

2010

Policy Brief on Employment of Minnesotans with Brain Injury

Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative

What Will It Take to Double Employment
of Minnesotans with Disabilities by 2015?

**“We need
everybody in the
workforce for
businesses to
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prosper.”**



POLICY BRIEF ON EMPLOYMENT OF MINNESOTANS WITH BRAIN INJURY

The purpose of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative (MEPI) is to facilitate dialogue and develop leadership on disability and employment policy that will result in increased competitive employment of Minnesotans with disabilities. Partnership is key to the initiative's success. MEPI is enlisting strategic partners from disability advocacy groups, counties, state disability councils, human resources organizations, employment services providers and other service providers, Centers for Independent Living, the University of Minnesota, businesses and business organizations and state agencies.

Together, MEPI and its partners undertake wide-ranging activities to bring together stakeholders to shape and advance public policy. They are convening "listening sessions" to be used as the basis for policy briefs identifying recommendations that will improve competitive employment outcomes for Minnesotans with disabilities around the core question, "**What will it take to double employment of Minnesotans with disabilities by 2015?**"

Executive Summary

On October 19, 2009 the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota hosted a listening session facilitated by the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative. The following recommendations were identified from the themes generated by the listening session participants:

- **Ensure that work is an expectation of Minnesotans with brain injury and those who support them.**
- **Develop measures illustrating the "big picture" by identifying cost savings and the return on investment of Minnesotans with brain injury who work.**
- **Provide individualized employment services and supports specific to individuals with brain injury.**
- **Develop self-employment services as an employment option for Minnesotans with brain injury.**
- **Develop a broader range of ongoing supports available to Minnesotans with brain injury responsive to the changing patterns of their needs over time.**
- **Assist Minnesotans with brain injury in developing self-management skills to ensure the greatest possible control over their services and supports.**

- **Secure a broadening range of champions within the business community to create more employment opportunities for Minnesotans with brain injury.**
- **Target small businesses in Minnesota to increase employment of Minnesotans with brain injury.**
- **Address concerns about the safety net of benefits available to Minnesotans with brain injury and the perception that employment could negatively impact that safety net.**
- **Explore the Evidenced-Based Practice of Supported Employment - Individualized Placement and Support model (EBP-SE) for individuals with brain injury.**

Although these recommendations were developed to address increased employment of Minnesotans with brain injury, many of them would also apply to individuals with other disabilities. Throughout 2010, the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative will be conducting nine additional listening sessions with other disability groups similar to the one on brain injury. MEPI is also working with five community action teams (CATs) to identify specific policy issues which support or impede these CATs as they develop customized employment for 25 individuals experiencing a range of disabilities throughout the state.

The information gathered through the listening sessions and through the employment development efforts of the CATs will be analyzed to develop a summary of commonalities. Representatives from the various listening session groups will then be reconvened to strategize on addressing the policy implications in improving employment outcomes and developing a more specific set of recommendations for action to move toward doubling the employment rate of Minnesotans with disabilities by 2015.

Background on Brain Injury

Acquired brain injury is an injury to the brain which occurs after birth. It includes traumatic brain injury which is due to an external blow to the head. Brain injury can have a devastating impact on employment. The Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems National Database for 2009 reports that:

- 63% of individuals with TBI were working at the time of their injury
- 28% are employed one year after injury and that percentage climbs to only 33% two years after injury.¹

The recently completed “2009-2010 Minnesota Statewide Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Needs and Resource Assessment” included employment in their survey conducted in April and May of 2009. The report states,

Over 70 percent of respondents to the survey indicate that their employment has been affected as a result of their brain injury, with 42 percent indicating they are unemployed. It

¹ "Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems." *National Data and Statistical Center*. Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems National Data and Statistical Center, 2009. Web. <<http://www.tbindsc.org/>>.

appears that the most common reason given for people being unemployed is that they cannot or are not allowed to perform the job they held prior to their injury.²

The report emphasizes the need for retraining after brain injury and assistance in finding new employment opportunities.

Most individuals with disabilities experience a fragmented system of services but fragmentation can be particularly prevalent for individuals with brain injury. The circumstances under which the injury occurs can determine the system of care first available to individuals and their families. Worker's compensation, auto insurance, private health insurance and, increasingly with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,³ the Veteran's Administration are all examples of parts of the service delivery system which serve individuals with brain injury. Some of those systems are time-limited, necessitating the need to move from one system to another in which the eligibility for services can vary.

