



Expanding Work Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Governor Cooper wants all North Carolinians to be healthier, better educated, and have more money in their pockets, including North Carolinians with disabilities. To help achieve that goal, he issued Executive Order No. 92, establishing North Carolina as an Employment First state to increase opportunities for fair wages, employment and careers for individuals with disabilities. This will also help meet the state's workforce needs by improving recruitment and retention of talented employees with disabilities, establishing state government a leader in this area and encouraging private businesses to follow suit.

What Does Executive Order No. 92 Do? The Executive Order directs the Office of State Human Resources, in consultation with stakeholders, to:

- Develop and adopt recruitment and retention policies—including evidence-based policies and best practices—to create a more open climate for workers with disabilities.
- Establish competitive, integrated employment as the first and preferred choice for all North Carolinians, regardless of disability, in a job they want to do and with necessary, reasonable supports and accommodations. Integrated employment means hiring people with disabilities to work in settings where most employees do not have disabilities and where workers with disabilities earn competitive wages and are paid directly by their employer.
- Build upon existing state personnel training to include more people with disabilities in the workplace.

Employment First builds on the progress of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready, Everybody Works NC and Hometown Strong initiatives and is aligned with Cabinet agency efforts to create an inclusive work environment through Executive Order No. 24, Prohibiting Discrimination in State Employment.

Why is Executive Order No. 92 necessary?

More than 1.3 million North Carolinians over the age of five—approximately 13% of the state's population—have a disability. There are more than 720,000 North Carolinians of working age living with disabilities, but fewer than 35% are employed—a stark contrast to the 76% of working age North Carolinians without disabilities who are employed.

What are the benefits of increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities?

Increasing competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities increases independence and results in savings in behavioral health, intellectual/developmental disability services and acute health care (LEAD Center Policy Brief 2015). Supported employment services typically return \$1.46 for every \$1.00 of taxpayer investment (Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation 2012).

Employing people with disabilities also benefits businesses, resulting in lower turnover, increased productivity, and access to a broader pool of skilled workers (National Conference of State Legislatures 2015). And accommodations for people with disabilities frequently cost the company little to nothing. A U.S. Department of Labor-funded survey found that 59% of accommodations cost nothing to make, while the rest had an average cost of only \$500 (Job Accommodation Network 2019).

Do other states have Employment First policies?

Yes. 36 states have in place an Employment First Executive Order, enacted legislation or both.