

Employment First in Minnesota

Employment First is Minnesota's policy that competitive, integrated employment is the first and expected option for working-age people with disabilities. The starting belief is simple and important: people with disabilities can work, want to work, and can earn a competitive wage in a regular workplace alongside coworkers without disabilities.

Content

Employment First is Minnesota's policy that competitive, integrated employment is the first and expected option for working-age people with disabilities. The starting belief is simple and important: people with disabilities can work, want to work, and can earn a competitive wage in a regular workplace alongside coworkers without disabilities.

The policy. The Olmstead Subcabinet adopted Minnesota's Employment First Policy in 2014, and in 2020 the Legislature wrote Employment First into state law. It directs state agencies to make employment the first option considered — meaning a person should be offered the chance to work and earn a competitive wage before being offered other day services or supports.

What competitive integrated employment means. A real job, in the community, at a fair wage that is at least minimum wage, working alongside people without disabilities, with the same chances to advance. Not segregated, not sub-minimum, not a placeholder.

How Minnesota supports it. Employment First is carried out through E1MN, a partnership of the Departments of Human Services, Employment and Economic Development, and Education, so employment support is coordinated rather than scattered. Investments in provider capacity and staff training back it up.

What it means for your work. Lead with the expectation that work is possible. When you help plan services, ask about the person's employment goals first, not last. Watch for low expectations — from systems, from others, and from ourselves — and counter them with options and support. Employment is not a reward for being ready; for most people, it is part of how a good life is built.

This is a working summary for staff. For specific program rules, check current DHS guidance or route the question to the consultant.

Choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Employment First in Minnesota.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Employment First in Minnesota to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product.

Choose the sections of Employment First in Minnesota that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Employment First in Minnesota, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

Check the stated limitations and evidence status for Employment First in Minnesota; escalate when current authority or individual context is missing.

Review the result with the affected person, team, or community and revise the find and apply guidance approach when it creates a barrier or unintended effect.

For all staff, use Employment First in Minnesota to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product; use the guidance in the immediate task, check impact and access, and ask for help when authority is unclear. Start by choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Employment First in Minnesota.

Verify the current primary authority and effective date; this resource does not provide fact-specific legal advice or replace authorized program interpretation.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

Employment First is Minnesota's policy that competitive, integrated employment is the first and expected option for working-age people with disabilities. The starting belief is simple and important: people with disabilities can work, want to work, and can earn a competitive wage in a regular workplace alongside coworkers without disabilities. Step 1. Choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Employment First in Minnesota. Step 2. Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Employment First in Minnesota to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product. Step 3. Choose the sections of Employment First in Minnesota that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule. Step 4. Document the action taken from Employment First in Minnesota, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner. Step 5. Check the stated limitations and evidence status for Employment First in Minnesota; escalate when current authority or individual context is missing. Step 6. Review the result with the affected person, team, or community and revise the find and apply guidance approach when it creates a barrier or unintended effect.