

Bazon, UMass Medical School Highlight Opportunities to Promote Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities

May 24, 2016 – A new brief by UMass Medical School and the Bazon Center for Mental Health Law outlines policy opportunities that can be leveraged to expand opportunities for people with psychiatric disabilities to successfully obtain and maintain employment. The brief also suggests policy changes that can result in increased access to career development, supported employment, and critical health services.

The brief, "[Policy Opportunities for Promoting Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities](#)," provides policy recommendations to address current barriers to employment. Individuals with psychiatric disabilities face substantial misperceptions about their abilities, along with a myriad of other employment barriers, including transportation limitations, the complexities of disability benefit programs, and a lack of access to evidence-based supported employment and other services.

The authors' recommendations include:

- Develop guidance and incentives for Medicaid coverage of supported employment.
- Maximize opportunities for access to healthcare made possible by the Affordable Care Act.
- Continue service innovations focused on educational and career development.
- Include people with psychiatric disabilities in federal and state employment initiatives.

The authors say there is compelling evidence that people with psychiatric disabilities want to work, but statistics show their employment rate is low. People without disabilities have a 74 percent employment rate, while individuals with disabilities have only a 33 percent rate. The rates of employment for people with psychiatric disabilities are even worse – ranging from 10 to 15 percent for individuals receiving mental health services, and 20 to 25 percent in broader population samples.

Unemployment among people with psychiatric disabilities is a significant problem; but when people are provided with appropriate supports and services, employment is attainable and leads to social inclusion, better health, reductions in public spending, and economic advancement, according to the brief.

The policy brief was written by Alexis D. Henry, ScD, OTR/L, and Jennie Fishman, MPH, of the Disability, Health and Employment Unit within UMass Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division; and Alison Barkoff, Jennifer Mathis and Bethany Lilly, all of the Bazon Center for Mental Health Law.

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