised by the Cabinet and EFOC, ensuring individuals with disabilities have opportunities to achieve economic independence through CIE.

² “Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE),” *Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor*. Accessed January 21, 2025. [Competitive Integrated Employment - https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie)

III. Executive Summary

The Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities Membership:



The Cabinet includes representatives from (top to bottom, left to right): the Human Relations Commission (PHRC), State Civil Service Commission (SCSC), Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of State (DOS), Office of Administration (OA), Department of Education (PDE), Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Department of Health (DOH), Council on the Arts (PCA), Developmental Disabilities Council (PADDCC), Department of Aging (PDA), Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), Governor's Office, and Housing Finance Agency (PHFA). Since 2024, the Department of Corrections (DOC) also has contributed to the work of the Employment First Cabinet.

Individuals seeking Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE) face many barriers, including a lack of understanding and education within the business community, insufficient or unreliable supportive services, and the complex nature of navigating benefits. Many employers may be unaware of the value and capabilities of individuals with disabilities and are often unfamiliar with the services that are available to them in supporting employees with disabilities. Sometimes, people with disabilities need additional support at work to help them navigate tasks effectively. This support can include essential services like transportation to and from work, direct care support for activities of daily living, and workplace accommodations to enhance productivity. Moreover, the intricate system of state and federal benefits and overlapping eligibilities can deter individuals from pursuing higher wage positions especially when it could mean losing essential healthcare or support services.

Act 36 of 2018 required the Commonwealth to develop an initial three-year plan. This first three-year plan included priority areas and recommendations designed to embed Employment First CIE policy into daily operations across agencies. The January 2024 iteration of this annual report served as the first update on the three-year plan under the Shapiro-Davis Administration. The 2024 report included 2023 data and highlighted how state agencies provided reliable services while promoting innovation across program areas throughout 2023.

2023 Highlights:

Rapid Engagement of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is required by the Rehabilitation Act to determine a customer's eligibility within 60 days of application for services and to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) within 90 days of the eligibility determination. Rapid engagement continues to be a national theme, and OVR has reinforced this agency-wide over the past two years and will continue to do so through system and procedural enhancements. The sooner a customer can engage in services the more likely they are to continue to engage and have successful outcomes.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

OVR is required to conduct Customer Satisfaction Surveys. These are distributed through an electronic survey process and routinely reviewed to inform policy and program development. OVR also offers public comment for its State Plan and for any policy changes that are being made to ensure the voices of the communities served are heard. There also are a variety of public meetings where stakeholders and the public have an opportunity to provide feedback on OVR services or comment on policy provisions.

Employment Services Recovery Payments

In 2023, 95 providers of Supported Employment, Benefits Counseling, or Small Group Employment Services were determined eligible to receive \$5 million in payments for serving more people in Fiscal Year 2022-2023 than they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Fiscal Year 2019-2020.

Sharing of Employment Race Data

In April of 2023, the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) developed and disseminated county-level employment reports that include data on CIE, employment services, and employment goals evaluated by race to each county or county joinder. ODP asked each county or county joinder to review the data, evaluate whether any significant disparities exist between races and whether a reason can be identified, and strategies to address them.

Benefits Counseling Waiver Amendment

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) approved an amendment to the benefits counseling requirements in the Community HealthChoices (CHC) 1915(c) waiver effective April 1, 2023. The amendment removed OVR referral requirements for this service. The Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) requested the amendment to ensure participants can access benefits counseling in a timelier manner.

Pay-for-Performance in CHC

The 2024 CHC agreement includes pay-for-performance incentives for CHC Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). The agreement provision requires CHC-MCOs to reach a supported employment 2.5 percent benchmark for CIE based on each MCO's ratio of home and community-based services (HCBS) population age group 21-64.

Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (CMHSBG) Funding

Montgomery County Community College-Pottstown utilized CMHSBG funding to support Wellness Center services. One hundred percent of students who frequented the Wellness Center the most were retained from fall to spring and saw increases in their grade point averages (GPAs). Continued enrollment and higher GPAs will help students attain employment.

Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

The Bureau of Family Health, within DOH, worked with all grantees who serve children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN) age 14 and above to promote the expectation that youth will work as adults within their level of functioning and ability and grantees shall assist clients, family members, caregivers, and social supports in identifying and linking to job readiness, employment services, and supports in all plans, goals, and services.

The Employment First Cabinet and the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) have collaborated to assess opportunities for improvement and address barriers to CIE. This year, all Cabinet agencies submitted a **self-assessment** to EFOC and have been engaged in a **complete overhaul of the [Employment First Data Dashboard](#)**. The agency self-assessments provided an opportunity to evaluate ongoing initiatives, to share progress in advancing CIE principles, and to inform this report. The redesigned Employment First Data Dashboard makes data analysis more accessible for EFOC and increases the transparency of programs, services, and benefits administered by the Commonwealth.

This Annual Report by the Employment First Cabinet has six thematic sections:

- [Service Provision and Benefit Coordination](#)
 - Maintaining effective delivery of quality supports to ensure that individuals receive the support they need to be successful in their careers
- [Accessibility](#)
 - Ensuring individuals of all ability statuses can easily navigate and interface with state government resources
- [The Commonwealth as a Model Employer](#)
 - Working to establish the Commonwealth as a model employer that promotes diversity and accessibility in the workplace
- [Other Agency Initiatives](#)
 - Includes assessments, plans, and reports undertaken by various agencies relevant to Employment First as well as public awareness campaigns, grant opportunities, and cross-agency efforts
- [Response to Employment First Oversight Commission \(EFOC\) Report](#)
 - Indicates which EFOC recommendations are under consideration and best efforts will be made to meet identified targets
- [Recommendations and Future Direction](#)
 - Identifies priority policy areas to guide future work as well as administrative priorities

The report also includes Appendices.

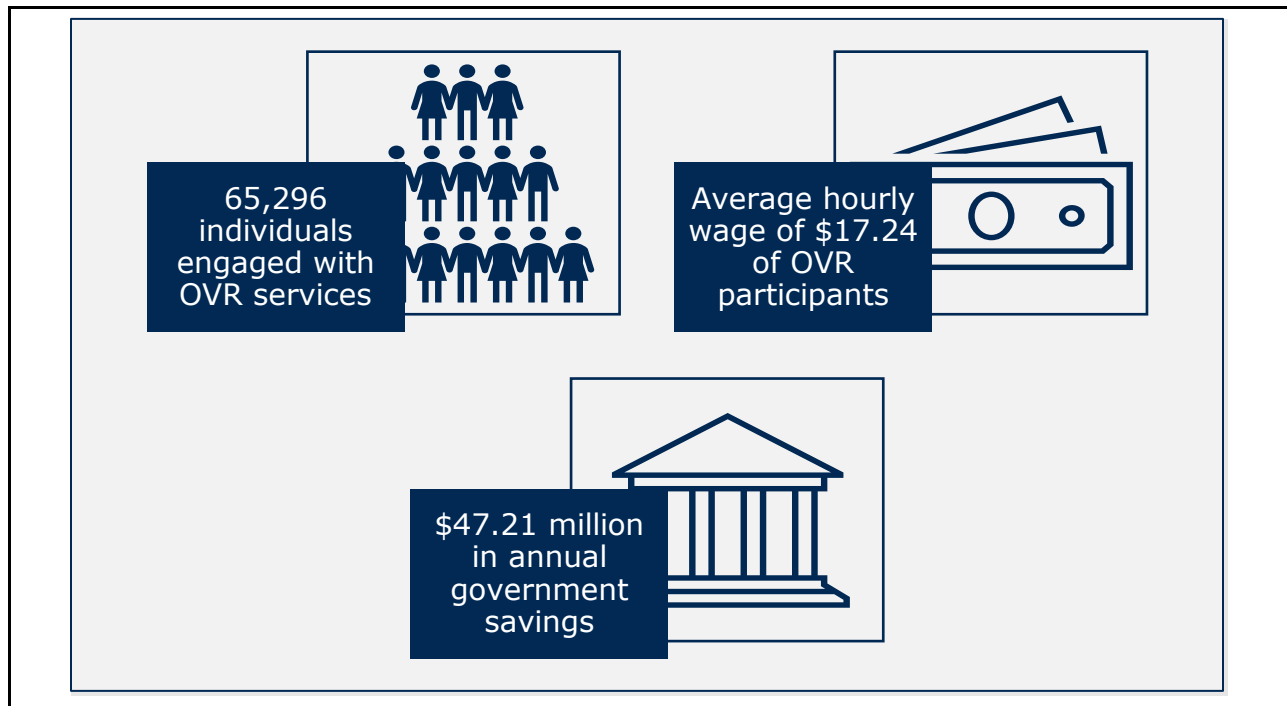
IV. Service Provision and Benefit Coordination

All Commonwealth agencies under the Governor’s jurisdiction have a responsibility to serve all Pennsylvanians and especially those Pennsylvanians with disabilities. The primary agencies that administer programs and benefits for people with disabilities include the Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Education (PDE), and the Department of Corrections (DOC).

Department of Labor and Industry

Part of L&I, the [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (OVR) provides vocational rehabilitation services to Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Services include a dedicated OVR Counselor, who serves as a coordinator to ensure that individuals are receiving adequate supports to prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. These supportive services include, but are not limited to counseling and guidance, diagnostic services, assessments, information and referrals, job development and placement, sign language interpreters, job coaches, and other personal assistive services and/or devices. The outcomes of OVR participation emulate the philosophy of Employment First.

Figure 1: OVR by the Numbers (1)



Business Services

In 2024, the Business Services and Outreach Division (BSOD) conducted 96 disability educational trainings for businesses at no cost, including 20 at conferences. Topics for these trainings included disability awareness and sensitivity; the Americans with Disabilities Act and accommodations; OVR 101; and navigating the hiring process for jobseekers with disabilities. BSOD also featured employers as guests during statewide meetings for OVR staff to learn about businesses looking to hire OVR customers. During these meetings, employers highlighted the jobs they are recruiting for, employee benefits, and employer-led initiatives to attract talent.

In 2024, OVR hired Business Services Representatives (BSR) in each district office statewide. These 21 BSRs are responsible for business outreach, providing disability and accessibility information to employer customers and connecting them with OVR jobseekers. BSRs will be working with local businesses to support them with no-cost OVR services.

