

The American Workforce and Persons with Disabilities

What is happening to our workforce, and does age make a difference?

- On January 1, 2012, ten thousand persons in the United States became 65 years of age. This trend will continue every day for the next nineteen years. The adult population is getting older, as is the workforce.
- Between 2010 and 2030, the number of people ages 65 and older is projected to increase to 31.7 million.
- Nearly one in three (31%) companies expects to have a significantly higher proportion of older workers (65+) within the next five years.
- 50% of employers report that they are offering flexible or customized work schedules to retain older employees, while 45% report that they offer such schedules to attract younger employees.
- Fewer than four out of ten persons with disabilities are in the workforce, as compared to more than seven out of ten persons without disabilities. Only two out of ten people with more significant disabilities are in the workforce.

What is the status of persons with disabilities in our society?

- More than 28% of persons with any disability and 34% of those with a cognitive disability live below the poverty level, as compared to 15% of persons without disabilities.
- 86% of youth with an intellectual disability expect that after they leave school they will definitely be in the workforce, and another 10% say they will probably be in the workforce.
- 22% of individuals with disabilities have less than a high school education, as compared to 11% of those without disabilities.

What are some of the social and economic costs we should be considering?

- Youth with disabilities who transition into non-work activities in their adult years will receive more than \$250,000 in Social Security payments over their lifetime.
- Only 11% of funding from developmental disability (DD) state agencies for day and employment services is directed to integrated community employment.
- Only 4.5% of the almost 7 million individuals with disabilities receiving Supplemental Security Income from Social Security are working.
- According to a 2008 study, an estimated \$357 billion was spent by the Federal Government on an array of programs to assist working-age adults with disabilities, with states spending another \$71 billion on joint federal-state programs. Of this \$429 billion, 95% covered health care and income maintenance, with only part of the remainder allocated to improving employment and economic independence.



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What is the status of employment for persons with disabilities?

- Over 175,000 individuals with disabilities enter employment each year with the support of the federal-state vocational rehabilitation program.
- Over the past decade, there has been little to no growth in the rate of persons with developmental disabilities served through the state DD agencies entering employment.
- While on average state DD agencies only support 19% of individuals in integrated employment, some states are supporting 40% to 60%.
- While on average 20% of individuals in community mental health programs are employed, a few states have employed over 30% of these individuals.

What can be done with regard to employment of persons with disabilities?

- There needs to be a clear and consistent message that the outcome of education and training efforts for persons with disabilities must be competitive integrated employment (jobs in the community paying prevailing wages).
- As youth with disabilities enter the adult service system, the expectation of that service system and its contractors should be the same: competitive integrated employment.
- Public monies should fund increased economic self-sufficiency through competitive integrated employment as the primary or preferred outcome for all persons with disabilities.
- The focus of training and placement should be directed at meeting employers' needs and using real-time labor market information to direct training efforts for persons with disabilities.
- As the workforce changes, reflecting the aging of the population and its increased diversity, employers are seeking ways to accommodate workers with disabilities. This provides an opportunity to use universal design strategies to create a more accessible and accommodating work environment for all job seekers and employees, with and without disabilities.

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) promotes the full inclusion of people with disabilities in every aspect of society. We do this through training, research, consultation, and clinical and employment services. Our projects increase disability inclusion throughout New England, across the United States, and internationally.

The ICI is a program of the University of Massachusetts Boston and Boston Children's Hospital. We are part of the national network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

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