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## **Equipping Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Teams with Individual Placement and Support Tools**

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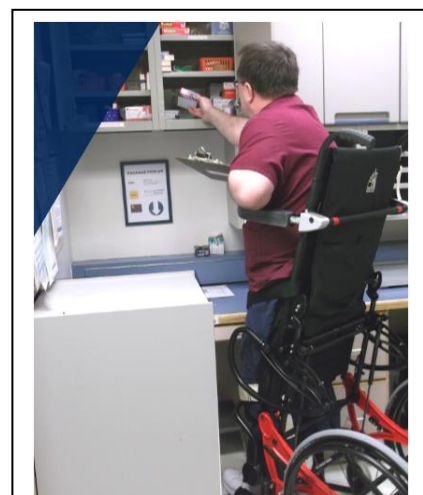
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**Background:** The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment is the only effective, evidence-based approach to vocational rehabilitation for persons with spinal cord injury (SCI).<sup>1-5</sup> With IPS, an employment specialist is integrated into the clinical rehabilitation team to help persons with disabilities find competitive employment in their communities. As with all other persons, employment for these persons provides them with greater economic independence<sup>6-8</sup> and improves their quality of life and well-being.<sup>9</sup> IPS, however, is not a part of standard SCI rehabilitation.

In 2016, through a Craig H. Neilsen (CHN) Quality of Life Program Grant, called “Tools for a Working Life with SCI: Translating Evidence-Based Employment Services into Practice”, a toolkit was developed to facilitate adoption of the IPS model of supported employment in SCI: *Tools for a Working Life with SCI: Individual Placement and Support in Spinal Cord Injury (IPS in SCI) Toolkit*. The toolkit was designed to address a gap in specialized training and resources in the field of SCI rehabilitation to help clinical and vocational teams transition from conventional employment services to IPS.<sup>10</sup> In 2017, a CHN Sustainable Impact Project was awarded to evaluate and improve the toolkit through a field test at one VA SCI Center. The goal of the project was to use the toolkit with external and internal mentorship to strategically accelerate implementation of IPS in the SCI Center and, thus, improve competitive employment outcomes among Veterans with SCI.

**Methods & Results:** During this field test, fidelity reviews and evaluation of program outcome data showed improved implementation and increases both in IPS utilization and in the employment rate of Veterans with SCI. Concurrently, a formative and summative evaluations of the toolkit were undertaken. Qualitative interviews of clinicians, vocational rehabilitation personnel, and SCI leadership were conducted to understand their experiences with the toolkit. Their recommendations for improving the toolkit were then refined with the help of a national steering committee of content and knowledge translation experts. Collectively, this effort resulted in a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the toolkit with the following improvements:

- (1) Streamlined information presented in a variety of formats (print, video, infographics)



TOOLS FOR A WORKING LIFE WITH SCI:  
**INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND  
SUPPORT IN SPINAL CORD  
INJURY TOOLKIT**

2nd Edition

- (2) A user-friendly method for navigating through the toolkit
- (3) A reorganization of content to facilitate finding information based on provider role or need
- (4) Addition of patient education resources
- (5) Guidance for leadership to advocate for employment services

**Significance:** Integrating vocational and SCI rehabilitation and rapidly engaging persons with disabilities in a search for community employment represents a paradigm shift from less effective, conventional vocational programs. Such a shift requires dedicated resources and support for successful implementation. To address that need, the IPS in SCI toolkit was developed and tested as a practical resource with a variety of tools to help teams adopt IPS and improve employment outcomes for persons with SCI.

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