As of October 1, 2024, OVR moved to a centralized employer case management system. This has enabled BSOD staff to capture number of employer site visits, events attended, follow-up and promotional phone calls, On-the-Job Training (OJT) and apprenticeship resources, and OVR-led trainings.

Service Provision

In 2023, OVR was awarded over \$9.9 million dollars from the US Department of Education (US DOE) through its [Pathways to Partnership \(P2P\) Disability Innovation Fund \(DIF\) Grant](#). OVR partnered on this P2P DIF grant with the federally funded Centers for Independent Living (CILs), the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), PDE, and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN). From October 2023 through September 2028, this grant enhances the independence of children, students, and youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania through training opportunities and increased Pre-Employment Transition Service (Pre-ETS) experiences.

The grant focuses on three pathways:

1. **Professional Development, Capacity Building, and Training:** All partners can receive comprehensive training in Charting the LifeCourse (CtLC) and the Transition Systems Framework from PaTTAN. These evidence-based programs focus on effective transition planning.
2. **Transition Planning Program:** This pathway implements an educator training model at intermediate units (IUs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to strengthen transition planning and improve student outcomes through individualized approaches. This component builds on the Professional Development, Capacity Building, and Training pathway above and supports the school-based implementation of innovative transition planning strategies. Approximately 1,914 students with disabilities will benefit from this program.

- 3. Community-Based Instruction (CBI) and Work Based Learning Experiences (WBLE):** Through the P2P DIF grant, 16 P2P-CBI and WBLE programs will be developed and implemented in 16 LEAs. This initiative will help PA Transition Partners to apply best practices from professional development and trainings to increase job exploration, self-advocacy, and work-based learning capacity for students with disabilities. Approximately 416 students with disabilities will gain Pre-ETS through participation in P2P-CBI and WBLE.

During the first year of the P2P DIF Grant Project, a total of 343 individuals—including children, youth, families, support people, and youth service professionals—benefited directly from OVR activities. Highlights of OVR’s direct service efforts included the successful distribution of Transition Discoveries cards, the launch of the CtLC Kick-Off Training, and a series of well-received outreach events. OVR prioritized outreach efforts in underserved communities, such as those served by the Pennsylvania Academic, Career, and Technical Training Alliance (PACTT), cyber schools, and other targeted programs across Pennsylvania. Furthermore, OVR significantly strengthened collaboration with 13 key Pennsylvania Transition partners and fostered a network poised to drive long-term change. To date, \$350,941.98 has been strategically invested to support these initiatives and ensure the project’s continued momentum.

In the second year of the P2P DIF Grant Project, OVR will focus on enhancing training opportunities and deepening community engagement. As part of an exciting collaboration, the University of Missouri–Kansas City’s Nexus team, through the **CtLC initiative**, is partnering with the **[InVEST \(Integrated Vocational Engagement and Support Team\)](#)** and P2P grants to offer innovative training opportunities for Pennsylvania professionals, youth, and families. These sessions will build the capacity and enhance the skills needed to foster person-centered approaches and community-driven transformation.

All of the above reflects OVR’s ongoing commitment to equipping Pennsylvania’s professionals and families with tools and strategies that drive meaningful change and improve outcomes across communities.

In addition to the P2P DIF grant, OVR received over \$13.9 million dollars in 2022 as a part of the US DOE’s **[Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment \(SWTCIE\) Grant](#)**, and is currently implementing projects to move away from subminimum wage employment arrangements by using a supportive wraparound model for individuals and employers. Under this grant, OVR launched the **[InVEST Project](#)** to provide resources for individuals and employers to move towards a Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) model.

InVEST has three primary components:

- 1. CIE Engagement**, focused on engaging individuals with disabilities and their families;

2. **CIE Service/Resource Coordination**, focused on creating an integrated resource team (IRT) to identify and deliver necessary supports and services to support CIE; and
3. **CIE Supports**, focused on supporting the needs of a business and the needs of workers with disabilities.

OVR works closely with ODP at DHS to engage with stakeholders and individuals. OVR and ODP have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to implement the InVEST project. Thus far, InVEST has 250 participants with another 35 that have expressed an interest in participating.³

Utilizing IRTs effectively is a primary component of the grant's service/resource coordination focus, to accurately identify and deliver necessary supports and services to make obtaining and maintaining CIE achievable. OVR has worked with the National Disability Institute (NDI) on training and technical assistance for IRTs and the development of statewide OVR staff training expected in February 2025.

The grant's evaluation activities are being developed with Temple University's Institute on Disabilities and the national evaluator Mathematica. Continuous quality assurance and data monitoring ensures essential data, specific to the grant's reporting and performance, is collected and additional modifications are updated within the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS).

OVR has secured provider contracts with Achieva/Sheetz and KenCrest/Community Integrated Services, which will facilitate the hiring of people with disabilities and support specialists.

Achieva/Sheetz:

- Achieva hired the Inclusion Liaison; training, orientation, and specialized onboarding with Sheetz began.
- Joint-company interviews were conducted seeking to hire an Embedded Employment Support Specialist in 2025.
- Three customized employment positions have been created and updates to candidate recruitment and staffing of these positions will be provided through 2025.
- A meeting was held with an interested provider in Butler County, discussing the potential of a second designated employer site.
- Five IRTs have been developed for InVEST participants.
- Three individuals are considering employment with Sheetz by participating via job shadowing and community-based work assessments. Two job offers are currently pending, as OVR is finalizing the OJT procedure with this employer.

³ For Section 511 Career Counseling success stories, please visit: [Andrew's story](#), [John's story](#), [Maggy's Story](#), and [Pat's story](#).

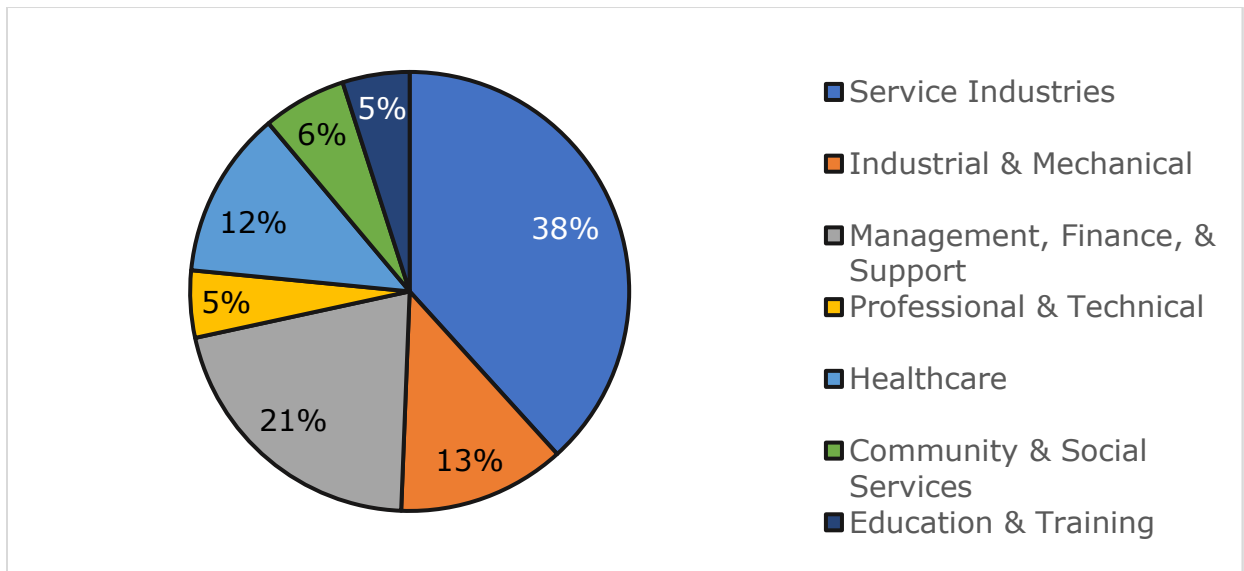
KenCrest/Community Integrated Services/Business Partner TBD:

- OVR Regional Business Services representatives and the Philadelphia and Norristown OVR District Offices are working to identify a business partner in the East.
- Cintas, a national uniform and cleaning distribution company, will be the second designated employer in three separate locations throughout southeastern Pennsylvania.

The [Hiram G. Andrews Center](#) (HGAC) is a post-secondary institution that provides **education and pre-employment transition support services for individuals with disabilities**. HGAC recently announced the launch of an [Early Childhood Education diploma program](#). The 12-month program, starting in January 2025, will provide enrolled students with comprehensive training in early childhood development, health and safety, curriculum planning, and over 480 hours of practical experience working with children. Graduates will qualify for PA Early Childhood Career Pathway entry-level careers. The program is open to individuals with a high school diploma or GED and welcomes six students in the initial cohort for the 2025 Spring Term.

L&I Data Snapshot⁴

Figure 2: OVR Competitive Integrated Employment Participation By Sector
July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023



⁴ "Percentage of Exited Participants" chart provided by the Pennsylvania Office of Administration Enterprise Data Office.

Figure 2 Data

This pie chart shows the breakdown of OVR Competitive Integrated Employment participation by sector.

