

Frequently Asked Questions for Individuals and Families: **Employment Preparation Services (EPR)**

Question: What is this new service I keep hearing about called *Employment Preparation Services* or *EPR*?

Answer: Employment Preparation Services (EPR) provides time-limited, individualized supports to gather information, explore options, develop skills, and gain experiences that will prepare an individual for Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). If you are currently working in a sheltered workshop, participating in sub-minimum wage contract work, or if your service provider employs you in any way, you will see this service start to be used to support you. EPR will help you learn or improve in skills that help you to find and keep a community job in the future.

Question: What does the term Competitive Integrated Employment or CIE mean?

Answer: Competitive Integrated Employment, sometimes stated as CIE, refers to jobs that are open to everyone in your local community. It also means that you work with some co-workers that may experience a disability and also non-disabled coworkers. It means that your pay is at least minimum wage and similar to coworkers that do the same work. Last, it means that you have the same opportunities for work benefits and advancement as any other employee in your workplace.

Question: Why is the change to EPR happening now?

Answer: EPR was created in response to: [Employment First](#), individual choice, and to comply with federal guidelines from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), such as the [Settings Rule](#). Medicaid funds cannot be used for employment or vocational services in a sheltered workshop setting. Sheltered workshops are settings where individuals with disabilities work alongside only other individuals with disabilities and are typically paid below minimum wage for their work. However, pre-vocational services can be provided and funded in a sheltered workshop setting if the services are: time-limited; their purpose is to prepare an individual for Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE); and the individual has full access to the greater community.

Question: What if I am comfortable with my job in a sheltered workshop or making sub-minimum wage?

Answer: Anyone working in a sheltered workshop, a sub-minimum wage job, or as an employee of a provider needs to transition to the EPR by March 17th 2022. This does

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not include those that are a part of an enclave or work crew. Jobs that are not Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) should be seen as time-limited training and stepping stones to future CIE. EPR may be used for up to 24 months. If more time is needed an extension can be requested to support you to gain the prevocational skills you need to pursue CIE. However, this service is for a defined period of time, meaning you will need to choose a different service at some point. Your support team should use person-centered planning to understand what makes you feel comfortable at your sheltered workshop. It could be that you like your routine, making money, or your friends you work with. Your support team can help you find ways to meet those needs through other services. They can also make sure that you have the support, like a job coach, that you need to feel comfortable and safe in a job in the community.

Question: How will I benefit from EPR?

Answer: EPR services will give you the opportunity to learn more about different community job options that interest you or you may not know about. EPR time can be spent exploring any work interests you have. EPR will also help you to be able to make an informed choice about employment. You may be able to go explore potential places you would like to work in the community, talk to people that work there, or watch how they do their job. If you already know that you want to work, you can learn new skills that will help you be successful in CIE when you are ready to find a job in the community.

Question: Can I still choose to attend day services?

Answer: Yes. Day Services will continue to be an available service option. Day Services will focus on skills needed for daily life. EPR services will include skill-building activities that help prepare someone for the general workforce. Individuals can use a combination of day service and time-limited EPR services to develop interests and meet health and safety needs. Informed choice for employment can be provided in day services or EPR.

Question: Will I lose my current job?

Answer: No. If you have been working in a sheltered workshop or on a sub-minimum wage contract you will not lose your job. You will also continue to have the right level of support to meet your individual needs. It does mean that the job you are working right now will not continue indefinitely. Instead, you will be given up to 24-months to learn

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the skills you need to be successful in a competitive and integrated job. Your support team can help you to discuss what this means for your individual situation. They will also discuss EPR with you each year to see if you are interested in finding a job, still working on prevocational skills, or want to do other meaningful activities with your day.

Question: Will anything change at my current job?

Answer: Yes. Federal guidelines require DSPD to separate day and employment focused activities. This does not mean that day services will end, instead those employment activities (like time spent in a sheltered workshop) will now occur under the EPR code. Introducing EPR will also change how your work week might look. You will spend some of your time each week learning about different community jobs and even trying some new job tasks yourself in different workplaces. When you feel ready, work with your support team to help you find and keep a competitive and integrated job.

Question: Will I still get to see friends from work?

Answer: Yes. If you want to maintain friendships with coworkers, talk to your family and support team about it so they can help you. You may observe, as time goes along, that you or your coworkers start to find new, community jobs, or decide to do different activities. Starting new jobs opens the door to make more friends if you choose. Work with your support team to help you find time to continue friendships with coworkers from past and current jobs.