In "Employment for Persons with Brain Injuries in Oregon" prepared for the Oregon Competitive Employment Project, Sherry Stock, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of Oregon, presents an overview with a national perspective on employment for individuals with brain injury. She reports the following statistics:

- 1.5 million people experience a traumatic brain injury each year.
- 80-90,000 sustain moderate to acute injuries that result in long-term or lifelong disabilities.
- 2% of the population is living with brain injury.
- The financial consequences of brain injury in the United States are \$60 billion annually.
- The average lifetime cost of care for severe traumatic brain injury is from \$600,000 to almost \$2 million, costs which do not include lost earnings by the individual or family caregivers or costs incurred by social service systems.⁴

Stock also details the effects of brain injury on physical capacities, behavioral and emotional capacities and cognitive capacities and provides examples of accommodations and strategies to address those multi-faceted and complex needs. Additional information on accommodations directed toward employers has been developed by Cornell University⁵ and the Mayo Clinic.⁶

² 2009-2010 Minnesota Statewide Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Needs and Resource Assessment. Rep. Brain Injury Association of America. Web. 21 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.braininjurymn.org/assessment.html>>.

³ Martin, Elisabeth M., Wei C. Lu, Katherine Helmick, Louis French, and Deborah L. Warden. "Traumatic Brain Injuries Sustained in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars." *American Journal of Nursing* 108.4 (2008): 40-47. Web. 15 Mar. 2010.

⁴ Stock, Sherry. 2006. Employment for Persons with Brain Injuries in Oregon. Paper prepared for the Oregon Competitive Employment Project.

⁵ Golden, Thomas P., Stephanie Hanson, and Susanne M. Bruyere. *Working Effectively With Employees Who Have Sustained a Brain Injury*. Publication. Cornell University, 2002. *Employment and Institute Disability Collection*. Web. 15 Mar. 2010.

⁶ *Understanding Brain Injury: A Guide for Employers*. Rep. Mayo Press, 2000. Web. <<http://www.mayo.edu>>.

Job placement and retention can be challenging for individuals experiencing brain injury. Stock cites a statistic from the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators that 75% of individuals with traumatic brain injury will lose their job within 90 days without supports, indicating that vocational rehabilitation services alone (which typically close cases after 90 days) cannot provide adequate support for job retention. In a 2005 survey conducted by the National Association of Protection and Advocacy, vocational supports and employment were identified as a “top concern” for individuals experiencing a traumatic brain injury.⁷

Stock also provides examples of initiatives of various states to address the employment needs of individuals with TBI. Those include:

- A TBI roundtable of specialists to identify recommendations for program improvement (Arizona),
- The development of cross agency referral criteria (Florida),
- The development of training modules (Maryland),
- Identification of TBI as the only disability group that can receive VR services for the outcome of part-time employment (Missouri),
- Research on the efficacy of the Evidence Based Practice of Supported Employment - Individual Placement and Support model (EBP-SE), originally developed for individuals with severe mental illness, for individuals with TBI (Ohio),
- A supported employment “return to work” program adapted to individuals with TBI (Utah),
- A TBI certification program for VR counselors presented by a local college, TBI Set Aside funds under Title VI-C, and a collaborative partnership between the TBI Advisory Council, the Brain Injury Association of Vermont and the Protection and Advocacy Program (Vermont),
- A project to identify obstacles to employment, vocational needs and employment outcomes by Virginia Commonwealth University, and
- A one day training curriculum for VR counselors (Oklahoma).⁸

Stock concludes by advocating a supported employment model using an interdisciplinary team for Oregonians with brain injury.

Supported employment with an individualized array of support services clearly has positive implications for individuals with brain injury. Dr. Mary Huber from Wright State University in Ohio and other researchers are currently exploring the Evidenced-Based Practice of Supported Employment utilizing the Individualized Placement and Support model (EBP-SE) as a promising practice for persons with brain injury and substance abuse through the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program.⁹

EBP-SE was originally developed for individuals with serious mental illness to include an array of supports working in an integrated model across medical and employment systems. The model has promising implications for individuals with brain injury who may benefit from

⁷ Stock, Sherry.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ To access a recent webcast on this work go to www.hvrp.org/training/webcastDetails.cfm/157.

supports for mental health, cognitive and physical capacities co-located and working together to plan for, secure and retain employment.