- Service Industries: 38%
- Management, Finance, and Support: 21%
- Industrial and Mechanical: 13%
- Healthcare: 12%
- Community and Social Services: 6%
- Professional and Technical: 5%
- Education and Training: 5%

Figure 3: OVR by the Numbers (2)

July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

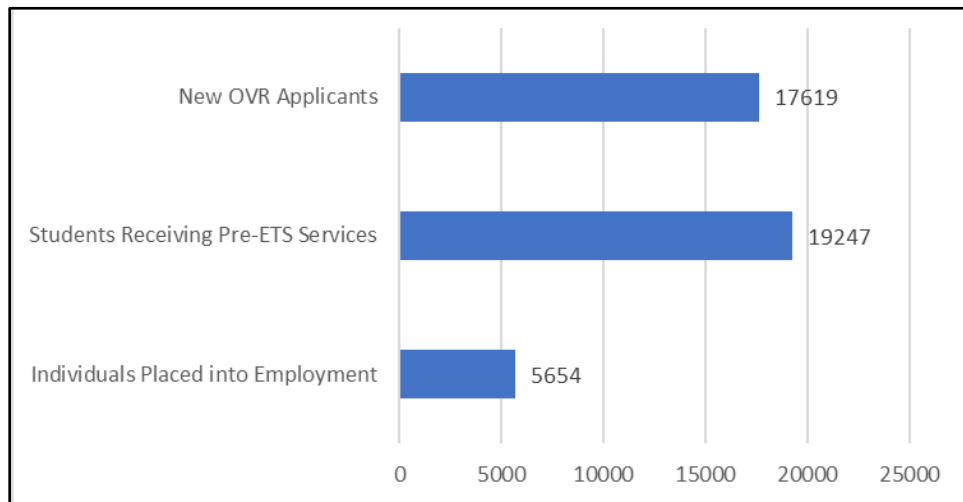


Figure 3 Data:

- New OVR Applicants: 17,619
- Students Receiving Pre-ETS Services: 19,247
- Individuals Placed into Employment: 5,654

Figure 4: Percentage of Exited Participants meeting with Category Outcome

Vocational Rehabilitation levels of performance by Program Year (July 1 – June 30)

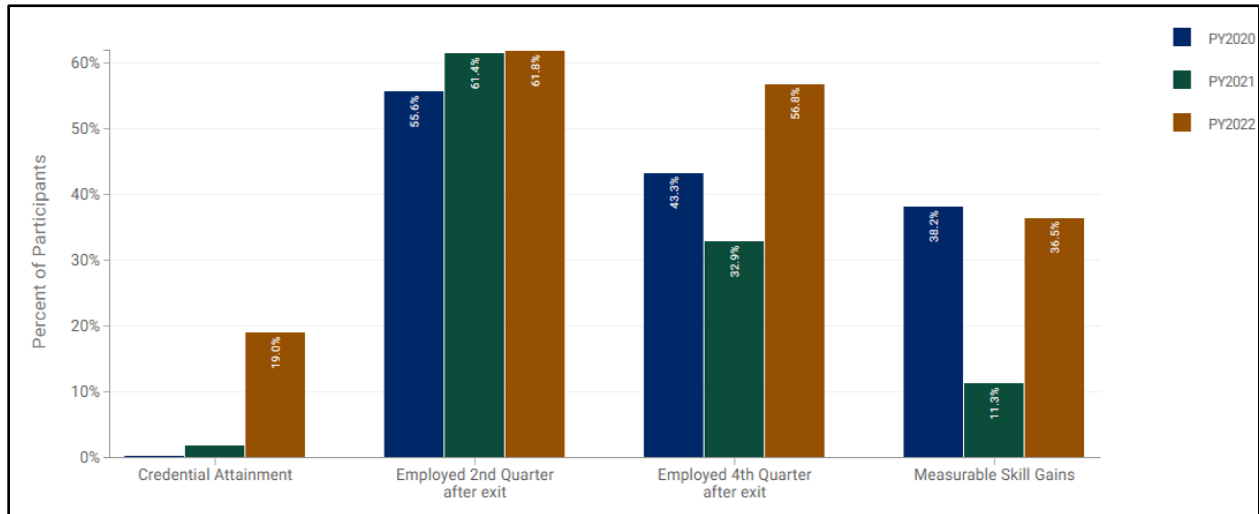


Figure 4 Data

Credential Attainment

PY 2022: 19%

Employed 2nd Quarter after exit

PY 2020: 55.6%

PY 2021: 61.4%

PY 2022: 61.8%

Employed 4th Quarter after exit

PY 2020: 43.3%

PY 2021: 32.9%

PY 2022: 56.8%

Measurable Skill Gains

PY 2020: 38.2%

PY 2021: 11.3%

PY 2022: 36.5%

Department of Human Services

DHS is committed to helping Pennsylvanians with disabilities to be a part of an inclusive community that they deserve. Supporting opportunities to work is an important part of building inclusion and fostering independence and empowerment. Employment services are embedded across the Medical Assistance (MA) program through the [Office of Developmental Programs](#) (ODP), [Office of Long-Term Living](#)

(OLTL), and the [Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services \(OMHSAS\)](#).⁵ DHS works with people covered through MA to understand how they can work and pursue goals without jeopardizing access to necessary services and supports.

Benefit Coordination: Medical Assistance Benefits

Individuals with disabilities often have unique medical needs requiring secure and adequate coverage for healthcare services. [Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities](#) (MAWD) is a program that provides healthcare coverage for people who have a disability and are working. To be eligible for MAWD, countable income must be below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Additionally, the individual must have less than \$10,000 in countable assets.

A common concern related to achieving CIE is that an increase in wages and savings could result in losing benefits that individuals need. The [MAWD for Workers with Job Success](#) (MAWD:WJS) is a relatively new benefit that enables an individual to be able to retain their MAWD benefit by paying a higher monthly premium to retain MAWD coverage for essential healthcare services. MAWD:WJS is for eligible individuals with a disability who make between 250 percent and 600 percent of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). The premium that an individual pays is unique to their income and assets. Some individuals pay approximately 7.5 percent of their countable income whereas others pay the full cost premium, which is \$948 per month. Due to lack of awareness of the MAWD and MAWD:WJS programs, the Office of Income Maintenance (OIM) has begun sending **monthly informational mailings** to targeted individuals who may be eligible for these programs.

DHS Data Snapshot 1

Figure 5: Healthcare Enrollment for People with Disabilities by Program*

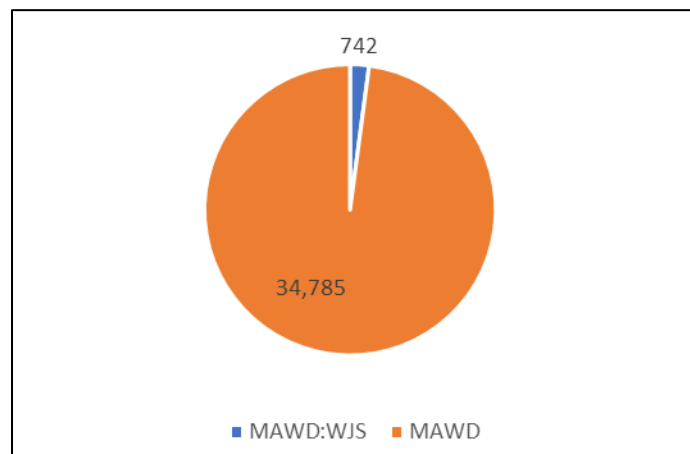


Figure 5 Data

*As of September 2024: MAWD:WJS: 742; MAWD: 34,785

⁵ For more on OMHSAS, see the “Other Agency Initiatives” section.

Benefit Coordination: Home and Community-Based Services

DHS administers programs to address needs related to the ability of an individual to live in independent and community-based settings. Services and supports that enable individuals with disabilities to live independently include home and community-based services and supports, such as direct support and attendant care, transportation, home and vehicle modifications, and employment services.

OLTL administers programs that provide long-term care, services, and supports for daily living activities in a home or facility setting for older Pennsylvanians and adults with physical disabilities. Primarily, OLTL coordinates home and community-based services, such as **direct care and attendant care**, which are critical services some individuals with disabilities need in order to work. These services are arranged by and paid for via Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). For the first time, the 2024 Community Health Choices (CHC) agreement included a **pay for performance incentive to MCOs** to increase the number of individuals 21-64 years old who are employed. In order to receive incentive payments, MCOs are required to reach a target of 2.5 percent of individuals, aged 21-64, receiving services and participating in the workforce in a CIE setting. Imposing a 2.5 percent minimum performance metric could result in doubling the number of individuals enrolled in OLTL services and participating in CIE.

Additionally, OLTL is conducting a **rate study** to assess the adequacy of payments for individuals receiving OLTL services for the five supportive service categories: Benefits Counseling, Career Assessment, Employment Skills Development, Job Coaching, and Job Finding. Finally, in the **2025 CHC Waiver**, which governs MCO coverage and operations policies, waiver funding must be used for community-based services that lead to and support CIE only rather than sheltered work where participants are supervised in producing goods or performing services under contract to third parties at subminimum wage.

ODP provides **supportive services for Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities and autism** to achieve greater independence and opportunity. In line with OLTL, ODP is implementing [performance-based contracting](#) for residential services to incentivize service providers to connect individuals with CIE and related supports effective January 1, 2025.

The Shapiro Administration led the effort to secure \$280 million dollars in the 2024–2025 budget to **increase hourly wages for direct support professionals** and a \$74.8 million infusion to **clear the emergency waitlist** for ODP’s waivers so that more Pennsylvanians can get the care they need. As of October 2024, 3,982 individuals were on ODP’s emergency waitlist, a number that continues to decline as all counties are actively enrolling additional adults into home- and community-based services. The list prioritizes individuals who have a need for services within six months for enrollment in available waiver slots.

Figure 6: Employment Services by Supports Coordination Organization (SCO)

