

**2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs
Assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs
of Individuals with Disabilities
in Maryland**

**Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services
and
Maryland State Rehabilitation Council**



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Executive Summary

The Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) continually assess the rehabilitation needs of Maryland citizens with disabilities, as part of its state and strategic planning process. DORS and the MSRC hold annual public meetings and the MSRC regularly provides input on Agency planning, policy development and recommendations. The results of the consumer satisfaction surveys are also reviewed in order to provide insight into the rehabilitation needs of Maryland citizens with disabilities.

This year, the Agency in collaboration with the MSRC undertook the triennial comprehensive needs assessment in compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations at 34 CFR (361.29). The 35-member team consisted of DORS staff, including participants in the Agency's Leadership Exploration and Agency Programs (LEAP) and consultation from MSRC. The LEAP program is one component of the DORS Leadership Development Program. Through pairing with experienced staff, this program provides an opportunity to increase and expand a participant's knowledge about the Agency, as well as, determine his/her inclination for leadership. The Needs Assessment team (1) collected and analyzed relevant existing data, (2) conducted and analyzed findings of supplemental surveys, and (3) facilitated focus groups and key informant interviews, in order to ascertain the needs of individuals with disabilities throughout the state.

Required Elements

The results of the Needs Assessment include the following required elements:

- I. The rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within Maryland, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of:
 - A. Individuals with most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services.
 - B. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program.
 - C. Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system.
 - D. Youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including:
 1. Their need for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) or other training services.
 2. An assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition services and Pre-ETS services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with local education agencies and other education systems.
 3. Assessment of the needs of transitioning youth with disabilities entering two- and four-year colleges and the extent to which such services are coordinated with college disability support services staff.

4. Assessment of the needs of students and their parents eligible for pre-employment transition services and the extent of which information regarding: getting a job, the job market, job shadowing and related activities, college or training opportunities, skills learned, and skills still needed have been provided to these students and parents.
- II. An assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

Recommendations from the Focus Areas of the Needs Assessment Addressing the Required Elements

1. Continue to monitor, strengthen, and foster relationships with the Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Health, and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Continue to explore data sharing strategies to demonstrate collaboration for the provision of services, and to ensure a smooth referral process between partners.
2. Evaluate the staffing needs within DORS, with a focus on the number of full-time vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor positions across the state to ensure an effective and manageable caseload distribution and to ensure that there is a sufficient number of VR counselors who provide services to transitioning youth and students with disabilities to accommodate the anticipated increase in the number of student referrals to DORS VR and Pre-ETS programs.
3. Provide continued opportunities for mutual training and collaboration between DORS and other workforce programs.
4. Enhance and expand the provision of Pre-ETS services statewide to include: increase the number of Pre-ETS services for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Blind or Visually Impaired, and Intellectually or Developmentally Disabled; expand outreach to Pre-ETS students and families whose first language is not English; align staffing and caseload assignments for better collaboration with local education agencies and other education systems; ensure consistent interpretation and implementation of policies and procedures and quality assurance standards; and improve cooperation between DORS Pre-ETS vocational rehabilitation counselors and school staff monitoring 504 plans as DORS has limited access to students with 504 plans.
5. Improve information and referral services to American Job Centers (AJC) and other workforce partners for individuals on the DORS waiting list, especially Social Security beneficiaries who may benefit from employment network services while waiting for DORS services to be available. Referral information should pertain to the closest and most relevant employment network for the individual.
6. Improve the variety of employment opportunities available to DORS consumers by increasing staff knowledge of current labor market trends, collaborating with community colleges to develop Pre-Apprenticeships and Registered Apprenticeship programs for high growth industries in Maryland. Expand and continue the collaboration with the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank to increase the number of individuals with disabilities participating in youth Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs, outreach to WIOA partners, and identify community colleges and employers

to provide training for a variety of apprenticeship programs for individuals with disabilities.

7. Re-establish the Agency's Multicultural Access Committee to ensure equal access for minorities to DORS services. This committee needs to ensure that the resources needed by DORS field staff have been developed and implemented.
8. Promote comprehensive rehabilitation services for Deaf-Blind individuals by reconvening the Deaf-Blind workgroup and filling the vacant Deaf-Blind specialist position to collaborate closely with grassroots organizations, community partners, advocacy groups and the Helen Keller National Center, ensuring that Deaf-Blindness remains a priority for the Agency. Services should focus on statewide Support Services Program (SSP); employment services, and employer education and awareness.
9. Continue to examine the updated DORS policy regarding supported employment with a focus on the newly introduced supported employment opportunities for individuals without access to long-term funding for extended supported employment services, and the impact of supported employment intensive job coaching supports focused on achieving job stability and retention.
10. Expand employment services for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing by developing enhanced relationships with businesses. Employment specialists and vocational rehabilitation counselors serving Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing consumers should have an employment toolbox which contains information on how to approach businesses and develop working relationships.
11. DORS should explore a rate increase for DORS-approved community rehabilitation programs.
12. Enhance relationships with community rehabilitation programs for increased collaboration in the following areas: knowledge and understanding of DORS policies and procedures; understanding benefits counseling and when it is to be provided; communication; and timely submission of documents, reports, and invoices.
13. Continue to work with 14c certificate holders to explore the number of individuals remaining in sub-minimum wage, how that may impact the number of referrals to DORS, and the barriers that 14c certificate holders are experiencing in moving individuals off 14c work sites.

Impact of Federal Funding and State Government Personnel Actions on Staff Capacity

As emphasized in the previous Needs Assessments, the DORS waiting list and delays in service provision remain a prominent concern and constitute the most prominent barrier to vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with significant disabilities in Maryland. As of the completion of this Needs Assessment, over 2,500 eligible individuals with significant disabilities are placed on a waiting list for vocational rehabilitation services lasting up to 32 months. Clearly, individuals on the waiting list are the most seriously unserved of populations. Several factors currently prevent DORS from moving people from the waiting list.

1. Sequestration

Maryland DORS' funding for the three-year period of FY 2017 to FY 2019 has increased from \$43,855,573 to \$45,197,460; a 3% increase over the last three years, while inflation over that same period has increased at a rate of 4.7%. This difference is the result of sequestration, which is a cut in funding for mandatory programs. For example, in FY 2019, if the mandatory sequestration cuts had not been imposed, DORS funding would have been \$48,135,376 compared to \$45,197,460; a difference of \$2,937,916.

2. Pre-Employment Transition Services: At Least 15% Reserve Fund Requirement

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), requires VR agencies to reserve no less than 15% of the federal VR allotment. This money is reserved to provide or arrange for the provision of Pre-ETS for students with disabilities transitioning from school to postsecondary education programs and employment in competitive integrated settings. This requirement for the Agency to reserve at least 15% of the state grant also applies to re-allotted funds. This leaves only 85% of the annual budget remaining for services to adults. Over the last three years, DORS has seen a dramatic increase in the number of individuals the Agency is serving that met the definition of students with disabilities. In FY 2019, DORS is serving over 4,700 students, compared to FY 2016 when DORS served 418 students.

3. State Government Personnel Actions

From 2006-2019, the VR program has seen a 19% reduction in its permanent workforce due to statewide budget constraints and the State's desire to reduce the overall size of the State's workforce. In addition, staff turnover is affecting VR specialists/counselors. In State FY 2019, the Agency had 14 full-time PINs or 10% of its VR counseling staff positions vacant. Also, five VR counseling contractual positions have been eliminated in the past year.

I. Comprehensive Assessment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities in Maryland.

A. Individuals With Most Significant Disabilities, Including Their Need for Supported Employment Services

1. The Need of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities for Supported Employment Services in Maryland

An increased need for supported employment services, including extended services for youth with most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed four years, is anticipated for several reasons. Since the Ken Capone Equal Employment Act became law in Maryland in 2016, information obtained indicates a reduction in the use of 14c certificates since the last Needs Assessment. The 2019 DOL data shows 1,462 individuals remaining in sub-minimum wage employment, representing a 58% decrease compared to 2016. With a total phase out of sub-minimum wage by October 1, 2020, DORS will need to continue to monitor the influence of 14c and the potential for increased supported employment needs.

On July 1, 2018, DORS introduced updated supported employment policy, including processes for eligible individuals without long-term funding available for extended supported employment services, including Agency-funded Youth Extended Services. Updated supported employment policy further includes an emphasis upon transitioning to job stabilization, where intensive job coaching supports decrease according to a fading schedule, to a predictable level of support which may be provided via ongoing support or extended services.

Methodology: DORS Data Review

DORS data was reviewed to assess the number of initial Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), identified as Supported Employment plans, developed during FY 2016 through FY 2018.

- Number of Supported Employment Plans Developed Each Year:
 - In FY 2016, of 5097 plans initiated, 1,726 (34%) were supported employment plans. Out of 1,726 supported employment plans, 296 (17%) were developed for youth with disabilities age 24 and younger.
 - In FY 2017, of 4,486 plans initiated, 1,596 (36%) were supported employment plans. Out of 1,596 supported employment plans, 252 (16%) were developed for youth with disabilities age 24 and younger.
 - FY 2018, of 3,883 plans initiated, 1,660 (43%) were supported employment plans. Out of 1,660 supported employment plans, 313 (19%) were developed for youth with disabilities age 24 and younger.
 - Through seven months of FY 2019, 2545 plans initiated, 897 (35%) were supported employment plans, 153 (17%) were developed for youth with disabilities age 24 and younger.

