COVID-19 Impact on Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

Revised October 1, 2020
COVID and People with Disabilities

- Health status ≠ disability
  - Many people with disabilities are healthy
  - Disability alone not associated with higher risk

- Common reasons for “higher risk”
  - Underlying / secondary conditions
  - Poverty
  - Lack of access to quality healthcare
  - Lack of access to PPE, hygiene products
  - Confinement (congregate settings)
COVID’s Disproportionate Impact

- Hospitalization more likely for men, elderly, individuals with pre-existing conditions, and Black/African Americans (CDC)
- COVID related death rate highest for blacks and Hispanics (APM Research)

Approx. HALF of low-income HH have experienced job/wage loss (Pew Research)
TOWARD DATA DRIVEN RECOVERY

Financial Inequality: Disability, Race and Poverty in America,
National Disability Institute (2019)
What is the impact of COVID-19 on...

- the disability employment service system?
- employment outcomes for people with disabilities?
- job development and job coaching service delivery?
APSE COVID Impact Survey

- Phase 1: June 15-28, 2020
  - 612 responses
  - 47 states participated
    - No responses from HI, MS, NV

- Phase 2: August 31 – September 25, 2020
  - 438 responses
  - 41 states participated
    - No responses from DE, HI, MS, MT, ND, NH, NV, SC, WY

Impact of COVID-19 on Disability Employment Services and Outcomes: Preliminary Results from a National Provider Survey
July 7, 2020

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged every aspect of our society and economy, including employment of people with disabilities. Both the widespread shutdown of businesses and the mass DHHS’s “work from home” directives have directly and negatively impacted employers and job seekers with disabilities and the delivery system for disability employment services.

Of utmost concern has been maintaining continuity of critical support services to employees with disabilities who have remained on the job as “essential workers” throughout the healthcare crisis. Indeed, many people with disabilities work in the types of businesses identified as essential during the pandemic, such as grocery stores, retail distribution centers and medical/healthcare facilities. Many of these essential workers rely on supports from job coaches and employment specialists to navigate changes in business practices and job responsibilities. These direct support professionals are crucial in ensuring the safety and health of people with disabilities. Supported workers need assistance to understand universal precautions fully, to adjust to work responsibilities that are changing in real-time, and to ensure communications are understood. Additionally, there is often a need to assist in mitigating anxiety and other emotional responses as best as possible.

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) or Medicaid typically fund employment services via payments to community-based service providers. However, when the economy quickly shut down, the regular flow of VR and Medicaid dollars at the local level was hampered by complicated state and federal regulations that define how services are delivered. In the early weeks of the crisis, community-based service providers needed to quickly pivot to provide supports remotely, utilizing various forms of readily available technology, often without complete assurance that remote service delivery would be reimbursed. Despite a relatively quick response from state and federal VR and Medicaid authorities to enhance flexibility and adjust funding requirements, these efforts were not fast enough to avoid the fact that many community-based services providers had to shut down programs and furlough staff.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) has collaborated with the broader disability advocacy community to ensure that emergency response efforts to COVID-19 included an intentional focus on addressing the needs of people with disabilities. Of vital concern has been maintaining supported employment and other employment services in local communities so that people with disabilities who can work have the supports they need to remain successful and safe on their job.
ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- ACCSES
- ANCOR
- APSE
- Arc of the United States
- Easterseals
- Goodwill Industries
- NADSP
- Paralyzed Veterans of America
- SourceAmerica
- TASH
- United Cerebral Palsy
Impact on Service System

- Employment services significantly impacted
- Dramatic impact at start of pandemic
  - 67% decreased in VR referrals
  - 43% slowing in Medicaid reimbursements
- Partial recovery as a result of policy change and COVID relief efforts
  - Medicaid and VR flexibility for remote/virtual service delivery
  - Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans

Decreased funding → Service closure → Staff furlough
Services Closed Due to COVID-19

- Pre-ETS
- Customized Employment (CE)
- Supported Employment (SE)
- Adult vocational skills training (non CE/SE)
- Job placement (non CE/SE)
- IPS
- Pre-vocational (facility-based)
- Pre-vocational (HCBS)
- Day habilitation (facility-based)
- Day habilitation (HCBS)

Intent to Reopen Facility-Based Services

- June
- September

Yes  No
DSP JOB LOSS

Projected loss of DSP jobs due to COVID-19 (n=478)

June

Positions Lost, 22%

Projected loss of DSP jobs due to COVID-19 (n=376)

September

Positions Lost, 23%
PPP LOANS RECEIVED

June = 23%

September = 50%
Impact on contract work

- Throughout the pandemic, approximately 80 percent of our AbilityOne contract sites have continued operating as essential contracts. More than 1,000 essential employees continue to work on the front lines while other contracts and operations have closed. ... We do not hold a 14(c) certificate; all our employees earn a living wage and work alongside people without disabilities and members of the general public in community settings. Due to the pandemic, we have actually seen opportunities to expand business services, such as call centers, custodial operations and food service.