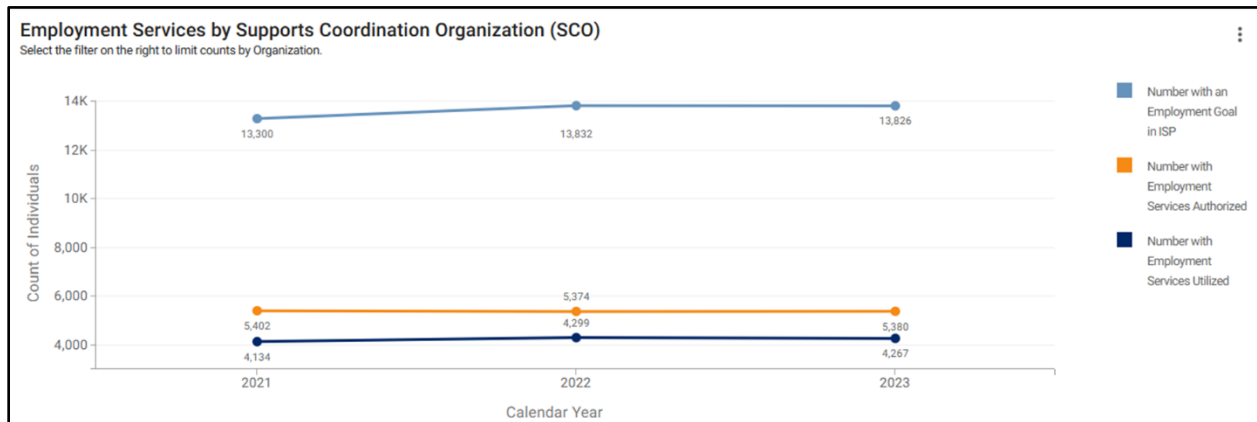


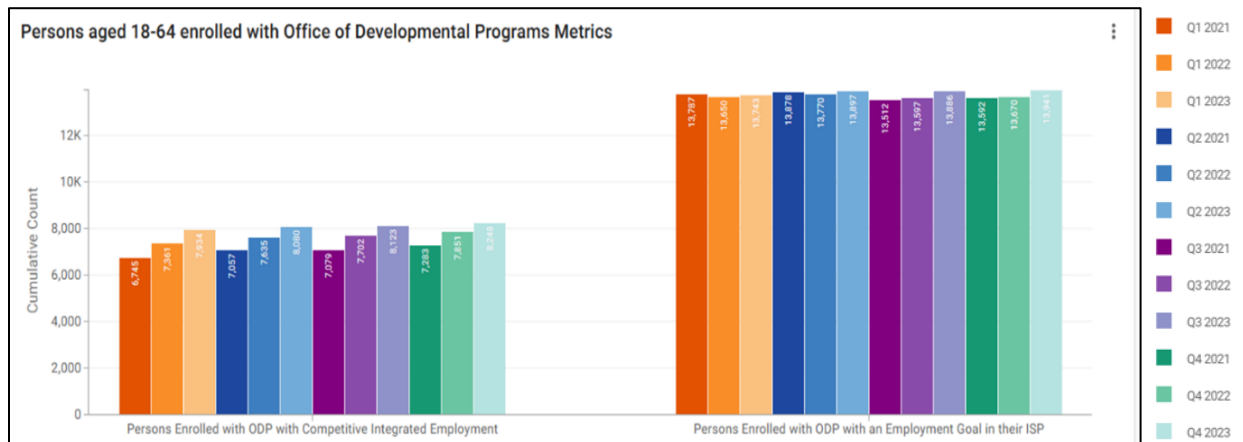
Figure 6 Data

2021: Number with an Employment Goal in ISP: 13,300; Number with Employment Services Authorized: 5,402; Number with Employment Services Utilized: 4,134

2022: Number with an Employment Goal in ISP: 13,832; Number with Employment Services Authorized: 5,374; Number with Employment Services Utilized: 4,299

2023: Number with an Employment Goal in ISP: 13,826; Number with Employment Services Authorized: 5,380; Number with Employment Services Utilized: 4,267

Figure 7: Persons aged 18-64 enrolled with Office of Developmental Programs Metrics



⁶ Both charts provided by the Pennsylvania Office of Administration Enterprise Data Office.

Figure 7 Data:

Persons Enrolled with ODP with Competitive Integrated Employment:

Q1 2021: 6,745; Q1 2022: 7,361; Q1 2023: 7,934
Q2 2021: 7,057; Q2 2022: 7,635; Q2 2023: 8,080
Q3 2021: 7,079; Q3 2022: 7,702; Q3 2023: 8,123
Q4 2021: 7,283; Q4 2022: 7,851; Q4 2023: 8,248

Persons Enrolled with ODP with an Employment Goal in their ISP

Q1 2021: 13,787; Q1 2022: 13,650; Q1 2023: 13,743
Q2 2021: 13,878; Q2 2022: 13,770; Q2 2023: 13,897
Q3 2021: 13,512; Q3 2022: 13,597; Q3 2023: 13,886
Q4 2021: 13,592; Q4 2022: 13,670; Q4 2023: 13,941

Department of Education

While PDE does not directly provide services or benefits, PDE administers state level policy, regulations, and standards that pertain to special education services in Pennsylvania via the [Bureau of Special Education](#) (BSE).

PDE developed the [Attract, Prepare, and Retain \(APR\) Learning Institute for Transition Consultants](#) to provide foundational knowledge about effective assistive technology practices in the workplace. The three-part program runs from November 12, 2024, through February 10, 2025. At the [2025 PDE BSE Conference](#) in February 2025, PDE will highlight mini-businesses established by **Student Shoppe Vendors** involved in the secondary transition process. The Student Shoppe offers students an opportunity to expand their work skills and broaden their understanding of marketing, advertising, and sales involved in the secondary transition process.

PDE maintains a [PA Secondary Transition website](#), which was expanded to include the PA Public Square, an interactive backend platform that functions like a learning community/social media for those in secondary transition. PDE's monthly newsletter, entitled "**Transition Tidbits**," highlights best practices and current news in the field of transition. In November 2024, for example, the [PA Transition Tidbits Newsletter](#) focused on building youth apprenticeship programs and how the P2P-WBLE program allows students with disabilities to gain practical work experience while still in school.

PDE developed a three-year state plan—**Secondary Transition Community of Practice (CoP)**—during the 2023 NTACT: Capacity Building Institute. Goals in the plan include increasing the youth engagement footprint in Pennsylvania and increasing the number of students with disabilities that are completers of career and technical education programs. The CoP is leveraging Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) **Youth Engagement Specialists** (YES) to work with OVR to increase the number of Youth Ambassadors in the state. YES led APR Learning Network for Transition Coordinators across the three PaTTAN offices with more than 300 participants statewide.

PaTTAN is piloting the use of the [Framework for Access and Belonging](#) (FAB) in Career and Technical Centers (CTCs). Then the CoP will partner with PaTTAN and PDE’s Bureau of Career and Technical Education (CTE) to pilot a cohort of staff to be trained as FAB facilitators. Also through PaTTAN, PDE offered an online professional development course, [Work Based Learning: A Guide for Program Implementation](#), for teachers, transition coordinators, and special education administrators. Lastly, the [Student-Led IEP Resource Hub](#) on the PaTTAN website is a one-stop shop for youth, families, and schools/educators at any stage of readiness to engage youth more meaningfully in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. The hub is embedded into the PA Secondary Transition website for easy access.

PDE Data Snapshot

The Federal Office of Special Education Indicator reporting indicates positive graduation and dropout rates. The 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 data should be interpreted with caution, but overall show a 2.9 percent increase in graduation rate and 2.7 percent decrease in dropout rate over the past six years.

Figure 8: Pennsylvania High School Graduation and Drop-Out Rates, 2017-2023 (Ages 14+)

Pennsylvania High School Graduation and Drop-Out Rates, 2017-2023 (Ages 14+)		
School Year	Graduation Rate (%)	Drop Out Rate (%)
2017-2018	85.80%	13.55%
2018-2019	86.13%	13.39%
2019-2020 (COVID DATA)	89.08%	10.56%
2020-2021 (COVID DATA)	89.53%	9.85%
2021-2022	87.52%	11.96%
2022-2023	88.67%	10.88%

Figure 8 Data:

2017-2018: Graduation Rate (%): 85.80%; Drop Out Rate (%): 13.55%
 2018-2019: Graduation Rate (%): 86.13%; Drop Out Rate (%): 13.39%
 2019-2020 (COVID DATA) Graduation Rate (%): 89.08 %; Drop Out Rate (%): 10.56%
 2020-2021 (COVID DATA) Graduation Rate (%): 89.53%; Drop Out Rate (%): 9.85%
 2021-2022 Graduation Rate (%): 87.52%; Drop Out Rate (%): 11.96%
 2022-2023 Graduation Rate (%): 88.67%; Drop Out Rate (%): 10.88%

Figure 9: Students Receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Program Years 2021 and 2022

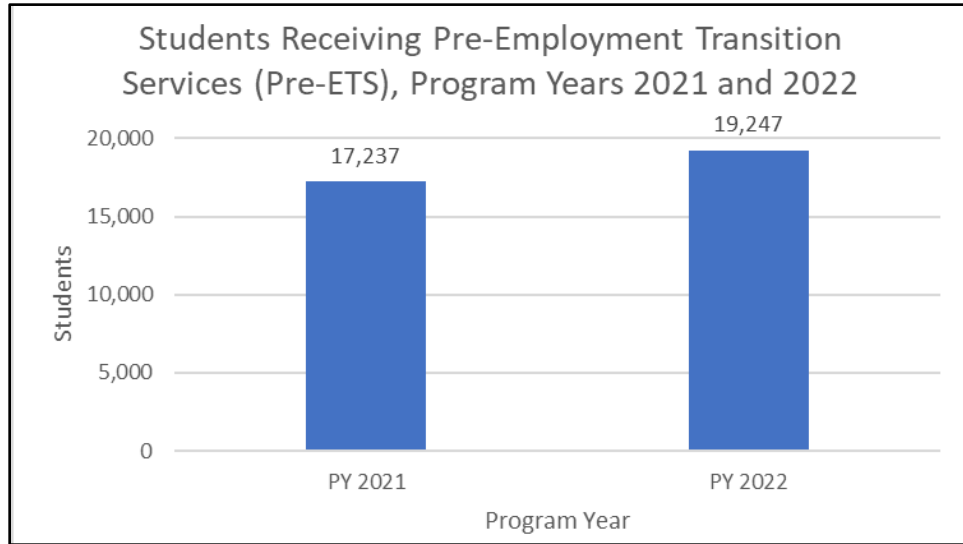


Figure 9 Data:

PY 2021: 17,237

PY 2022: 19,247

Figure 10: Number of Unique Students Entering CIE within Three Months of Graduation (Program Years 2021 to 2023)

