

Supported employment

People with substance use disorders can face significant barriers to finding stable employment. **Individual Placement and Support**, an evidence-based model of supported employment, helps people with behavioral health conditions find and sustain employment at jobs of their choice. Research supports using this model for people with substance use disorder with or without a co-occurring mental health disorder.¹

About the model

Core principles of the Individual Placement and Support model include:²

- **Competitive employment:** People apply to and secure competitive jobs with fair and reasonable compensation comparable to workplace colleagues.
- **Systematic job development:** The supported employment team identifies potential job opportunities that align with job seekers' needs and interests.
- **Rapid job search:** The model prioritizes expedited hiring processes, minimizing prolonged training or assessment periods.
- **Integrated services:** The supported employment team collaborates with mental health and substance use treatment teams for coordinated support.
- **Benefits planning:** Participants receive personalized education and guidance on navigating benefits like health insurance.
- **Zero exclusion:** Eligibility for employment services is open to all individuals who want to work — no exclusions.
- **Time-unlimited supports:** The model has no time constraints on the support provided, with ongoing engagement between employees and their designated specialist.
- **Worker preferences:** Program services are designed around the employee's individual preferences and aspirations, fostering a person-centered approach.

About us

Healthy Minds Policy Initiative is a nonprofit LLC contracted by the Oklahoma Office of the Attorney General to support the Oklahoma opioid abatement grant program.

Focus population

People living with mental health and substance use conditions, including opioid use disorder, frequently face barriers to securing and maintaining employment. Some of those challenges can include difficulties with managing symptoms, conflicting priorities (like housing instability, for example), lack of confidence, and stigma in the workplace.

Many workplaces are not inherently structured to accommodate employees with behavioral health conditions. The Individual Placement and Support model can address barriers to employment for people with opioid use disorder (or other substance use concerns) and build relationships with employers in the community.

EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES FOR OPIOID ABATEMENT

Supported employment as an opioid abatement strategy

Employment can play a pivotal role in promoting positive outcomes and providing a sense of normalcy and routine for people with behavioral health conditions, especially when workplaces make accommodations to support them. Without stable employment, people may experience setbacks in their recovery. A supportive and inclusive work environment — one that actively accommodates and optimizes employment for individuals with mental health and substance use challenges — can reduce stigma, foster greater transparency, and create an atmosphere where both current and prospective employees feel empowered and valued.

Compared to other vocational programs, Individual Placement and Support has yielded better employment outcomes, including higher rates of competitive employment and quicker job attainment,³ greater average number of hours worked and higher earnings,⁴ and longer job tenure.⁵

While most research has focused on the model's outcomes among people with mental health conditions, there are indications of similar successes among job seekers with co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions.⁶ Within the last two years, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs expanded Individual Placement and Support services to veterans with substance use disorder and are currently assessing the effectiveness of this model for veterans with opioid use disorder.⁷

Other findings supporting the Individual Placement and Support model include:

- Work is recognized as a fundamental component of the recovery process, fostering long-term success. Job security increases the likelihood of abstinence from substance use.⁸
- The model enhances the probability of sustained sobriety by decreasing substance use, minimizing hospitalizations, and promoting continuous recovery and abstinence efforts.⁹
- It generates significant cost savings for both employees and employers by reducing absenteeism and turnover while supporting long-term stability.¹⁰
- It also facilitates the development of effective relapse prevention strategies tailored to the workplace and provides crucial support during relapses, ensuring continued employment where feasible.¹¹
- The model educates employers about substance use disorders, helping to dismantle stigma and discrimination, while fostering the implementation of “recovery-friendly” workplace policies and practices.¹²

EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES FOR OPIOID ABATEMENT

Implementation considerations

- Embed employment specialists and other employment services within opioid treatment programs.^{13, 14}
- Follow evidence-based Individual Placement and Support model principles, including: 1) focus on rapid job search for competitive employment; 2) provide time-unlimited, individualized job supports; and 3) use a team-based approach to integrate employment and clinical services.¹⁵
- Help individuals develop relapse prevention plans related to work and support people through relapses while helping maintain employment when possible.¹⁶
- Educate employers on substance use disorders to reduce stigma and discrimination and promote “recovery-friendly” workplace policies and practices.¹⁷
- Support access to education and skills training opportunities that help people advance to better jobs over time.¹⁸

Additional reading and resources

Training and support resources from the [Individual Placement and Support](#) website

SAMHSA’s [Individual Placement and Support](#) toolkit, training guide, and fidelity scale

SAMHSA’s guide to [Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education](#)

Resource for states, territories, and organizations: [Individual Placement and Support for People with Co-occurring Substance Use Disorders](#)

[Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery Employment \(ASPIRE\)](#), a resource from the U.S. Department of Labor

2022 journal article published in Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences: [“Who benefits from individual placement and support? A meta-analysis”](#)

EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES FOR OPIOID ABATEMENT

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