

Employment of Individuals with ASD in Indiana

Indiana Resource Center for Autism

Employment is a fundamental part of adult life because it provides opportunities to build occupational, social, and emotional skills. In addition, employment oftentimes provides for meaningful participation in society outside of the workplace, including providing access to medical insurance coverage and the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with coworkers. While opportunities in the workforce are bountiful in the current economy, too often employees with an autism spectrum disorder are not considered.

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Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a pervasive neurodevelopmental disability that is found in about 1 out of every 44 individuals ([Data & Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder | CDC](#)). An ASD diagnosis typically involves challenges in social communication and social interaction.

Because of these unique traits, individuals with ASD commonly report substantial challenges in attaining gainful employment throughout the lifespan ([Autism | U.S. Department of Labor](#)). In addition to struggles in finding employment, job retention is an additional issue, with many individuals with ASD struggling to keep employment for long stretches of time. For those able to find and retain employment, they often report underemployment - not being provided enough hours to provide for themselves financially – and therefore face another unique set of issues. Similarly, employment settings are tremendously important for the financial and social health of individuals with ASD. While the goal is for individuals to work in competitive integrated employment in community-based settings, some individuals continue to be subjected to employment in segregated facilities, often working for less than minimum wage ([Subminimum Wage | US Commission on Civil Rights](#)). While employers, both large and small, have adjusted policies and practices to recruit, retain and accommodate employees with ASD, employment remains limited.

Results from the IRCA's Needs Assessment

While the research is clear from a national perspective, investigations on a state level are critical, as employment is rooted in the industries of local communities. In 2021, the Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA) at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC) conducted a legislatively mandated Needs Assessment to determine the current state of services across Indiana for individuals with ASD and their families. The IRCA Needs Assessment covered a variety of domains including education, funding structures, behavior, and many others. In addition, the report provided an opportunity to investigate the needs of individuals with ASD in the workplace.

The results of the IRCA Needs Assessment indicated that of the 309 respondents who have a family member with ASD who is eligible for employment, 15% (n=47) report that their family member with ASD is currently employed. For those who are employed, community employment was the most reported type of employment setting (56.1%). Analysis of this group indicated that, on average, an employed individual with ASD worked an average of 25 hours per week with a yearly income of \$16,231.



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The highest reported salary was \$65,000. Another commonly reported setting was “no day programming at all” (30%), meaning that the individuals had no meaningful activities to attend to during the day.

To assess what the state needed to accomplish to ensure better employment outcomes for individuals with ASD, the IRCA Needs Assessment asked family members to identify common barriers to employment for individuals with ASD. The most reported barrier was a lack of options in their community (n = 92; 46%). A personal lack of interest (n = 61; 30.5%), lack of transportation (n = 29; 14.5%) and fear of losing benefits (n = 18; 9.0%) were also reported.

In regard to the lack of options, the IRCA Needs Assessment additionally included a question asking family members to identify supports needed to be successful in finding and keeping a job. The top service/support was social skills training (n=184) followed by a job coach (n=149) and appropriate accommodations in the workplace (n=149). It was commonly reported that these services were unavailable for their son/daughter.

Recommendations

Individuals with ASD can be successful in a competitive job market and remain an untapped workforce. Companies should continue to be supported and encouraged in employing those with disabilities. Below are some recommendations of how Indiana can utilize this information to improve employment opportunities.

1. In a labor market that is currently struggling to attract and retain employees, large and small businesses should consider recruitment strategies to attract this largely underemployed community.

Partnerships with local employment providers such as Vocational Rehabilitation could provide a stable pipeline for recruitment.

2. State and local governments should consider incentivizing the hiring of employees with ASD to help cover the current labor shortage.

Solutions such as tax breaks and other fiscal incentives to hire employees with ASD could help to ease the current labor shortage.

Commonly Reported Barriers to Employment



Lack of Options

• 46% (n=92)



Lack of Interest

• 30.5% (n=61)



Lack of Transportation

• 14.5% (n=29)



Fear of Losing Benefits

• 9.0% (n=18)

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