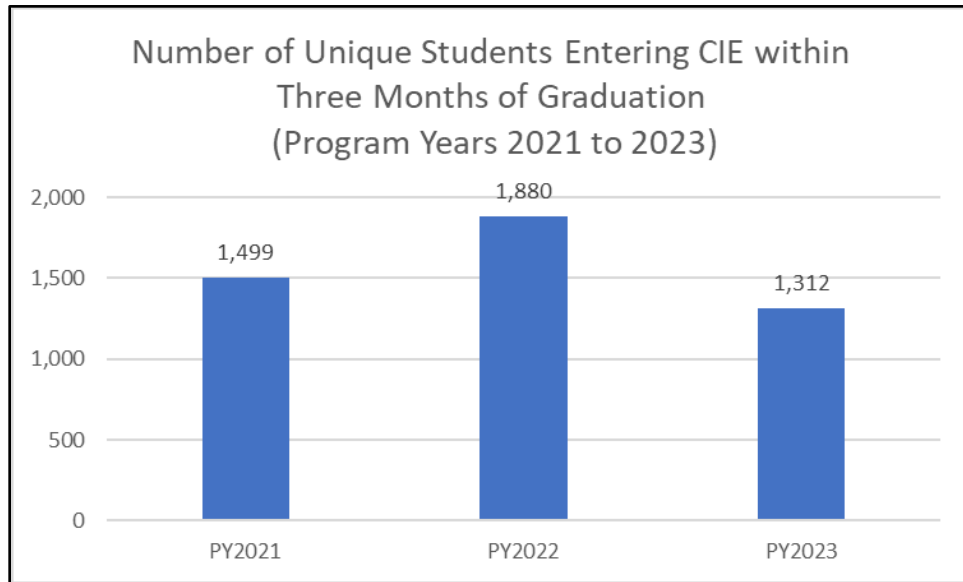


Figure 10 Data

PY 2021: 1,499

PY 2022: 1,880

PY 2023: 1,312

Figure 11: People with Disabilities who Entered Competitive Integrated Employment and Had Been Students While OVR Customers

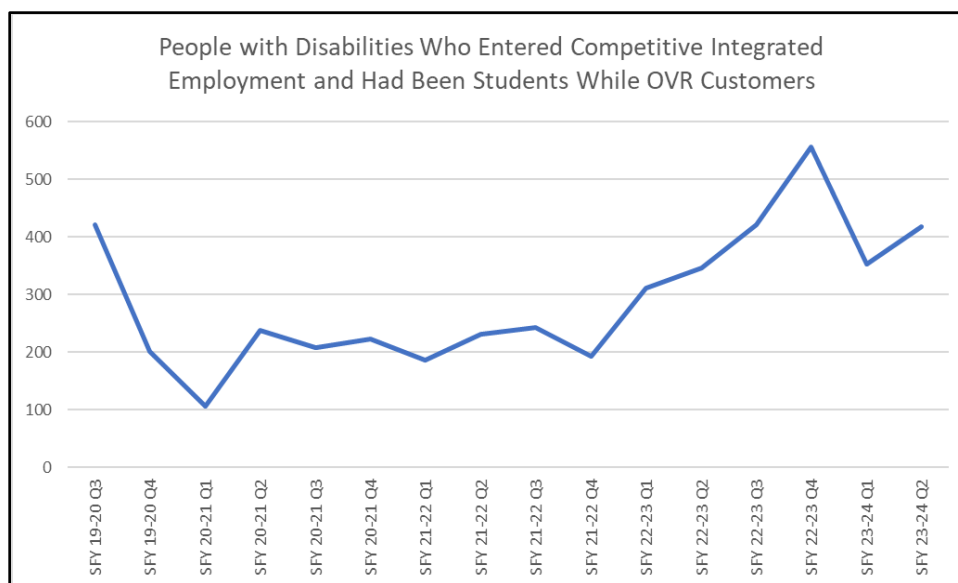


Figure 11 Summary

This line chart shows by fiscal year and quarter the number of people with disabilities who entered CIE and had been students while OVR customers. In Q2 of 2023 to 2024, just over 400 people entered CIE and had been students while OVR customers.

Department of Corrections

DOC is a newer addition to the Employment First Cabinet, joining in the summer of 2024 as a participating, non-member agency. DOC has multiple programs designed to serve justice-involved individuals with disabilities. Using a mix of state and federal funds, DOC offers the following [reentry services](#) to assist these individuals: housing assistance, mentoring, [workforce development](#), family reunification, day reporting, outpatient mental health treatment, outpatient behavioral programming, and the State Drug Treatment Program. DOC partners with 93 different providers offering services at 238 locations across the state.

DOC’s [Neurodevelopmental Residential Treatment Unit](#) (NRTU) at [State Correctional Institution Albion](#) is one of several specialized units DOC operates across the state. The NRTU specializes in addressing the unique rehabilitative needs of inmates diagnosed with intellectual and developmental disorders, including autism spectrum disorder. The unit has a dedicated parole agent, offering tailored reentry services; adaptations to the unit environment to reduce external stimuli; and evidenced-based specialized programming to help individuals with social skills (via the proven [PEERS program](#)). Residents of the unit can obtain employment to develop a variety of skills in preparation for reentry. Other DOC specialized units, located throughout the state, tailored for people with disabilities include: Personal

Care, Skilled Care, Special Needs, Therapeutic Community, Intermediate Care, Forensic Treatment, Intermediate Treatment, Mental Health, Residential Treatment, and Neuro Cognitive Care.

V. Accessibility

State government services, resources, and physical and digital property should be accessible to all Pennsylvanians regardless of disability status.

To address physical accessibility, the Shapiro Administration has begun an **accessibility study of the Pennsylvania Capitol Complex** to understand mobility challenges that individuals with disabilities may face when visiting or working in the Capitol Complex. Results are anticipated in spring of 2025.

To address digital accessibility, **CODE PA** (Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience), established by Governor Shapiro via [Executive Order 2023-08](#) in April 2023, is streamlining online services for Pennsylvanians, including older adults and people with disabilities. Ahead of federal regulations from the [U.S. Departments of Justice](#) and [Health and Human Services](#), CODE PA aims to make resident-facing applications as accessible as possible for all Commonwealth websites, applications, and services, such as **COMPASS** and **PATH**, by April 2026. CODE PA has already partnered with IT Delivery Centers and their agency customers to meet them where they are with application modernization projects, integrating accessibility into the design. This approach creates a sustainable model for future new or modernized applications. Progress is further supported by partnerships with OVR, involving people with disabilities as testers to ensure services meet real-world needs.



Former OVR Intern and current CODE PA employee Nicolas Spohn speaks with First Lady Lori Shapiro during a "Lori Listens" session focused on Digital Accessibility.⁷

⁷ Photo courtesy of CODE PA.

The Shapiro Administration is prioritizing improving digital accessibility across Commonwealth services to ensure equitable access for all Pennsylvanians. By engaging real-world testers like Nicolas (pictured above), who brings lived experience as a person who is blind, we create more inclusive digital solutions that meet the needs of everyone. These insights are essential to designing services that work better for residents and reflect the Administration's commitment to meaningful accessibility improvements. Since this session, Nicolas has become a full-time Quality Assurance Tester at CODE PA.

Nicolas Spohn (CODE PA): "What I like most about my job is that my work is very meaningful and impactful in my role as an accessibility analyst. I assist with making state websites and applications accessible and assist with procurement of assistive technology for state employees. It's very rewarding. I basically help find problems and bugs before the user does. I not only find those things but, I also work with the developers to help make sure those bugs turn into an easy digital experience for the end users."

"Having a job means waking up every day having a purpose set in front of me and goals to achieve and helping to make state services more accessible. This is what I set out to achieve. Although it is slow and steady work, this is the goal I set out to achieve each day."

Also this year, the Cabinet redeveloped the [Employment First Data Dashboard](#) to include recurring data requests from the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC). The Dashboard is categorized as follows:

1. Pennsylvania Labor
2. Education and Training
3. Healthcare, Services, and Supports
4. State Employment
5. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Cabinet redeveloped the dashboard to promote transparency, accessibility, and information sharing among EFOC and the public.

In addition, state agencies, including the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Transportation (PennDOT), as well as the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), a nonprofit governed by a board appointed by the Governor, have key roles to play in increasing accessibility.

Department of Health

DOH facilitates the [Special Kids Network](#), which assists providers and parents of children and youth with special health care needs with accessing local services and supports. Special Kids Network serves children and youth with physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional needs from birth through age 21.

Department of Transportation

PennDOT works with county transit agencies to improve the overall outcomes for its [Rural Transportation Program for Persons with Disabilities](#) (PWD). The PwD program is for individuals who live and/or travel outside the fixed-route system. It provides service beyond the ADA requirements. Through this program, people with disabilities, aged 18 through 64, may receive reduced rates on shared-ride, curb-to-curb, and advance reservation transportation services. In 66 out of 67 counties (Philadelphia is not included), people with disabilities pay a portion of the regular fare and the PwD program pays the remainder of the fare (up to 85 percent) for trips that are not eligible for any other funding source. Historical trends indicate that PennDOT's [Find My Ride](#) program, which helps people plan transportation and schedule trips (including accessible options at reduced fares), has steadily grown from 2021 to 2023 with the percentage of trips taken by PwD remaining fairly static at 62-63 percent.

PennDOT Data Snapshot

Figure 12: OVR Cases Receiving Transportation Services

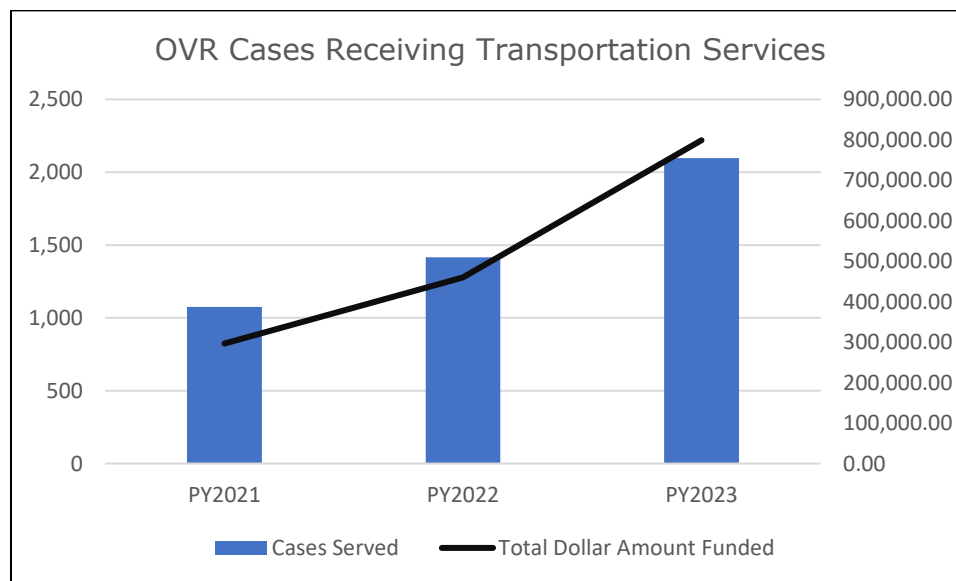


Figure 12 Summary

This chart shows OVR cases receiving transportation services from Program Year 2021 to 2023. It shows an increase in cases served and total dollar amount funded. In 2021, just over 1,000 cases were served compared to just over 2,000 in 2023.

