



Photo courtesy of Alaska Project SEARCH

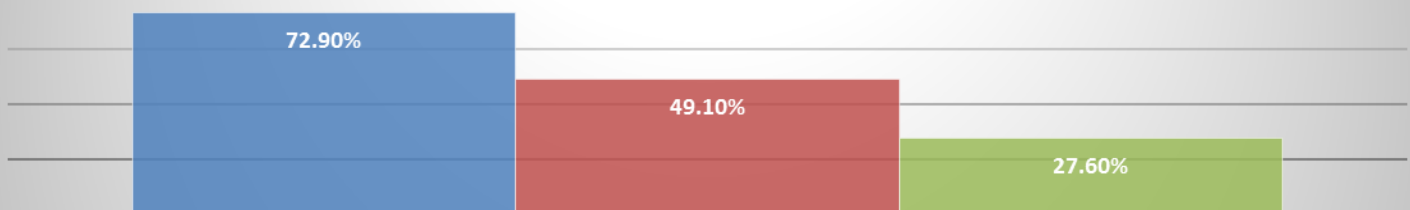
ALASKA WORK MATTERS: EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Introduction:

Employment for all is a cost-savings for Alaska! Employment, even at low levels, was associated with better health and health behaviors as well as lower costs.

- 2013 Kansas State University study (Hall, Kurth, Hunt), “strongly support changes to provider practices and federal disability policy to support employment at all levels for people with disabilities.”
 - “Findings indicated participants with any level of paid employment had significantly lower rates of smoking and better quality of life; self-reported health status was significantly higher, while per person per month Medicaid expenditures were less. Employment, even at low levels, was associated with better health and health behaviors as well as lower costs.”
- Alaskan employers need to plan ahead to fill the gap in available workforce due to the retirement of the *Baby Boomer* generation. Employers would benefit from tapping into this segment of the workforce and hiring more qualified individuals with disabilities.
- Work provides a meaningful outlet for skills and talents. It is often how individuals form their identity within their community. Individuals with disabilities want the opportunity to work.

2016 AK Percentage of Working Age Population Employed



SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

- % of people employed with no disability
- % of people employed with a disability
- % of people employed with a cognitive disability

RECOMMENDATION:

- ✓ **Initiate an “Alaska Work Matters” Work Group or Commission**
- **Further implement the 2014 Employment First law concepts of competitive and integrated employment for Alaskans with disabilities to better outcomes.** ¹
 - Would include Employment First law reporting departments (Health & Social Services, Education & Early Development, Labor & Workforce Development) and could include other departments (such as Department of Corrections)
 - **Serve as a catalyst for ramping up Alaska’s State As a Model Employer (SAME) efforts within state government.**
 - Institute a centralized accommodation fund for job accommodations >\$2,500
 - Note: Most accommodations are no or low cost options under \$500. ²
 - Institute a percentage hiring goal of individuals with disabilities for state contractors/sub-contractors (*similar to what the federal government does*).
 - Increase awareness of Alaska’s current procurement preference (*the Alaskans with Disabilities Preference program*) for Alaska state government regarding doing business with disability-owned businesses and explore a procurement goal. ³
 - Increase utilization of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation’s (DVR) provisional hire process for individuals with disabilities to work in state government. ⁴
 - Scale up the DHSS/DOL Business Employment Services Team (BEST) collaborative employer engagement efforts to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and veterans.
 - **Enhance apprenticeship opportunities for Alaskans with disabilities**
 - Pursue more technology and healthcare related apprenticeship opportunities
 - **Enhance Alaska’s re-entry process and system (making employment/work experience an area of even stronger focus)**
 - Revive prison industry within Alaska - model after Wisconsin’s durable medical equipment (DME) reuse and recycle program.
 - Explore the work Arizona has undertaken through its sizable enhancement of its re-entry process and system, utilizing innovative strategies around employment.
 - Important area of focus due to the high percentage of the incarcerated population who are Trust beneficiaries (individuals with disabilities). ⁵
- ❖ **The Council stands ready to facilitate this work group or commission at no additional cost.**

¹ 2014 Alaska Employment First Law: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/committees/et/HB0211EmploymentFirstStateLaw.pdf>.

² Job Accommodation Network <https://askjan.org/>

³ Alaskans with Disabilities Preference: <http://www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/ppga.pdf>

⁴ Alaska DVR Provisional Hire Program: <http://doa.alaska.gov/dop/fileadmin/statewidehr/pdf/provisionalhireprogram.pdf>

⁵ Trust Alaska Scorecard 2016: the percentage of incarcerated adults with mental illness or mental disabilities was 44.1%, with the rate of criminal recidivism for incarcerated adults with mental illness or mental disabilities at 38.2% (http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/2016%20Trust%20Scorecard_final_2-16-2017.pdf).