

Employment Assistance

IPS and State Vocational Rehabilitation Works!

When a person with mental illness wants to work, she may choose which program will help her with employment. Different programs are available in different geographic areas. This document describes a federal program available in each state and U.S. territory (state Vocational Rehabilitation) and an evidence-based employment practice called Individual Placement and Support (IPS). In many areas, state Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and IPS programs collaborate to give people the best resources that each has to offer.

“I am impressed with the IPS model and the positive impact it has on our Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients. I believe our VR and IPS teams work well together, helping our mutual clients have a greater chance of becoming successfully employed.”

*Denim Lyman, District Director
Southern Utah Vocational Rehabilitation*

Some people have tried state Vocational Rehabilitation services in the past without success. There are many factors that can affect that outcome. But those same people may find that a combination of IPS services with state Vocational Rehabilitation counseling provides the supports they need to work.

At the end of this document, we have included links to locate IPS programs and state Vocational Rehabilitation services in your area.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS)	State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
<p>IPS is a specific type of supported employment program that was designed to help people with mental illnesses to work at regular jobs in their communities. IPS is an effective approach as demonstrated through multiple studies.</p> <p>IPS services are part of mental health treatment teams so that employment and mental health services can be closely coordinated.</p> <p>IPS is available in many communities, but IPS programs are not available everywhere. The number of IPS programs grows each year.</p>	<p>Each state and U.S. territory has offices of Vocational Rehabilitation that help people with different types of disabilities return to the workforce. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors offer career counseling, job training, job placement, and assistive technology. Counselors may provide services directly or contract with local employment programs to serve clients. For example, a state Vocational Rehabilitation counselor may contract with a local IPS program to work directly with one of his clients on employment. State Vocational Rehabilitation is often a significant funder of IPS services.</p>

Who is served by each program?

People with mental or physical disabilities that make it hard to find work or keep a job may be eligible for vocational counseling, job training and other forms of assistance from state Vocational Rehabilitation. Eligibility is decided on a person-by-person basis between the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and person who is applying for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Most IPS programs serve people who have mental illnesses. IPS programs accept people who want to work regardless of mental health symptoms, substance abuse problems, legal issues, or other factors. There is growing evidence that IPS helps people with other disabilities or problems. Therefore, some IPS programs serve homeless youth, people with spinal cord injuries, or other populations of people.

What is the caseload size of counselors and IPS specialists?

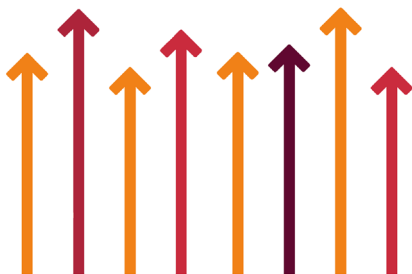
State Vocational Rehabilitation counselors have large caseloads, sometimes as high as 150 or 200 people. That is why they contract with employment programs to provide direct services to individuals. IPS specialists have caseloads of about 20 people so they are able to provide side-by-side assistance to job seekers, students, and workers.



What services are provided?

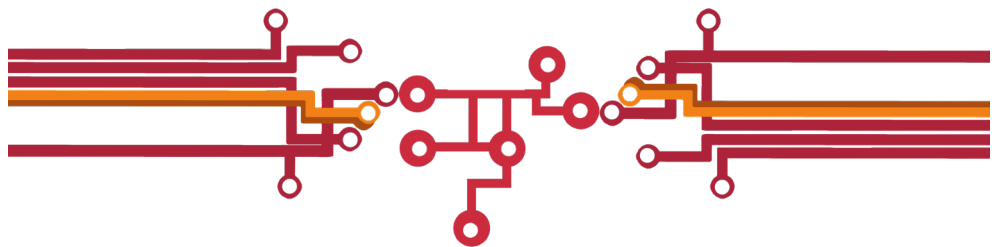
State Vocational Rehabilitation counselors know about the process of helping people get back to work, and they are knowledgeable about different disabilities and long-term illnesses. They work with job seekers and IPS specialists to develop an employment plan. When people have health problems in addition to mental illness, counselors can pay for medical evaluations (if needed), and they share their own expertise about work which work environments and job tasks are suitable. And counselors can also provide assistive technology, for example, a phone app to help a worker manage anxiety while he is at work or recorded textbooks for students. State vocational rehabilitation counselors are sometimes able to help with resources such as clothing for a job interview, tools for a job, or short-term transportation costs. These resources are available on a case-by-case basis and must be related to the person's employment plan. State Vocational Rehabilitation counselors meet with IPS specialists monthly to discuss each person's progress towards his goals, and to suggest possible strategies. State Vocational Rehabilitation counselors also meet with job seekers and workers on their caseloads, but the frequency varies by counselor. Family members may request to attend some meetings with the state Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, with the person's permission.

IPS specialists help people consider what jobs are available that relate to their preferences and individual situations. They may help people explore different careers by visiting businesses together to learn about jobs or making appointments with advisors at schools or job training programs.



