

**WHAT IS NCHSD?**

Authorized under the *Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999* (TWWIIA) and approved by Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), the National Consortium for Health Systems Development (NCHSD) represents states that have joined together to assist other state agencies, legislatures, consumers and advocates in their efforts to build systems that support competitive employment for individuals with disabilities. The primary means for achieving this goal is through state-to-state information sharing, individualized technical assistance, and the dissemination of best practices to a broad array of involved stakeholders in states around the country.

**THE HEALTH CARE ACCESS-DEPENDENCY LINK**

At a time when most businesses are facing a serious shortage of qualified workers, *three out of every four* people with disabilities are not working. Many of these individuals are highly skilled and want to work but remain unemployed for fear of losing their health care benefits. Most often, the primary source of coverage available to people with disabilities is the Medicaid program. This coverage can be easily lost if either income or assets rise above certain narrowly prescribed eligibility limits. Because access to health care is so vital to the ability of disabled individuals to live independently, they are forced to make life-defining choices—economic independence, or dependence on cash assistance to assure access to needed medical and long term care services.

**THE CHALLENGE TO STATES**

States can begin to address this significant barrier to employment through provisions in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and TWWIIA and thereby encourage policy development that promotes an inclusive workforce. Such a workforce will necessarily build on the skills and experience of all workers, regardless of their disability status. The provisions of TWWIIA and other recently enacted legislation provide a range of opportunities for states to build health systems which support the employment aspirations of individuals with disabilities who have had little choice in the past to pursue meaningful employment opportunities.

**HOW CAN NCHSD HELP?**

The NCHSD is an efficient venue to facilitate state-to-state information sharing about best practices and challenges encountered in building supportive health care and social support systems for people with disabilities who wish to work. Many of the state partners in NCHSD are among the first group of states in the country to implement work incentive options in their Medicaid programs. Additionally, they have been in the forefront of building inter-agency partnerships for the purpose of creating integrated and comprehensive approaches to workforce policy development for individuals with disabilities. Because Medicaid is a federal-state partnership, each state's program has design and administration features that reflect its unique political culture and social values. The NCHSD is committed to honoring this uniqueness while looking for opportunities to share best practices, lessons learned, and technology transfer.

**FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIPS**

NCHSD operates on the premise that the best policy happens when all stakeholders are at the table and actively involved in setting the policy agenda. By providing opportunities for meaningful collaboration between states, advocates, and consumers, in partnership with federal and other key stakeholders, NCHSD activities can create the conditions that foster the relationships necessary to build comprehensive, consumer-driven health systems' development.

### **WHAT KIND OF ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE?**

- Assessment tools and assistance in examining existing state policies and programs that serve as barriers to employment
- Design of model benefit packages and innovative delivery system enhancements
- Development of accurate cost estimates for expanding Medicaid options
- State-to-state problem-solving and development of issues' resolution strategies to overcome structural, policy, and political barriers to systems change
- Development of on-going research and evaluation methods and tools to monitor the outcomes and impacts of systems and policy change
- Development of model training modules for state Medicaid eligibility workers, VR counselors, community mental health workers and other professionals who provide support to individuals with disabilities
- Technical assistance and best practice strategies for engaging the employer community

### **HOW CAN INTERESTED STATES BECOME PARTNERS?**

All states are invited to become partners in NCHSD. States that join NCHSD through a financial contribution become full partners, including having a seat on the National Policy Advisory Council that sets the NCHSD agenda, workplan, and operating priorities. For those non-dues paying states "non-affiliated states" assistance is also available on an as-needed basis.

Current NCHSD state partners include: Alaska, Washington, Kansas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and West Virginia in the Consortium for Health Systems Development; and Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont through the Northeast Partnership for Health Systems Development.

Complementing the expertise of partner states' policy experts, the work of NCHSD is fully supported by a core staff of policy and research professionals from the SSI Coalition for a Responsible Safety Net, the Center for Health and Disability Policy at the Oregon Health Sciences University, and the Center for Health Policy and Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

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