The cost effectiveness of competitive supported employment using the individual placement model for individuals with TBI is supported by Wehman, et. al. They found that the target population was employed for an average of 42.58 months with average of gross earnings of \$26,129.74 for employment services costing \$10,349.27, a cost savings of \$17,515. Their study reported the cost savings increased significantly with retention lasting over 2 years.¹⁰

Background on Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative Listening Sessions

The Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative is conducting listening sessions in the following areas:

Brain Injury	Mental Health
DeafBlind	Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Vision Loss	Autism
Developmental Disabilities	Physical Disabilities
Transition	Families

Listening sessions are convened by a host organization which selects participants representing a variety of perspectives. The listening sessions are facilitated by MEPI using three questions as the framework for the sessions. The questions are designed to build upon one another creating momentum toward strategies for the final question on doubling employment.

The first question, “**Why is Work Important?**” helps a group to focus specifically on employment. It also reminds the group of the benefits work provides to individuals with disabilities and creates a positive orientation for the subsequent questions.

The second set of questions, “**What’s Working? What are Minnesota’s Strengths Related to Employment?**” builds on the first question, reminding participants of the many services, initiatives, and groups that are already in place or in the planning stages to improve employment outcomes. It identifies strengths on which to build and also opportunities to produce better collaboration between groups and initiatives. It also creates a shared frame of reference for the group and is usually a learning experience for group members as they share their knowledge base about the strengths and leadership within Minnesota. The more common focus of identifying barriers often does not lead to creative strategies to address those barriers and the negative focus on barriers can make it more difficult to brainstorm on potential strategies toward better employment outcomes.

The third question, “**What Will It Take to Double Employment of Minnesotans with Disabilities by 2015?**” is the core question for participants. It is a question originally posed by

¹⁰ Wehman, Paul, et al. "Supported Employment for Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury: A Preliminary Investigation of Long-Term Follow-Up Costs and Program Efficiency." *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* 84 (2003): 192-96. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*. Feb. 2003. Web.

the Alliance for Full Participation and, with their permission, adopted by MEPI. It is intended to be provocative by challenging participants to think out of the box and move toward strategies that can have a more dramatic effect on employment outcomes.

Listening Session on Brain Injury

The listening session on “Employment and Minnesotans with Brain Injury,” hosted by the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota, was conducted on October 19, 2009. More than twenty participants worked together to identify strategies to increase employment rates for individuals with brain injury. Participants represented survivors, residential and employment provider groups, the University of Minnesota, hospitals, state agencies, and the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota. Their responses to the three questions follow.

Question 1: Why Is Work Important?

- Provides opportunities for social interaction and developing relationships
- Creates a sense of self-worth and contributes to self-esteem
- Provides structure and routines
- Builds a sense of purpose
- Provides a social outlet
- Enables individuals to have more money leading to greater economic freedom
- Provides a sense of identity important in American culture
- Creates a sense of confidence
- Provides greater stability in an individual’s life
- Enables individuals to use their talents and make a contribution to society

Question 2: What’s Working? What Are Minnesota’s Strengths Related to Employment?

- Growing expectation that employment is a normal part of life
- Better resources and supports specific to individuals with brain injury
- Working with individuals as they are, rather than expecting them to meet a certain threshold before receiving employment services
- Opportunities for paid “volunteering” through internships and other incentives to employers
- Team orientation toward service delivery
- Outcome-based services and accountability for providers – pay for performance
- Peer mentoring
- Greater visibility and presence of people with disabilities in the community
- Supported employment services
- Availability of services through workforce centers – resume writing, job-seeking skills, etc.
- Better infrastructure of supports from a variety of sources
- Persistence and resilience on the part of individuals with brain injury and those who support them

- Greater availability of work incentives – Social Security Administration, Ticket to Work, etc.

Recommendations from Question 3: What Will It Take to Double Employment of Minnesotans with Disabilities by 2015?

The following recommendations are based on the themes identified from the responses of listening session participants. The recommendations represent the breadth of the group’s responses and were not prioritized. The discussion that follows the ten recommendations provides further information on “next steps” in refining the recommendations and moving toward more specific policy implications.

