

APSE Notes

APSE Special Topical Conference Explores Potential for Increased Employment Support in Medicaid and Social Security

Approximately 75% of the public funding available to support employment for “Medicaid eligible” individuals is directed to day activity and other congregate services. SE professionals know the data well: in 1999 Medicaid long term services funding supported over 63,000 individuals in congregate settings and less than 22,000 in integrated employment settings. While Medicaid funding for SE has grown, it has grown at a much slower rate than segregated services over the past ten years (see Fig. 1).

Advocates for years have pointed to a strong bias towards segregation in Medicaid rules and regs as the explanation for the slow growth of public funding for integrated employment. That’s totally, according to state agency leaders who informed attendees at APSE’s Employment, Medicaid and Social Security: Collaborations at Work, A National Conference on Change, with discussions of how they are using Medicaid funding to advance supported employment.

APSE: The Network on Employment, joined by the Disability Research Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Indiana University Institute on Disability and Community, the National Consortium for Health Systems Development, and VCU’s Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, State Partnership Initiative Project, in sponsoring this national event to explore the potential for employment funding through Medicaid and Social Security. Two hundred and fifty people from across the country attended the May 16–19, 2004 conference at Minneapolis.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Center on Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) supported the conference as federal co-sponsors. Collaborative

co-sponsors were Health & Disability Advocates; National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems; George Washington University Work Incentives Project; National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities; Cornell University, Program on Employment and Disability; University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration; Ability Magazine; Association of University Centers on Disabilities; Work Incentives Project, George Washington University; Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation; Institute on Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Westchester ARC, Westchester County New York; Wilson Resources, Inc.; and TASH.

Conferees attended tutorials on Medicaid and Social Security employment initiatives and many hours of intensive discussions led by state DD and VR officials on what is currently possible and occurring for employment through State Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, Medicaid Buy-In Programs and creative Medicaid Waiver designs, as well as Social Security work incentives and Ticket to Work programs. What attendees learned from innovative state officials is that *there is no statutory or regulatory barrier to Medicaid funding of supported employment*. Where there is a commitment at the state level to use Medicaid funding to support employment, exciting changes are occurring for individuals with high support needs. And, there are some very innovative state officials making the change happen. Participants also had the opportunity to learn more about the Ticket to Work, Olmstead, organizational change activities, and other issues relevant to the utilization of Medicaid and SSA resources for employment.

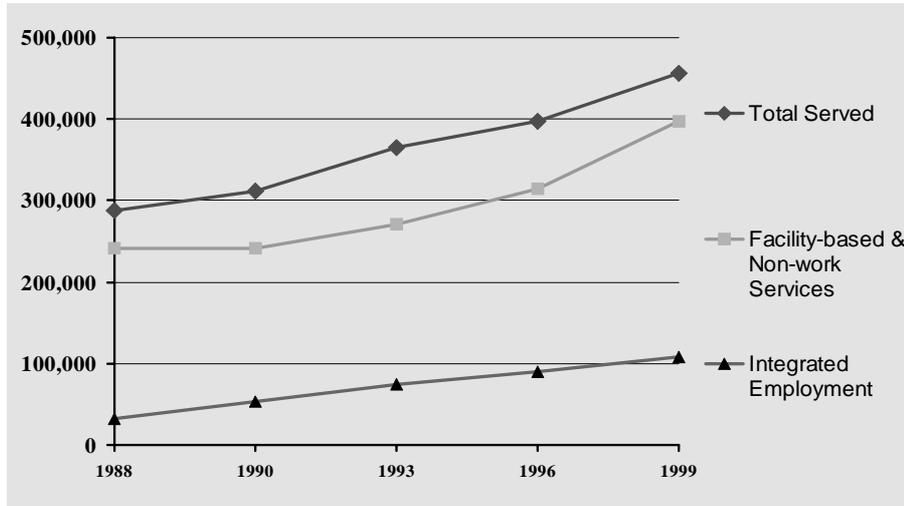


Fig. 1. MR-DD agency ten year growth pattern. The MR/DD Agency growth pattern over the past ten years points to a tremendous divide between the commitment at the federal level to advance employment opportunities and the reality for individual lives. (Chart/data from Institute on Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts).

Participants ended each day with facilitated group discussions, which provided the opportunity for more in-depth information exchanges and strategic dialogues on advancing the employment agenda through the Ticket to Work, SSA Work Incentives, Medicaid Waiver and other long term services programs. The conference was closed by David Mank, Director of Indiana's Institute on Community and Disability, with a challenge to participants to turn the knowledge gained at the conference into systems change activities back home.

The ultimate goal of the conference was to build momentum for change and to arm participants from across the country with the necessary knowledge base and strategies to assist them in accessing Medicaid and Social Security support for employment in their own states and localities. It also provided wonderful opportunities

for national networking with colleagues who share the commitment to expanding available resources for work place supports and to boost collaboration among the various public funding agencies.

Exploration of these issues will continue at the APSE Annual Conference in Indianapolis, July 11–14, and proceedings from the Minneapolis and Indianapolis. Proceedings from discussions at both conferences will be available at the APSE website: www.apse.org. in the Fall.

(Note: This article is reprinted from the Advance, newsletter publication of APSE: The Network on Employment. To view the newsletter in its entirety or for more information about upcoming APSE meetings, trainings and other activities, visit the APSE website at www.apse.org.)