



The impact of COVID-19 on unemployment

A rapid review of the impact of COVID-19 on people
with mental health issues across IIMHL countries

There is a growing recognition that the mental well-being of employees has a positive impact on organizational success as well as on employee health, professional fulfilment and quality of life.¹

Work is the best treatment we have.²

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global health, social and economic crisis.³ 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. As Individual Placement and Support (IPS) has the most evidence of success it will be highlighted across countries.⁴ This rapid review builds on the work of Lockett and colleagues in January 2020 which looked at IPS progress across countries.⁵

Key points

1. Most countries have general policy on unemployment for people with mental distress in the COVID-19 context.
2. Increasing levels of unemployment and mental health issues is a major issue for all countries during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹WHO: <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/mental-health-in-the-workplace>

² <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/evidence-for-ips/>

³ <http://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---public-policy-submissions/covid-and-mh-policy-paper-pdf.pdf>

⁴ Op. cit.

⁵ <https://www.iimhl.com/files/docs/IIMHL-Updates/20200113.pdf>

3. Indigenous peoples require support for health and employment in ways that are targeted and equitable.
4. 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/or addiction. In addition, if you add indigenous and migrant communities, unemployment is even higher (as noted in an earlier IIMHL report).⁶
5. Many people with a mental health problem may also experience addiction, and may have experienced trauma.
6. The newly unemployed may also be at risk of developing mental health problems as a result of their change in economic circumstances.
7. Many countries (eg Australia, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand) have a COVID-19 unemployment benefit that employees can apply for when laid off. All countries are exploring ways to increase help to support people with mental health problems into work in this challenging COVID-19 employment environment.
8. There will be no “vaccine” for the population mental health impacts of COVID-19. Instead we should invest in meeting our fundamental and complex human needs – of which work is one.
9. The approach with the most evidence for success is Individual Placement and Support (IPS) which has an international group conducting research, promoting its evidence and supporting development across more than 20 countries.
10. The OECD is a key promoter of integrated employment and mental health policy and practice, including IPS. All OECD countries have signed up to the OECD Recommendation on the Council on Integrated Mental Health, Skills and Work Policy.

⁶ <https://www.iimhl.com/files/docs/IIMHL-Updates/20201009.pdf>

11. Pre-COVID-19, countries that were delivering IPS employment support were the US, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, New Zealand, Australia, the UK and Ireland, and Canada. Sweden and Denmark are also doing IPS work.
12. A key aspect of IPS is the way specialist mental health and addiction, social welfare, primary care and local employment and rehabilitation agencies work together to fund and deliver integrated mental health, addiction and employment support.
13. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries are extending their work in this area to cater for people who may have lost their job as a result of COVID-19, particularly through integrated employment support in primary health care settings

International agencies

Many international agencies (OECD, WHO,⁷ World Economic Forum⁸ and United Nations⁹) have noted that work is an essential part of recovery for people in general and specifically for people with mental health issues in the COVID-19 environment.

The OECD is the lead agency on policy in employment and mental health internationally. This reflects the fact that tackling mental ill-health of the working-age population is a key issue for labour market and social policies in OECD countries, as well as for health systems. The OECD recognises Individual Placement and Support (IPS) as the most researched and effective way to approach employment support for people in contact with secondary mental health and addiction services.^{10,11}

⁷ https://www.who.int/mental_health/in_the_workplace/en/

⁸ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/how-non-standard-workers-are-affected-and-protected-during-the-covid-19-crisis-stylised-facts-and-policy-considerations/>

⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/how-non-standard-workers-are-affected-and-protected-during-the-covid-19-crisis-stylised-facts-and-policy-considerations/>

¹⁰ <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/ips-international-learning-community/>

¹¹ <http://www.oecd.org/els/fit-mind-fit-job-9789264228283-en.htm>

The International IPS Learning Community is based in the US and includes 24 US states, the District of Columbia, Alameda County (California), Broward County (Florida), and six countries/regions outside the US: Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, New Zealand, England, and Canada.¹² Six strategies for IPS in the COVID-19 context were outlined by the International IPS Learning Community in April 2020.¹³

During the pandemic, IPS programs have rapidly shifted to provide employment support services remotely by phone, video chat, email, and text message¹⁴.