Ensure that work is an expectation of Minnesotans with brain injury and those who support them. Minnesotans with brain injury, and disabilities in general, are often viewed as “unable to work.” At times, seemingly artificial criteria of “readiness” become barriers to people and those who support them. Those readiness criteria are often constructed without an understanding of supported employment and how the concept of individualized support can change perspectives on the potential for employment. Also, there is very little understanding about customized employment, an emerging set of practices that fundamentally change what it means to be “qualified” to obtain and hold an integrated job in the workforce.¹¹ If the expectation that an individual would return to work was part of the medical, therapeutic, and rehabilitation process from the beginning, services should be redesigned in ways that support a return to work or finding a suitable job at the earliest time. Given the increased fragmentation of the service delivery system for individuals with brain injury, it is especially important to bring together professionals from an array of services to emphasize a focus on employment and to share promising practices across systems.

Develop measures illustrating the “big picture” by identifying cost savings and the return on investment of Minnesotans with brain injury who work. Employment services for people with disabilities are often imbedded within the social service system where costs are sky-rocketing. If employment is viewed as an investment and measures of cost savings are available to policymakers, the return on investment (ROI) for employment services can be better evaluated as a valuable service not only in the gains provided in quality of life measures for the individual but also through measurable cost savings for the larger community.

Provide individualized employment services and supports specific to individuals with brain injury. Individuals with brain injury remain a small group with unique needs from other disability groups and within the group there is a diverse array of complex and challenging factors. Individuals can find themselves included in services designed for individuals with developmental disabilities in which they do not see a “fit” for their situation. Specialized expertise and a team approach designed to address their medical, behavioral health, cognitive,

¹¹ Customized employment (CE) as defined by the Office of Disability and Employment Policy (ODEP) means “individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs and interests of the person with a disability, and is also designed to meet the specific needs of the employer.” For more information on CE visit www.dol.gov/odep/categories/workforce/CustomizedEmployment/what/index.htm.

and employability needs will result in more effective job placement and retention outcomes in the workforce.

Develop self-employment services as an employment option for Minnesotans with brain injury. Self-employment is an option that is only recently being fully promoted for individuals with disabilities. Self-employment can provide an array of accommodations opening up opportunities that might not be available through wage employment. Self employment needs to be more fully developed to become an accessible and viable opportunity for individuals with brain injury and other disabilities.

Develop a broader range of ongoing supports available to Minnesotans with brain injury responsive to the changing patterns of their needs over time. Although gains in recovery slow over time, individuals with brain injury can expand their skills through training and compensatory strategies. The service delivery system available provides a heavy emphasis on medical models early on and is lacking in a consistent array of career and employment supports over time.

Assist Minnesotans with brain injury in developing self-management skills to ensure the greatest possible control over their services and supports. Self-advocacy is recognized as essential to improving quality of life outcomes and ensuring that individuals with disabilities exercise choice and self-determination in their lives. The necessity of ongoing supports should not result in the individual being just the “recipient” of services. The individual should be developing a greater capacity to “direct” supports and services.

Secure a broadening range of champions within the business community to create more employment opportunities for Minnesotans with brain injury. Employers are key to improving employment outcomes. Ensuring that employers are knowledgeable about the abilities of individuals with TBI and also the supports leading to long-term retention is crucial to a successful employment match. Understanding and meeting the needs of employers is the means to building the support of the business community and to having employers influence other employers as advocates for the employment of individuals with TBI.

Target small businesses in Minnesota to increase employment of Minnesotans with brain injury. Small business is “big business” in workforce development. Small businesses create the majority of jobs and should not be overlooked when seeking employment. Small businesses often have flexibility in hiring and customizing optimal employment conditions which can be crucial to job success.

Address concerns about the safety net of benefits available to Minnesotans with brain injury and the perception that employment could negatively impact that safety net. Many Minnesotans with brain injury are hesitant to work due to fears that they will lose their disability benefits. Given the complexity of the various benefits and work incentives, it is difficult for individuals and families to access sound advice to enable individuals seeking employment to

maximize their income through employment.¹² The complexity of the system is a major barrier to employment for Minnesotans with TBI.

