

Mental Health and Employment

Most people with a serious mental illness want to work. According to recent research, 70% of adults with a serious mental illness would like to have a job. Employment is now viewed as an important part of recovery and supported employment for people with a serious mental illness is considered an evidence based practice, meaning there is data to prove that it works.

Unfortunately, for many people with a serious mental illness, employment eludes them. People with a serious mental illness have the highest unemployment rate which is costly to the individuals and to our communities.

Of the adults with a serious mental illness using case management, 75% were reported to be looking for work or not in the labor force. Barriers to employment included: stigma and discrimination, fear of losing health benefits, lack of vocational services and lack of transportation. The unemployment rate and lack of employment services to assist people with a mental illness is a national and state disgrace.

In 1995 the Minnesota Legislature funded an Extended Employment project for people with a serious mental illness. This new project, requiring collaboration between the Department of Human Services and Rehabilitation Services, funds supported employment services that provide individualized support, ongoing assistance, and assistance to employers. Additionally, the hope was that this new funding would increase the capacity of providers to meet the needs of people with mental illness.

The Extended Employment Project for People with Serious Mental Illness (EE-SMI) uses interagency collaboration, individualized supported employment and consumer involvement in the planning, development, oversight and delivery of services. Support services can include: job coaching, facilitation of natural supports, supportive counseling, coordination of support services, job development or placement, training in social skills and money management. A key feature of this program is that ongoing employment supports are provided – meaning that providers can step in and help someone who is already employed keep their job if they start having problems. They can also help with career advancement and to find a new job.

Recovery is possible, but that means we must fund programs that assist people in finding and maintaining employment. We must fund programs that will work with employers to break down stigma and educate them about the supports and accommodations that may be needed by people with serious mental illness.

The Mental Health Legislative Network Supports:

- Increased funding for the EE-SMI program (SF 861/HF 973)
- Funding for pilot projects that facilitate employment for people in mental health courts, commitment courts or for transition age youth (SF 861/HF 973)

All these provisions are also contained in HF 196 and SF 148.

For more information contact:
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