

Providing IPS services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Our lives have changed rapidly due to COVID-19 over the past few months, including how we provide Individual Placement and Support services. Our colleagues in the International IPS Learning Community and the Supported Employment Demonstration study recently shared ways they are providing services during this unprecedented time. Programs are making decisions based on guiding principles of safety and continued support, which has led to increased flexibility in services. Everyone is vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and many people are at a higher risk for illness severity due to comorbid health conditions. While there is no road map for providing services in a pandemic, in the spirit of peer-to-peer learning, we hope that these strategies might be helpful to others.

1. IPS programs are providing services remotely via phone, video chat, text message and email in order to protect people's health. Leaders in Alabama and South Carolina shared how IPS specialists are communicating with clients several times per week in order to provide holistic support. State and country leaders are adjusting service definitions in order to accommodate telehealth interventions.
2. IPS specialists are continuing to deliver vocational services, including intake, assessment using the Career Profile, job search activities like preparing resumes and applying for jobs, job retention, and supported education. Several staff shared that they have successfully reconnected with clients who were disengaged from services. IPS specialists are also offering important emotional support to people by checking in frequently, sharing encouragement, and promoting wellness strategies.
3. Teams are helping clients with financial changes, including applying for unemployment benefits and linkage to individualized benefits counseling. State and country leaders are providing guidance on this- for example, Vermont is having a benefits counseling statewide call focused on changes in work hours and the impact of unemployment payments on other benefits.
4. IPS programs are responding to a rapidly shifting labor market by continuing to help people find jobs and build employer partnerships. Rather than contacting employers in person, IPS specialists are connecting with employers remotely. Staff are looking at their employer contact logs and reaching back out to existing employer connections. Clients are still getting job offers and many people are still working in essential jobs. IPS specialists are helping working clients stay as safe as possible at work to avoid illness.
5. IPS specialists are staying connected to their IPS team, clinical teams, VR counselors, school counselors, and other partners. Teams are meeting remotely to coordinate support for clients. In Ohio, VR is providing information on temporary employment and unemployment benefits for IPS clients who have been laid off from their jobs.
6. Leaders in the International IPS Learning Community are communicating frequently with their IPS providers and offering more online training and technical assistance. Tennessee is sending weekly updates to IPS teams. Alaska has biweekly conference calls with IPS specialists and Kentucky's IPS supervisors meet via Zoom videoconference. Many states and countries have increased training opportunities via webinar. At this time, fidelity reviews have been suspended, but some states are doing remote quality assurance by reviewing charts, career profiles, and other documentation and providing feedback.

Beloved children's television producer Fred Rogers once said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me ["Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."](#)

Thank you for your continued efforts to support IPS clients during this challenging time.