- Specific Populations Provided Supported Employment Services each year:
 - The number of Evidenced-Based Practice Supported Employment (EBPSE) individuals served declined 7% from 1486 in FY 2016 to 1384 in FY 2018.
 - The number of EBPSE individuals served ages 24 and under increased 41% from 138 in FY 2016 to 195 in FY 2018.
 - The number of individuals receiving non-EBPSE supported employment has decreased 15% from 413 in FY 2016 to 352 in FY 2018.
 - The number of youth with disabilities age 24 and younger receiving non-EBPSE supported employment has increased 9% from 57 in FY 2016 to 62 in FY 2018.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- With a total phase out of sub-minimum wage by October 1, 2020, DORS will need to continue to monitor the influence of 14c and the potential for increased supported employment needs.
- Although the overall number of plans developed during FY 2016 through FY 2018 has decreased by an average of 12.5%, the number of supported employment plans has remained within the same range, averaging 1,660 individuals per fiscal year.
- Supported employment services for youth with disabilities age 24 and younger is expected to continue to increase due to ongoing emphasis upon services for students with disabilities and final phase-out of 14c programs in the state of Maryland.

Recommendations

- Continue to examine DORS policy regarding supported employment, and evaluate the use of newly introduced supported employment opportunities for individuals without access to long-term funding available.
- Monitor the impact of supported employment intensive job coaching supports focused on achieving job stability and employment retention statistics on a quarterly basis using post-exit wage data.
- Develop strategies to streamline processes to support potentially eligible students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS, with those potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.
- Partner with Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), and 14c certificate holders to ensure compliance with Section 511 requirements.

2. Individuals who are Blind/Visually Impaired and Deaf-Blind

As reported in the 2016 Needs Assessment, DORS and the Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS) are committed to providing quality and specialized services to Maryland

citizens who are Blind, Visually Impaired, and Deaf-Blind. Together, OBVS and the MSRC Blind Services Committee provides oversight and leadership in guiding policies and enhancing services to Maryland citizens. OBVS operates the following programs and services for eligible participants:

- VR counselors are located throughout the state in DORS field offices and at the Workforce & Technology Center (WTC). The staff is providing employment and independent living services for individuals who have a goal of employment.
- Rehabilitation Teachers for the Blind are also located throughout the state in DORS field offices and at WTC. The staff is providing independent living assessments and services to individuals who have a goal of employment. Additionally, these rehabilitation teachers are providing in-home teaching for our Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) grant. They assess for areas such as: mobility training, household management skills, and communication device training.
- OBVS is in the process of interviewing for a Deaf-Blind Specialist whose role will be to provide technical assistance and support to all staff on issues pertaining to Deaf-Blindness. Another major component of the role is to communicate with the Deaf-Blind community, expand program development, and assist with job development and placement.
- The Maryland Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (MDBEP) is also operated through OBVS. MDBEP provides opportunities for individuals who are legally Blind to operate vending, gift shops, or other food service facilities in federal and other property.
- Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) is a program for individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired and is located at WTC. SBVI addresses areas of independent living, mobility, technology, and communication training in a residential setting. The program also collaborates with the WTC for the facilitation of a support group for individuals in need of this service.

Prevalence

According to the 2016 American Community Surveys, there are 58,094 individuals in the State of Maryland with vision loss who are between the ages of 18 and 64. During the past three years, DORS served 2,151 individuals for whom Blindness was reported to be their primary impairment, and 429 of these were youth in transition when applying for services.

There is limited data available on individuals experiencing a dual sensory loss in Maryland, but the number does appear to be relatively low. The 2017 National Child Count of Children and Youth who are Deaf-Blind, administrated by the National Center on Deaf-Blindness, identified 188 children or youth with significant levels of dual sensory loss in Maryland. Over the past three years, DORS has provided vocational rehabilitation services for 136 individuals who are Deaf-Blind, and 25 of these were transition age youth.

Methodology: A survey regarding Blindness and Deaf-Blind services was distributed to stakeholders, consumers, community partners, caregivers and DORS staff via email, Facebook and the DORS website to solicit feedback regarding the unmet needs of individuals

who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Deaf-Blind. DORS received 125 completed surveys via email.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Increase the use of benefits counseling for individuals seeking employment.
- Need to explore different options for job placement methods to ensure individuals, especially those who have completed trainings and internships, receive continuous assistance and have access to job leads through various mediums.
- Lack of efficiency in the service delivery and follow-up by DORS staff.
- Need to increase comprehensive and intensive Blindness skills training to help consumers become proficient in independent living skills such as cooking, Braille, cleaning, non-visual literacy, and orientation and mobility.
- Concerns related to technology, especially the lack of advanced technology/computer training being offered to consumers.
- Concerns regarding employers not hiring individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired and their lack of knowledge regarding Blindness and workplace accommodations.
- Concerns regarding the lack of affordable and reliable transportation for consumers, including the shortage of options available in rural areas.
- Lack of support groups, role models and peer support to help consumers deal with vision loss.

Recommendations

- Collaborating with other government or private sector businesses that provide employment training.
- Provide disability education and offer more incentives to employers for hiring consumers.
- Advocate for and consider additional job development and placement hours because the placements are usually more challenging.
- Empower consumers and teach them how to advocate for themselves.
- Increase funding to hire additional DORS staff with specific knowledge of Blindness and Visual Impairments including staff specialists, orientation & mobility specialists, rehabilitation teachers, employment specialists, and vocational rehabilitation counselors; to ensure more personalized services, increase counseling services, and a fully embraced customer service approach that is focused on the individual.
- Enhance and emphasize counselor role in:

1. Advising consumers about the full scope of services, the rehabilitation team and process, including expediting services to those in job jeopardy to ensure the consumer has the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills necessary to maintain current employment.
 2. Focusing on capabilities and individualized needs and learning styles.
 3. Facilitating access to assistive technology.
 4. Minimizing gaps in the provision of services.
 5. Increasing timeliness of the services provided.
- Increase staff knowledge about self-employment opportunities and how they can be accessed.
 - Provide updated technology trainings to DORS consumers including more advanced trainings on software/devices and access technology used in competitive integrated employment.
 - Explore possible solutions to issues related to limited transportation to assist those in more rural areas to have full access to DORS services.
 - Expand staff and advocate for community resources to provide a full range of independent living and employment services to Deaf-Blind individuals within DORS and community programs/providers (qualified interpreters, technologists, teachers, counselors, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and other professionals).

3. Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened

Prevalence

Per the fiscal year 2017 annual report from the Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing, it is estimated that there are approximately 1.2 million Marylanders who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. For fiscal years 2017 and 2018, DORS has served 1,737 individuals who reported Deaf or Hard of Hearing as their primary disability (AWARE Case Management System Report: Annual All by Primary Disability).

Methodology: Subject Matter Interviews

Information regarding employer engagement when hiring individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing was obtained through individual interviews with Kathy West-Evans, Director of Business Relations, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and John Evans, Co-Owner of Abilities United and former Program Administrator for Business Relations with the Washington State Department of Social Health Services.

During these interviews, strategies for expanding employment opportunities for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals were discussed. The interviews focused on developing trusting working relationships with employers, educating employers, accommodations, and supporting the employers needs when hiring Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals. Suggestions provided

included: sharing success stories with employers, presenting communication strategies, education and disability awareness. Both agreed that once you have the trust of business, you can build further relationships and begin to provide education and awareness. When you have that trust with the employer it increases comfortability levels for the employer to ask about accommodations and supports needed.

Both emphasized that ensuring that the employment specialists and VR counselors have a toolbox which contains information on how to approach businesses is vital for success. This toolbox should include but not be limited to strategies for: how to approach businesses, listening to employers and their needs, strategies for communication, and education and awareness. Mr. Evans suggested:

1. DORS should invite employers to the WTC Business Advisory Board meetings to share their experiences and highlight their successes in working with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals and where they need support.
2. DORS employment specialists need to follow-up with businesses, complete quality assurance checks, and continue to build the working relationships that exist.

In addition, both agreed that DORS employment specialists need to understand data which will help to facilitate an understanding of which consumers are working, where they are working, their earnings, and those businesses who have hired Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals. Mr. Evans expressed his personal experience with data and how understanding the data helped him to continue to maintain positive business relationships and successful networking with other employers in the same area.

A major factor for successful business engagement is networking. The Agency needs to network with other professionals serving Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals. It was highly recommended that DORS staff serving Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals attend national conferences with those from other states.

Methodology: Survey

An online survey was distributed to Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD) at DORS, their supervisors and regional directors to evaluate the effectiveness of the eligibility forms (Functional Limitation Checklist and VR Priority Category Checklist) for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals. The online survey also evaluated the effectiveness of DORS staff communicating with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals through the use of technology available within the offices. The online survey was available to 24 individuals within DORS. Of the 24, 15 individuals responded (62.5%).

Needs/Concerns Identified

- The VR Priority Category Checklist and eligibility determination forms should be reviewed to determine effectiveness regarding Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals.
- Ensure RCDs receive timely training to effectively complete forms in the AWARE case management system when determining eligibility.

- Communication devices (e.g., VRI, Sorenson, and Purple) and software should be purchased or replaced, as needed.
- Communication devices should be available to all field offices that demonstrate a need for such devices.
- Routine maintenance on communication devices should be completed in field offices.
- Training on the use of communication devices should be provided on a regular basis.
- Employment Specialists need to better understand and utilize data.

Recommendations

- Update eligibility forms and provide training to RCDs regarding appropriate use of forms when determining eligibility for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing consumers.
- Communication devices should be checked every six months to ensure they are in working order.
- Purchase or replace communication devices, as needed, to ensure effective communication between hearing and Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing staff or consumers.
- All staff in each office should be trained at least once a year on the communication devices in their office to ensure effective communication with consumers.
- Data reports regarding employment information should be disseminated to appropriate staff on a regular basis.
- Employment specialists and RCDs serving Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals should have an employment toolbox which contains information on how to approach businesses.

4. Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disability, including Section 511 Considerations

WIOA Section 511 does not require a Designated State Unit (DSU) to identify individuals who are currently earning sub-minimum wage. However, in 2016, DORS examined the number of individuals in Maryland who were earning wages below minimum wage to determine the impact of their potential referrals to DORS. DORS is interested in knowing the number of individuals remaining in sub-minimum wage, how that may impact the number of referrals, and the barriers that 14c certificate holders are experiencing in moving individuals off 14c work sites. Since the Ken Capone Equal Employment Act was signed into law in Maryland in 2016, with a total phase out of sub-minimum wage by October 1, 2020, DORS anticipated a much lower number than in the previous report (2016).

Prevalence

Data was reviewed from the DOL Wage and Hour Division for Maryland. The data was current through June 2019. Information was compared to the DORS fee schedule to determine which Regions the providers primarily service.

Within the five DORS Regions, the Wage and Hour Division information translates as follows:

Region	Consumers	Community Rehabilitation Programs 14c Certificate Holders
1	229	3
2	559	6
3	5	1
5	482	5
6	187	1
Statewide Total:	1,462	16

Information from 2016 indicates there were 3,469 individuals served across 36 Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) versus 2019 data demonstrating 1,462 individuals in sub-minimum wage being served by 16 CRPs.

Information obtained indicates a reduction in the use of 14c certificates since the last Needs Assessment. However, it is also noted that there remains a significant number of individuals who will be exiting sub-minimum wage employment over the next several months.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- The number of individuals and providers working under 14c certificates has decreased significantly. While DORS has provided the required counseling and guidance to individuals, questions remain regarding the steps the 14c certificate holders will put in place to ensure a total phase out of sub-minimum wage.
- Need to identify where the remaining CRPs are in their transition from sub-minimum wage to Competitive Integrated Employment.
- Need to identify the barriers CRPs and individuals are facing in transitioning individuals into Competitive Integrated Employment.

Methodology: Individual Survey and CRP Survey

Of the CRPs that completed the survey, 31 responders indicated that they serve DDA consumers. Of the eight that reported they are still using sub-minimum wage, six agencies indicated that they are in transition to end the use of sub-minimum wage. Of the six, current needs include benefits counseling and training for jobs. CRPs expressed concerns regarding a need to provide transportation and benefits counseling to individuals and their families, intensive job search, and a more efficient process to obtain authorizations when working with DORS counselors.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- 14c certificate providers are not addressing training needs and opportunities to be included in DORS trainings.
- Benefits counseling information needs to be made available to individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Assistance is needed with vocational skills training.

Recommendations

- Continue to work with providers to address training needs and opportunities to include providers in DORS trainings.
- Provide benefits counseling to beneficiaries working under 14c certificates once they are referred to DORS.
- Establish a collaborative process with CRPs to assure that vocational training needs for individuals are being met.
- Establish a process to identify the individuals who continue to work under 14c certificates.

5. Individuals with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness

Information from the 2016 Comprehensive Needs Assessment noted that the utilization of mental health supported employment services varies by county. DORS and BHA have a long-standing collaborative history and work within a well-established braided funding mechanism to assure that services are available and reach the maximum number of participants.

Prevalence

BHA reports that claims paid through April 30, 2019 include 281,179 individuals in Maryland being served by BHA and 3,720 of those individuals are receiving long-term funding for supported employment. The previous 2016 Needs Assessment noted 68,000 individuals receiving BHA services in general. The significant increase in individuals receiving services is due to BHA adding addictions services under their overall service delivery. In the previous needs assessment, those individuals were not included in the general count.

Methodology: BHA and DORS DATA Comparison

The results of the comparison are provided in the table below. For each county the table displays the total number of individuals receiving BHA services, the total receiving BHA supported employment funding, the DORS Region, and the total number of CRPs approved both by DORS and BHA to provide services in each county.

County	Total receiving any BHA service	Total receiving BHA supported employment funding 2019	Total receiving BHA supported employment funding 2018	DORS Region	# DORS/ BHA CRPs
Alleghany	6,415	33	25	1	2
Anne Arundel	21,943	243	202	2	3
Baltimore City	40,620	255	364	3	13
Baltimore County	73,228	452	215	5/3	4
Calvert	3,910	101	83	2	1
Caroline	2,422	17	16	2	1
Carroll	6,020	177	157	1	3
Cecil	7,649	27	28	5	1
Charles	5,420	215	141	2	2
Dorchester	3,251	37	28	2	1
Frederick	8,985	167	176	1	1
Garrett	1,784	21	19	1	2
Harford	11,195	24	62	5	2
Howard	6,715	228	202	5	3
Kent	1,257	15	14	5	1
Montgomery	21,722	868	741	6	4
Prince George's	24,734	224	169	6	4
Queen Anne	1,934	34	24	2	1
Somerset	2,158	13	11	2	0
St, Mary	4,810	274	181	2	2
Talbot	1,892	19	12	2	0
Washington	11,556	131	116	1	2
Wicomico	7,682	108	50	2	3
Worcester	3,466	36	18	2	0
Total		3,720	3,054		

The chart below reflects the number of providers by Region, and the number of DORS staff assigned to the behavioral health supported employment providers (including evidence based providers).

Region	Number of BHA CRPs	Number of Staff Assigned to BHA Cases
1	5	5
2	8	8
3	14	12
5	10	6
6	7	8
Total	43	39

Fewer individuals are receiving supported employment services through BHA as compared to 2016. Comparing DORS staff allocations for behavioral health supported employment CRPs, the data appears that DORS has an adequate number of staff assigned to the providers in

each Region. Many of the providers have a very large referral base which keeps the caseloads of field staff large as well.

Methodology: Individual Survey and CRP Survey

Forty-two responses were received from the All Disability Groups, Individual Survey. Of those responses, six individuals indicated that they receive supports from BHA. They noted that they receive the following supports from their service provider:

- job development
- help with applications
- extended support services
- housing assistance
- guidance
- transportation
- education.

These individuals indicated the supports they receive are adequate. Most indicated the VR services they received helped them prepare for employment. When asked what could have been done differently, the responses were that DORS could have provided benefits counseling, schedule more meetings, and provide a work try-out to see if the individual could perform the tasks of their vocational goal.

Forty responses were received from the CRP survey. Thirty-two respondents indicated that they work with individuals with behavioral health diagnoses. Eighteen indicated that the primary population they serve is behavioral health. Overall, responses indicate a need for an increase in collaboration between DORS and the providers, continued need for benefits counseling, and improved responsiveness from DORS' staff when communicating either through email or by telephone.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Benefits counseling is needed covering both federal and state benefits.
- Improved communication between providers and DORS' staff.
- Use of alternative methods, such as a work trial, to see if an individual has the ability to perform a position.

Recommendations

- Assure that benefits counseling is offered and provided to individuals served by behavioral health providers, who are beneficiaries, when that individual becomes a consumer of DORS.
- Improve communication DORS staff and providers to enhance the delivery of quality services.

B. Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Minorities and Individuals with Disabilities Who Have Been Unserved or Underserved By the VR Program.

1. Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Minorities

The 2016 Needs Assessment identified a need for DORS to consider target outreach efforts, in collaboration with workforce and education partners, to increase services to minority individuals with disabilities with emphasis on Hispanic and Asian individuals.

The 2016 Needs Assessment report provided recommendations to increase accessible services for minority individuals with disabilities. The 2016 Needs Assessment also identified the need to develop a catalogue of standard letters in foreign languages to ensure individuals understand services, their rights, and responsibilities during the rehabilitation process. As a result, a variety of brochures, forms, and other materials were made available in Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, and French in 2017 and 2018. These materials are available for staff on the internal intranet and available to the public on the DORS public website. Targeted outreach efforts to increase the number of minorities served by DORS has not been developed. Additionally, DORS counselors were not provided with information to share with non-citizens regarding the process for an individual to be legally allowed to work in the U.S. DORS continues to be committed to increasing and improving services for minority populations.

Prevalence

According to the 2018 U.S. Census Estimates, 14.9% of the population in Maryland are foreign-born. Ten percent (10.1%) of the population identified as Hispanic and 6.7% of the population identified as Asian. These estimates also show that 18% of households speak a language other than English. (www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/md,US/PST045218)

Methodology: AWARE data was reviewed to assess the numbers of individuals served by DORS who are of Hispanic or Asian ethnicity (AWARE Report: Participants Served by Ethnicity). Individuals from Hispanic and Asian backgrounds continue to be underrepresented among individuals receiving services. While the number of individuals served by DORS remains low, it is important to note that DORS service levels have remained consistent each year.

Hispanic Individuals Served:

- FY 2016 number served: 755 (3% of total served)
- FY 2017 number served: 775 (3% of total served)
- FY 2018 number served: 723 (3% of total served)

Asian Individuals Served (Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander):

- FY 2016 number served: 784 (3% of total served)
- FY 2017 number served: 801 (3% of total served)
- FY 2018 number served: 753 (3% of total served)

Methodology: DORS Counselor Survey

Regional Directors from the Office of Field Services (OFS) and the OBVS Director were contacted to identify DORS VR counselor(s) in each Region who would provide information on the efforts and needs of their Region in serving consumers for whom English is a second language. Eleven (11) DORS counselors were contacted and interviewed by telephone.

Needs/Concerns Identified

Staff identified a variety of needs in their Region in regards to serving non-English speaking individuals.

- Staff shared their challenge of ensuring that they provided an adequate explanation of the DORS process and services to non-English speaking individuals.
- Staff were queried on the knowledge and use of the printed materials in different languages available on the DORS intranet. All reported knowledge of the materials and most reported successful use. In addition, staff were aware of the foreign language translation service available and most reported that it was convenient and efficient.
- Staff reported that their primary challenge in assisting non-English speaking consumers with employment is identifying CRPs that provide services to non-English speaking consumers in their native language.
- Staff continue to report that they do not have information to share with applicants who are non-citizens regarding the process for an individual to be legally allowed to work in the U.S.
- No one was aware of targeted outreach efforts in their Region to increase the number of minorities served by DORS.