The following recommendation was not presented by the listening session group but is added as a promising practice:

Explore the Evidenced-Based Practice of Supported Employment - Individualized Placement and Support model (EBP-SE) for individuals with brain injury. Although originally developed for individuals with serious mental illness, this model of co-locating and integrating employment services with medical services can result in a stronger system of supports and better employment outcomes than other models. The EBP-SE model for individuals with mental illness co-locates and integrates employment services into mental health centers and into the treatment plans for individuals accessing mental health services. In applying this model to brain injury, a broader array of medical services might be utilized than for individuals with mental illness given the complex medical and rehabilitation needs of individuals with brain injury. An integrated approach of medical and employment resources would be particularly valuable in developing adaptations and compensatory strategies for use in the workplace. The EBP-SE model is currently being explored in Ohio with individuals with brain injury who also experience substance abuse, but it is being recommended here for individuals with brain injury with or without substance abuse.

The fundamental idea with the EBP-SE model is to imbed customized and supported employment practices within a medical and behavioral health milieu to:

- Encourage and increase expectations about possibilities of work,
- Insure access to employment assistance from trained and qualified practitioners,
- Promote job placement and return to work goals through the use of integrated treatment teams supporting individuals with TBI, and
- Pool available expertise, fiscal resources, and service capacities among all team members to obtain and maintain integrated employment consistent with the interests, goals, and strengths of each individual.

Implications for Policy

Although the recommendations above focus on Minnesotans with brain injury, many of the recommendations would also apply to individuals with other disabilities. The Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative is conducting nine additional listening sessions in 2010 and will be collecting further information from other disability groups using the same questions.

Also during 2010, MEPI will be working closely with five community action teams (CATs) receiving intensive training and technical assistance from the Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center (MNTAT). The CATs will be an important resource in identifying specific policy issues which support or impede these groups as they develop customized employment for 25 individuals experiencing a range of disabilities throughout the

¹² For assistance in this area, Minnesotans can contact the Disability Linkage Line (www.semcil.org/dll.html) and the Minnesota Work Incentives Connection (www.mnworkincentives.com). Pathways to Employment (PTE) is also developing an online tool called Disability Benefits 101, to help make the system less complex. To learn more about PTE visit www.positivelyminnesota.com/pte.

state.¹³ The policy issues identified through the five CATs will be summarized in a separate policy brief.

The information gathered through the listening sessions and through the employment development efforts of the CATs will be analyzed to identify commonalities. Representatives from the various groups will then be reconvened to strategize on addressing the policy implications in improving employment outcomes and developing a more specific set of recommendations for action to move toward doubling the employment rate of Minnesotans with disabilities by 2015.

About the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative

The purpose of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative (MEPI) is to facilitate dialogue and develop leadership on disability and employment policy that will result in increased competitive employment of Minnesotans with disabilities and promote the proposition, “We need everyone in the workforce for businesses to thrive and communities to prosper.” Central to this initiative is the belief that employment is fundamental to adulthood, quality of life and economic freedom and choice. MEPI is an initiative of Pathways to Employment (PTE), Minnesota’s Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.¹⁴

In January 2010, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) reported that only 22% of individuals with disabilities were employed. The employment rate for individuals without disabilities was 70%. That translates into an employment rate in which individuals with disabilities are employed at a rate that is less than one third that of individuals without disabilities. The Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative is working across disability groups to close that gap by identifying strategies that will benefit all Minnesotans with disabilities in addition to strengthening and building new alliances to enlarge the circle of employment champions.

Leadership for MEPI comes from National APSE - The Network on Employment - in concert with its state chapter, Minnesota APSE.¹⁵ The initiative works with numerous stakeholders to align policies, services and practices to ensure that integrated competitive employment is widely recognized and routinely promoted as the preferred option of all Minnesotans with disabilities. MEPI also works in close collaboration with the Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center (www.mntat.org) to maximize the impact of employment policy and practice across Minnesota.

Additional policy briefs and reports will be available as they are developed at the MEPI website, www.mn-epi.org.

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¹³ For more information on the CATs, visit www.mntat.org

¹⁴ To learn more about PTE visit www.positivelyminnesota.com/pte.

¹⁵ For the APSE website, visit www.apse.org. For the Minnesota APSE website, visit www.mnapse.org.

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