

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategic plan, *A Blueprint for Change*, outlines the origin, mission and goals of the Oregon Competitive Employment Project (Project), and the strategies the Project will utilize and the activities it will implement in order to make competitive and inclusive employment possible for Oregonians with disabilities.

### **Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

While people with disabilities, as a group, have made progress in several areas in recent years, including statutory recognition of their civil rights, significant numbers of persons with disabilities remain unemployed and underemployed. U.S. Census data for 1997 (the most recent applicable national data) indicates that while 78 percent of the total U.S. population between 21 and 64 were employed, only about half of those persons with disabilities, and 31 percent of those with severe disabilities were employed. 2000 Census data on Oregon's employment rate showed that while Oregonians with disabilities were employed at a higher rate the difference was marginal and data precedes the recession in which Oregon had the highest unemployment rate in the nation for 13 consecutive months. Other national and state employment sources report that many persons with disabilities have lower employment rates and less desirable jobs than others.

The effect of unemployment and underemployment on people with disabilities should not be understated. The 2004 National Organization on Disabilities/Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities, which found that only 35 percent of people with disabilities reported being employed full or part time, compared with 78 percent of those without disabilities, also found that:

- Three times as many live in poverty with annual household incomes below \$15,000 (26 percent versus 9 percent).
- People with disabilities are twice as likely to have inadequate transportation, and a much a higher percentage go without health care.
- People with disabilities are less likely to socialize, eat out, or attend religious services than their non-disabled counterparts.
- Only 34 percent of persons with disabilities said they were very satisfied with their lives, compared with 61 percent of those without disabilities.

## **CMS Medicaid Infrastructure Grants**

In 2005, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) awarded the Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVRs), a four-year Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. CMS awarded “comprehensive” MIG grants to eleven states, including Oregon, that in recent years have developed services and supports needed by many persons with disabilities in order to obtain and maintain competitive employment, including personal assistance services and Medicaid buy-in programs.\* In CMS’ view, states that have developed these services and supports are capable of developing a comprehensive system of employment services and supports system that will make meaningful and inclusive employment a reality for citizens with disabilities.

Comprehensive MIG grantees were directed to spend the first year of the four-year grant cycle developing strategic plans outlining activities for the ensuing three years. OVRs initiated the Competitive Employment Project in the spring of 2005 with an inaugural meeting of key stakeholders and recruitment of Project staff. In late August, after staff had been hired, a twenty-two member Leadership Council was appointed. Its members include individuals with disabilities and their supporters, representatives of public and private employers, and representatives of allied governmental agencies and programs. Shortly thereafter, the Project began to plan. Over the following five months, Project staff, consultants and the Leadership Council worked intensively to complete the *Blueprint*.

## **Development of the Blueprint**

The *Blueprint for Change* was developed through a number of successive steps. In the first of these, Project staff and consultants scanned Oregon’s disability and employment-related systems and identified:

- The strengths and beneficial elements that need to be preserved and sustained.
- Gaps, barriers and problems that limit persons with disabilities from gaining and maintaining meaningful employment.
- Ideas, recommendations and strategies for sustaining strengths and addressing gaps, barriers and problems.

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\* A Medicaid buy-in program allows individuals with disabilities to work while retaining their Medicaid health benefits. Without these benefits, many of these individuals could not work.

This information and analysis was obtained through a number of processes, including

- Interviews and surveys of 22 “key informants” about disability and employment issues.
- Community forums that were held in nine Oregon communities in order to obtain input and recommendations from persons with disabilities, employers, local governmental officials, and disability service providers.
- Development of concept papers and briefs on key issues and developments

Through subsequent planning meetings, the Leadership Council, Project staff and consultants developed a comprehensive and prioritized set of strategies and activities for advancing competitive employment of persons with disabilities. On November 30, a draft version of the *Blueprint* was sent to CMS. In late December, CMS evaluated the draft plan and recommended several changes. The *Blueprint* was completed and submitted to CMS on February 15, 2006.