Recommendations

- Re-establish the Multicultural Access Committee to continue their efforts to ensure equal access to DORS services.
- Task the Multicultural Access Committee with developing a resource list for each Region of available community agencies that provide assistance in completing the Application for Employment Authorization, Form I-765, which is the first step for non-citizens to become legally allowed to work in the U.S.
- Task the Multicultural Access Committee with identifying a resource list for each Region of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) providers.
- Develop an Agency work group lead by WTC's Academic Services department to explore the option of WTC offering ESOL classes at the Center or in the Regions.
- Develop an Agency work group lead by DORS Community Rehabilitation Programs office to identify CRPs that provide services to non-English speaking consumers in their native language. Ensure that services include an understanding of the complicated VR

and job search process. Services should include identifying appropriate training, completing employment applications, and finding a suitable employer.

- Task the Multicultural Access Committee with publishing all information developed as a result of these recommendations on InDORS, the Agency's internal intranet.
- Task the Agency's Staff Development office to arrange a cultural competency training which will ensure that staff have been trained and are better sensitized to the needs of individuals from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Before developing outreach efforts to increase the number of minorities served by DORS, the Agency needs to ensure that the resources needed by field service staff have been developed and disseminated. This will contribute to a better employment outcome for minorities served by our Agency.

2. Individuals with Disabilities Who Have Been Unserved, Or Who Are Underserved By The Vocational Rehabilitation Program

As with the previous 2013 and 2016 Needs Assessment reports, this assessment has identified underserved and unserved populations for which DORS has been unable to fully meet the statutory requirements outlined in the Rehabilitation Act (i.e., providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities). This assessment has identified several contributing factors including: a lack of sufficient resources, the continued utilization of a "Delayed List" for individuals assigned to Order of Selection categories (where a severe functional limitation limits less than three major life activities), productivity issues related to caseloads served by staff with less than three years' vocational rehabilitation experience, and complex barriers to employment that differ by population served.

Within the 2019 Needs Assessment, we will first seek to define underserved and unserved populations. Second, and unlike in other areas of this assessment or prior needs assessments on this topic, this review focuses not upon consumer survey results or feedback from DORS public meetings, but instead summarizes and draws conclusions based upon several data-sets, both publically available, and from within the DORS case management system AWARE and related systems. And finally, we will propose recommendations to address the trends and concerns evident within this data.

For the purposes of this report, "underserved" DORS consumers largely fall within two categories. First, there are those individuals on the DORS Delayed List. Second, those individuals: being served by a VR counselor who has less than three years' experience, or on a caseload which does not have an assigned full-time counselor ("vacant"), or the caseload is being covered by a supervisor or other staff person.

It is also important to identify individuals who are "unserved" by DORS. To address this, one must first identify those individuals with a disability in Maryland who are not served by VR. There are numerous data elements, outlined in the Methodology section below, which presents either a snapshot in time or trends over time. These data elements can be compared to the comparable periods of service for DORS consumers, thus identifying the total population available "to be served," those being served by DORS, and the remainder being "unserved."

Methodology: Review of Relevant Data

- U.S. Census and the American Community Survey 2017; and the Cornell University 2017 Disability Status Report: Maryland.
 - 447,161 (7.4%) people in Maryland self-identify as having a disability, and are under the age of 65 (2013 - 2017)
 - 42.6% (190,490) Employment rate of working age people (ages 21-64) with disabilities
 - 9.4% (42,033) actively looking for work among working age people with disabilities
 - 21.5% (96,139) the Poverty Rate of working age people with disabilities
 - Educational Attainment in 2017, the percentage of working age people with disabilities:
 - 32.5% (145,327) with High School diploma or equivalent
 - 29.1% (130,123) with some college or Associate's degree
 - 19.3% (86,302) with Bachelor's degree or more
- Maryland students in high school with an Individual Education Plan (IEP)
 - 27,219 (for the 2017 - 2018 school year).
- Social Security Administration (SSA) data
 - Ticket Holders being served by DORS January 2016 - April 2019 (as a % of all Ticket holders in Maryland via SSA's Ticket Tracker Monthly data)
 - 2014: average of 3.71% of Assignable Tickets assigned to DORS
 - 2016: average of 4.37% of Assignable Tickets assigned to DORS
 - 2017: average of 4.31% of Assignable Tickets assigned to DORS
 - 2018: average of 4.34% of Assignable Tickets assigned to DORS
 - 2019: average of 4.46% of Assignable Tickets assigned to DORS
- As of 6/2019, 1,126 Ticket Holding individuals are on the waitlist
- Review of DORS-based data
 - DORS Counselors
 - As of June 2019, there are 133 full time (non-contractual) counselors in OFS and 13 counselors in OBVS
 - Since January 2017, 61 new counselors were hired
 - DORS Waiting List numbers
 - October 2015, the Wait List was 2,697 individuals with a wait of 17 months
 - April 2019, the Wait List was 2,505 individuals with a wait time of 32 months
 - Numbers peaked between April and July 2017, when the list totaled 4,086 individuals with a wait time of 39 months
 - Barriers to Employment data; specifically, those consumers who applied (October 2016 or later), were found Eligible and placed on the Waiting List.
 - Homeless - 41

- Long Term Unemployed - 653
- Will exhaust Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in two years - 5
- Consumers 18 years old and younger (July 2017 – June 2018)
 - Pre-ETS - 1,500
 - Closed - 70
 - Still open - 1,430
 - Pre-ETS VR – 317 of 1,500
 - Closed - 19
 - Still open – 298
- DORS Benefits Planning Usage Statistics
 - Benefits Planning Usage Statistics for the provision of benefits planning to eligible beneficiaries for cases “Closed” (Successful or Unsuccessful) in the fiscal years which correspond to the 2013, 2016, and current 2019 Needs Assessment reports (data from proprietary DORS systems and AWARE database):
 - FY2013: 22% received benefits planning
 - FY2016: 31% received benefits planning
 - FY2019 YTD: 38% received benefits planning

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Presuming all 61 recently hired VR counselors remained with DORS (which is not the case), 42% of VR counselors have two years or less of DORS work experience serving consumers. On average, vocational rehabilitation counselors take two years to begin to understand the federal/state VR program (consumers underserved).
- Supervisors and VR counselors are assigned caseloads left “vacant” when VR counselors vacate the position, in addition to maintaining their own supervisory duties and/or caseloads (consumers underserved).
- There are far more individuals with disabilities than DORS has the capacity to serve.
 - There are 256,670 working age (21-65) adults with disabilities who are not employed; 42,000 of these individuals are actively looking for employment (consumers unserved).
 - Of the 27,219 students with disabilities (2017-2018), DORS provided services to 3,207 students in 2017 and 3,640 students in 2018 (consumers unserved).
 - Only 4.46% of all SSA Ticket Holders in Maryland are currently receiving services from DORS.
- For more than the past six years, fewer than 50% of SSA beneficiaries eligible for benefits planning services received this service from DORS (consumers underserved).
- Forty-two percent (42%) of individuals currently on the DORS Waiting List have a Social Security “Ticket to Work” waiting to be assigned to an Employment Network (consumers underserved).

- Over the past five years, fewer than 5% of individuals with a Social Security “Ticket to Work” had their ticket assigned (consumers unserved).
- Disabled individuals with significant barriers to employment (long-term unemployment, homelessness, exhausting TANF) are waiting for services from DORS (consumers unserved).

Recommendations

- Increase the number of full-time VR counselor positions across the state, to provide an effective and manageable caseload distribution. One of the stated reasons for resignation, as cited by VR counselors, is the high number of cases on each caseload. High caseload size negatively impacts the VR counselor’s ability to effectively serve individuals.
- Increase the number of VR counselors who serve students and transitioning youth, to accommodate an anticipated increase in the number of student referrals to the DORS VR and Pre-ETS programs.
- Continue to include benefits planning service for consumers who receive SSI/SSDI benefits. Develop a method for tracking those individuals who receive SSI/SSDI and are declining benefits planning service (i.e., previously received this service, received this service from a different Employment Network provider) to gain more accurate data regarding provision of this service.
- When individuals are placed on the DORS Waiting List, require that they are given referral information to the closest and most relevant WIOA partner. Similarly, in the case of Social Security beneficiaries, provide referral information to the closest and relevant Employment Network.
- Develop an intra-agency mechanism to share basic consumer information between WIOA partners which will ensure a smooth referral process between WIOA partners thus allowing the tracking of the individuals’ progress.
- Develop a work group to study those consumers who receive SSI/SSDI and are on the DORS Waiting List, to determine if the Order of Selection should be adjusted to Category 1.
- Consider further and future assessment strategies to determine whether the barriers to access VR services or the lack of knowledge of VR services contribute to populations being unserved/underserved.

C. Individuals with Disabilities Served Through Other Components of the Statewide Workforce Investment System.

In October 2015, Governor Larry Hogan determined that Maryland would have a combined state plan under the requirements of WIOA. Maryland DOL, Department of Human Services (DHS), and MSDE collaborated to develop the operational components of Maryland’s workforce system plan.

In 2018, the State's workforce plan was revised and expanded the number of partners and resources to be included in Maryland's workforce network. The Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) Community Services Block Grant program, the DLLR Division of Unemployment Insurance, and the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) were formally added into Maryland's Combined State Workforce Plan.