Australia

The Australian Government has made provision for additional benefits as a result of COVID-19.^{15,16} In addition, Australia has many national agencies which give advice to people about mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and with regard to employment issues, such as Heads up,¹⁷ Beyond Blue¹⁸ and the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance.¹⁹

The Chair of this latter agency notes, “While COVID-19 has presented workplaces with new and unknown challenges, it is also an opportunity for learning and leadership. We encourage you to show leadership in situations where a staff

¹² <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/ips-international-learning-community/>

¹³ <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/2020/04/21/providing-ips-services-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

¹⁴ <https://talk.crisisnow.com/bob-drake-says-employment-is-the-most-critical-intervention-in-crisis-prevention-and-recovery/>

¹⁵ <https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/coronavirus-covid-19-information-and-support>

¹⁶ <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/payments-and-services-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

¹⁷ <https://www.headsup.org.au/home>

¹⁸ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

¹⁹ <https://www.headsup.org.au/general/about-us/mentally-healthy-workplace-alliance>

member may be exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19, to ensure they feel supported.”²⁰

Australia is a country that has embraced IPS research.^{21,22} An example of research supporting IPS is that of Neami National and the University of Sydney²³ and operational guidelines for research are described by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.²⁴

Much evidence is now available to support IPS. Indigenous Australians require tailor-made solutions to employment.²⁵

Australia’s 2020-2021 Budget has also just announced an expansion of their IPS in Headspace pilot from 26 to 50 sites across the country.²⁶

Canada

Early on in the COVID-19 crisis, the federal government announced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) – a taxable benefit of \$2000 per month over four months for workers across a range of problems (eg unemployment).^{27,28} In

²⁰ <http://mentallyhealthyworkplacealliance.org.au/covid-19/>

²¹ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2019/ips-trial-operational-guidelines-november-2019-d19-124024.pdf

²² <https://www.neaminational.org.au/what-we-do/research-and-evaluation/projects/employment-outcomes-of-an-australian-individual-placement-and-support-ips-service-informed-by-the-collaborative-recovery-model/>

²³ <https://www.neaminational.org.au/what-we-do/research-and-evaluation/projects/employment-outcomes-of-an-australian-individual-placement-and-support-ips-service-informed-by-the-collaborative-recovery-model/>

²⁴ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2019/ips-trial-operational-guidelines-november-2019-d19-124024.pdf

²⁵ Op cit. <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/evidence-for-ips/>

²⁶ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2020/individual-placement-and-support-trial-ips.pdf

²⁷ <http://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---public-policy-submissions/covid-and-mh-policy-paper-pdf.pdf>

²⁸ https://cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EN_COVID-19-Policy-Brief.pdf

addition Service Canada provides Canadians with a single point of access to a wide range of government services and benefits.²⁹ Similar to other Governments, Canada has a portal “Wellness Together” for people to access support during the pandemic.³⁰

The Mental Health Commission of Canada³¹ (MHCC) states that by addressing the psychological effects of unemployment, we can help mitigate the mental health consequences and turn hardship into resiliency.