In 2021, amount funded was close to \$300,000 compared to nearly \$800,000 in 2023.

Figure 13: Find MY Ride Booked Trips and Percentage Trips for Employment

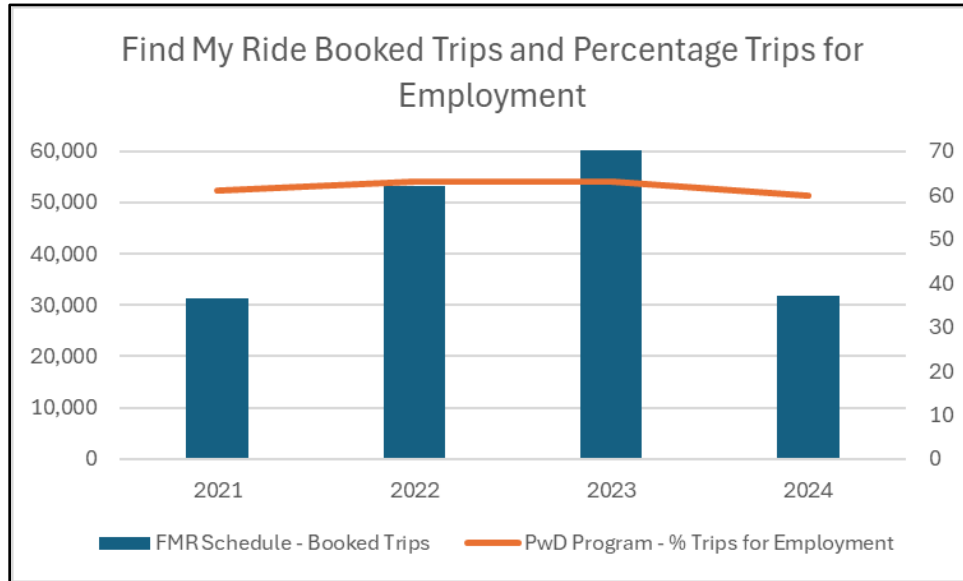


Figure 13 Summary

This chart shows Find My Ride booked trips and percentage trips for employment from 2021 to 2024. Percentage trips for employment remained fairly static at around 60 percent. Booked trips increased from 2021 to 2023 but went back down to the 2021 figure in 2024 at around 31,000.

Figure 14: Find My Ride Applications and Approved for Service

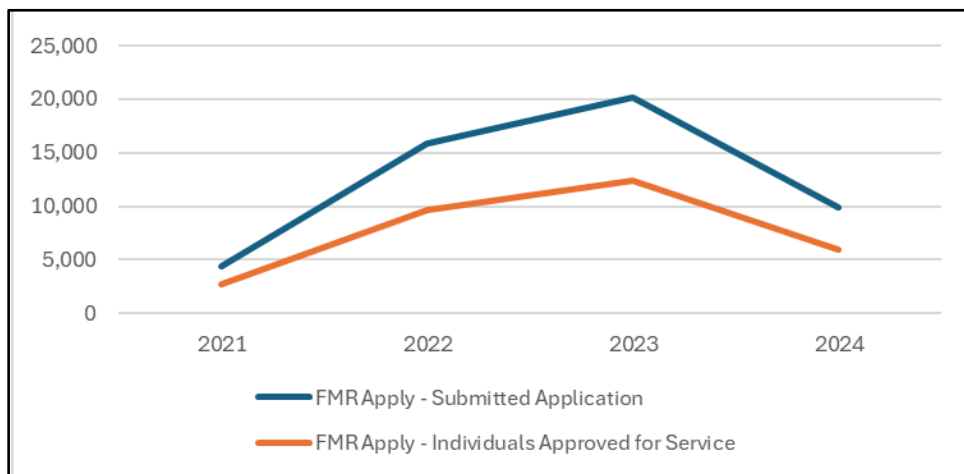


Figure 14 Summary

This line graph shows Find My Ride applications and those approved for service from 2021 to 2024. Both metrics increased from 2021 to 2023 but decreased in 2024 to close to the 2021 number. In 2021, 4,400 people submitted an application and 2,700 were approved. In 2023, 20,000 submitted an application and 12,000 were approved.

Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) offers an online [housing search tool](#) that provides the ability to search by accessibility needs for those with disabilities. PAHousingSearch is a free resource to help buyers find a home that fits their needs and budget. Property providers also can list available apartments or homes.

VI. The Commonwealth as a Model Employer

On May 13, 2024, Governor Shapiro signed [Executive Order 2024-01](#), which established the **Hire, Improve, Recruit, and Empower (HIRE) Committee** and set strategic direction for the Commonwealth to establish inclusive practices. Membership of the HIRE Committee includes the Executive Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation or designee. The Executive Order specifically states that the purpose of the group is to ensure that “the policies and programs of the Commonwealth [serve] as a model for other employers in the Commonwealth and as such, the Commonwealth’s policies should reflect its position as a model employer.”

The Office of Administration (OA), Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), and the Department of State (DOS) have made significant progress in intentionally creating new processes to make the Commonwealth’s employment systems to be more inclusive of individuals with disabilities.

Office of Administration

OA is responsible for human resource functions for agencies operating under the Governor’s jurisdiction within state government. OA has been engaged with other Cabinet and non-Cabinet agencies to ensure that employees with a disability have the resources needed to be successful in their Commonwealth employment. Some examples include: the **hiring of a disability recruiter**; the Bureau of Enterprise Recruitment (BER) with the Bureau of Organization Management (BOOM) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOO) **promoting accessible position descriptions and essential functions** and **providing training for agencies** on writing these; creating and presenting Disability Awareness Trainings to all human resources managers under the Governor’s jurisdiction; and hosting interns in partnership with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).

In the summer of 2024, **OA in partnership with OVR hosted 23 interns in eight Commonwealth agencies**, including OA, Department of Agriculture (PDA), DCED, Department of Corrections (DOC), Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Department of General Services (DGS), Department of Human Services (DHS), and L&I. The program expands every year from 18 participants in the inaugural year 2018. Future recruitment efforts will focus on geographic areas with high student interest to yield a larger candidate pool. During the summer of 2024, 23 interns from OVR were hired, but there were more job openings than qualified candidates available. OA hopes to expand the number of participating agencies in 2025.

Additionally, OA is actively working with agencies to implement a **pilot program in partnership with OVR to refer qualified individuals receiving OVR services to frequently posted Commonwealth jobs**. This new pilot began in August 2024 with DMVA. The process is as follows:

1. DMVA notifies OA and OVR of entry-level non-civil service openings, which are posted internally to target OVR clients;
2. OA forwards internal job postings to OVR counselors who work with their customers/job seekers to apply to any openings in which they are interested and eligible;
3. Qualified applicants are given the opportunity to interview; and
4. The agency follows its standard selection procedure.

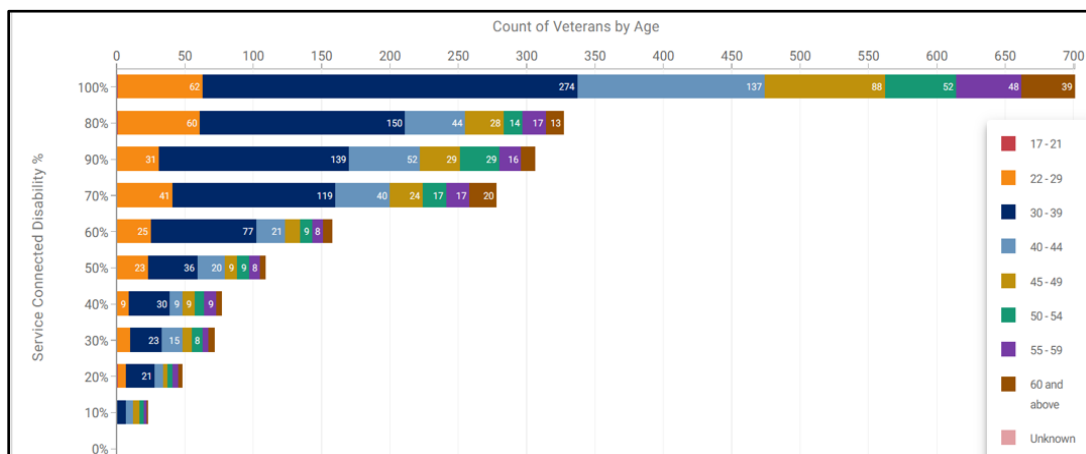
Currently, the pilot is focused on DMVA custodial and food service positions in long-term care facilities across the state. Ten OVR candidates have been referred to DMVA; one was hired at Delaware Valley Veterans’ Home and four candidates are still in the interview process.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

In addition to the pilot mentioned above, DMVA **intentionally hires individuals with disabilities**. DMVA works with an OA disability recruiter to encourage candidates with disabilities to apply for DMVA state employment. OVR disability counselors can help candidates find DMVA positions. While making progress towards this initiative continues, there have been challenges because the data regarding veterans with disabilities in Pennsylvania is housed at the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.

DMVA Data Snapshot⁸

Figure 15: Veteran Readiness & Employment Program Participation by Age and Service-Connected Disability



⁸ “Veteran Readiness & Employment Program Participation” chart provided by the Pennsylvania Office of Administration Enterprise Data Office.

Figure 15 Summary

This bar chart shows veteran readiness and employment program participation by age and service-connected disability in 2023. For example, there were 274 age 30 to 39 at 100 percent service-connected disability who participated in the program. There were 36 age 30 to 39 at 50 percent disability who participated.

Department of Labor & Industry

In addition to service provision, OVR within L&I works closely with other state agencies and local partners to promote the accessibility of state resources to individuals with disabilities.

