



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Employment First and Benefits

Chimere Clemons & Monty Chamberlain

What is Employment First?



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

The philosophy that employment in the general workforce should be the first and preferred option for persons with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly funded systems. Simply put, Employment First means real jobs, real wages, earning minimum wage, or better.



Employment in the General Workforce

What does this mean?

- Employment in the general workforce means regular jobs like everyone else in a typical work setting, working side-by-side with people without disabilities, earning regular wages, benefits, and being part of the economic mainstream of our society.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Employment Goal

A person sets employment as a goal with assistance from the Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) program/ provider.

It is not mandated that the person become employed. Instead, it is a goal based on the **person's desire.**



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

How is Employment First different?

Historically, when it came to publicly funded services, employment in the community has been among a number of choices presented to people with disabilities, and in many cases, individuals have been shuttled to facility-based segregated services. Under Employment First, assistance to find a job in the community and become a tax-paying citizen, is the preferred choice.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Employment First Assumption

Employment First starts with a presumption that a person with a disability can work! Unlike other people of working age in our society, where it's presumed they will become employed, people with disabilities have too often had to demonstrate their "readiness" for employment. The philosophy of Employment First assumes that a person is capable of working until proven otherwise, and employment in the general workforce is the first option pursued.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services



Why is Employment First Important?

- Texas became an Employment First state with the passage of the 2013 Senate Bill 1226, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session.
- The Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Texas Education Agency, and Texas Workforce Commission have adopted the Employment First policy.
- Read the policy and find out more about Texas Employment First at <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/employment/employment-first> or [EmploymentFirst](#)



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

HCBS Final Rule

- Released January, 2014 by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).
- Deadline for compliance initially set for March 17, 2019.
- Deadline extended to March 17, 2023.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Purpose of HCBS Final Rule

Purpose: To make sure people receiving-services in settings that are integrated in and support full access to the community.

Give people the opportunity to:

- a. Seek employment in competitive and integrated settings;
- b. Take part in the community;
- c. Be in control of personal resources; and
- d. Get the same access to services as those not receiving HCBS.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Employment Assistance and Supported Employment

- Employment Assistance (EA)
 - Assists a person to find competitive, integrated employment. The work before the job is acquired.
- Supported Employment (SE)
 - Assists people in maintaining employment. The support provided after the job is acquired.
- Providers must make employment services available in accordance with the waivers, directly or by third party.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Examples of Billable EA Activities

Services are individualized, person-directed, and may include:

- Exploring personal employment preferences (where do I want to work?);
- Transportation needs for employment (going to look for jobs);
- Filling out job applications;
- Writing resumes; and
- How to dress for an interview.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Examples of Non-billable EA Activities

- Face-to-face contact with a person to provide EA services simultaneously with Day Habilitation services, Supported Employment, CFC PAS/HAB, or Respite.
- EA services accessed and/or funded through other sources at no cost to the program provider such as Employment Services through Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services formally known as the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Service.
- Life skills training such as hygiene/grooming care.



Examples of Billable SE Activities

- Employment adaptations (iPad to read totals aloud to cashier);
- Transportation to and from work;
- Communicating with managers to maintain and sustain stable employment;
- Assisting in reporting income to Social Security; and
- Training or consulting in work-related tasks.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Examples of Non-billable SE Activities

- Interacting with a person prior to obtaining employment (this could potentially be billed as EA instead of SE).
- Face-to-face contact with to provide SE services simultaneously with Day Habilitation services, Supported Employment, CFC PAS/HAB or Respite.
- Any activity taking place in a sheltered work environment or similar types of vocational services in specialized facilities.
- Payment as an incentive to participate in SE activities.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

What are Families worried about?

- Failure – letting their child/themselves venture out and fail and then...
 - Lose their job/benefits/income.
 - Become homeless.
 - Go into the criminal justice system.
- Safety – putting their child/themselves at risk for...
 - Robbery and credit insecurity.
 - Abuse from attendants/coworkers/relationships.
 - General health/medical needs.
- Loss of waiver slot and/or cash benefits through Social Security and/or HHSC Medicaid.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Supporting Families with Employment Goals

1. Video here

Employment is a fundamental value and ambition in American culture, and people with disabilities want to be a part of their communities just as everyone does. HHS is committed to ensuring people with disabilities have access to meaningful employment services in the community, especially integrated competitive employment.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

How Often Have You Heard?

- If I go to work, I will lose my benefits.
- I can only earn a certain amount of money each month or I will lose my benefits.
- I can't get the skills and experience I need for a career without losing my benefits.
- If I go to work and then stop working, I won't be able to get back my cash benefits or Medicaid/Medicare back.
- If I go to work Social Security will send me a letter asking for a lot of money back.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Basic Terms

- SSA: Social Security Administration
- SSI: Supplemental Security Income
- Title II: Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Childhood Disability Beneficiary (CDB/DAC) and Disabled Widow/Widower (DWB)



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Social Security Administration Programs for People with Disabilities 1 of 3

- Administers several programs for people with disabilities that provide a monthly cash benefit and/or health insurance through two Social Security Administration (SSA) programs:

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

- \$794 Federal Benefit Rate (2021) for an individual;
- \$1,191 (2021) for a married couple;
- Resource limits not to exceed \$2000 for an individual and \$3000 for a couple. (2021);
- If you qualify for SSI in Texas you automatically get Medicaid;
- When you go to work and can pay some of your food and shelter with your earnings, your SSI cash benefit goes down;



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Social Security Administration Programs for People with Disabilities 2 of 3

- You will always have more money in your pocket to pay bills and enjoy life when you work!
- Monthly amount will vary if there has been an overpayment, earned income from working or some other source of unearned income, or the individual lives with someone who provides them with full or partial food and shelter.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Social Security Administration Programs for People with Disabilities 3 of 3

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

- Based on work history;
- If you get SSDI you also get Medicare;
and
- No resource limit. The “Oprah” benefit.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Why Two Disability Cash Systems?