Programs included in the plan:

WIOA State Plan Program	Core WIOA Program as determined by law	Additional WIOA Program as determined by Governor	MD State Agency Responsible for Oversight
Adult Program	✓		DOL
Dislocated Workforce Program	✓		DOL
Youth Program	✓		DOL
Wagner-Peyser Act Program	✓		DOL
Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program	✓		DOL
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	✓		MSDE
TANF Program		✓	DHS
Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Program		✓	DOL
Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) Program		✓	DOL
Unemployment Insurance**		✓	DOL
SCSEP**		✓	DOL & Senior Service America, Inc.
RExO		✓	Seedco & Bon Secours
Community Services Block Grant**		✓	DHCD

** New addition to Maryland Combined State Plan effective 2018-2020.

Source: 2018 Maryland WIOA State Plan

Maryland American Job Centers

Prevalence

During the previous three years, the Agency has seen a decrease in individuals reporting that they were referred by the American Job Centers (AJCs). In 2016 to 2018, 244 individuals were referred; in 2013 to 2015, 862 individuals were referred. This is a significant decrease of 618 individuals. These statistics are garnered from the AWARE Referral Module, where staff entering referrals help the individual select their referral source; "One-Stop Center" is one choice.

To assess how effectively DORS staff are collaborating with the Maryland AJCs, two separate surveys were distributed: one to AJC Personnel and one to DORS staff.

Methodology: DORS Survey of American Job Center Personnel

Sixty-eight surveys were completed by individuals who work in AJCs. The survey results follow:

- 94% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the services provided through DORS to individuals with disabilities to help them develop employment-related skills.
- 79% of respondents reported that they have referred individuals to DORS for services.
- Respondents were asked to select the referral methods they used:
 - 73% providing contact information (DORS office location, phone number, etc.) to individuals
 - 37% facilitating in-person introductions to DORS Staff
 - 14% DORS online referral
 - 10% universal referral form
 - 2% other options.
- When asked if the referrals resulted in the referred individuals receiving services through DORS:
 - 37% were aware
 - 52% did not know
 - 7% were unaware.
- In response to whether they have any customers who are receiving services from both the AJC and DORS, respondents reported that 61% did not, while 39% indicated that they had customers receiving services from both agencies.
- Respondents were asked to comment on the manner in which they document services provided by DORS for mutual customers in their case management system, Maryland Workforce Exchange (MWE).
 - 35% enter a case note in MWE
 - 10% document in the Individual Employment Plan
 - 10% do not document DORS services.
- When asked if they meet with DORS staff regarding mutual customers to collaborate on services, 78% indicated they do not, while 22% indicated they do.

Methodology: Survey of DORS Staff including VR supervisors and counselors, employment specialists, and business services representatives regarding their knowledge of AJC services, referrals to AJCs, and documentation of referrals.

Fifty-nine DORS staff completed the survey with the following results:

- Respondents represented various positions within DORS:
 - 67% counselors
 - 12% supervisors
 - 7% business services representatives
 - 2% WTC employment specialists
 - 12% other classifications, including regional director, administrative specialist, secretary and teacher for the blind.

- When asked if they were aware of the variety of services available through the AJCs, 80% indicated “Yes” and 20% responded “No.”
- 83% of the respondents indicated that they have referred DORS consumers to an AJC for services and 17% indicated they have not.
- Respondents indicated they have used the following referral methods:
 - 86% provided contact information for AJC (location, phone number, etc.)
 - 37% provided in-person introduction to AJC staff
 - 29% used the Maryland Workforce Exchange
 - 12% used the universal referral form
 - 4% used another method.
- 80% of respondents reported that referrals resulted in individuals receiving services through the AJC and 20% indicated they had not.
- 64% of those with caseloads indicated they had consumers on their caseload who were receiving services from both DORS and an AJC, while 36% indicated they did not.
- Respondents were asked to comment on the manner in which they document services provided by the AJC in AWARE. Of the 19 responses to this question, 75% indicated that they documented in a case note or job search activity and 16% indicated they documented under “Special Programs.”
- 63% reported that they did not meet with AJC staff regarding mutual customers to collaborate on services and 37% indicated they did.

These two surveys indicate increased knowledge about and collaboration between the AJCs and DORS. During the 2016 Needs Assessment, only 15 AJC staff completed the survey compared to 74 respondents this year. In 2016, 73% of AJC staff indicated they were aware of DORS services, compared to 94% during this survey. Although DORS staff were not surveyed for this purpose in 2016, 80% indicated they are aware of the services available through the AJCs on this year’s survey.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Despite the apparent increase in collaboration between AJC and DORS staff based on the surveys, there is a decline in AJCs being selected as the referral source for new referrals in AWARE.
- There does not appear to be a specific or consistent way for either DORS staff or AJC staff to document referrals or collaboration.
- The definition of what is considered a “referral” is broad, from simply providing a phone number to a formal form or in-person introduction. Additionally, due to differences in terms, it is uncertain if staff are referring to the same things when discussing services.

Recommendations

- Determine the reason for the decline in selecting AJCs as a referral source and provide guidance to staff on appropriate referral documentation (i.e., is terminology consistent).

- Consider methods for tracking collaboration with AJCs in the DORS AWARE system, such as creating a case note category of “AJC Collaboration.”
- Provide training to DORS staff on appropriate timing and method of referrals to AJCs.
- Collaborate with AJCs on appropriate timing and method of referrals to DORS.
- Continue to explore data sharing between agencies to assist in identifying common consumers and collaborating on services provided.

Other Workforce Programs

Prevalence

During the 2019 Needs Assessment, DORS utilized a variety of methodologies to assess the number of individuals with disabilities in Maryland served by partner programs identified within the Maryland State Combined Workforce Plan.

Methodology: Literature Review – Maryland DOL annual report/statistics

The Maryland DOL and the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL) provided the following statistics regarding the number of individuals with disabilities who accessed services through WIOA programs.

During Program Year 2017:

- WIOA Title I Adult Program served 345 individuals with disabilities.
- WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker Program served 69 individuals with disabilities.
- WIOA Title I Youth Program served 477 youth with disabilities.
- WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy Services Program served 994 individuals with disabilities.
- WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser Program served 2,750 individuals with disabilities.

Methodology: DORS and DHS Data Review

The DORS AWARE case management system indicates the number of consumers who reported receiving financial support from DHS when they applied for vocational rehabilitation services, including TANF or General Assistance.

- FY 2017: 406
- FY 2018: 423
- FY 2019 YTD: 274

This is a decline from the 2016 Needs Assessment, where an average of 650 consumers each year reported receiving financial support from DHS.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- There was a significant decline in the number of individuals with disabilities reported as served by DOL-DWDAL from those reported on the 2016 Needs Assessment. The difference can be attributed to the fact that during the 2016 Needs Assessment, DOL was still operating under Workforce Investment Act and all participants, including those who only had self-services or received information, were included in the count. From program year 2016 onward, under WIOA, only those receiving staff-assisted services are included in the participant counts. Additionally, some participants may be reluctant to disclose a disability when working with staff at the AJCs.
- It is difficult to track common customers of the various workforce partners and to document collaborative services. Despite the fact that DORS is working more collaboratively with DOL and AJCs, the data does not show that collaboration.

Recommendations

- Continue to foster and strengthen relationships with DOL, DHS, and other partners included in the state plan.
- Continue to look for ways to strengthen data sharing among partners.

Apprenticeship

Methodology: Literature Review

The 2019 Needs Assessment committee members reviewed the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability and Employment Policy (ODEP) research and data regarding apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The following literature resources were used:

1. ODEP website- Disability Employment Policy Resources by Topic of Apprenticeship: www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/Apprenticeship.htm
 2. U.S. Department Of Labor FY 2018-2022 Strategic Plan- www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/budget/2019/FY2018-2022StrategicPlan.pdf
 3. The 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency strategy- www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/20150302-fpt.pdf
- In the FY 2018-2022 strategic plan, the U.S. Department of Labor identified apprenticeship as a performance goal for particular focus in FY 2018-19. The goal is to enroll one million new apprentices (including registered programs, industry-recognized apprenticeships, and other non-registered programs) over the next five years to enable more Americans to obtain jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage through high quality earn-and-learn opportunities. By September 30, 2019, DOL will enroll 280,000 new apprentices as part of the Agency's broader efforts to promote and expand apprenticeship.
 - The current DOL Strategic Plan documents evidence that supports expanding high-quality apprenticeship opportunities across sectors, including manufacturing, transportation, information technology (IT), health care, and the skilled trades. DOL's

data indicates graduates of Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs earn an average of \$60,000 per year, and more than eight in ten graduates retain their employment nine months after exiting their apprenticeships.

- Since January 2017, the apprenticeship system has added 303,157 new apprentices, with 61,165 coming in the third quarter of 2018. In total, there are 556,495 active apprentices and 23,126 apprenticeship programs nationwide.
- In 2016, the federal DOL's Apprenticeship Equal Employment Opportunity Regulations were updated to ensure equal employment opportunities in apprenticeship programs for under-represented groups, including people with disabilities. Previous regulations did not include nondiscrimination or affirmative action requirements on the basis of disability. The final rule added disability as an element of sponsors' affirmative action programs and established a national goal that 7% of programs' apprentices be individuals with disabilities.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Historically, apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities have been limited.
- There is limited collaboration, coordination, and cooperation among youth and adult service systems, state education agencies, state VR and workforce development agencies, schools, and youth with disabilities and their families to assist students with disabilities in achieving their postsecondary education and career goals.
- There is a service gap between youth and adult programs to encourage and expand opportunities for students and youth with disabilities up to age 24 (e.g., dual enrollment, internships, mentorships, apprenticeships, and postsecondary training options).
- During transition planning, there is limited encouragement provided to students with disabilities to consider apprenticeship programs.
- There are limited efforts to promote apprenticeship training through community college to help reduce costs for RA sponsors and youth and adults with disabilities.
- Need to increase outreach and recruitment efforts and tracking of apprenticeship participation and success.
- Employer impressions of individuals with disabilities in general may still be limiting the number of apprenticeship opportunities available to youth and adults with disabilities.