OVR and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) entered a MOU to increase opportunities for high school students up to age 25 to participate in paid work experiences in PA state parks and DCNR-managed state forests through the [PA DCNR Outdoor Corps](#). The DCNR Outdoor Corps Youth Employment Program offers paid work experience of \$15.00 per hour, skills training, professional development, and hands-on environmental education experiences through exposing participants to a variety of professionals and career paths while working to complete recreation and conservation projects on PA's public lands. The youth program, which includes an American Sign Language Youth Crew, typically has 10-12 high school participants each summer. The young adult program for ages 18-25 spans nine months and is a gateway to professional training, development, and growth opportunities.

MY Work (Municipalities + Youth) is a summer employment program created by OVR to provide high school students with disabilities the chance to work within their local municipalities. The program started with 50 students. During the most recent program year, OVR placed 1,214 students (up from 850 in the prior year) with disabilities at 165 worksites across 58 Pennsylvanian counties. OVR covers the program's wages for all student workers, with no cost to the municipality. Additionally, OVR has developed work readiness guidance in a variety of fields, including beautification projects, children's programming, and customer service. As OVR's presence becomes more established in these localities, more employers, educators, and community members become aware of OVR's services.

Department of Community and Economic Development

Aiming to be a model employer, DCED includes personnel from its **Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEBI) office** on interview panels when appropriate. DCED also met with staff from OVR's [On-the-Job Training](#) (OJT) program to discuss DCED participation in the program and discussions continue. OJT provides opportunities for qualified OVR customers to enter into employment. The OJT program reimburses a percentage of an OVR customer's wages to absorb some training costs. OVR offers technical support and certification of additional business tax credits when employers hire qualified, job-ready OVR customers. In addition, DCED participated in OVR's internship program for the 2024 season.

VII. Other Agency Initiatives

Commonwealth agencies represented in the Cabinet are making progress towards incorporating Employment First principles in agency operations and programs. Success can be attributed to the Administration's prioritization of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and workforce goals and to agencies' strategic planning and office- and bureau-level foresight and initiative. Additionally, agencies have made progress in cross-department collaboration and enhancement, rather than duplication, of efforts.

Department of Human Services

In May and June of 2024, the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) hosted the second annual series of **Employment Symposiums**. In 2024 ODP increased the number of symposiums from three (3) to four (4). The in-person symposiums offered tangible opportunities for networking, sharing resources, and learning best practices for employer engagement. The symposiums were designed to facilitate authentic dialogue about increasing employment rates for people with disabilities. Additionally, staff from ODP and OVR presented information on cross-system navigation when working with both offices.

In September 2024, ODP developed and disseminated a second year of county-level **employment reports with data on CIE**, employment services, and employment goals evaluated by race to each county or county joiner. ODP also developed an **Analysis Guidance tool** to assist counties in evaluating the provided data, including identifying potential racial disparities or barriers to employment services, support in addressing any identified disparities or barriers, and technical assistance from ODP Employment Leads. ODP also distributed a survey to solicit feedback on ways in which future reports and technical assistance could be improved.

Additionally, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (OMHSAS) made changes to the Medicaid State Plan for Peer Support Services to allow the **expansion of eligibility to work as a certified peer specialist (CPS)**—an individual with personal, lived experience in their own mental health recovery—removing the requirement for a serious mental illness, which is a broader definition. Mental illness can have a disabling impact upon individuals and is considered a disability. Also, the CPS program, with the Department of Corrections (DOC), identifies and trains those individuals who have been released from a carceral setting within the last two years and who are interested in obtaining employment as a CPS in their community. This project not only focuses on enhancing the CPS workforce but also provides support to current specialists to obtain employment post involvement in the CPS program.

Department of Aging

In 2024, the Department of Aging released Pennsylvania’s first multisector plan on aging, [Aging Our Way, PA](#). This document is a 10-year strategic plan to improve systems of support for older adults and caregivers. The plan includes tactics to help older adults find accessible work opportunities to maintain employment as they age.

Department of Aging Data Snapshot

Figure 16: Older Pennsylvanians Receiving Supported Employment Services

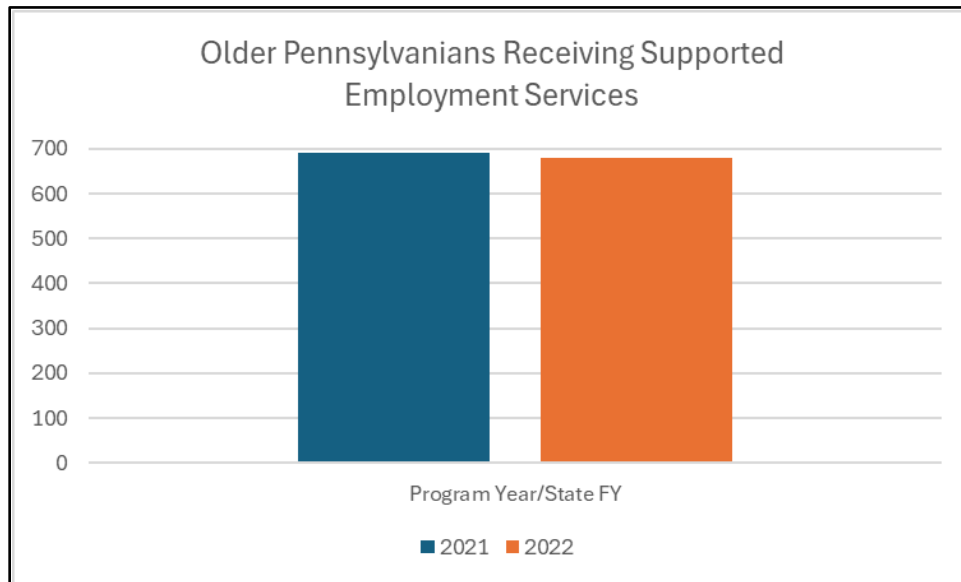


Figure 16 Summary

This chart shows that the number of older Pennsylvanians receiving supported employment services has remained consistent over Program Year 2021 and Program Year 2022, with close to 700 older Pennsylvanians served in each year.

Department of Health

DOH developed a multi-year strategic [State Health Improvement Plan](#) in collaboration with diverse stakeholders across the state, focusing on equity and addressing social determinants. The overall goal is to improve the health and life expectancy of all Pennsylvanians and eliminate health inequities by focusing on whole person care and chronic disease prevention.

DOH’s [State Health Assessment](#) (SHA) examines **inequities** ([State Health Assessment Dashboard](#)) by disability in access to information, accommodations, access to transportation, healthcare providers’ competencies to treat people with disabilities, and access to health care and health insurance. The SHA also assesses impact of social isolation on mental health and individuals living with disabilities.

Developmental Disabilities Council

The Developmental Disabilities Council (PADDC) creates a new [State Plan](#) every five years that includes “actions and strategies that will lead to more meaningful, inclusive, and self-directed lives for people with developmental disabilities.” Two of the plan’s objectives focus on employment: 1) through peer-to-peer training, increase the number of people with developmental disabilities who state they make decisions for their own lives and 2) support 20 businesses each year through education and technical assistance focused on practices to employ/promote more people with developmental disabilities.

PADDC also **funds new and innovative short-term projects** ([PADDC Current Grantees](#)) that help people with disabilities to participate more fully in their communities. Some examples include: Arc Human Services in Washington County provides educational sessions on customized/supportive employment; Community Living and Support Services in Pittsburgh holds employment seminars and job fairs; and Community Options identified 20 storytellers with disabilities and gave them the opportunity to share their stories through storytelling events.

Human Relations Commission

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) focused its Employment First efforts on **public awareness** of the protections afforded to individuals with disabilities through training, informational pamphlets and posts, and strategic litigation. The aim is to drive more individuals to the agency to exercise their right to be free from discrimination on the basis of disability. Employment discrimination already vastly outpaces the discrimination that PHRC hears about in other areas of protection.

Public awareness activities included hosting PHRC’s [Second Annual Disability Conference](#) in July and two “Lunch and Learns” focused on autism and neurodivergence. PHRC also issues pre-hearing and post-hearing **press releases**, ([PHRC press releases](#)) which may involve disability rights litigation, to educate the public. In addition, 18 counties have PHRC [Social Justice Ambassadors](#), who advocate for social change for individuals with disabilities and others. PHRC aims to have one in every county. Ambassadors refer education, employment, housing, commercial property, or public accommodation discrimination complaints from community members to PHRC and keep PHRC updated on incidents of hate and bias in their communities.

Figure 17: Employment Discrimination Complaints Filed by State Fiscal Year

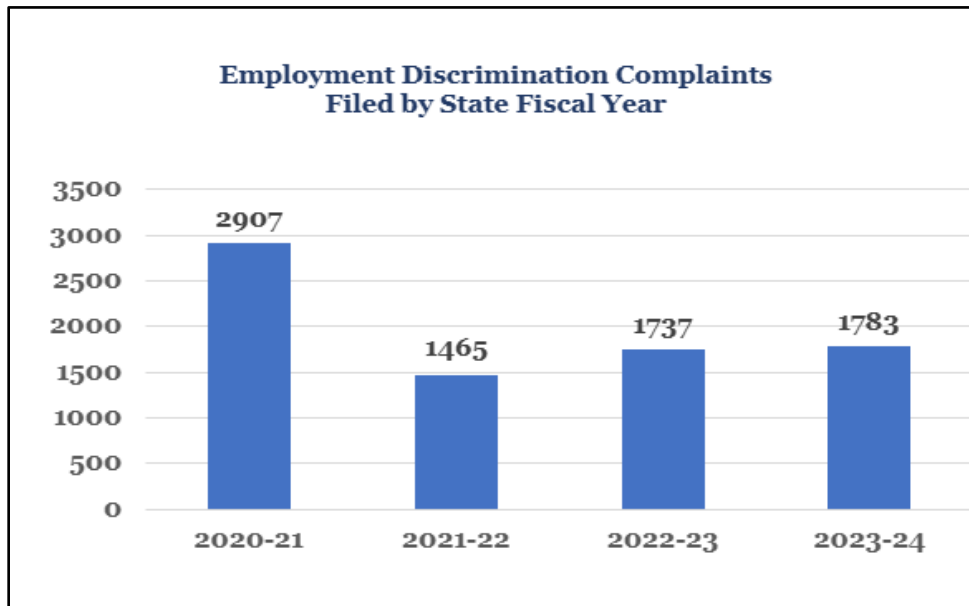
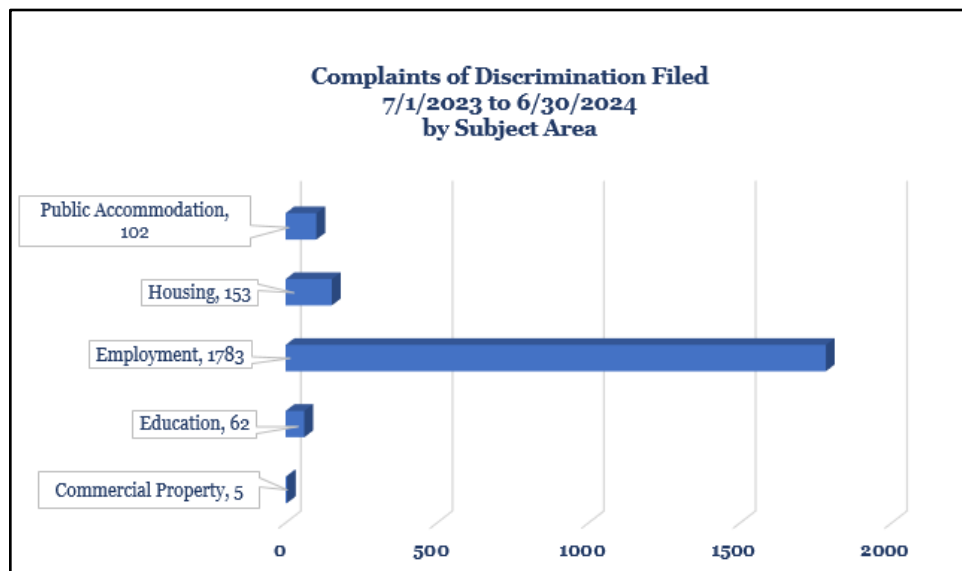


