

THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2014

What Continuums of Care Need to Know

People experiencing homelessness want to work. Helping them find and keep jobs can benefit individuals, employers, housing providers, and the community at large.

Opening Doors, the federal plan to prevent and end homelessness, includes increasing economic security as a goal. To that end, the plan identifies the **Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act** (WIOA),¹ enacted in 2014, as an opportunity to improve access to employment supports. Continuums of Care (CoCs) can play an important role.

WIOA Prioritizes Employment Services to People Experiencing Homelessness.

Employment services are important for people experiencing homelessness, whose job needs are often overlooked. Surveys indicate that the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness—as many as 90 percent—want to work.^{2,3} However, in many cities, only about one in five actually *is* working.^{4,5} Offering employment supports can significantly impact the employment rate, particularly for people experiencing chronic homelessness. In one study, 57 percent of those offered employment supports found work, including 27 percent in competitive employment, compared to 22 percent and 13 percent, respectively, of those who were not offered employment services.⁶ WIOA represents an important opportunity to help people most in need move toward self-sufficiency.

WIOA specifically states that serving people experiencing homelessness and others with barriers to employment is a key priority for the nationwide network of American Job Centers, which are operated by local and state workforce investment boards, and other federally funded workforce providers. (For an overview, see https://www.doleta.gov/WIOA/Docs/WIOA_OneStop_FactSheet.pdf) The law requires increased “access to and opportunities for the employment, education, training, and support services [that individuals with barriers to employment] need to succeed in the labor market.”⁷

Performance Expectations under WIOA Are Based on Participants’ Barriers to Employment.

WIOA creates incentives for local workforce systems to assist people with significant barriers to work. Under WIOA, the Department of Labor evaluates state and local system performance based on indicators such as the percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment following program exit, participants’ median earnings following exit, and the percentage of participants who obtain a recognized post-secondary credential. WIOA adjusts performance expectations at state and local levels based on barriers to employment that people participating in the program face, including homelessness.⁸

WIOA Includes Special Provisions for Youth Experiencing Homelessness.

The new law increases from 30 to 75 percent the portion of youth workforce development funds spent on out-of-school youth, including youth experiencing homelessness [WIOA Section 129(a)(4)],¹ and raises the age of eligibility from 21 to 24 [WIOA Section 129(a)(1)].¹ The law also sets separate performance indicators for youth participants, measuring, for example, the percentage who are participating in education or training activities, or are in unsubsidized employment following program exit [WIOA Section 116(b)(2)].¹ These indicators allow providers greater flexibility in tailoring services to the needs of at-risk youth.



We know that people experiencing homelessness and those with multiple vulnerabilities can succeed with the right opportunities, training, and supports. – Norm Suchar⁹



WIOA Requires the Workforce System to Report Outcomes for People Experiencing Homelessness.

Under WIOA, local and state workforce systems are held accountable for employment outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and other disadvantaged groups. Providers, local workforce boards, and states must report their performance on each outcome measure for each group facing barriers to employment, including people experiencing homelessness [WIOA Section 116(d)(2)].¹

WIOA Embraces Work First Strategies.

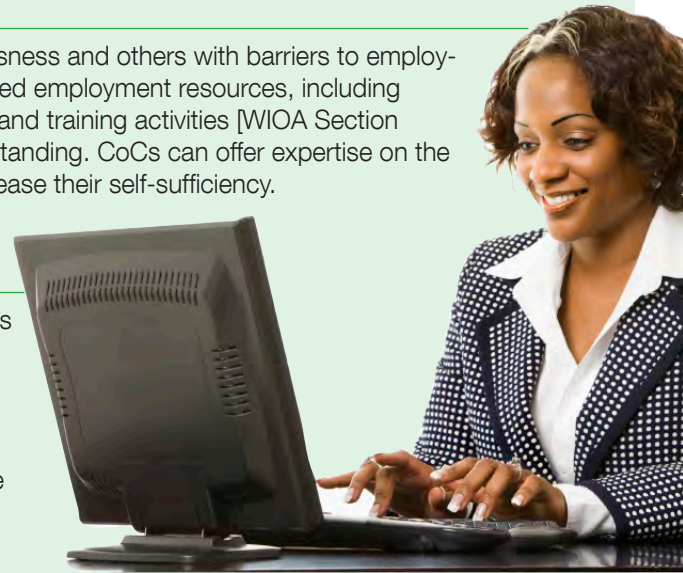
Under WIOA, people experiencing homelessness do not have to participate in pre-vocational activities before receiving job placement services. Instead, the law directs local workforce boards to expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services to people experiencing homelessness and other individuals with barriers to employment while they are co-enrolled in core job services [WIOA Section 108(b)(3)].¹ This approach mirrors evidence-based Supported Employment, which involves a rapid search for competitive employment while a person receives ongoing support to secure and retain employment.

WIOA Requires Coordinated Service Delivery.

To facilitate access to employment services for people experiencing homelessness and others with barriers to employment, WIOA requires local job centers to collaborate with other federally funded employment resources, including Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded employment and training activities [WIOA Section 121(b)(1)].¹ This collaboration is to be governed by a memorandum of understanding. CoCs can offer expertise on the intensive services that many people experiencing homelessness need to increase their self-sufficiency.

WIOA Encourages Collaborative Planning.

Rather than submitting a separate workforce investment plan covering WIOA's core programs, states may choose to develop a combined state plan that includes both WIOA programs and additional employment-related activity. From several programs specifically mentioned in the law, states may choose to include HUD-funded employment and training activities in the combined state plan [WIOA Section 103(a)(2)]. Such an effort would allow CoCs and the workforce system to share their expertise in developing the most effective solutions to unemployment and homelessness in the state.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WIOA:

U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration: <http://www.doleta.gov/wioa/>

U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration:
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa-reauthorization.html>

Endnotes

¹ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Public Law 113-128 (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ128/PLAW-113publ128.pdf>

² Sacramento Steps Forward. (2010, November). Sacramento's initiative to end homelessness. California: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.kevinjohnson.com/action/quality-of-life/file/Sac-Steps-Forward-One-Year-Anniversary-Report.pdf>

³ Rio, J. (2012, November 13). You get what you try for—employing people experiencing chronic homelessness [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://nationalinitiatives.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/you-get-what-you-try-for-employing-people-experiencing-chronic-homelessness/#_ftn1

⁴ Markee, P. (2013, September 18). NY Times: Working New Yorkers without homes [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/ny-times-working-new-yorkers-without-homes/>

⁵ U.S. Conference of Mayors. (2013). Hunger and homelessness survey: A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities. New York: Author. Retrieved from <http://mazon.org/assets/Uploads/Hunger-and-Homelessness-Survey.pdf>

⁶ Burt, M. R. (2012). Impact of housing and work supports on outcomes for chronically homeless adults with mental illness: LA's HOPE. *Psychiatric Services*, 63(3), 210-215. Retrieved from <http://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ps.201100100>

⁷ Section 2(1) of WIOA, Public Law No. 113-128 (2014). <https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ128/PLAW-113publ128.pdf>

⁸ Section 116(b)(3) applies to states; section 116(c)(3) applies to local workforce boards.

⁹ SSNAPS In Focus: CoC collaboration with workforce boards under WIOA. Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, Department of Housing and Urban Development. Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/snaps-in-focus-coc-collaboration-with-workforce-boards-under-wioa/>.