Question: How will my Support Coordinator help me?

Answer: The Support Coordinator's role is to advocate for you. Support Coordinators make sure you have control over your life and can make informed choices regarding all areas of your day. They can assist you to plan and participate in activities that interest you, make goals, and develop skills that you want. They will also connect you to other resources. If you are interested in working, they will help you decide if EPR is the best fit to prepare you for a future competitive and integrated job in the community.

Question: How will my staff help me?

Answer: Staff, including job coaches, are available to assist you to be successful in whatever job you choose. The purpose of EPR is to help you learn skills that are needed

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in all jobs. Staff will support you to learn these abilities. Once you have decided on a specific job, you can request a job coach to help you learn more skills to be successful.

Question: Do I have to work in the community

Answer: No. In many cases, you and your family may want to take some time to consider if work in a competitive and integrated setting is right for you. No one is ever required, or forced to work. If you choose not to work, this means that you have also chosen not to participate in a sheltered workshop opportunity, or on a sub-minimum contract work. This is because EPR activities prepare an individual, interested in work, for the requirements of Competitive Integrated Employment. Your support team might also discuss with you other activities or interests, as well as other ways you would prefer to spend your time.

Question: What if I am concerned about safety in a community job?

Answer: Your safety in the workplace and the greater community is a priority. Employment services can address any safety concern, and are always available to support you in the sheltered workshop and in a community job. If support needs change as you transition from sheltered work to community work, reach out to your support coordinator and other members of your support team.

Question: Can I work a job in the community and also keep my job in the sheltered workshop?

Answer: If you have a job in the community, work with your support team to focus on adjusting your community job hours and responsibilities, find a second job in the community, or exploring other interests and activities outside of work. Since you already have prevocational skills and are using them in your community job, staying in a sheltered workshop is not recommended for you. Your support team should use person-centered planning to understand what you want to do with your day. They can learn about what makes you feel comfortable at your sheltered workshop. It could be that you like your routine, making money, or your friends you work with. Your support team can help you find ways to meet those needs through other services. They will help you with a smooth transition from the sheltered workshop to other services by March 17, 2022.

Question: What if I don't know if I want to work in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)?

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Answer: EPR is available to anyone who might be unsure or unaware of their employment options. As part of EPR, you will be supported to make an informed, educated decision about whether or not to work. The EPR service will provide you with: hands-on experience; information about potential competitive integrated jobs; and ongoing discussions about your work options to help make that choice.

Question: Can I receive EPR for more than 24 months?

Answer: You may make a request for an extension of EPR. This means that if you are still working on developing a skill to lead to CIE, or have had a significant life event that paused your progress toward CIE, your Support Coordinator can submit a request for you to continue using EPR. DSPD will review the request and make a determination based on your CIE goals, the skills you want to continue to develop, and if continuing the EPR service meets your needs. There is no specific limit to the number of extensions allowed. However, this is a time limited service and requests will not be approved indefinitely.

Question: What do I do if I am denied the EPR service?

Answer: If you are denied EPR after DSPD has reviewed the request your Support Coordinator submitted, you will receive a letter. The letter will let you know how you can appeal the decision if you disagree. You will continue to receive your current services while the appeal process takes place. If you choose not to appeal or the appeal process results in again denying your request for EPR, your Support Coordinator will help you look at other services options that can meet your needs. You will have support to transition to another service option and will not be without services.

Question: What if I don't want to go into the community?

Answer: If you do not want to go into the community, you are not required to do so. You get to choose when and how often you go into the community. Members of your support team are available to help you with any challenges, or concerns you might have about participating in community activities. Alternative activities would be offered during times you choose not to go into the community. As part of this new EPR service, you will spend a portion of every week in your local community, exploring work interests. The goal of the EPR service is to explore jobs that would be available to you in

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the community. You will be asked often about: interests; desires; meaningful activities you would like to do; and also going into the community to learn about work interests and other options. These questions may be repeated to make sure you are given every opportunity to experience and participate in your community.

Question: What if I have more questions?

A detailed description of all the basic changes can be found on the “EPR Guidance: Fact Sheet.” If you have further questions feel free to speak with your Support Coordinator, submit an email to dspdinfo@utah.gov, or send your question directly to Bryn Peterson at brynpeterson@utah.gov or (385) 228-3122.