



**Serving job seekers with barriers to  
employment through WIOA**

*Insights from workforce development and  
human services data*

**February 2018**

Many factors influence people's employment situations and job searches. Lack of essential resources such as money, housing, transportation, child care or medical care often create barriers to securing employment. Accessing viable training or employment opportunities with living wages is particularly difficult for individuals living in poverty, affected by unstable housing or facing health issues.

### **Current workforce policies and programs prioritize job seekers with barriers to employment**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) charges local workforce development boards to focus investments on programs that serve people who are low-income, receive public assistance, or without the necessary literacy or mathematical skills to attain employment. The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry requires at least 51% of the individuals receiving these services and 50% of people in trainings be low-income individuals or people with additional barriers to employment.

### **Intensive job seeker services are reaching those with the greatest need**

An analysis of local workforce and human services data confirms that WIOA-funded programs are serving the prioritized population of job seekers with barriers to employment. Twenty-nine percent of job seekers who received any career service also accessed services through the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS). A larger proportion of job seekers (43%) accessing more intensive or individualized career services through the Pennsylvania CareerLink® system<sup>1</sup> are low-income or have needs that qualify them to receive benefits and services through the DHS. In addition, about 28% of the job seekers who received basic career services also received human services or public assistance.<sup>2</sup> The most common services DHS provided to job seekers were public benefits, mental health services, and public housing assistance.<sup>3</sup> Notably, 40% of the individuals who received more comprehensive workforce services were also public assistance recipients.

Specifically, 47% of the several hundred individuals who engaged in training programs funded through the PA CareerLink® system received human services in the same year.<sup>4</sup> While there are far fewer individuals engaged in these more intensive trainings compared to basic career services, these job seekers receive public assistance in significantly larger proportions than individuals only in basic career services.

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<sup>1</sup> PA CareerLink® Pittsburgh/Allegheny County, a proud partner of the American Job Center Network, is a one-stop system designed to connect job seekers to employers. Services include workshops, recruitment events, one-on-one career counseling, and a database of online job postings.

<sup>2</sup> The WIOA data in this report includes adult and dislocated worker services only. Basic career services primarily comprise Labor Exchange services, but also includes services from other workforce programs. Data referenced is from program year 2016, which ran from July 2015 through June 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Public benefits include Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Mental health services are publicly funded mental health services and supports. Assisted housing services include affordable housing and the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program.

<sup>4</sup> Training programs include occupational skills training, on-the-job training, and customized training programs.

Job seeker services received in program year 2016	Number receiving workforce services	Percent receiving any human services <sup>5</sup>	Percent receiving public benefits	Percent receiving mental health services	Percent receiving assisted housing
Job seekers who received basic career services only	59,442	28%	26%	5%	2%
Job seekers who received more intensive or individualized services <sup>6</sup>	3,516	43%	40%	9%	5%
All job seekers	62,958	29%	27%	5%	3%

**Some job seekers are more likely to face additional barriers to employment**

Job seekers that received public assistance were typically prime-age (between 25 and 54), many had a high school diploma or less, most were persons of color, and most were female. Prime-age workers constituted two-thirds of the people who received both career services and human services. The educational attainment of people receiving human services is also lower than the average for all job seekers, indicating that people with lower levels of education might face additional barriers to employment and require more intensive services.

Some stark differences appear when considering race and gender. Persons of color comprised 27% of all job seekers, but represented more than half of all individuals who received both human services and career services; specifically, 62% of people who received both intensive career services and human services were persons of color. Similarly, women comprised just 42% of all job seekers, but comprised:

- 56% of job seekers who received human services and basic career services.
- 53% of job seekers who received human services and individualized career services.

<sup>5</sup> Human services include public benefits, mental health services, and assisted housing. The data for public benefits, mental health services, and assisted housing are percentages of all individuals receiving workforce services.

<sup>6</sup> Intensive and individualized services include trainings.

Demographics		Percent of all job seekers	Percent of job seekers who received basic career services and human services	Percent of job seekers who received intensive career services and human services
Education	High school diploma or less	40%	53%	45%
	Associate's degree or some post-secondary education	27%	29%	36%
	Bachelor's or advanced degree	24%	13%	15%
Age	24 and younger	9%	14%	8%
	25 to 54	58%	62%	66%
	55 and older	23%	14%	17%
Race	Person of color	27%	51%	62%
	White	61%	42%	31%
Gender	Female	42%	56%	53%
	Male	58%	44%	47%

**Collaboration is key to matching job seekers with workforce services**

Obtaining employment is linked inextricably to other factors in job seekers’ lives; any difficulty job seekers face when finding employment is compounded by other barriers they might face. The local workforce system focuses on placing job seekers in positions that pay self-sustaining wages. The total number of job seekers who qualify as priority of service individuals is likely higher than this analysis captures, as this data does not include all possible indicators of employment barriers. However, this analysis does suggest that individuals with barriers to employment, who are in poverty or receiving public assistance—especially those with low levels of education, persons of color and female job seekers—may require, and in fact do receive, more individualized services or trainings for successful job placement. For job seekers who do not face additional barriers, basic or non-intensive career services may be sufficient to successfully place them in employment.

Further, the ability to effectively serve all job seekers and direct resources to the populations of people that need them the most is predicated on the collaboration of local agencies and organizations, such as the partnership between Partner4Work and DHS. This brief report demonstrates that such collaboration enhances our understanding of the people we serve and improves the efficacy of workforce services.

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