Recommendations

- Expand and continue the collaboration with the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank to increase the number of individuals with disabilities participating in Youth, Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs, and outreach to WIOA partners.
- Utilize the members of the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank to identify community colleges and other approved labor vendors to provide training for a variety of

Apprenticeship programs (including Youth, Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeships) for individuals with disabilities.

- Develop strategies with the Maryland DOL to promote and educate VR staff and partners such as consumers and their families, schools, Community Rehabilitation Programs, Pre-ETS' providers, career assessment providers and other DORS vendors about apprenticeship.
- Develop strategies and outline roles and responsibilities for DORS statewide staff related to expanding apprenticeship education and opportunities.
- Expand knowledge of and partner with MSDE staff to support the goal of Apprenticeship Maryland which creates compensated, high quality youth apprenticeships that prepare students to enter employment in high-skilled, high-growth sectors in manufacturing and STEM occupations such as healthcare, biotechnology, IT, construction and design, and banking and financing.
- Promote collaboration, coordination, and cooperation among youth and adult service systems, state education agencies, state VR and workforce development agencies, schools, and youth with disabilities and their families to assist students with disabilities in achieving their postsecondary education and career goals.
- Explore ways to use WTC in collaboration with other core WIOA partners to expand and develop Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship training programs in key industries supported by DOL.
- Review and outline the roles and responsibilities of DORS statewide staff, including WTC, in order to support consumers participating in Youth, Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship.
- Expand the development of policy and implement training for the tracking and documentation in AWARE of Youth, Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship services.
- Develop strategies to increase the number of businesses offering apprenticeships in growth industries in Maryland in collaboration with WIOA partners.

Apprenticeships and Maryland Community Colleges

In 2019, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the U.S. Department of Labor launched the Community College Apprenticeships Initiative, which will produce 16,000 new apprentices over the next three years. Colleges can join this partnership, which will use \$20 million in federal funding to help create apprenticeships.

While strides have been made partnering with community colleges, there are additional objectives to be met, including advancing apprenticeship as a workforce strategy. Working with community colleges to expand the scope of services provided through Registered Apprenticeship Programs could help state and local workforce systems transform how they meet the needs of businesses and workers fully achieving the vision of WIOA.

Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank

The Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank was developed in January of 2018 and is a network of professional organizations committed to expanding apprenticeship opportunities to individuals with disabilities. Through a diverse array of initiatives – research, education, public engagement, and on-the-ground innovation and practice – the Think Tank shares information on emerging trends and opportunities, best practices in apprenticeship and highlight how apprenticeship can break into new industry sectors and serve a more diverse population of VR individuals. The Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank members consist of a variety of leaders from DORS, including WTC, along with DOL, Maryland Department of Disabilities, the Community College of Baltimore County and community program providers such as, the ARC who are collaborating to secure lasting change in the area of Youth, Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship at the State and local level.

Methodology: Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank Members Focus Group and a survey of attendees from the DORS Apprenticeship Training.

During the May 2019 Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank meeting, members were asked several questions regarding how to better serve individuals with disabilities through other components of the statewide workforce investment system such as AJCs, other workforce programs, employers, and Maryland Community Colleges.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Identification of an organizational structure within DORS for the delivery of Apprenticeship services.
- Limited availability of statewide Pre-Apprenticeship programs in Construction/Electrical/Plumbing and IT.
- Need for expansion of Registered Apprenticeship programs in collaboration with businesses and community colleges.
- Lack of methods and strategies for the tracking and sharing of apprenticeship data between DORS, community colleges and WIOA partners.
- Need representation from MSDE for participation on the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank.
- Systems are limited for the collaboration and communication between MSDE and DORS related to Youth Apprenticeship.
- Lack of consumer and staff knowledge regarding apprenticeship programs and services available statewide.

Recommendations

- Explore the Agency's capacity and staff resources for the expansion of Apprenticeship Navigation Services at WTC that will be responsible for the coordination and implementation of apprenticeship services such as, collaboration with community

colleges, WIOA partners, statewide and local trainings, facilitation of consumer services related to apprenticeship consults and linkage to statewide apprenticeship training, etc.

- Explore development of Pre-Apprenticeship programs at WTC or in partnership with community colleges and other workforce partners.
- Continue collaboration with CVS, DOL, and the Community College of Baltimore County to develop a Registered Apprenticeship Program for Pharmacy Technician at the WTC.
- DORS should continue its efforts to develop a system for data sharing agreements between DOL, Community Colleges and DORS for apprenticeship, employment and credentialing information.
- Identify representation from MSDE and the new Apprenticeship Coordinator from the Community College of Baltimore County for participation on the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank.
- Develop a system to enhance the collaboration and communication between MSDE's Career and Technology Education Instruction branch and DORS staff serving transitioning youth.
- Work with the DORS Office of Public Affairs to explore and develop marketing strategies to enhance staff and consumer education and awareness about apprenticeships including but not limited to, YouTube videos for staff and consumers, WTC Instagram, podcast, webinars, training sessions at various conferences and schools, information packets, etc.

Employers

Although employers are not a workforce program under WIOA, they are integral partners and customers in a job-driven and business-responsive workforce system. It was determined that they should be included in the 2019 Needs Assessment to highlight their needs which affect the preparation and employability of job seekers with disabilities.

Methodology: Literature Review – 2018 Maryland WIOA State Plan, Labor Market Information (pages 12-22)

Labor market information summarized in the 2018 Maryland WIOA State Plan highlights the needs of Maryland's employers, especially those in growth and emerging industries. Construction of buildings experienced an 8.7% gain in employment from 2015 to 2016, while the professional and technical services industry gained the most growth of 4,704 jobs, bringing the average employment in that industry to 246,864.

Skilled workers for healthcare, IT systems and design, management, and administrative occupations are at the top of Maryland's major business needs. Jobs most advertised through the Maryland Workforce Exchange in 2016 included those in the following occupational categories:

- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical
- Computer and Mathematical

- Management
- Sales
- Office and Administrative Support
- Architecture and Engineering
- Transportation and Material Moving
- Business and Financial Operations
- Food Preparation and Serving
- Installation, Maintenance and Repair.

These represented jobs requiring all levels of education and experience, from no minimum education requirement, high school diploma or equivalent, to bachelor's degree.

In 2017, the certifications that employers desired most based on advertised job postings on the Maryland Workforce Exchange included those in Healthcare, such as Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Basic Life Support Certification (BLS), Advanced Cardiac Life Support Certification (ACLS), Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), and Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS); Information Technology, including Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP) and Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA); and Commercial Driver's License (CDL).

Methodology: Literature Review/Focus Groups – Business Roundtable Report: Employment Engagement in Vocational Rehabilitation; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration; 12/26/16.

In response to the WIOA's focus on employer engagement as it relates to the employment of individuals with disabilities, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) conducted a series of roundtable discussions to gain insight in the following areas within businesses': human capital needs and challenges, skill needs and job requirements, recruitment strategies, and methods to employ more job seekers with disabilities. Businesses from four industry sectors (federal contracting, banking and finance, health care, and IT) were included and represented small, medium, and large companies. These are high growth and employment industries with diverse occupations that require varied skill levels.

The roundtable discussions revealed the importance of VR agencies partnering with employers to increase the understanding of specific industries and businesses, especially their human capital needs. "Soft skills" such as communication and interpersonal skills were identified as critical to retention, advancement, and long-term success by those participating in the roundtable discussions across all industries.

Some of the industry-specific findings included:

- Federal contractors are not meeting their requirement to have a workforce that includes at least 7% of employees with disabilities.
- There is a high turnover of millennial-age employees.
- STEM skills needed.
- High degree of interpersonal skills required.

- Health care employers indicated that roles in hospitals extend beyond just health care, including physical plant and hospitality roles. Although there is a need for experienced employees, the low supply of skilled staff in a local labor market and high turnover can result in hiring inexperienced individuals and higher wages.
- Banking and finance employers need large numbers of qualified candidates and especially require those with competencies in “soft skills.”
- IT employers are experiencing retention challenges, and skill requirements evolve rapidly. There is a need for highly specialized software skills. Federal IT contracts require very specific qualifications and are stricter than those in the commercial IT sector.

Recommendations resulting from the roundtable discussions included: align training for job seekers with disabilities with job opportunities; promote awareness of VR agencies and the advantages of partnering to recruit individuals with disabilities (including financial incentives); expand employer engagement and relationship building; and invest in VR staff development on topics of labor market and occupational information in career planning and IPE development, employer consultation on accommodations, and developing customized training designed to meet the needs of specific employers.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- There continues to be a significant employment gap for individuals with disabilities as compared to job seekers without disabilities.
- Development of “soft skills” or essential workplace skills is critical to successful employment, regardless of industry or occupation.
- Use of labor market information is extremely beneficial in career counseling and guidance while also identifying varying levels of preparation required for occupations in industries which have a bright outlook.
- Job seekers need to increase their use of labor market information so that they can better match their skills to the employers’ needs.
- Additional training, resources, and tools for DORS staff relative to use of LMI are needed.
- Expansion of certification and credentialing, especially in the healthcare and IT industries is needed to make job seekers more marketable.
- Employers in some industries are experiencing problems of retention, high turnover and lack of qualified candidates.

Recommendations

- Expand employer engagement to better understand businesses’ human capital needs in order to prepare job seekers for the workforce.