The Collaboration Between IPS and State Vocational Rehabilitation: Hilda's Experience

Hilda was unemployed but wanted to work as a phlebotomist. Her mental health counselor referred her to the IPS program. An IPS specialist met with Hilda to discuss her work history, education, and interests. After a couple of meetings, they decided that state Vocational Rehabilitation services would be helpful, and the IPS specialist made the referral. When Hilda got an appointment letter from a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, her IPS specialist offered to go to the appointment with her. They met with Dave, the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, to discuss Hilda's interests and to complete paperwork for his agency. Dave suggested that Hilda and the IPS specialist should start by investigating the cost and length of phlebotomy training, and that they should visit a training program so that Hilda could learn what the training would require. He also explained that he may be able to help with some of the training costs, but that Hilda would have to apply for federal financial aid first. They made plans to meet again in three weeks to discuss what Hilda and the IPS specialist learned about phlebotomy training.



They may also meet with family members and the person to discuss his strengths, interests, and past work experiences. And IPS specialists talk to mental health practitioners, such as counselors and case managers about jobs that the person may enjoy. When a job seeker receives entitlements such as Social Security Disability Insurance, the IPS specialist helps him arrange to meet with a trained benefits planner to learn how different levels of earnings will affect his benefits.

When a person has an employment goal, the IPS specialist and/or job seeker begins contacting employers in person very quickly. Examples of how the IPS specialist and job seeker obtain job offers include:

- ◆ Meeting at a library or job center to complete online job applications.
- ◆ Going to businesses together to follow up on job applications.
- ◆ Building relationships with employers. For example, the IPS specialist may meet with managers to learn about different job types and the skills and qualities employees need to succeed at that business. As the specialist learns about an employer's needs, she

builds a relationship with him and will eventually ask to introduce a job seeker who would be a good match. (IPS specialists only provide this help when a job seeker agrees to disclose his involvement in the IPS program to employers.)

- ◆ Assistance with résumés and cover letters.
- ◆ Help finding job openings related to the job seeker's preferences.

After a person finds employment the IPS specialist provides job supports. Job supports are also individualized and may include any of the following services:

- ◆ Meetings at the worker's home, a coffee shop, the workplace, or another location to discuss how the job is going, to celebrate successes and problem solve, as needed.
- ◆ Help learning how to take public transportation to work.
- ◆ Assistance obtaining uniforms, tools, or clothing for a job. (The specialist may help the worker find donated clothing or may request that a state Vocational Rehabilitation counselor pays for what is needed.)

- ◆ Meetings with the worker and her supervisor (if the worker agrees) to talk about her strengths and areas for improvement, if any.
- ◆ Family meetings to discuss progress at work and future career goals.
- ◆ Meetings with a trained benefits planner to help the worker understand how his entitlements will be affected by changes in his earnings.
- ◆ Collaboration with mental health practitioners who can support working people through assistance with coping strategies, symptom management, substance use supports, and medication adjustments. (Many IPS programs are located within community mental health agencies and serve consumers of their own agencies. Other IPS programs are separate from, but collaborate with, mental health agencies.)

IPS specialists can also help with education and job training programs when those are related to a person's career goal. They help students learn about different programs and they assist with financial aid applications and other sources of funding for school. They also help students connect with services at schools that help with accommodations. IPS specialists may meet students on campus to discuss their progress in different classes and to review time management strategies or good study skills.

How long does it take to get services?

Some IPS programs may have a waiting list, while others are able to meet with people within a week or two. Some state Vocational Rehabilitation offices must limit services when they cannot serve everyone who is eligible for their services. In those cases, they may give priority to those who have the most significant disabilities. In these states there may sometimes be waiting lists for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

How long are services provided?

Vocational rehabilitation services are intended to be time limited and generally continue until people complete the goals on their employment plan, have a job they like, and agree that they no longer require vocational rehabilitation services. In some cases, this may be 90 days after a person is stable on a job.

IPS programs continue to work with a person after the Vocational Rehabilitation program discontinues services when that is the preference of the worker. IPS programs typically provide services until a person has worked steadily for about a year, on average. Some workers may request to have their cases closed sooner because they don't need ongoing services. When a person exits the IPS program, mental health practitioners provide employment supports.

How can a person get started with state Vocational Rehabilitation and IPS services?

Anyone can refer themselves to a state Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Once a person completes an application and is found eligible, he will meet with a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and develop an individual employment plan. This plan may include referral to one of many supported employment programs or vendors that Vocational Rehabilitation counselors work with to provide services on behalf of Vocational Rehabilitation participants. Locate a state Vocational Rehabilitation office near you at <https://askjan.org/concerns/State-Vocational-Rehabilitation-Agencies.cfm>

If a person is receiving mental health services, she can ask her mental health provider whether there is an IPS program available. (Depending on the state, IPS may not be available at all mental health programs.) If an IPS program collaborates with mental health services, the mental health practitioner can refer her to IPS. Many IPS programs work in partnership with state Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and may help the person enroll with local Vocational Rehabilitation services as part of the IPS program. To learn whether IPS is available in your area, go to www.IPSWorks.org and select the Library. Then search for State Leader Contact List.

The Collaboration Between IPS and State Vocational Rehabilitation: Regina's Experience

Regina left her job as a cashier at a grocery store because she felt overwhelmed by long lines of people who were in a hurry. She met with her IPS specialist and Vocational Rehabilitation counselor together to discuss what jobs would be a better match. Regina said that she would prefer a job that did not include working with the public. Together, they brainstormed job types that met Regina's preferences and the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor changed the goal on her employment plan. The IPS specialist asked if Regina would like him to have contact with her supervisor on her next job, and whether she would like him to advocate for her with potential employers. Finally, the IPS specialist made plans to help Regina begin applying for work the following week.



Employment Center

www.ipsworks.org