



EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT (IPS) FOR ADULTS WITH JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT STUDY SUMMARY

This document summarizes the plan for the Evaluation of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) for Adults with Justice Involvement (IPS-JI). The study is one of several rigorous studies being conducted under a federally-sponsored project called [Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies \(NextGen\) Project](#). The NextGen Project is being conducted by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the federal Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Social Security Administration. Experienced researchers at Mathematica and Westat's IPS Employment Center are leading the effort to implement the Evaluation of IPS-JI.

Study goals and research approach

Why study IPS? Policymakers and program administrators are searching for better ways to help justice-involved adults with mental health challenges who are re-entering the community to obtain jobs and avoid becoming dependent on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and other forms of public support. The NextGen Project has identified IPS as a promising way to do that.

What is IPS? IPS is an evidence-based model of support for individuals who want to work. IPS seeks to rapidly place the individual in a competitive job in a manner that is guided by the individual's preferences. Trained IPS staff work with the employer to determine how the individual can best meet the employer's needs. Employment support is integrated with any needed medical treatments. IPS provides individualized long-term support such as assistance with job changes and career advancement. It also provides benefits counseling. [Past evidence](#) demonstrates that IPS helps adults with significant mental health conditions become employed and continue to work for many years. The evaluation will test whether IPS is effective at increasing employment, reducing reliance on government benefits, and reducing recidivism.

How will IPS be tested? The NextGen Project will use an experimental design, the gold standard for rigorous testing of health and social services. An automated process will randomly assign eligible adults with justice involvement who have consented to participate in the study to either an IPS group or a usual vocational services group—about half in each. Participants in both groups will be offered vocational services as well as mental health and other services. The study will test whether the IPS services produce substantially better employment and other outcomes than the other vocational services that are usually available to such individuals. Effects of IPS on employment, benefit receipt, and other outcomes will be measured by comparing average outcomes for those assigned to the IPS group to the corresponding averages for those assigned to the usual vocational services group across all sites combined—about 500 in each group. The study will also document how IPS is implemented in the centers and conduct a benefit-cost analysis.

Study sites

Five mental health centers will each recruit about 200 adults with justice involvement for the study. Each center is either a state agency or a non-profit organization that is substantially supported by a state mental health agency. All the state agencies are highly supportive of the study. Each center will recruit potential study participants from adults who are re-entering its community from a jail, state prison, re-entry facility, or starting an alternative sentence ordered by a mental health court or drug court.

Study eligibility

To be eligible for the study, individuals must:

- a. Have been released into the community following the completion of a sentence or ordered to serve an alternative sentence by a mental health or drug court within the past 30 days
- b. Be at least 18 years old
- c. Be eligible for mental health services at the participating mental health center
- d. Not be restricted from working by probation, parole, or other court-ordered rules
- e. Be interested in working in the center's service area and not be currently employed (other than casual jobs)
- f. Affirm they have never received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) as an adult, and are not awaiting a decision on an application

Before being enrolled in the study, prospective study participants will be told about the study and asked whether they consent to participate.

Services offered to study participants

All study participants will become clients of the center that recruits them and will be offered all the mental health and non-vocational services available at the center, as needed. Those assigned to the IPS group will be offered IPS services, while those assigned to the usual vocational services group will be offered low-intensity employment services and referrals to service providers in the community as needed.

Benefits counseling will also be different for the two groups. In line with the goals of IPS, benefits counselors will be expected to advise IPS participants on how to succeed economically without seeking financial support from SSI. Benefits counselors for the usual vocational services group may encourage or help them apply for SSI, as usual.

Recruitment and enrollment process

Who will coordinate recruitment and enrollment? At each center, a research coordinator employed by the center will 1) serve as the center's liaison with the referral sources; 2) visit the referral sources and meet with prospective study participants; 3) guide prospective study participants through the intake process at the center; and 4) hand off the study participants to an appropriate member of the center's staff.

How will prospective study participants be recruited? The research coordinator will visit each referral source on a regular schedule to conduct informational meetings with prospective study participants—usually in groups but individually if needed. Afterward, the coordinator will meet individually with each interested study participant to assess their eligibility, answer additional questions, and schedule a follow-up enrollment appointment at the center.

How will individuals enroll in the study? At the center, the research coordinator will guide each individual through the rest of the intake process, using a secure, internet-based program designed for the purpose. Steps at this stage include: verification of study eligibility; admission to

the center as a client; informed consent; completion of a short survey about their health, past experiences and other characteristics; and automated random assignment to the IPS or usual vocational services group. Those who decline to participate in the study will still be eligible for the center's services, including usual vocational services, but not IPS.

How will participants start to receive services? Immediately after random assignment, the research coordinator will hand off each enrolled study participant to another staff member at the center. This will usually be a case coordinator who will be responsible for working with the individual to determine service needs. Participants assigned to IPS will also meet their IPS employment specialist or, if unavailable, another member of the IPS team.

Data collected for the evaluation

Mathematica will collect data on all study participants for about two years. The data will cover employment, receipt of government benefits, health, and involvement with the justice system. All study participants will complete a survey as they enroll in the study. They will be asked to complete a follow-up survey about nine months after enrollment and a second follow-up survey about 21 months after enrollment. The surveys will ask about services received, employment, benefits, health, and other outcomes. Mathematica also will obtain data on employment and program participation for all study participants from administrative records of state and federal programs. In addition, each center will provide Mathematica with information on the services it delivers to study participants. Mathematica will conduct site visits to learn about implementation of IPS from the perspectives of program administrators, front-line staff, employers, and participants; and ask centers to provide cost information needed for the benefit-cost analysis.

Human subjects' protection

The study is designed to benefit participants, and to ensure that they do not experience harm because of their participation. For that reason, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as three federal entities—OPRE, SSA, and the Office of Management and Budget—must approve the study design before the study starts. All study participants will have access to some vocational, mental health, and other services provided by the center.

All study participants will be volunteers. Before they volunteer, the research coordinator will explain the study to them and verify that they understand critical aspects of the study, including random assignment to one of two vocational service groups. Study participants will receive a gift card as a token of appreciation for responding to each follow-up survey.

Project timeline

Mathematica will enter into formal agreements with each center as soon as feasible, likely in September 2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated recession, we will delay the start of study enrollment until at least April 2021. Mathematica will notify the centers of the start date for enrollment at least three months in advance so that centers will have adequate time to hire or reassign staff and complete training activities.

The NextGen Project plans to publish a report on descriptive findings in 2022, a report based on the first follow-up survey in 2024, and a final report in 2025. These timelines may change if the study experiences further delays.

Contact information

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