IIMHL Leadership Briefing LV

**COVID-19 and Employment Services for
People with Mental Distress**

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Introduction

Employment for people who experience mental distress is a key topic for all countries as a result of the pandemic. The current author Janet Peters has written this first report focusing on employment in a COVID-19 environment in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In this Briefing, work from Aotearoa/New Zealand outlines key issues regarding employment and the COVID-19 environment; guidelines for mentally healthy workplaces are given by an agency in Australia; and in the US, an expert in the area of supported employment argues that it can be a solution to COVID-19-initiated employment problems.

Aotearoa/New Zealand

Te Pou: The impact of COVID-19 on unemployment December 2020 A rapid review of the impact of COVID-19 on people with mental health issues across IIMHL countries
2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global health, social and economic crisis. This rapid review is a look at one key issue: how some IIMHL countries are supporting people with mental health issues to stay at work and return to employment in the COVID-19 environment.

Countries are experiencing high rates of unemployment due to COVID-19 and even higher are the rates of unemployment for people with mental distress and addiction. In addition, if you add Indigenous and migrant communities, unemployment is even higher (as noted in an earlier IIMHL report).

As Individual Placement and Support (IPS) has the most evidence of success it will be highlighted across countries. This rapid review by Peters builds on the work of Lockett and colleagues in January 2020 which looked at IPS progress across countries. Countries were Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, and the US.

Thirteen key points are noted, with Individual Placement and Support (IPS) seen as an effective tool for employment during the pandemic.

Australia

The National Mental Health Commission and the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance: Mentally Healthy Workplaces during COVID-19
2021

It has been a challenging year for Australian workers, with many impacted by COVID-19, bushfires, flood and drought. The Commission, in conjunction with the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance, has created a series of evidence-based, easy to use guides to support the mental health and wellbeing of Australian workers and to encourage mentally healthy workplaces during COVID-19.

These guides have been created by experts to provide practical tips and advice on helping employers and employees look out for the signs that someone may need support, and assist them to find help when they need it.

Resources have been developed for:
- Sole traders
- Small business
- Medium to large business.

https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/Mental-health-Reform/National-Workplace-Initiative/Mentally-Healthy-Workplaces-during-COVID-19

England

NHS Confederation: Ensuring appropriate employment support for people with mental health problems.
2020

The authors: Peter Molyneux, Rachel Perkins and Miles Rinaldi state this briefing is designed to help systems and their partners understand why employment support for people with mental health problems is important and how it can look in practice.

Key points made are:
- For people with mental health problems, the parallel provision of clinical and employment support services is critical to their recovery.
- All staff working with people with a mental health problem have an important role in promoting the benefits of appropriate employment and in promoting a positive view of the person's skills and ability to work.
- Social prescriber link workers and mental health practitioners in primary care networks have a major role in both raising and discussing employment with the people they support and signposting them to specialised employment support based on the person's needs.

- Both local authority and NHS commissioners work with wider system partners to integrate and embed employment support alongside clinical services to improve access, integration and visibility of employment support.
- The full implementation of the NHS Long Term Plan commitment to increase access to specialist employment advice for people with mental health problems requires the provision of employment advice within improving access to psychological therapies services and an individual placement support service at the level of 'place', if the full benefits are to be realised.

https://www.nhsconfed.org/resources/2020/10/ensuring-appropriate-employment-support-for-people-with-mental-health-problems

United States

Dartmouth: White Paper COVID-19, Unemployment, and Behavioral Health Conditions: The Need for Supported Employment
2021

Several lines of evidence point to remote IPS supported employment as a solution to COVID-19 related unemployment.

First, studies of IPS for people with conditions other than serious mental illness have shown effectiveness. Second, studies of return to work interventions for people with depression are most effective when they combine vocational and behavioral health supports, which is a fundamental principle of IPS supported employment. Third, the current Social Security Administration study of unsuccessful disability applicants (few of whom have serious mental illness) in 30 cities across the U.S. has helped hundreds of people gain employment during COVID-19. Fourth, the current study of veterans transitioning from the military to civilian life during COVID – many with anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder -- is showing that remote vocational supports can be effective. Finally, IPS employment specialists around the country have developed skills for and experience with remote delivery of all phases of supported employment.

https://mcusercontent.com/c0cc0bb7d7ade9649fb1ad184/files/93c8091c-0125-4c51-91ed-f70290629fc9/COVID_IPS_white_paper_2021.pdf