- We are close enough to meeting our increased FY20 contract that we accomplished this. It is anticipated that in FY21 we may not reach even our initial contract due to the limitations in some school districts of students being unable to work out in the community due to COVID.
COVID Impact: Job losses for PWD

June ➔ September
Primary Reasons for Job Loss

1. Mandatory business/industry closure
2. Individual voluntarily exited employment due to health-related reasons (e.g., individual is medically high-risk)
3. Changes in job responsibilities and/or work processes were too difficult
4. Lack of access to a job coach or virtual employment supports
5. Lack of access to personal protective equipment (PPE)
JOB LOSSES AND GAINS BY MARKET SECTOR
Impact on Local Business Economy

• It really has brought the community together and we have always valued the small, family owned businesses - but now that COVID has been active, it has reinforced that.

• Businesses are using less people to do more, which is always challenging for people with disabilities. At the same time, lots of people are afraid to work so businesses are open to hiring. Lots of small business closures and scaling back has hurt our placement rates.

• Businesses are hiring, but they are not interested in talking with job developers right now regarding necessary accommodations that might be necessary.

• Since many businesses were closed for a time, they are struggling to get back on their feet. They don't have the extra income to hire our students with disabilities even if they wanted to do this for educational support.
VR & Medicaid Challenges

Funding Challenges

- June
- September

VR vs Medicaid

- VR
- Medicaid
Systems Response: VR

Sample Challenges

• In the beginning we were not receiving many referrals because the state VR offices were closed. Now we have seen an significant influx with their re-opening. They are working remotely.

• Our state has NOT adapted well. Minimum communication from the offices, local offices are not in taking many clients and our referrals have decreased by 95%. Local VR offices have not adapted to remote work well and it has discouraged clients from getting the assistance they need.

Sample Adaptations

• Increased flexibility regarding the use of technology has been the most helpful. Additionally, for about 6 weeks, we received a higher fee for the services we were providing. That made a huge financial impact for us!

• Our state VR system provided stimulus payments for a period of time, which was helpful. VR Counselors have also been more flexible with service end dates in order to provide more time to complete the authorized services given the current challenges.
Systems Response: Medicaid

Sample Challenges

• Our Medicaid agencies have created far more barriers during this time than helpful solutions. They have offered some virtual meetings and trainings but very little information has been provided.

• No one has told me to stop doing my job so I assume we are still being funded by Medicaid.

• It has been very difficult to adapt. We have been restricted to providing limited services to individuals.

Sample Adaptations

• They provided enhanced payments for all the people that were being required to stay home. That enhanced payment ended, but the pandemic has not. Approving the temporary use of technology to provide supports was helpful.

• Advocating for Contingency funding from CMS. Keeping us informed about new COVID practices and how they impact persons with disabilities we support. Required an approved Re-opening Plan before we could open our doors.
A SHIFTING SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM
WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

Use of remote/virtual supports post COVID-19

- Very likely
- Likely
- Neither likely or unlikely
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

June  vs  September
Priorities* for Fourth Congressional Package

- Funding for Home and Community Based Services
- Waive of Federal Match Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation for 2 years
- Expansion of the Paycheck Protection Program

* In coordination with NOD and many other disability organizations
Fourth COVID-19 Congressional Package Timing

• Congress currently negotiating a fourth COVID-19 response package

• House, Senate, and Executive agree that another bill is likely needed

• The House passed their version of a COVID-19 response package, the HEROES Act, which included funding for HCBS and expanded the PPP in May
  • CARES 2.0 passed earlier this week

• Timing: ???
Tell Congress to address the critical needs of people with disabilities in the next COVID-19 relief package!

1. **Increased funding for states for home and community-based services (HCBS)**
   - HCBS funding makes it possible for direct support staff, including job coaches, to provide supports so that individuals with disabilities who are working at this time can do so safely and effectively.
   - Funding for HCBS will ensure that people with disabilities who can work are able to enter or return to the workforce quickly as part of our country’s overall recovery efforts. HCBS funding can also be used for assistive technologies to facilitate virtual work as needed.

ACTION ALERT: FUND HCBS!!!
#DSPsAreESPs #WhatWeNeed
2. **Vocational rehabilitation (VR) service supports for states**
   - We ask that the federal match for VR be waived for two years to ensure that states can pull down their full allocation of VR dollars so that individuals with disabilities, including those who have become suddenly disabled because of COVID-19, will be able to access VR services.
   - VR funding supports employment specialists who guide individuals with disabilities to access training to meet business needs, help them apply for meaningful employment, and assist them in being successful on the job.

3. **Funding for businesses and nonprofits through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)**
   - Programs like PPP have allowed businesses who employ individuals with disabilities to keep them on their payroll during this crisis and have allowed nonprofits that support individuals with disabilities during this time to continue to do so.
   - A national survey of disability employment services providers indicates that only 25% of organizations successfully applied for a PPP Loan.
   - Expanding the eligibility and timeframe required to spend the PPP funding will help businesses and nonprofits that support individuals with disabilities to be able to continue doing so.

**Call/Tweet/Email Congress TODAY!**
Help us tell stories!

- October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (#NDEAM). This year's theme is Increasing Access and Opportunity. Throughout the month, APSE will be highlighting stories of essential workers with disabilities who worked throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the employment services professionals who supported them, and businesses who employed them.

- I have a great story to tell! How can I share it?
  - Download the submission form [here](https://apse.org/ndeam-2020/).
  - Complete the form.
  - Email the form and a photo to julie@apse.org.

- For more info: [https://apse.org/ndeam-2020/](https://apse.org/ndeam-2020/)
Questions & Thank You!

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Download the summary of COVID Impact Survey preliminary findings HERE.