- DORS should use every avenue available to ensure that consumers have opportunities to learn, develop, practice and hone “soft skills.”
- DORS should use varying methods of educating staff and consumers about where to find and how to use labor market information.
- The DORS Business Relations Branch should sponsor industry-specific and employer-specific career information sessions, open to staff and consumers.
- Work with the DORS Office of Public Affairs to expand marketing activities to employers that promote the advantages of collaborating with DORS to meet their workforce needs, including recruitment and retention services and designing customized or business-driven training.

D. Youth with Disabilities and Students with Disabilities

1. Their Need for Pre-ETS or Other Transition Services

Prevalence

The need for Pre-ETS and other transition services in Maryland is most evident when reviewing the post-school outcomes of students receiving Special Education, as reported on the Maryland Report Card. In 2018:

- 13.9% of students in grades 9-12 receiving Special Education services and 6.7% of students in grades 9-12 receiving services under a 504 plan dropped out of school, compared to 8.3% of students in regular education.
- 66.8% of the Class of 2018 students receiving Special Education services and 88.4% of students receiving services under a 504 plan graduated high school, compared to 87.1% of students in regular education.
- 41.5% of students who received Special Education services in high school were attending college 16 months post high school, compared to 72.1% of students who were in regular education.

Theoretically, youth with disabilities and students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS services would increase their opportunity to remain in high school, and pursue post-secondary education or employment if they received training in self-advocacy and independent living.

2. Assessment of the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities for Transition Services and Pre-ETS & the Extent to Which Such Services Are Coordinated with Local Education Agencies, Other Education Systems (to include Juvenile Services Education System, Maryland School for The Deaf, and Maryland School for The Blind), and Workforce Partners

DORS would like to continue to assess the current 2019 need for Pre-ETS statewide, as well as the availability of such services. As a result of WIOA, DORS is now required to set aside at least 15% of our federal allotment to provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities between the

ages of 14 and 21, and are to be available to all students with disabilities regardless of the severity of their disability.

Pre-ETS are very specific in nature and include the following:

- Job exploration counseling
- Work-based learning experiences
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs
- Workplace readiness training to develop social and independent living skills
- Instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring

DORS continues to review proposals submitted by community rehabilitation programs (CRP), secondary schools, workforce partners, and colleges and universities, desiring to offer Pre-ETS as a fee-for-service. The current statewide number of partners providing DORS-funded Pre-ETS programming is listed below:

- Region 1 (Western Maryland) has 26 CRPs, one secondary school, two colleges, four workforce partners, and 11 other partners (to include centers for independent living, community work incentives coordinators (CWIC), and out-of-state programs for students who are deaf).
- Region 2 (Southern Maryland & Lower Eastern Shore) has 28 CRPs, six secondary schools, three colleges, one workforce partner, and 13 other partners (to include centers for independent living, CWICs, and out-of-state programs for students who are deaf).
- Region 3 (Baltimore City) has 14 CRPs, two secondary schools, one college, two workforce partners, and 11 other partners (to include centers for independent living, CWICs, and out-of-state programs for students who are deaf).
- Region 5 (Central Maryland & Upper Shore) has 25 CRPs, three secondary schools, two colleges, two workforce partners, and 12 other partners (to include centers for independent living, CWICs, and out-of-state programs for students who are deaf).
- Region 6 (D.C. Metro) has 23 CRPs, two secondary schools, no colleges, two workforce partners, and 10 other partners (to include centers for independent living, CWICs, and out-of-state programs for students who are deaf).

DORS seeks to use this Needs Assessment to acquire a better understanding of the numbers of potentially eligible VR consumers who will be participating in these services over the next few years, as well as, which Local Education Agencies (LEA) are already providing these services, and where there may be opportunities for collaboration.

Methodology: Survey of Local Education Agencies and Other Education Systems

Surveys were sent to each of the LEAs and other educational systems to determine:

1. Which of the five Pre-ETS programs are currently provided by the schools as part of secondary transition.
2. Of those services provided, which can be further enhanced by partnering with DORS.
3. Which services are not currently available in their respective geographical areas.
4. Is the coordination of transition services between DORS and the LEA and other education systems perceived as sufficient to meet the needs of all students with disabilities within that LEA and other education systems?

Twenty-three LEAs and other education systems indicated that they refer students to DORS. The information summarized below represents the responses received from 20 of the local education agencies surveyed, Maryland School for the Deaf, Maryland School for the Blind, and the Juvenile Services Education System.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Coordination of transition services between DORS and the LEAs or other education systems was not sufficient to meet the needs of all students with disabilities.
- There is a disconnect between the time a DORS referral is made and actual contact with families.
- Not all students with disabilities are being reached by DORS (specifically with students and families speaking languages other than English).
- There is a lack of communication between DORS Transition Counselors and LEA Transition Facilitators or IEP chairs.
- There is a limited number of Pre-ETS programs for all disability populations in rural areas.
- There are not enough DORS Transition Counselors to work with all students with disabilities.
- CRP partners working with students have limited training and experience in providing services to students.
- Once Pre-ETS programs are in place for students, DORS outreach regarding VR services is limited (not all of the eligible VR students are applying for VR services).
- School staff often have difficulties accessing DORS Transition Counselors for participation in student IEP meetings.
- There are limited Pre-ETS programs that are available for students who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

- There are limited Pre-ETS programs that are available for students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
- Education systems that have worked with students across the state have had the experience of DORS transition counselors operating differently depending on the area of the state.
- DORS transition counselors with large caseloads limit their capacity to partner with LEAs and other education systems or participate in student IEP meetings.
- There is a lack of communication with LEAs and other education systems regarding the local availability of specific Pre-ETS programs.
- DORS appears to be restricted due to the supplanting concerns in its ability to provide services to 18-21 year old students, specifically services during the school day.
- There are limited updates and communication from DORS regarding status of student referrals and services that they may receive through DORS.

Methodology: Data collected was based on the number of potential Pre-ETS applicants statewide utilizing both data provided by MSDE and data found on the Maryland Report Card.

High School Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) in 2018 (Source: Maryland State Department of Education)

Grade	Students
9th	9,647
10th	7,282
11th	6,353
12th	3,950
Total	27,232

Total Number of Students Potentially Requesting Pre-ETS in FY 2019: 27,232.

This number is not inclusive as the number of high school students with 504 plans in 2018 was not available at this time.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- It is anticipated based on data collected that the number of students accessing DORS services will increase each year.
- It is anticipated that DORS will not be able to access all students with 504 plans due to limited collaboration between DORS and school staff monitoring 504 plans.
- It is anticipated that the number of students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities accessing DORS services will increase each year as a result of WIOA requirements related to Section 511 and the closing of the 14c programs.
- It is anticipated that DORS transitioning caseloads will continue to grow each year.

Methodology: Survey of Local Workforce Partners

Surveys were sent to each of the local workforce partners to determine

1. How and if the local workforce partners are collaborating and partnering with DORS to serve transitioning youth and students with disabilities.
2. What DORS assistance or services are expected to benefit transitioning youth and students with disabilities served by workforce partners.
3. What services are being offered to transitioning youth and students with disabilities through the workforce partners.

The information summarized below represents the responses received from seven of the local workforce partners surveyed:

- Anne Arundel County
- Baltimore County
- Carroll County
- Frederick County
- Howard County
- Montgomery County
- Upper Shore

All seven respondents currently collaborate or partner with DORS in some way to provide services to students with disabilities. Six of the respondents refer transitioning youth and students with disabilities to DORS for services, but it was noted that these referrals are not submitted often.

Of those individuals who responded to the survey, their comments are noted below regarding collaboration with DORS:

- During the course of the year, DORS staff meets with workforce partners to discuss strategies to better serve transitioning youth in the area.
- DORS collaborates with Anne Arundel and Montgomery Counties for Maryland's Disability Employment Initiative grant.
- Frederick and Howard Counties and the Upper Shore partner with DORS to provide summer youth experiences for transitioning youth and students with disabilities.
- DORS staff meets with Carroll County's AJC at least twice per month.
- Baltimore County and DORS have coordinated meetings regarding consumer services.
- DORS provides Baltimore County with regular referrals.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- Increase the number of DORS referrals from the workforce partners.

- DORS needs to provide education and disability awareness regarding how to work with specific populations to the workforce partners.
- DORS needs to provide technical assistance regarding summer youth experiences and work experience placement for students with disabilities to the workforce partners.

Recommendations

- DORS needs to continue to expand the availability of Pre-ETS statewide specifically in rural areas for students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Blind or Visually Impaired, and intellectually or developmentally disabled. Instructional areas should focus on self-advocacy and counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs.
- DORS needs to align its staffing and caseload assignments to have sufficient DORS Transition Counselors available to coordinate the provision of Pre-ETS and collaboration with LEAs and other education systems.
- DORS needs to revisit best practices in outreach to students and families who speak languages other than English.
- DORS needs to improve its practices in connecting potentially eligible students to the VR program in their next-to-last year of high school.
- Local agreements between DORS and LEAs should be updated to address concerns (e.g., identifying a communication process regarding student's referrals and Pre-ETS available in the local area).
- DORS needs to identify quality assurance concerns in the provision of Pre-ETS through workforce partners.
- DORS should continue to provide staff training and information dissemination to ensure that staff are operating within standard policies and procedures across the state.
- DORS should collaborate with 504 coordinators in each LEA to address the difficulties of accessing students with 504 plans.

3. Assessment of the Needs of Transitioning Youth with Disabilities Entering Two- and Four-year Colleges & the Extent to Which Such Services Are Coordinated with College Disability Support Services Staff

DORS would like to evaluate how effectively the Agency collaborates with Disability Support Services (DSS) staff to meet the needs of transitioning students with disabilities entering, or planning on entering, two- and four-year colleges.