The Canadian Mental Health Association espouses IPS as the gold standard of employment practices. “Employment placement rates for clients of high performing IPS programs are more than double those of other supported employment programs for people with serious mental illness. CMHA VF regularly achieves or exceeds the employment placement rates outlined in the literature”.³²

The city of Montreal in Canada is the lead location for IPS in Canada. Chez Moi the Housing First collaborative looked to integrate IPS into the housing support. The cohort had high levels of co-existing addiction issues, involvement with the justice system, which meant people needed personalised, and intensive employment support. So fidelity to IPS principles and practices would be important in service delivery.³³

²⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/service-canada.html>

³⁰ <https://ca.portal.gs/>

³¹ <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/catalyst-may-2020-without-job-not-without-hope>

³² <https://vancouver-fraser.cmha.bc.ca/types-programs-services/social-enterprise-services/>

³³ https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/at_home_final_report_montreal_eng_0_0.pdf

England

In England financial support is available for people via a benefits system.³⁴ The Government also has information for people on improving mental health and wellbeing in the COVID-19 context,³⁵ as does the Mental Health Foundation.³⁶ The impact of COVID-19 on work and employment seen as a critical issue in the UK.³⁷ A recent briefing by the NHS Confederation has noted “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”. (P. 1)³⁸.

Several national agencies support the IPS approach. For example, the Mental Health Foundation,³⁹ the Royal College of Psychiatrists⁴⁰ and the National Health Service (NHS) outlines the benefits of IPS⁴¹ for people with significant mental distress, “work is the best treatment we have”.⁴²

As with Australia, England has several IPS programs operating pre-COVID-19. This means that they already have a process in place which could be scaled up to cope

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/worker-support>

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19#advice-for-groups-with-additional-mental-health-needs-or-facing-specific-issues>

³⁶ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-working-during-coronavirus>

³⁷ <https://post.parliament.uk/work-employment-and-covid-19-what-are-experts-concerned-about/>

³⁸ https://www.nhsconfed.org/-/media/Confederation/Files/Publications/Documents/BRIEFING_Ensuring-appropriate-employment-support_FNL.pdf

³⁹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/coronavirus-mental-health-pandemic>

⁴⁰ <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/nccmh/other-programmes/ips>

⁴¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/case-studies/individual-placement-and-support-offers-route-to-employment-for-people-with-severe-mental-health-conditions/>

⁴² <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/evidence-for-ips/>

with COVID-19 increases in unemployment.⁴³ In addition, there are *Centres of Excellence*, services which are exemplary in their use of the IPS principles and practices and the job outcomes they achieve for people in contact with secondary mental health and addiction services.⁴⁴

The NHS Mental Health Implementation Plan 2019/20–2023/24⁴⁵ notes that “For people with ‘Severe mental illness’ (SMI): Access to Individual Placement and Support (IPS) will be doubled, enabling people with severe mental illnesses to find and retain employment.”(p.6). Employment Advisers are being scaled up during COVID-19.⁴⁶

The Adult Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme (IAPT)⁴⁷ is expanding services so that 1.9m adults access treatment each year by 2024; IAPT is seen as supporting people to find or stay in work, and work contributes to good mental health, thus IAPT services can better contribute to improved employment outcomes.

Aotearoa/New Zealand

Work and Income in Aotearoa is the agency that oversees additional COVID-19 benefits.⁴⁸ The New Zealand Government has published a document “Mental health

⁴³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7235312/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/ips-centres-excellence>

⁴⁵ <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/nhs-mental-health-implementation-plan-2019-20-2023-24.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/xi/vacancy/916125177>

⁴⁷ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/adults/iapt/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/>

at work during COVID-19⁴⁹ and good information is also available from the Mental Health Foundation for both leaders⁵⁰ and workers.⁵¹

Five national reports note that increasing access to employment support is central to a transformed mental health and addiction system,⁵² and the Kia Kaha, Kia Māia, Kia Ora Aotearoa: COVID-19 Psychosocial and Mental Wellbeing Recovery Plan states the need for access and choice for people who may lose their job as a result of COVID-19.⁵³

As with Australia and England, New Zealand has IPS services underway which can be strengthened to suit increased unemployment due to the pandemic. Aotearoa New Zealand also has a centre of expertise on IPS, Work Counts, offering training, implementation support, and facilitating a community of practice for employment and health practitioners (www.workcounts.co.nz).^{54,55} Aotearoa NZ also has a cross-government, cross-agency IPS national steering group, working to increase access to IPS employment support across the country.