Figure 17 Data

This bar chart shows that Employment Discrimination Complaints were 2,907 in Fiscal Year 2020-2021; 1,465 in Fiscal Year 2021-2022; 1,737 in Fiscal Year 2022-2023; and 1,783 in Fiscal Year 2023-2024.

Figure 18: Complaints of Discrimination Filed 7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024 by Subject Area



⁹ Both charts provided by PHRC.

Figure 18 Data

This bar chart shows the nature of complaints of discrimination in Fiscal Year 2023-2024:

Employment: 1,783

Housing: 153

Public Accommodation: 102

Education: 62

Commercial Property: 5

Cross-Agency

Led by the EFOC, representatives from DHS, OVR, County Local Workforce Development Boards, Southwest UnitedWay, and private employers form **Local Employment Coalitions** that meet to discuss building on work at the local and county level to support people with disabilities in finding and maintaining employment.

PDE, OVR, ODP, and the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) co-presented at the **PDE Transition Conference**. Representatives from these agencies delivered a [joint Transition Conference presentation](#) on collaborating to support CIE for people with disabilities.

OVR and the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS) entered into a MOU in May 2017, in effect until June 2026, to better serve justice-involved youth with disabilities. Internal OVR staff provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and accept referrals for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services. VR Specialists provide technical assistance to OVR staff, Pennsylvania Academic, Career, and Technical Training Alliance (PACTT) partners, PACTT affiliates, and complete reporting to BJJS. (The [PACTT Alliance](#) is part of BJJS.) In November 2024, PACTT affiliates and PACTT Regional Consultants presented on the **OVR and BJJS/PACTT partnership** at the 2024 James E. Anderson Conference on Juvenile Justice.

VIII. Response to Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) Report

The Cabinet would like to thank EFOC for continued collaboration and their thoughtful annual report ([Employment First Oversight Commission Annual Report](#)), submitted in October 2024. Of the recommendations that EFOC put forward, the following are under consideration and best efforts will be made to meet identified targets:

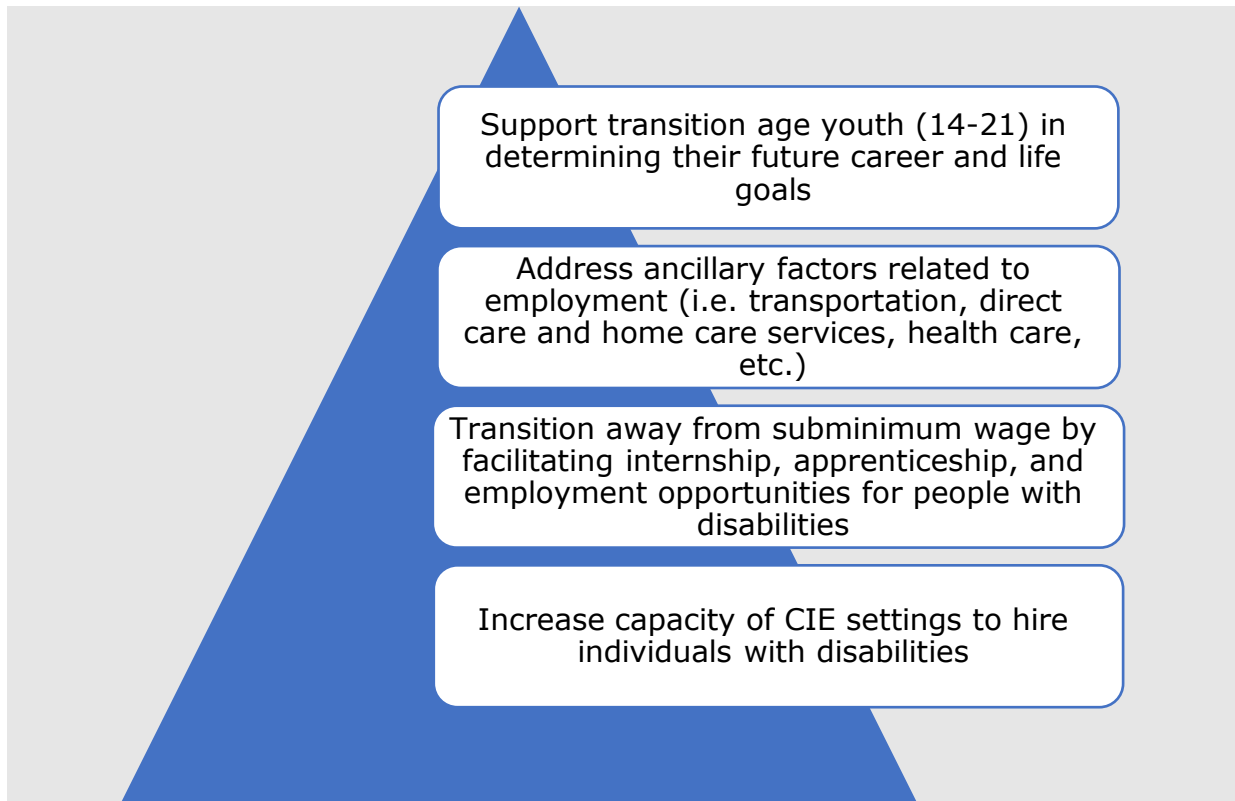
- Require Cabinet representation and participation at least half of the EFOC meetings in 2025.
- Ensure that Pennsylvanians with disabilities can get Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and transition away from subminimum wage and restrictive settings/segregated work.
- Increase the number of Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) internships available in state agencies.
- Use accessible position descriptions and ensure accessibility in hiring processes (interviews, etc.).
- Emphasize transportation matters in the Cabinet.
- Increase the number of individuals with CIE, individuals with an employment goal, and individuals with authorized employment services in waiver programs.
- Ensure access to home and community-based services, particularly employment services, for waiver recipients to alleviate barriers to CIE.
- Ensure comprehensive transition support for students with disabilities and facilitate and expand CIE opportunities for graduates.
- Set goals for the Department of Health (DOH) for hiring more people with disabilities in healthcare jobs and further ways to address social determinants of health and health inequities through various programs.
- Enhance employment flexibility and increase opportunities and resources for older adults with disabilities.
- Increase opportunities and resources for veterans with disabilities while continuing to support the partnerships between the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) and the Office of Administration (OA) and OVR.
- Support job training for inmates and accessible reentry services.

The Cabinet would also like to express its appreciation for the one-on-one meetings EFOC has conducted with agencies in order to work more collaboratively with them to formulate goals and recommendations that are feasible. We are encouraged by this development and think it will support greater success.

IX. Recommendations and Future Direction

The Cabinet has made significant progress in advancing Employment First principles and expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities. While many advances have been made in the past year and prior years, there is still work to be done to ensure all individuals have access to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). The Cabinet has identified the following priority areas to guide future work:

Figure 19: Cabinet Priority Areas to Guide Future Work



The Cabinet also has identified the following administrative priorities:

- **Data Transparency:** The Cabinet and Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) worked together to develop the revised Employment First Data Dashboard to focus on targeted measures to assess progress and gaps. By streamlining the data request process this year, we have determined the most critical and actionable data points, reducing duplication, streamlining the process, and making the information readily available in different formats for any interested party to use. The specific data sets on the dashboard will remain static, but the data itself will be refreshed annually.

- **Agency Self-Assessment:** This year, EFOC requested that agencies complete a self-assessment to understand where each agency is with implementing Employment First recommendations. In future years, the Cabinet recommends working closely with EFOC to develop questions to ensure that the information provided is helpful for EFOC.
- **Collaboration:** Continue to raise awareness about Employment First work that the Commonwealth is conducting and collaborate with relevant stakeholders. In addition to EFOC, the Cabinet has engaged with the [Workforce Development Board](#) by attending meetings of the Barrier Remediation Committee. The Workforce Development Board has adopted recommendations to phase out 14(c) employment arrangements as well as other recommendations to support individuals with disabilities in their workplace.
- **Communication:** The Cabinet would like to continue to build on the progress to date and facilitate open dialogue with EFOC. To ensure that both entities are moving Employment First priorities forward, regular communication and coordination is critical. Ensuring that the recommendations and goals put forth by EFOC are specific and executable is key to continued progress. The Cabinet believes that increased communication and interaction with EFOC will result in positive outcomes for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.
- **Adaptability:** This year, the Cabinet decided to invite the Department of Corrections (DOC) as a participating member of the Cabinet given an increased focus on reentry and justice-related services and policies. The Cabinet will continue to assess gaps within the group and adjust membership accordingly building on the representation outlined in Act 36 of 2018.

X. Acknowledgements

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XI. Appendices

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