

Pathways to a Healthy Bernalillo County

Employment Pathway Return on Investment Analyses

Since 2010, completion of the Employment pathway has generated approximately \$8.1 million in income for Pathways clients and the communities in which they live and work. Every \$1 invested in administration of the Employment pathway produced almost \$13 in additional income for extremely needy county residents. But even this high benefit-to-cost ratio doesn't fully capture the Employment pathway's potential benefits. Having a job has been shown to improve physical and mental health in ways that can't be fully explained by the income employment produces. Unfortunately, despite its other benefits, employment is not a solution to the problem of poverty or an antidote to its negative health impacts for most Pathways participants. Rarely are the jobs obtained by Pathways clients sufficient to lift them from poverty or eliminate their need for public aid.

Community health navigators help Pathways clients surmount tremendous barriers to employment

- 42% of clients who pursued the Employment pathway had recently been released from jail or prison. 53% have experienced mental illness.
- Two-thirds did not graduate high school.
- 28% were single mothers with no outside support.
- 77% lacked reliable transportation
- 39% lacked reliable telephone access 40% were not proficient in English

Community health navigators (CHNs) help employment pathway clients assess their qualifications, prepare and post resumes, apply for jobs, prepare for interviews, proceed through the hiring process, and acclimate to employment. Pathways clients face tremendous barriers to employment and helping them find suitable, sustainable jobs requires creativity and persistence by CHNs.

The link between employment and health

Employment status is a social determinant of physical and behavioral health. Employment influences health by affecting income, access to healthcare, and emotional wellbeing. Jobless adults are more likely than employed adults to describe their physical health as "fair" or "poor." Nine out of ten Employment pathway completers described their health as "fair" or "poor" upon entry to the Pathways program.

The loss of a job has also been shown to severely impact mental health, more than doubling the probability of depression. Upon entry to the Pathways program, 92 percent of Employment pathway completers said that they were currently disabled by depression and 64 percent said that they had been unable to obtain behavioral healthcare when they needed it. Unemployment more than doubles the likelihood of depression. Patients with depression have average annual healthcare costs roughly 240 percent higher than those of non-depressed patients.

Re-employment after a period of joblessness, has been associated with marked improvements in behavioral health and smaller, but still significant, improvements in physical health, including decreased risk of mortality. Clients who completed the Employment pathway were more likely than other Pathways participants to describe their health as "improved" or "greatly improved" on the exit survey. Eighty percent of clients who completed the Employment pathway, reported that their health had "improved" or "greatly improved" since participating in Pathways.

Unemployment increases the risk of mortality from all causes, including suicide. Death rates have been shown to increase 50 to 100 percent in the year following unemployment and remain significantly elevated for the next 20 years, reducing a 40-year-old's life expectancy by an average of 1 to 1.5 years.

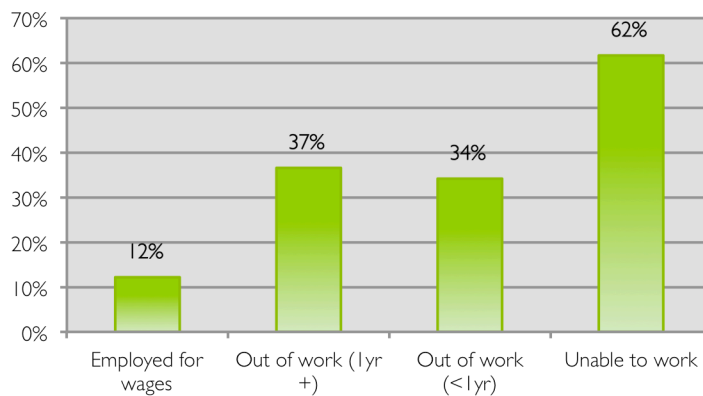
Many of the adverse health impacts of unemployment are related to loss of income. A 2011 study of the long-term unemployed and under-employed found that 63 percent skipped dental visits, 56 percent deferred needed health care, and 40 percent did not fill prescriptions.

Upon entry to the Pathways program, 79 percent of Employment pathway completers said they had been unable to afford needed healthcare and prescription medications.

without other aid. The basic cost of living for a single Bernalillo County adult totaled \$21,514 in 2015 and a two-person household needed \$46,062 before taxes just to make ends meet.

Many of the benefits of employment, including improvements in mental health and changes in healthcare costs, are not readily quantified for the Pathways population. Still, a comparison of the additional \$8.1 million in income earned by Pathways participants to the \$626,808 cost of administering the Employment pathway suggests that every \$1 spent on the Employment pathway produces almost \$13 in benefits.

Bernalillo County adults: Self-rated health in "fair" or "poor" by employment status 2013-2016



Pathways clients usually obtain minimum wage employment and part-time hours. Even working full time and year round for \$8.75 per hour produces gross income of \$18,200, slightly above the poverty threshold for a household of two but still well below the amount needed to cover a single individual's basic expenses for a year

The full report with citations is available at <http://hsc.unm.edu/community/chwil/pathways/index.html>