### **Summary of Blueprint**

The *mission* of the Oregon Competitive Employment Project is *to enhance the quality of life in Oregon by achieving, maintaining and advancing the competitive and inclusive employment of persons with disabilities.*

The Project’s *goals* are to:

- Empower people with all types of disabilities to obtain meaningful employment.
- Educate and engage employers to develop and market the “business case” for employing people with disabilities.
- Enhance the availability and effectiveness of employment supports for persons with disabilities.
- Enhance Oregon’s workforce system and expand its availability for persons with disabilities.

The Project will seek to fulfill these goals by addressing the objectives and implementing the strategies and activities outlined below:

1. **Expand the availability of supported employment services and supports to persons historically underserved.** The Project will:
  - Collaborate with OVRs and the Office of Mental Health & Addiction Services in developing evidence-based supported employment to persons with serious and persistent mental illness in up to five counties through provision of technical assistance resources and grants.
  - Assist OVRs and the Seniors and Persons With Disabilities Services (SPD) cluster in increasing the availability of supported employment services and supports to persons with developmental disabilities through expansion of existing and new employment services and initiatives.
  - Develop and implement one or more strategy and set of activities with its DHS partners and others in order to increase the availability supported services and supports to persons with acquired traumatic brain injuries.
  
2. **Develop a comprehensive, integrated and accessible benefits planning system to provide information on work incentives and supports needed by persons with disabilities in order to seek, obtain and maintain employment.** The Project will coordinate these efforts with the Oregon Advocacy Center, the State Independent Living Council, and disability, vocational and educational programs and providers. The focus will be on expanding the availability of professional benefits planning, as well as developing information and training for intake staff, who are the initial point of contact for persons with disabilities, and for professional staff, who are responsible for supporting and coordinating services and supports.
  
3. **Refine, strengthen and, where feasible, expand the availability and accessibility of work incentives and programmatic supports, while reducing the effect of work disincentives.** The Project will work with SPD, State Medicaid officials, the Social Security Administration, the Workers' Compensation Division and others to maximize the usefulness and effectiveness of work incentive programs

4. **Promote the use of peer mentors as an employment support for persons with disabilities and employers**, through the development and implementation of related policies and practices. The Project will work with the State Independent Living Council and other self and peer advocacy organizations and groups to fulfill this objective.
5. **Assist youth and adults in transitioning to the adult employment system.** In collaboration with the Oregon Parent Training and Information Center, Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Education and others, the Project will:
  - Develop a program that trains parent volunteers and self-advocates to assist students, parents and agencies in developing successful transition plans.
  - Develop a project that trains 150 individuals in up to 5 counties to assist self-advocates and families in acquiring information, knowledge and skills to successfully navigate the transition and employment systems so youth with disabilities can successfully complete the transition from the school to adult employment.
  - Support an annual statewide conference on transition to provide teachers, disability and vocational professionals, parents and students with needed information and training on transition, and to develop transition leaders.
6. **Develop and implement a comprehensive education and marketing strategy to promote employment of person with disabilities to employers.** The project will work in partnership with the Oregon Business Leadership Network, the Employment Department, the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Services and public and private employers.
7. **Expand and develop transportation systems and services necessary for competitive employment of individuals with disabilities**, with a focus on communities with limited or non-existent public transportation systems. The Project will collaborate with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Oregon United We Ride Working Group by assisting and supporting ODOT and local communities implement and sustain one or more initiatives to increase the availability of transportation services and supports to persons with disabilities. An emphasis will be placed upon creating coordinated transportation plans within local communities that place an emphasis upon employment transportation for persons with disabilities.

**8. Increase accessibility to and the availability of culturally appropriate and competent employment services and supports to persons with disabilities who are ethnic or cultural minorities.** The Project, in collaboration with organizations and groups representing Oregon's communities of color and ethnically diverse communities and in coordination with DHS' diversity initiative, will develop and implement one or more strategy and set of activities to increase accessibility to and availability of needed culturally appropriate and competent employment services and supports



We hope you will join us in implementing the *Blueprint* and making competitive employment a reality for all Oregonians with disabilities.

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