In 2019, the Waitematā IPS partnership won the Excellence in Health Outcomes Award.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ <https://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2020-Mental-health-at-work-during-COVID-19.pdf>

⁵⁰ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/COVID-19/GTT-L1-workplace-resource-final.pdf>

⁵¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/COVID-19/GTT-Wellbeing-tips-for-healthcare-workers.pdf>

⁵² https://www.workcounts.co.nz/increasing-access-to-employment-support-is-central-to-a-transformed-mental-health-and-addiction-system/?utm_source=Work+Counts&utm_campaign=eb3ce4a2ef-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_31_11_42_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8f0d04e0be-eb3ce4a2ef-48449901

⁵³ <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/covid-19-psychosocial-mental-wellbeing-recovery-plan-15may2020.pdf>

⁵⁴ <https://www.workcounts.co.nz/about/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/individual-placement-and-support-trials/index.html>

⁵⁶ <http://hea.waitematadhb.govt.nz/2019-winners/>

“Recognising the central role of work in promoting wellness, GP practices – as well as other community settings – should have Individual Placement and Support Services (IPS) specialists attached. There is ample evidence showing the benefits of this work-placement approach. It therefore makes sense to roll this out as soon as possible”.⁵⁷

The AUT Centre for Person Centred Research has completed a systematic review of the evidence on what works to support people living with a range of long-term health conditions to get into paid work and found the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) approach is the intervention with the strongest evidence base for effectiveness for people with a mental health diagnosis. However, it needs to be further developed within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, in particular incorporating and building from Māori values and perspectives.⁵⁸

Ireland

The Government of Ireland Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has a system of benefits for specific groups of people.⁵⁹ A key national document is “Sharing the Vision: A mental health policy for everyone” (updated September 2020).⁶⁰ It notes (as with other countries cited to date) individuals with enduring mental health difficulties, or those recovering from a once-off but significant mental health difficulty, the possibility of securing employment or returning to work can be a key factor in recovery.⁶¹

IPS exists across Ireland and is funded currently through the service reform fund. There are at present 26 employment specialists employed. They are employed

⁵⁷ <https://informedfutures.org/protecting-and-promoting-mental-wellbeing-beyond-covid-19/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.workcounts.co.nz/new-research-shows-the-importance-of-ips-employment-support-in-primary-mental-health-services/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/be74d3-covid-19-pandemic-unemployment-payment/>

⁶⁰ https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/32228/1/DOH_Vision_for_change_2020.pdf

⁶¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2e46f-sharing-the-vision-a-mental-health-policy-for-everyone/>

through a number of employment support agencies and work on the Irish Health Services - Health Service Executive (HSE) community mental health teams and HSE rehab and recovery teams.⁶² A similar practice for people with a disability is available in Ireland.^{63,64}

In July 2020 the IPS initiative won the 'Championing Mental Health' award in the Health Service Executive: Excellence Awards.⁶⁵

There is a national IPS Advisory Group made up of representatives of Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Department of Health, Health Service Executive, Genio, Mental Health Ireland and service user representation. This group was originally charged with overseeing the rollout of IPS nationally, developing a Standard Operating Procedure document, advising on the national Service Level Agreement and providing other advice as requested.⁶⁶

Scotland

The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICE) has published an interesting timeline focuses on Scotland's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and includes all major developments including work-related issues. Each entry includes a link to further information and/or relevant official reports, policies and guidance.⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid. P.68.