- Title II (SSDI)
 - ▶ For persons who paid into the system through working or are related to somebody who paid into the system.
- Title XVI (SSI Childhood or Adult)
 - ▶ For those who have not paid enough into the system, or **do not have the "right" relative who paid into the system** to draw Title II . Title XVI are needs based programs.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Can Individuals work and keep Medicaid?

You keep Medicaid and your SSI “status” until you earn \$47,676 (2021) gross a year!



This is called “SSI 1619b Medicaid”.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Work Incentives

What are work incentives?

- Work incentives help beneficiaries enter, re-enter, or continue in employment by protecting their eligibility for cash payments and/or health care coverage until they achieve self-supporting employment.
- Expenses for items or services directly related to enabling a person with a disability to remain working. They must be working to receive incentive.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Common things that are covered under work incentives

- Cost of prescription drugs related to disability.
- Paratransit.
- Job coaching.
- Mileage to and from work when driven by someone else-and can not get to work any other way.
- Durable equipment such as wheelchair.
- Assistive Technology if necessary for job.
- Medical services not covered by insurance (e.g. personal attendant care).



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Reporting Income

Someone gets a job. What do you do?

- Everyone must report their income to SSA. Those on SSI are required to report every month. Title II are required to report any time there is a change in earnings (even one cent).
- Ways to report:
 - Report using app on Android or I-Phone at mySSA.gov.
 - Wage reporting line: 866-772-0953.
 - By Mail or in person.

**Please keep a record of everything!



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

How to verify benefits?

1. Log onto www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount; select “Create An Account”. (Again) Select “Create An Account” on right hand side of page.
 2. Check “I agree to Terms of Service”.
 3. Enter Name as shown on Social Security Card and Social Security number.
 4. Enter Date of Birth.
 5. Enter Home Address and phone number (must be updated with SSA).
 6. Choose username and password; Sign into account.
 7. Select “Get A Benefit Verification Letter”; Print letter.
- Not available to those with Rep Payee or Legal Guardian



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Help with Benefits and Employment Questions

- There are people who can help, right here in Texas and across the nation.
- You don't have to become an expert in benefits to make them work for the people you serve.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Community Work Incentive Coordinators

Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs). CWIC's' are highly trained staff certified by the Social Security Administration under a 'WIPA' grant.

- Services are free to any consumer who receives SSI and/or a Title II disability benefit who is actively looking for a job or has a job.
- CWIC Services include:
 - ▶ Help you understand how working and earning wages will affect your public benefits
 - ▶ Understand the potential benefits of employment as a person who receives disability benefits from Social Security while dispelling the myths about working.
- Find a WIPA program at <http://choosework.net> or [ChooseWork](#)



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- TWS - VR Services are for adults with disabilities to help prepare for, obtain, retain, or advance in employment.
- TWS – VR Services are for youth and students with disabilities to help prepare for post-secondary education and employment opportunities.
- TWS- VR Services help adults who are legally blind to prepare for and find employment, attend college or a trade school, and live independently.
- Contact Texas Workforce Solutions - Vocational Rehabilitation Services Inquiries
 - Call: 800-628-5115
 - Email: customers@twc.state.tx.us



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

SSA'S Ticket to Work Helpline

- You can contact a representative at SSA's Ticket to Work Helpline at 866-968-7842 (voice) or 866-833-2967 (TDD)
- Representatives give people basic information on SSI and Title II programs, and the effects of earnings from work on cash benefits and health care coverage.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS)

- PABSS assists beneficiaries to protect their rights and overcome barriers to employment. This may include resolving problems with employment service providers, housing, transportation, accommodations, and overpayments that are work related and pose a barrier to work.
- Follow this process to reach a PABSS staff:
 - **Call Disability Rights Texas' Intake Line: 800-252-9108.** You will be contacted by a PABSS staff.
 - Current clients of PABSS call 800-315-3876.
- Read more about PABSS at:
<https://choosework.ssa.gov/blog/how-protection-and-advocacy-for-beneficiaries-of-social-security-pabss-can-help-people-who-receive-disability-benefits>



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

SSI in a Nutshell

- SSI cash amount is determined by a formula.
- A person will always have more money if they work under SSI.
- SSI Medicaid continues until earnings of \$47,676 (2021) or higher each year!



SSDI in a Nutshell

- There are lots of safety nets and many years the individual can try work and still be attached to the system.
- Title II has provisions for getting back onto the system quickly even if someone is terminated from cash and health care benefits.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Special Projects Unit Employment First Activities 1 of 2

- Employment First full day training events were conducted in 39 locations in 2018.
- Employment first full day training events were conducted in 11 locations in 2020.
- **Planned full day training events for “boots on the ground” staff such as Employment Specialists, Service Coordinators, Job Coaches at six locations in 2021.**
- 2022 project proposal for continuation of training in additional cities.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

SPU Employment First Activities 2 of 2

- Employment Recruitment Coordinator activities.
- Presentations at various job fairs.
- Attendance and presentations at conferences, stakeholder meetings, and association meetings.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Contact Information



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

- Monty Chamberlain:
Monty.Chamberlain@hhs.texas.gov
- Chimere Clemons:
Chimere.Clemons@hhs.texas.gov
- Employment Services Questions
Mailbox:
SE.Questions@hhsc.state.tx.us



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Thank you