Methodology: Disability Support Services Professionals Survey

An on-line survey of DSS professionals was used to evaluate how effectively DORS collaborates with DSS staff to meet the needs of transitioning students with disabilities. This

survey was sent directly to members of the Maryland Association of Higher Education and Disability (MD-AHEAD). Twenty-two individuals provided responses to the survey questions.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- DORS staff need to understand which assessment data from student high school records meets the requirements of DSS staff.
- Many students making the transition to college are not aware of the DORS program until they enter college and then they are placed on the DORS wait list.
- Although 91% of those surveyed, indicated that they do refer consumers for DORS services, 34% do not partner with DORS staff.
- 79% of the DSS professional staff surveyed indicated they are unaware of others in their system that may refer students to DORS.
- It appears there is a disconnect between the colleges' career center, DSS and DORS to ensure students receive career counseling and job placement assistance.

Recommendations

- Consider establishing a liaison relationship with each DSS office to strengthen the partnership between DORS field staff and DSS staff in both two- and four-year colleges, as not all college DSS professionals are familiar with DORS services and supports. This liaison with the college should be the DORS transition counselors for that county.
- DORS college liaisons should also connect with the college career center. A relationship should be established to provide career counseling and job placement assistance.
- Consider strengthening the Pre-ETS outreach to transitioning students with disabilities to ensure supports are in place prior to these consumers attending college.
- Training should be provided to college personnel regarding DORS services and supports. This training should also identify which college staff refers consumers to DORS.
- Upon consumers entering college, DORS staff should ensure updated, valid disability documentation which supports requested reasonable accommodations.

4. Assessment of the Needs of Students, and Parents of Students, Eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services & the Extent of Which Information Regarding Getting a Job, the Job Market, Job Shadowing and Related Activities, College or Training Opportunities, and Skills Learned and Skills Still Needed Have Been Provided to these Students and Parents

Methodology: Survey of Students and Parents

Surveys were sent via email to students, and parents of students, eligible for Pre-ETS. The goal was to determine whether students and parents feel that they are receiving information regarding: getting a job, the job market, participation in job shadowing or related activities, college or training, skills learned, and skills needed in order to obtain a job post high school.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- There appear to be limited methods available for transitioning youth and students with disabilities to learn self-advocacy skills and the opportunity to practice such skills.
- There appear to be limited programs available to provide transitioning youth and students with disabilities with information about college and other training options.
- There appear to be limited opportunities for transitioning youth and students with disabilities to gain the skills needed to obtain employment or complete a skills training or college program.
- There is a lack of information received regarding the various jobs of interest for a student in their community.
- There is a need for opportunities for “real life” work experiences.
- There is a need to educate parents about summer youth programs, and paid and volunteer work experiences.

Recommendations

- DORS should consider partnering with transition coordinators to facilitate workshops for transitioning youth and students with disabilities to educate them regarding college or training options. Assistance with enrollment could also be provided.
- During summer Pre-ETS programs within the Agency, a program to assist transitioning youth and students with disabilities with learning life skills such as self-advocacy and communication should be offered.
- Additional Pre-ETS programs through the Agency could be provided to assist transitioning youth and students with disabilities with obtaining skills to acquire or complete job training.
- To address the parent concerns regarding the lack of information about the various jobs of interest for a student in their community, local DORS offices should host a job fair with employers who can provide students with information regarding various jobs.
- Increase the number of work experience opportunities for transitioning youth and students with disabilities.
- The Agency needs to increase its efforts to ensure that the parents are provided with sufficient information regarding summer youth experiences, and paid and volunteer work experiences.

II. Assessment of the Need to Establish, Develop or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the State

The success of DORS' consumers is due in many instances and respect to the partnerships DORS has established with CRPs, which provide a number of direct services throughout the state, and WTC, which provides a number of direct services to consumers referred by DORS counselors. Efforts are made throughout the year to ensure that there is a sufficient number of CRPs to provide employment services to consumers statewide.

To assess the need to establish, develop, or improve CRPs within the state and services available at WTC, DORS reviewed the results from:

1. A survey of CRP Executive Directors and CRP front line staff
2. A survey of DORS staff
3. Results from in-person interviews and focus groups of DORS staff

Prevalence

With regard to the CRPs working with DORS within a particular Region, data was compared from the 2016 Needs Assessment with the current 2019 data.

Region	Number of CRPs 2016	Number of CRPs 2019	Difference +/-
1	41	36	-5
2	46	49	+3
3	32	38	+6
5	44	52	+8
6	43	54	+11
Total	206	229	+23

While the allocation of CRPs by Region would appear to be robust, according to the data above, there still remains a number of CRPs that have become relatively inactive and/or provide little to no services in collaboration with DORS (Region 1: 4 providers; Region 2: 7 providers; Region 3: 8 providers; Region 5: 5 providers; and Region 6: 11 providers). Overall, it appears that there has been a substantial increase in providers per Region the past three years. This is believed to be in part due to the increase in number of CRPs who are becoming DORS providers from BHA that also provide substance use treatment in addition to supported employment.

Methodology: In-person interviews of DORS Staff

Several small teams led by WTC Staff Specialist for Program Evaluation and Development, Marketing, and Outreach visited offices in four Regions to elicit feedback regarding the services available at WTC. During these visits, in-person written surveys were completed by vocational rehabilitation counselors in conjunction with group discussion.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- There is a need to continue to simplify the process by which referrals for services are processed and admitted to WTC.
- There is a need to continue to collaborate with DORS field staff regarding communication when consumers are discharged or receive disciplinary action.
- Transportation costs negatively affect the decision to refer an individual to attend services at WTC.

Recommendations

- Continue to simplify the process for referring individuals to WTC.
- Examine strategies for enhanced communication between WTC and DORS field staff.
- Explore how WTC can assist with the transportation needs of consumers interested in participating in services.

Methodology: Surveys

A survey was sent to DORS field staff regarding WTC and CRPs. Fifty-one staff responded to the survey.

90% of DORS staff reported that they view WTC as an effective partner in their consumer's rehabilitation. DORS field staff reported that the most frequently utilized WTC services include career assessment, work readiness, rehabilitation technology services, driver's education, career training, and medical services. When asked what concerns consumers expressed to DORS field staff regarding the WTC and what reservations staff have about referring individuals to WTC, the overwhelming response was distance and transportation.

Regarding CRPs, DORS field staff identified a need for improved communication between CRPs and DORS field staff, more training for CRP staff regarding DORS policy and documentation (84% reported issues with timely submission of reports and invoices, 51% reported issues with timely submission of employment verification forms, and 46% reported issues with the accuracy of reports), a lack of CRPs specializing in Traumatic Brain Injury or Intellectual Disabilities, and a need for additional supports for consumers with Autism who are college bound.

A survey was sent to CRP executive directors and front line staff to elicit feedback on the relationship between DORS' staff and our CRP community, a possible rate increase for services, and other needs. Forty-nine responses were received.

Information from CRPs indicated:

- A continued need for increased communication between DORS' staff and CRPs regarding a lack of notice when DORS has policy changes.
- An interest in additional training to work with specific disability populations.

- Training in DORS policy, procedures and documentation.
- Need for benefits counseling for consumers when initiating a referral prior to entering the job search process.
- Need for increased rates.

When DORS policy changes, CRP staff prefer communication to come directly from Headquarters using a distribution list. The second preference is to receive the information from the counselor liaison. The least preferred methods were: the DORS' website, and in-person communication from the DORS supervisor.

CRP staff were asked for information regarding how they thought DORS should increase their rates and what would be an appropriate percentage:

- 39% indicated a preference to use the projected increase for minimum wage.
- 34% indicated a preference to use the cost of living increase.
- 14% indicated that a flat rate increase would be preferable.

A survey was posted on the DORS website for individuals to complete regarding CRPs and WTC. Forty-two individuals responded to the survey.

Of those individuals completing the survey, 45% were aware of WTC. All of these individuals reported that they learned about WTC through personal contacts, DORS staff, transition fairs, family and friends. None had learned of WTC through other means such as social media and direct marketing. Of those familiar with WTC, 58% were not aware that a dormitory is available for consumers. Respondents also indicated an interest in apprenticeships, increasing the number of training programs, and expanding job search assistance.

Needs/Concerns Identified

- CRPs need training to better understand DORS policy, documentation, and invoicing requirements.
- Lack of timeliness and accuracy of documentation received from CRPs.
- Improve communication between DORS field staff and CRPs.
- Improve communication from DORS to CRPs when policy changes are implemented.
- Enhance communication and education between DORS field staff and CRPs regarding when and under what circumstances an individual can receive benefits counseling.
- CRP rates need to be increased.
- Transportation is a barrier for individuals to participate in services at WTC.

Recommendations

- Strive to improve effective communication between DORS field staff and CRPs.
- Improve communication from DORS to CRPs when policy changes are implemented.
- Develop training modules for CRPs to include understanding DORS Policy (when changes are made), reporting and documentation requirements, and invoicing.
- Enhanced communication regarding when and under what circumstances an individual can receive benefits.
- Explore a CRP rate increase for the provision of services.
- Develop training opportunities for DORS staff to have a better awareness of CRP services provided and greater knowledge of consumer status from referral to completion or services.
- Develop new training programs at WTC and CRPs based on market demands of growing fields. Training programs will include the exploration of additional apprenticeship programs, travel training, and travel assistance.
- WTC will work with the DORS Office of Public Affairs to increase direct marketing to consumers and explore social media and other methods of outreach to make the program and its activities more widely recognized by potential participants.
- WTC will explore transportation assistance to include travel training when needed and other accommodations to make travel more affordable.
- WTC will pursue an apprenticeship coordinator position within the Employment Services department to allow for greater exploration and participation of consumers in apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.
- WTC will work with the DORS Office of Public Affairs to develop marketing materials to inform individuals when they can receive benefits.