⁶³ https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment_and_disability/supported_employment_for_people_with_disabilities.html#la82be

⁶⁴ <https://www.opendoorsinitiative.ie/>

⁶⁵ <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/news/general/winners-of-the-2020-excellence-awards.html>

⁶⁶ <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/dsc/communityservices/employment-specialist.html>

⁶⁷ <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2020/10/02/timeline-of-coronavirus-covid-19-in-scotland/>

As with the others countries cited to date in this document, a range of extra support and measures are being in place from the Scottish and UK Governments to help workers, benefit claimants and businesses affected by coronavirus.^{68,69,70,71}

In September 2020 the advice is “for everyone to work from home if they can”.⁷² An extensive list of business support is available as at 1st October 2020.⁷³

The Mental Health Foundation in Scotland published “The COVID-19 Pandemic, Financial Inequality and Mental Health” which concluded the COVID-19 pandemic is putting a huge strain on people’s mental wellbeing.⁷⁴ Assistance with financial issues is available.⁷⁵

While IPS appears to be in a formative phase in Scotland, the Scottish Government has committed to review the provision of IPS within Fair Start Scotland, considering wider delivery approaches in order to understand how best IPS can be delivered in partnership with key agencies.^{76,77,78,79} Interestingly, some vacancies in IPS delivery

⁶⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-support-for-employees-benefit-claimants-and-businesses>

⁶⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support>

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-fair-work-statement/>

⁷¹ <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/bitc-toolkit-wellbeing-covid19-employeehealthandwellbeing-april20VE.pdf>

⁷² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/returning-to-work/>

⁷³ <https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=24038&p=0>

⁷⁴ https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/MHF%20Scotland%20The%20COVID-19%20Pandemic_0.pdf

⁷⁵ <https://www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/scot/top-tips/why-the-mental-health-and-money-advice-service-is-helping-people-with-mental-illness-and-money-issues/>

⁷⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-disabled-people-employment-action-plan-progress-report/pages/4/>

⁷⁷ <https://www.remploy.co.uk/remploy-scotland>

⁷⁸ <https://www.remploy.co.uk/about-us/current-programmes/individual-placement-and-support>

⁷⁹ <https://www.remploy.co.uk/articles/press-release/jobseekers-lanarkshire-perth-and-kinross-angus-and-dundee-get-fair-start>

were put on hold because of COVID-19 rather than scaling up this service as some other countries have done.⁸⁰

US

A range of national agencies supports people into employment and supports employers during the pandemic.^{81,82,83} “SAMHSA recognizes the challenges posed by the current COVID-19 situation and is providing the following guidance and resources to assist individuals, providers, communities, and states across the country. SAMHSA stands ready to assist in any manner possible”.⁸⁴ A wide range of technical assistance is available and was updated on 2/10/20.⁸⁵

In the US there are 355 IPS programmes, with the International IPS Learning Center based in New Hampshire;⁸⁶ and, in the first quarter of 2020, 20241 people were served in the US Learning Community states. A range of different populations have benefited from IPS, for example Veterans, people with Justice involvement, youth, American Indian, Alaskan, adults and older people.⁸⁷ In addition, SAMHSA has continued to fund IPS work and including moving to online work.

SAMHSA has been a key leader in work on trauma: “Research has shown that traumatic experiences are associated with both behavioral health and chronic physical health conditions, especially those traumatic events that occur during childhood. Because behavioral health concerns can present challenges in

⁸⁰ <https://goodmoves.com/vacancy/a4s3z00000xv9H7AAI/employment-specialist-five-individual-placement-support>

⁸¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>

⁸² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mental-health-non-healthcare.html>

⁸³ <https://www.usa.gov/unemployment>

⁸⁴ <https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus>

⁸⁵ <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/training-and-technical-assistance-covid19.pdf>

⁸⁶ <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/ips-international-learning-community/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.samhsa.gov/criminal-juvenile-justice/grant-grantees/transforming-lives-through-supported-employment-program#individual-placement-support-and-supported-employment-program-alabama>

relationships, careers, and other aspects of life, it is important to understand the nature and impact of trauma, and to explore healing”.⁸⁸ The author notes the link with COVID-19 and trauma informed care has not yet been strongly made but it appears likely that it will be.

⁸⁸ <https://www.samhsa.gov/trauma-violence>